Lac La Biche Chronicles: The Early Years, A Joint Project by Portage College ard the Town of Lac La Biche Mc Dermi



Lac La Biche Archives

Lac La Biche shortly after World War II.

"Lac La Biche is one of the most beautiful lakes of the North West; we do not say one of the largest, although it is some twenty-four miles long. Its appearance is picturesque with its immense shorelines, belts of bays, peninsulas, hills and valleys. Several large islands, scattered here and there, in its centre, and some houses of primitive simplicity built on the hillsides with their little fields present a charming picture. The traveller who arrives on the lakeshore after having crossed woods and muskegs, rivers and rapids is truly filled with wonder."

- Reverend Father Vital Fourmond, O.M.I., 1874

Cover Photo. Tourists enjoy a summer afternoon on the lakeshore in front of the newly built tak the Biche fun in 1916. They may be waiting to board the tour boat for a sunset cruise of the tak the Biche.



"WÂWÂSKESIWISÂKAHIGAN, n.f. Lac Labiche" -Le Rév. Père Alb. Lacombe, O.M.I., Dictionnaire de la Langue des Cris, 1874

Lac La Biche Chronicles: The Early Years

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Preface

Lac La Biche Chronicles: The Early Years is a project that grew out of the 1998 celebration of the Lac La Biche Bicentennial and the thirtieth anniversary of Portage College (formerly, Alberta Vocational College - Lac La Biche). It also represents the realization of an idea cherished by Mr. Michael Maccagno.

A longtime resident of Lac La Biche, Mr. Maccagno was actively involved in the community. He served as Councillor and Mayor. He was an active member of the Board of Trade and, for 13 years, he represented the Lac La Biche constituency in the provincial legislature.

He was also an avid amateur historian. During the mid-1980s Mr. Maccagno accepted a position as "Historian in Residence" at Alberta Vocational College -Lac La Biche. He gathered and preserved documents, photographs, and "first-hand" stories about the history of the Lac La Biche region which led to the establishment of a local community archives.

The information Mr. Maccagno collected complemented the archaeological research conducted in the Lac La Biche area by Mr. Edward J. McCullough. The combination of these endeavours resulted in the 1991 publication of *Lac La Biche and the Early Fur Traders* by Edward McCullough and Michael Maccagno. That book, co-published by the College and the Circumpolar Institute, has since gone to second and third printing.

Alberta Community Development reviewed and evaluated the College's efforts in supporting the preservation of historical resources, and complimented the College for its "farsightedness" and the resulting "heightening of heritage and awareness and pride" in the Lac La Biche region.

Mr. Maccagno's enthusiasm and commitment also led to numerous requests to provide classroom presentations and talks to community groups related to his work. These activities then extended to a series of reprints of old newspaper stories published in the *Lac La Biche Post* over a two year period.

The positive response to these endeavours prompted Mr. Maccagno to suggest the publication of a different book to be called *Lac La Biche Chronicles*, intended to capture a number of the interesting stories, photographs, critical events, unique characters - the "historical vignettes" which have helped define, explain, and shape the evolution and development of the Lac La Biche regional community.

Lac La Biche Chronicles - The Early Years is now a reality thanks to the inspiration of Michael Maccagno, the ideas and contributions of countless supporters, the interest and commitment of Portage College, and the motivation provided by the bicentennial - a celebration of 200 years of growth and development.

Ted Langford, President Portage College, Lac La Biche

Introduction

- The Making of Lac La Biche Chronicles

CHRONICLE: kron'i•kl, *n*. [Fr. *chronique*, a chronicle.] An account of facts or events disposed in the order of time; a history, more especially one of a simple unpretentious character.

In the summer of 1997 the Town of Lac La Biche hired me on a part-time basis to help coordinate the forthcoming bicentennial. Part of my duties included raising awareness of what the 200th anniversary was about: a celebration of the arrival of David Thompson on the shores of the lake on October 4, 1798. Before long there was loose talk of producing a history book. Knowing that such a project takes years to research and write, I was very reluctant to get involved. Instead, I wrote a weekly newspaper column which the Lac La Biche Post was kind enough to publish. Then, one day, I received a phone call from Ted Langford, President of Alberta Vocational College (now Portage College). He wanted to talk about the possibility of publishing a book based upon an idea former Liberal MLA Mike Maccagno developed while conducting research for the College during the 1980s. The general aim was to pull together a number of stories which said something about the history of the area.

I agreed - in retrospect far too hastily and in January 1998 a committee was struck with a mandate to publish an unpretentious and readable book titled *Lac La Biche Chronicles*. As the task of collecting the material and editing it for publication proceeded, I quickly discovered that it needed to be organized, analyzed, and cast in a broader historical context. That meant more research, at enormous expense to my bank account, to fill gaps and to correct a number of errors which had turned up in already published sources.

Despite all the work, however, this book does not pretend to be a comprehensive history of Lac La Biche. It is not an "academic" treatment which presents a special "thesis" about the making of a northern community. Nor is it a "community history" in the sense that it provides capsule histories of each and every family in the Lac La Biche region. Important as those subjects are, they would require quite a different book with quite a different focus.

Rather, *Lac La Biche Chronicles: The Early Years*, is a collection of stories, historical anecdotes, documents, photographs, and maps which tell something about the triumphs, the tragedies, the hardships, and the humour of human survival in Northeastern Alberta. It provides a general introduction to the history of Lac La Biche and its place in the wider context of Canadian history to the end of World War II.

From the time that the first human beings came to Lac La Biche some 10,000 years ago, the community has served primarily as staging area, service centre, and transportation corridor for various kinds of economic activity carried on in the broader region. There have been a few industries, such as the fishery, which were specific to Lac La Biche and could not have been established elsewhere. But, Lac La Biche has rarely been the focal point for development.

Development proceeded through a number of fairly distinct, but overlapping phases. The *Chronicles* committee chose to examine those phases using what could be best termed a "modified chronological framework," meaning that although the stories are presented more or less in the order they happened a number of them move backward and forward in time.

Thus, "Part One: A Record in Stone," deals with both the archaeological record

as well as developments in the Native community after the Europeans showed up near the end of the 18th century. This is the sketchiest part of the book in terms of the documentary evidence.

"Part Two: The Fur Trade Era," opens with the expansion of the fur trade into Western Canada and continues down to the coming of the missionaries in the 1850s.

"Part Three: The Mission Era", picks up with the expansion of missionary activity into Alberta during the 1840s and continues down to the coming of the railway in 1915.

"Part Four: The Railway Era", covers developments up to the end of World War II.

There were several reasons for closing the book at 1945. The end of World War II marked a major transition point in Canadian history. The Liberal government of Mackenzie King adopted the welfare state and began entering a period of international activism and economic diversification. That process eventually had an enormous impact on Lac La Biche which would be better dealt with in a separate volume. More to the point, there was simply too much good material which would have been sacrificed to a single volume.

It is always the case with books of this nature that readers will disagree with the selection of the material. Why was this included and not that? How come more emphasis seemed to be placed on that development and not on this one? You cast that family in a bad light, but my grandfather told me...! And on it goes.

Decisions about the scope and content of the book were made at the committee level. After long and sometimes intense debate, the committee developed a number of guidelines. First and foremost, everything in the book had to be a matter of public record, which is to say that "heresay" evidence or rumour which could not be supported by documentary evidence or historical authority was automatically ruled out.

Second, there had to be enough material to produce a story. In some cases there

were promising starts to great stories but the lack of material or supporting documentation forced an abandonment.

Third, the stories had to be interesting and historically relevant. On that matter, a Committee majority ruled. Finally, all Committee members agreed that the good had to be accompanied by the bad. History can inflict some pretty nasty wounds. All that can be said is that no individual or group has been singled out for defence or for attack.

On a more personal note I would like to thank Portage College President Ted Langford for inviting me to contribute to this project and former Mayor Ovide Langevin and the Lac La Biche Bicentennial Committee for supporting my efforts. I would also like to acknowledge the enormous contribution Tom Maccagno made to the book. We had our ups and downs while putting together the *Chronicles* but such is the nature of friendship. It has been a truly rewarding experience.

One final comment. Although new to Lac La Biche, I am not a complete stranger. Parts of my family - the Yakoweshens moved here in the 1930s. My grandfather, who used to come to Lac La Biche to fish, was the eldest child of all the Yakoweshens. I remember only too well that day more than twenty years ago when he died and I was told, "the relatives from Lac La Biche are coming." When they arrived, the stories were told while the vodka flowed. The place held as much mystique for me then as it does now.

Gregory A. Johnson Lac La Biche

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To those who came before; For those who come after.



The Stone

Lac La Biche is a very old place. Long before the Europeans showed up near the end of the 18th century, Native peoples lived on the shores of the lake. Although no one knows with absolute certainty who arrived first, they were likely descendants of those who crossed the Bering Land Bridge about 14,000 years ago.

The Bering Land Bridge was a wide strip of land which connected Siberia with Alaska. It appeared with the lowered sea level during the Ice Age, or *Pleistocene Epoch*. The theory is that people travelled across the land bridge and down an ice free corridor in search of food. As the ice melted they gradually spread across North America.

People could have started living at Lac La Biche during the early prehistoric peri-



od, roughly 10,000 B.C. to 5500 B.C., when the more than one km thick ice began disappearing from the region. Spearheads found in the Lac La Biche area and identified as "Agate Basin" type can be dated to around 8500 B.C.

The first people to inhabit the area probably hunted large animals such as mammoths, lion-like cats, and giant bison. They might have supplemented their diet with fish. But, from five to eight thousand years ago, the large animals died out. The reason why this happened is the subject of considerable debate among scientists. What is known is that an *Altithermal* occurred: the temperature climbed and for a few thousand years parts of Alberta experienced desert-like conditions.



The Bering Land Bridge and the Ice-Free Corridor by which people might have reached Lac La Biche. The Charlie Lake Caves are located near present day Fort St. John in British Columbia. Vermilion Lakes, one of the oldest known sites of human occupation in Alberta, is in present day Banff National Park.

How Archaelogists Classify the Past

"History" is the history of the written word, hence the term "prehistoric" to describe what came before the written word. Since Native Canadians - and prehistoric Europeans for that matter - did not communicate through written language, archaeologists have to rely on other methods to study the past. The primary piece of evidence archaeologists in

Alberta use is "projectile points": spearheads and arrowheads. These points are identified through three broad prehistoric categories within which the type of projectile points are placed. The following chart provides a road map to the various types of projectile points found in the Lac La Biche region.

Classification of Projectile Points Found in the Lac La **Biche Region**

Folsom Fluted Point (9000 B.C. - 8000 B.C.) Agate Basin (8500 B.C. - 5500 B.C.)

Mummy Cave Complex (5500 B.C. - 3000 B.C.) Oxbow Phase (3500 B.C. - 1500 B.C.) McKean Phase (2500 B.C. - 1500 B.C.) Duncan Phase (2000 B.C. - 1500 B.C.) Hanna Phase (1500 B.,C. - 1000 B.C.) Caribou Island Complex (1500 B.C. - 1000 B.C.) Pelican Lake Phase (1000 B.C. - A.D. 200) Besant Phase (A.D. 1 - A.D. 750) Mackenzie Complex (500 B.C. - A.D. 500) Hennessey Complex (200 B.C.- A.D. 100)

Avonlea Phase (A.D. 200 - A.D. 1000) Old Women's Phase (A.D. 1000 - A.D. 1725) Taltheilei Complex (A.D. 100 - A.D. 300) Windy Point Complex (A.D. 300 - A.D. 500) Frank Channel Complex (A.D. 1300 - A.D. 1500) Spence River Complex (? - A.D. 1700) Duck Lake Phase (A.D. 500 - A.D. 1700) Selkirk Phase (A.D. 700 - A.D. 1800)

Early prehistoric period 10,500 B.C. - 5500 B.C.

> Middle prehistoric period 5500 B.C. - A.D. 700

Late prehistoric period A.D. 700 - A.D. 1725





In addition to the projectile points that can be identified by established categories, archaeologists have excavated a number of points which have not been identified. While this could indicate a separate cultural development in the Lac La Biche region, a great deal more research needs to be conducted to confirm a separate culture in the Lac La Biche area. At left are two examples of unidentified projectile points.

Lac La Biche Chronicles: A Record in Stone

When the first people arrived at Lac La Biche ten or eleven thousand years ago they wandered onto a glacial water plain. As the water receded, a spruce forest grew. The spruce eventually gave way to birch about 7200 B.C. With the onset of very hot and dry weather during the Altithermal, the region might have looked more like the great plains or perhaps parkland such as the area around present day Edmonton and Red Deer.

Then, sometime during the later stages of the middle prehistoric period, from 5500 B.C. to A.D. 700, there was another shift in weather patterns and Lac La Biche became part of the Boreal Forest. This forest, which was primarily poplar or possibly aspen, has diversified over the years. The climate from about 1500 B.C. to the present has more or less stayed the same.

The oldest spearhead or projectile point found to date in Lac La Biche is "Agate Basin," although an older "Folsom" fluted point was unearthed at Vilna, Alberta. The terms, Folsom and Agate Basin, refer to particular types or styles of spearheads. Folsom points were used between 9000 B.C. and 8000 B.C., while Agate Basin were used between 8500 B.C. and 5500



Gail Helgason, The First Albertans, p.38

Example of a Folsom Fluted point such as that found near Vilna, Alberta.



Agate Basin Projectile point used between 8500 B.C.-5500 B.C. Terms such as Agate Basin refer to particular types or styles of spearheads and arrowheads.

Maccagno Collection

B.C. There are certainly other styles which date from roughly the same period, such as Plainview, Milnesand, Hell Gap, Alberta, and Scottsbluff. The differing styles of points describe different cultures across North America. The people who used Agate Basin points lived primarily by hunting bison.

Beginning in 5500 B.C. and running to 3500 B.C. there was a shift away from Agate Basin to the Mummy Cave Complex points. Named after a cave located just east of Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming, Mummy Cave points were used between 5500 B.C. and 3000 B.C. However, no Mummy Cave projectile points common to the middle prehistoric period have been found at Lac La Biche. Archaeologists have puzzled over this. Did the people leave? Did they stay and not use the new style of spearheads? Or, has not enough digging been done in the region to come to any conclusion?

Ed McCullough, an archaeologist who has studied the Lac La Biche area, does not believe that people left. He has argued that the drier conditions created a parkland, or perhaps a transition zone between parkland and the plains, which would have been ideal for bison and bison hunters. He has concluded that people living in the Lac La Biche area continued using the older spearheads.

There is evidence to support this contention. The Agate Basin style point was used in places like the Northwest Territories long after other areas had adopted different styles.

Whatever the reason for the lack of different spearheads in Lac La Biche during the Mummy Cave Complex, there was another shift around 3500 B.C., when people began using Oxbow and later McKean type points. The primary differences between Agate Basin and Oxbow and McKean points are the size, shape, and use of the point. Agate Basin points are large, heavy, and shaped like a lancehead tapering to each end. They were used on heavy spears. The Oxbow and McKean points are smaller, side-notched darts intended for use with the *atlatl*, or throwing spear.

People used Oxbow and McKean points from 3500 B.C. to 1500 B.C. Although little is known about the Oxbow and McKean cultures, some archaeologists believe that the McKean people drove the Oxbow people off the plains. What is interesting is that McKean hunters were not forest people. Yet, McKean points were used extensively in the Lac La Biche area, and very few McKean points have been found north of Lac La Biche. Ed McCullough has speculated that Lac La Biche was still part of the parkland or transition belt during the Oxbow and McKean period.

The next big players to appear on the scene were those who adopted the Pelican Lake point, named after a site in south central Saskatchewan. In all probability the Pelican Lake point evolved from an earlier phase called Hanna. The Hanna-Pelican Lake phase, which lasted from 1500 B.C. to A.D. 200, was something like the European Renaissance of the 15th century.

The Pelican Lake people developed new strategies for living and hunting. Older generations hunted bison by ambushing and stalking them. The Pelican Lake people began using communal bison hunting techniques such as traps, jumps, and pounds (a form of corralling). They also engaged in greater contact and trade with people in other areas. But, towards the end of the middle prehistoric period, probably around A.D. 1, the people who used Pelican Lake points apparently vanished.

No one is certain why this happened. What is known is that two new cultures appeared, Besant and Avonlea. If the Pelican Lake period can be said to have represented the European Renaissance, then the Besant and Avonlea phases were



Example of a buffalo pound in about 1820.

like the European Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries.

The Besant culture, which existed from about A.D. 1 to A.D. 750, added further refinements to the strategy of "pound" hunting, or corralling bison into holding areas. These people also developed extensive trade networks. The Besant culture is marked, above all, by the use of Knife River flint, which is found only in North Dakota. Yet, Besant points have turned up at Lake Athabasca and there is evidence of Besant culture as far away as the Great Lakes in eastern-central Canada and the United States.

The Avonlea people introduced two major technological advances: the bow and arrow and the use of pottery on a large scale. Although some archaeologists have argued that Avonlea people were Athabaskan invaders who travelled south from the Boreal Forest, recent evidence suggests they probably evolved from the Pelican Lake people who perhaps did not so mysteriously disappear.

The Avonlea culture existed from A.D. 200 to A.D. 1000, during the late prehistoric period. Although Avonlea and Besant cultures were different, they coexisted. Then, sometime between A.D. 750 and A.D. 1000 the two cultures gave way to the Old Women's Phase. Some archaeologists believe that the Avonlea and Besant cultures merged and evolved into the Old Women's culture. Named after a buffalo jump near Cayley, just south of High River, Alberta, the Old Women's Phase lasted from A.D. 1000 to 1725 (about 75 years before the Europeans came to Lac La Biche).

While there is some evidence of Besant and Avonlea cultures at Lac La Biche, there is very little that connects the area with the Old Women's Phase. Rather, Lac La Biche appears to be associated with such cultures as the Taltheilei Complex from A.D. 100 to A.D. 300, the Windy Point Complex from A.D. 300 to A.D. 500, the Frank Channel Complex from A.D. 1300 to A.D. 1500, the Spence River Complex, which lasted until 1700 and the Duck Lake and Selkirk Phases from about A.D. 500 to 1800. All of these cultures are associated with forest people. The Old Women's Phase people lived on the plains.

The scanty evidence of Avonlea and Besant cultures, the absence of Old Women's Phase culture and the strong



McKean Phase



Pelican Lake Phase



Maccagno Collection

Examples of projectile points found in the Lac La Biche region. From left to right: Oxbow Phase (3500 B.C. - 1500 B.C.); McKean Phase (2500 B.C. - 1500 B.C.); and Pelican Lake Phase (1000 B.C. - A.D. 200).

presence of forest cultures suggests that by about A.D. 100 Lac La Biche was in the Boreal Forest zone. Although examples of Prairie Side Notched points have been excavated around Lac La Biche, there is little evidence to suggest that plains people were any more than occasional visitors to the area.

Archaeologists have turned up a number of projectile points which have not been identified with a particular culture or prehistoric phase. While this could mean that a distinct Boreal Forest culture developed around Lac La Biche, the evidence is inconclusive.



Maccagno Collection

Examples of Prairie Side Notched points found in the Lac La Biche area. The presence of these points, which date from the late prehistoric period, indicates that at least some prairie peoples travelled to Lac La Biche.

The Problem of Archaeology in Northeastern Alberta

Archaeologists working in Northeastern Alberta encounter a number of difficulties when they try to uncover the history of the region. As John Ives, a respected archaeologist, has pointed out:

"The problem is that we have a hard time linking things from different times together. There are few stratified sites places where the sediments built up, leaving behind long records of occupation for different time periods. In addition, much of what has gone on in archaeological research in northern Alberta is pioneering work. ... Finally, the kind of archaeological record we have is difficult to work with for a variety of other physical and cultural reasons. The soils which form under the leaf and needle litters from trees are acidic, and they very soon destroyed all the organic parts of the archaeological record: the leather, the wood, and even the bones and antler. Often we have only stone tools left to work with. By living in small groups and moving frequently, the boreal forest peoples also contributed to this archaeological problem. Such activities created small sites, with few artifacts."



Maccagno Collection

Projectile points from the middle and late prehistoric periods. From left to right: Besant Phase (A.D. 1- A.D. 750); Avonlea Phase (A.D. 200 - A.D 1000); and Taltheilei Complex (A.D. 100 - A.D. 300).

The Boreal Forest

Its name derived from the Greek word, Boreas, God of the North Wind, the Boreal Forest is the most northern and coldest forest zone in the Northern Hemisphere. The Boreal Forest stretches across North America, Europe, and Asia. It is the most extensive vegetation zone in Canada and it can be found in virtually every province and territory.

In Canada, the Boreal Forest and woodlands are dominated by evergreen trees, usually black and white spruce, jack and lodgepole pine, and balsam. Other species of trees include deciduous trees such as American larch, paper birch, aspen, and poplar.

Animal life is also extensive. Moose, caribou, black bear, wolf, beaver, muskrat, and squirrel are some of the more important mammals found in the Boreal Forest. There are hundreds of species of birds as well as notorious mosquitoes, black flies, and sand flies.

The Boreal Forest is prone to fire and every year lightning and human induced fire claims vast areas of the forest. But the Boreal Forest is highly adaptable to fire and burned areas recover quickly.

There are three distinct subzones of Boreal Forest: Northern Boreal Woodland with widely spaced trees and lichen covered forest floor; Main Boreal Forest with dense tree growth and moss forest floor; and Southern Boreal Forest with temperate trees. In addition there are two transitional zones, Hemi-Arctic Forest Tundra in the north and Hemi-Boreal Aspen Parkland and Conifer-Hardwoods Forest along the southwest and southeast margins of the forest.



Edward J. McCullough, Prehistoric Cultural Dynamics of the Lac La Biche Region, Alberta Culture, 1982, p.147

Map depicting Lac La Biche in relation to the Boreal Forest. Note how the Boreal Forest-Grassland-Parkland border shifted over time, thereby making Lac La Biche part of a transitional zone.

Life in Prehistoric Lac La Biche

What was life like in prehistoric Lac La Biche? Archaeologist Ed McCullough argues that specialization and cooperation were the keys to survival:

"In the fall, the men would have trapped beaver and muskrat before the winter freeze-up and would also have pursued the moose, for during the rut moose can be 'called' to the hunter and killed with relative ease. During this same period, the women would have been processing hides and meat in readiness for the coming winter as well as preparing for the fall fishery. With the onset of the fall spawn, they would have shifted their emphasis to the netting and processing of fish.

In the winter, although fishing was probably less productive, the women likely fished to obtain a fresh food supplement. During the winter the men pursued the numerous faunal species of the forest, including the moose, deer, caribou, wood bison, wolves, fox, rabbit, etc.

During the spring months, fishing was probably the main activity of women, although the men probably participated in this activity as well. However, this would have been the time for muskrat and beaver trapping, a male task.

During the late summer and fall, a combination of hunting by the men, fishing, fowling, and vegetable gathering [berry picking] by the women would have provided an ample resource supply."

Cooperation and specialization would have been necessary to successfully complete these many tasks. Part of the theory is that as groups worked together they developed the concept of territory and nationalism which in turn led to tribal groupings.



D.J. Smpka

The Calendric Tally Stone

In the late 1980s, Harry Mueller of Lac La Biche unwittingly stumbled upon a rare artifact while collecting rocks for a flower garden. His daughter, Jennifer, noticed that one of the stones was quite different. It was a piece of ironstone about 12.5 cm long, 10 cm wide and 3.5 cm thick. The surfaces were smooth and polished and along one edge twelve vertical lines had bird or animal. Tally sticks were used to measure the phases of the moon. Since the Mueller artifact contains both figures and notches speculation about what it is will likely continue.

been carefully cut into the stone. The stone also appeared to have a number of figures carved on it. Ms. Mueller subsequently turned the stone over to archaeologists for inspection. They have been speculating about the artifact ever since.

Recently, however, Gloria Fedirchuk, an archaeologist familiar with the Lac La Biche area, has suggested that the artifact might be either a medicine stone or a calendric tally stick. Medicine stones were often carried by Native people. They were usually associated with a personal guardian spirit, often a



Photo courtesy of Gloria Fedirchuk



Photo courtesy of Gloria Fedirchuk

Two views of the strange artifact Harry Mueller acquired while building a flower garden. His daughter, Jennifer, was the first person to recognize its potential significance.

The People

Archaeology can shed a great deal of light upon the past. There are, however, a few matters upon which it cannot shed much light at all. One of those matters is the question of who lived in Lac La Biche before the Europeans came. It is well and good to write of "Agate Basin" points and "McKean Phase" and "Pelican Lake" cultures. But who were those people? What did they call themselves? And what is their relationship to Native people of today?

Although Native or "First Nations" presence in the Lac La Biche region is today predominately Cree and Chipewyan, it was not always so. In fact, Chipewyan, and especially Cree peoples, moved into the Lac La Biche area from the north and from the east in advance of the fur trade and displaced people who were already living in the area. But if the Chipewyan and Cree are relative newcomers, who were the original inhabitants of Lac La Biche?

The available evidence indicates that Beaver, Sarcee, Sekani and Blackfoot peoples inhabited the Lac La Biche area. Unfortunately, the historical record does not say just *how long* these peoples lived around Lac La Biche or whether they had in turn displaced earlier peoples.

When Alexander Mackenzie was exploring the Northwest he observed that Beaver tribes inhabited the territory around Île à la Crosse and to the west before the Cree expanded into the area. This observation was supported by Hudson's Bay Company [HBC] Governor George Simpson, who noted that "to the Southward and Westward of Athabasca Lake District we fall in with Beaver Indians."

The Beaver First Nation - known as



Source: Edward J. McCullough, The Prehistoric Cultural Dynamics of the Lac La Biche Region, Alberta Culture, 1982, p.148

Map showing the approximate locations and territory of Native peoples in Alberta in about 1765. The Chipewyans later pushed as far south as Beaver Lake.



Native Cultural Arts Program, Portage College. Artist: Dorothy Young



Native Cultural Arts Program, Portage College. Artist: Brenda L. Willier

Tsattine or "dwellers among the beavers" were part of the Athapaskan language group and closely related to the Chipewyan, Sarcee, Sekani and Slavey. At one time the Beaver, Sarcee, and Sekani might have been part of one group which broke up before the Europeans arrived.

Before the Cree moved west, the Beaver hunted an area from roughly the present day Alberta-Saskatchewan border on the east to Peace River on the west; and from Fort Vermilion to the north and Lesser Slave Lake to the south. They had the reputation of being superb moose hunters and trappers. Historians believe that there were at least five different bands of Beaver which were reduced by disease to three by the end of the 19th century.

As the Cree expanded into the Lac La Biche area, the Beaver were driven west. In 1782 the Beaver obtained guns and were able to stem the tide of the Cree invasion. In the process, however, the Beaver were forced out of Lac La Biche, although there are scattered references to Beaver showing up on the north shore of the lake long after the Cree had established themselves in the area.

The Beaver were a fiercely independent people. Although described as a "peaceable and quiet people and perhaps the most honest of any on the face of the earth," they were also warriors. Alexander Mackenzie claimed that they were "more vicious and warlike than the Chepewyans [sic]," who had the reputation of being extremely warlike.

In 1823, for example, the Beaver attacked the Hudson's Bay Company post at Fort St John, killed the chief trader, Guy Hughes, and four of his men, and burned the post to the ground. The reasons for the attack are unclear, but the HBC punished the Beaver by closing all of its posts in the area for three years. Another story is told about a Beaver attack on a western tribe, probably Sekani or Slavey, near present day Dunvegan on the Peace River in Northwestern Alberta. As they crossed the river and neared the enemy camp a dog began barking. Fearing the dog would alert the camp to their pres-

The Beaver in 1872.

"On the morning of the third day after leaving [Fort] Vermilion we fell in with a band of Beavers. Five wigwams stood pitched upon a pretty rising knoll, backed by pine woods, which skirted the banks of the stream, upon the channel of which the lodges of the animal beaver rose cone-like above the snow. When we reached the camp 'At-tal-loo', the chief, came forth. A stranger was a rare sight and 'At-tal-oo' was bound to make a speech; three of his warriors, half a dozen children, and a few women filled up the background. Leaning upon a long single-barrelled gun 'At-tal-loo' began:

'This winter had been a severe one: death had struck heavily into the tribe; in these three wigwams six women had died. Tea was the pressing want. Without tea the meat of the moose was insipid.'

I endeavoured to find out the cause of this mortality among the poor hunters, and it was not far to seek. Constitutions enfeebled by close intermarriage, and by the hardships attending upon wild life in these northern regions, were fast wearing out. At the present rate of mortality the tribe of the Beavers will soon be extinct, and with them will have disappeared the best and the simplest of the nomad tribes of the north."

-Sir William Butler, 1872 Sir William Butler served as an intelligence officer during the Red River Expedition of 1870.

ence, the Beaver warriors made a rush. One observer later said: "They ran so fast one of the young men overtook the dog and killed it with a knife." Then they killed all the enemy save for one man, who apparently jumped into the river and escaped.

To the west of the Beaver lived the Sekani. The Sekani, or "people of the rocks," consisted of several family groups or bands. At the time of European contact they hunted and traded along the Finlay and Parsnip tributaries of the Peace River.

Like many Native people in Western Canada, the Sekani suffered harassment from the Cree. But they also suffered at the hands of the Beaver, who pushed them west. Later, Carrier peoples who lived to the west tried to drive them back east.

The Sekani were primarily hunters, though they fished when times were hard. Nevertheless, as hunters the Sekani tended to scorn fishing and often contemptuously referred to their Carrier neighbours as "fisheaters." There was some irony in this because during the 19th century many Sekani intermarried with Carrier and subsequently adopted aspects of West Coast culture such as matrilineal marriage, potlatching, and fishing. Before the Carrier influence, the Sekani married through kin lines and they also practiced polygyny, although a woman with more than one husband was not unknown. Unlike the Beaver, however, the Sekani do not appear to have engaged in wrestling contests for brides.

Sekani people were heavily involved in the fur trade and had the reputation of producing high quality tanned skin. Although fur trade posts began appearing on Sekani territory after 1826, they still obtained European goods through trade with Tahltan and Carrier Natives.

Like so many Native peoples, the Sekani

suffered greatly from the effects of disease, alcohol, and European intrusion from trappers and, later, miners.

South of the Sekani lived the Sarcee. The Sarcee were once united with the Beaver, but separated before the arrival of the Europeans. Evidence of the Beaver -Sarcee split is found in Sarcee oral tradition as well as the European record.

The Sarcee had the reputation of being one of the most fierce and warlike tribes on the prairies. It might be for this reason that historians once mistakenly believed that the name "Sarcee" was derived from the Blackfoot term for "no good" - sa ahksi. However, the Blackfoot term for "no good" is *matsokapi*, not sahksi. The Sarcee called themselves *Tsotli'na*, which means "earth people."

Although the Sarcee are associated with the plains area around Red Deer and Calgary, Alberta, they also travelled north. As late as the 1890s, Henry Moberly, who had served as Chief Factor at the Hudson's Bay Company post in Lac La Biche, reported that the Sarcee ranged as far north as Fort Vermilion, Alberta. Still, the Sarcee had by then developed very close relations with the Blackfoot and were considered part of the Blackfoot confederacy.

The Blackfoot Nation was one of the most famous and respected tribes to roam the great plains of North America. It was made up of three tribes of the Algonquian language group, the Bloods, the Blackfoot, and the Peigans. The Blackfoot Nation called itself *Soyitapi*, meaning "prairie people." They had the reputation of being a great warlike nation. George Simpson wrote of the Blackfoot as a "very interesting people who have excited more curiosity than any other of the native tribes of North America."

It has been with good reason that the Blackfoot have aroused curiosity. Even the



Glenbow Archives

A small band of Beaver near the Peace River in about 1899.

origin of the Blackfoot Nation sparks curiosity. The story goes that the Blackfoot were once suffering at the hands of their enemies from all sides, so they decided to split up. One group went north to deal with the Crees. Another group went southwest to fight the mountain tribes. The third went southeast to guard against the Assiniboines, Crows, and Sioux.

Some time later, a man from the northern tribe went to visit the other two tribes. Upon arriving at the southern camp, he asked for the chief. Apparently, everyone he spoke to claimed to be the chief. The man called the southern group *Akainai*, or tribe of Many Chiefs. *Akainai* formed the basis for *Kainai*, which is the native word for the Bloods. The Bloods, for their part, were struck by the northern visitor's blackened moccasins and so called his tribe *Siksikaw*, or Black Foot.

The traveller continued on to the third group. He found that they were not tanning their hides properly so that the men were wearing robes that still had dried bits of meat and hair. He called them *Apikuni*, or Scabby Hides (or badly tanned robes). The name Peigan is a corruption of the term *Apikuni*.

At the time of European contact in the mid-18th century, the Blackfoot were already skilled horsemen armed with guns. They were also using other European goods such as kettles and knives. The European goods were most likely obtained through trade with the Cree. Historians used to believe that the

Alexander Henry on the Sarcee

Better known as "the Younger," Alexander Henry was the nephew of Alexander Henry "the Elder," one of the first English traders into the Northwest. Henry the Younger entered the trade in 1791 and served with the North West Company for 23 years. He was a very astute observer of fur trade and Native life. Although he drowned on the Columbia River in 1814, the journals he left are among the finest accounts of the fur trade. About the Sarcee he wrote:

"These people have the reputation of being the bravest tribe in all the plains, who dare face ten times their own numbers, and of this I have had convincing proof during my residence in this country. They are more civilized and more closely attached to us than the Slaves [Blackfoot], and have on several occasions offered to fight the others in our defence. None of their neighbors can injure them with impunity; death is instantly the consequence. Most of them have a smattering of the Cree language. which they display in clamorous and discordant strains, without rule or reason. Their own language is so difficult to acquire that none of our people have ever learned it."

The Beaver-Sarcee Split

The split between the Beaver and Sarcee First Nations is part of the Sarcee oral tradition. Although there are several stories told about the separation, the most common one involved a hazardous lake crossing during the winter. This particular story was retold by the noted Alberta historian, Hugh Dempsey, in his *Indian Tribes of Alberta*:

"As they reached the middle of the lake, a woman noticed an animal's horn protruding from the ice. When she curiously pulled on it, the ice trembled and groaned and suddenly a great crack appeared which cut through the ice, dividing the lake in two. Terrified, part of the tribe rushed north to their hunting grounds while the other fled south. Once separated, those in the southern group kept travelling until they reached the plains where they became known as the Sarcee tribe."



Glenbow Archives

A Sarcee camp near Calgary in the 1890s.

Blackfoot and Cree were bitter enemies. Recent evidence, however, suggests that the Blackfoot and Cree had an alliance which dated from the early 1730s. The good relations lasted until the 1790s, when a series of skirmishes resulted in the termination of the alliance in 1806. Hostile relations continued until the great Blackfoot Chief, Crowfoot, reestablished good relations in the 1870s.

Owing to the lack of fur in their territory, the Blackfoot were not big players in the fur trade. While they traded dried meat, buffalo robes, and horses for the goods they sought, the fur trade did not have nearly the same impact it did on other Native peoples. Since they were not trappers and had a good food supply in the form of the buffalo, the Blackfoot had more time to devote to religion, the arts, and warfare. As a result they developed a strong sense of national unity.



Provincial Archives of Alberta

Isapo-Muxika, better known as Crowfoot, who became a Blackfoot chief in 1870. This photograph was taken by Calgary photographer Alex J. Ross in 1886.

The Blackfoot at Lac La Biche?

At the time of European contact during the 18th century, Blackfoot territory extended from the North Saskatchewan River to the Yellowstone River in present day Montana and from the Rocky Mountains to the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. The Blackfoot were by then a plains people and they believed they had always lived on the plains. Crowfoot, who became a chief in 1870, once stated that he was "positive in asserting that his people for generations past has always lived in the same part of the country that they now inhabit."

Crowfoot's assertion aside, there is a body of evidence which strongly suggests that the Blackfoot once lived in the Boreal Forest of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba as far north as the sixtieth parallel (Lac La Biche is located between the 54th and the 55th parallel). That means the Blackfoot might have been a Woodlands people who migrated south. Even more surprising is the fact that some authors argue the Blackfoot began moving to the plains only in about 1700.

Some of the most powerful evidence to support this claim comes from the observations of various explorers and fur traders. When David Thompson, for example, once asked Peigan elders about the original location of their homeland, they pointed to the Northeast. Similarly, Alexander Mackenzie reported that the Cree spoke of a group of people known as Slaves who had lived at Slave Lake. The Cree called the Blackfoot A-wah-kan. meaning "slaves." The three Blackfoot tribes - the Blackfoot, Bloods, and Peigans - were known collectively to the Cree as Ai-ass-tsi-no-wuhk, which means "a different people." The Cree maintained that southwest of Lake Athabasca there was a large lake known as Ai-ass-tsi-nowuhk Sa-ha'ki-gun, which means "the different people's lake" or Blackfoot Lake.

The notion of a northern homeland for the Blackfoot is also contained in Blackfoot oral tradition. Edward Curtis, an American photographer and writer who devoted most of his career from 1896 to 1952 to recording the way of life of North American Native people, once interviewed a Blackfoot named Tearing Lodge, who was born in 1830:

"Our three tribes came southward out of the wooded country to the north of the Bow River. We began to make short excursions to the south, and finding it a better game country and with much less snow, we kept coming farther and farther, and finally gave up altogether our old home. This happened before my grandfather's time. We call that former home *Istssohtsi* ["in the brush"]. The Peigan led in this movement and were followed by the Bloods and later the Blackfeet."

Tearing Lodge added that his grandfather, who died a very old man in 1840, left the forest when he was a grown man. That would put at least part of the southern migration sometime in the mid-1700s.

Not all writers agree with the idea of a northern homeland for the Blackfoot. Some have disputed associating the term "Slave" with the Blackfoot. Others argue that because the Blackfoot were unfamiliar with canoes, and did not want to eat any meat but that of buffalo, they could not have lived in the north. Still others point to the absence of "forest culture" in the Blackfoot way of life.

As Edward McCullough has pointed out, these objections are easily explained by the fact that the Blackfoot adapted quickly to a plains culture and did not have to use the canoe. Moreover, it is now known that the Bloods traded at the Hudson's Bay Company's York Factory and must have used the canoe to get there.

The controversy will no doubt continue, but the bulk of the evidence points to a northern homeland for the Blackfoot.

The Chipewyan

Despite the fact that they were once the largest Athapaskan speaking group in northern Canada, there is very little evidence to suggest that Chipewyans had lived in the Lac La Biche region for an extended period before the European invasion.

Rather, the Chipewyans



Chipewyan people at Heart Lake in about 1924.

Glenbow Archives

appear to have expanded south from the Arctic.

Alexander Mackenzie remarked that the Chipewyans he met at Île à la Crosse in the 1790s considered themselves as strangers to the area. They "seldom remain longer than three or four years," he wrote, "without visiting their relations and friends in the barren grounds which they term their native country." Hudson's Bay Company Governor George Simpson similarly noted that the Chipewyans did not consider the area around Lake Athabasca their homeland. Simpson wrote that the Chipewyans he knew came from the barren lands to the north of Lake Athabasca.

The name Chipewyan was taken from a Cree term meaning "pointed skins" - so named for a sort of shirt-tail Chipewyan people often wore. They were also known as *Wechepowuck* by the Cree, *Montagnais* by the French and *Northward Indians* by the English. The Chipewyans called themselves *Dene* (or *Dénè*), meaning "the people."

At the time of European contact near the end of the 17th century the Chipewyans occupied a belt of territory along the northern fringe of the Boreal Forest which extended from the Great Slave Lake to Hudson Bay. They lived primarily by hunting caribou, although buffalo, muskox, moose, and fish supplemented the Chipewyan diet. They were a migratory people. Hunting parties usually consisted of two or more related families which would sometimes join larger regional bands. There was no strict form of leadership and authority. Leadership and authority were based on ability, wisdom, and generosity. This was particularly true of doctors or medicine men, in whom the Chipewyans placed great faith. In spiritual matters, the Chipewyans had guardian spirits and individual spirit protectors. These were often received in dream visions. Some had great powers for healing, as in the case of doctors, but they could also cast evil spells.

Although attempts were made to involve the Chipewyans in the fur trade as early as 1689, it was not until 1716 that William Stewart of the Hudson's Bay Company succeeded in bringing a small number of them to York Factory to trade. The following year the HBC built Fort Churchill (Prince of Wales Fort) and within a short time the Chipewyans were trading on a regular basis for guns, ammunition, and metal utensils.

The character of this trade changed in 1778 when the North West Company opened a trading post at Lake Athabasca. The Chipewyans began to trade with the NWC. They also began to expand to the south as far as Beaver Lake and they more or less controlled the lower waters of the Peace and Athabasca Rivers.

The Chipewyans had the reputation of being flerce warriors. This is perhaps not surprising considering they were nearly surrounded by other groups. To the north were the Inuit; to the south were the Cree; and to the west were the Slavey and Dogrib. Even the names the Chipewyans had for other tribes contained warlike connotations: the Inuit were called *hotél ena*, or "enemies of the flat area" and the Cree were called *ena*, or "enemy." This warring activity stemmed partly from the fur trade and partly from traditional rivalries, especially with the Inuit.

The Chipewyans regarded the Inuit as their mortal enemies. In 1771 Hudson's Bay Company explorer Samuel Hearne expressed horror over the way the Chipewyans dealt with this enemy. Hearne had hired some Chipewyans to help him find the Coppermine River. Much to his surprise, about 70 or 80 warriors joined the expedition. It soon became clear that the trip was an excuse for attacking the Inuit. Hearne described in graphic terms the scene of one attack: "The shrieks and the groans of the poor expiring souls were truly horrible and was much increased at the sight of one young girl, about eighteen years old, whom they killed so nigh me, that when the first spear struck her, she fell down and twisted about my feet and legs."

By that time the Chipewyans had been involved in the fur trade for fifty years. But while a peace of sorts was established between the Chipewyans and the Cree in about 1760, and with others after the fur traders moved inland, skirmishes with the Inuit continued until well into the 19th century.

In 1749 the Chipewyan population was estimated to be about 4000. The great smallpox epidemic of 1781-82, and succeeding epidemics, had a devastating effect. Some writers have estimated that nine-tenths of the population were wiped out - and even at the beginning of the 20th century the Chipewyan population stood at about only 1000.

The Origin of the Chipewyans The Legend of Yakke-elt'ini

"In the beginning there was a tall giant named Yakke-elt'ini [the one whose head sweeps the vault of heaven] who prevented us from entering this deserted land which had not been inhabited yet. The Dénè gave him chase and killed him. His cadaver fell across two continents and it petrified, then it was used as a bridge. ... The monster's feet were resting on the other shore while its head reached as far as *T'u-nékkradh-t'ué* [Cold Lake]."

-Recorded by Emile Petitot, 1875



Native Cultural Arts Program, Portage College Artist: Marcia Kipling



Provincial Archives of Alberta

This dramatic photograph of Woods Cree was taken by Charles Mathers in the 1890s. It was titled "Lo, The Poor Indian" - from a poem by the English poet Alexander Pope.

The Cree

The name "Cree" appears to have originated from the French term, *Kiristinon* later shortened to *Cri*. The first Jesuit Missionaries used the term *Kilistinons*. To the English the Cree were known as the *Knisteneaux*, though there were variations such as *Cristineaux*, *Christnaux*, *Clistinio*, *Kris*, and even *Nahathaway*. Eventually the English adopted the French *Cri* and spelled it Cree.

The early accounts of the Jesuit missionaries suggest that at the time of European contact in the 17th century there were four groups or "Nations" of the Algonquian speaking Cree: the Alimibegouek Kilistinons; the Kilistinons of the Ataouabouscatouek Bay; the Kilistinons of the Nipisirineins; and the Nisibourounki Kilistinons. Most Cree were concentrated around the James Bay area in present day Ontario and Quebec, although the Alimibegouek Kilistinons lived around Lake Nipigon (which was called Lacus Alimibegouek), just north of present day Thunder Bay, Ontario. The Cree population in the 1600s is estimated to have been about 30,000.

A small number of historians have tried to argue that the Cree had been as far west as Peace River as early as the 14th century. The generally accepted view is that the Cree began moving west in about 1660 or 1670.

The catalyst for the westward expansion of the Cree was the fur trade. Although there is evidence that the Cree traded furs with Henry Hudson's expedition in 1611, the vast majority of Cree traded with Ottawa First Nations and the French, who were situated along the St. Lawrence River. With the establishment of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1670, and especially York Factory in 1684, the Cree began to shift their trade pattern dramatically. At first the Bay trade was small. HBC records indicate that 70 canoes of Cree came to York Factory in 1685. By 1695 it had risen to 300 canoes and by 1700 it was over 600 canoes.

As early as 1680 the Cree had estab-

The Confusing Origin of the Cree Name

There is probably no other Native group in Canada whose name has such a complex, confusing, and unresolved origin as the Cree. Although it is generally accepted that the name "Cree" originated from the French term, *Kiristinon*, and evolved through a series of name changes, including *Kinistinaux, Kristeneaux, Kilistinon, Kilistinaux, Christinaux, Christino*, and *Clistino* to *Kri, Criq, Cris, Kree* and finally Cree, that is by no means the end of the story.

The Cree called themselves *Nehethewak*, meaning "exact people." This is perhaps also the origin of the English term, *Nahathaway*. Long after European contact the Cree recognized three major divisions. First were the *Maskekowak* or "swamp people" who lived between Hudson Bay and Lake Superior. These were the so-called "Swampy Cree." Second were the *Saka-Wiyiniwak* or "woods people" who lived in the woodland areas of present day Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. Finally, there were the *Paskwa-Wiyiniwak* or "prairie people" who lived in the plains region. Some of these names could not have been used before European contact because the Plains Cree, for example, did not exist.

According to M. de Bacqueville de La Potherie, who attempted an early classification of the Cree, there were four divisions of Cree. Those who lived along the shores of Hudson Bay were the *Ouenebigonhelinis* or "people of the shore." A second group were *Monsaunis* or "people of the marsh" who lived adjacent to the *Ouenebigonhelinis* but on higher ground. A third group, who lived further west and to the south, were the *Maskegonehirinis* or *Savannahs*. Finally, there were the *Christinaux*, who eventually lived in the area around the lower Saskatchewan River. The term *Christinaux* was usually used to describe the Cree as a whole.

There is to date no definitive answer to the question of the origin of the Cree name.

lished themselves as important middlemen in the fur trade and they began to expand into Western Canada at an increasing rate. Armed with the gun, the Cree were able to push aside other groups, such as the Beaver. By the early 1800s the Cree controlled the vast forest belt of Western Canada and they were also expanding north.

The result of this activity, as Hugh Dempsey has so aptly pointed out, was that the fate of the Woodland Cree became closely intertwined with the fur traders. This led to some fairly dramatic changes in the Cree way of life as they began to abandon aspects of their own culture and dress in favour of European ways. Another important development was the marriage of Cree women and fur traders, which led to the birth of the Métis people of Canada bearing such surnames as Cardinal, Cunningham, and Desjarlais.

The Woodland Cree did not maintain a strong tribal identity, but they were a

deeply religious people. Cree culture is full of stories about forest life, supernatural beings, and evil spirits who would prey upon the unwary. The Woodland Cree also had sorcerers who possessed special supernatural powers. In the Cree culture, spirits would often reveal themselves in dreams.

Although brave fighters, the Cree were not often involved in warfare. There were certainly battles with the Beaver and the Blackfoot, but the main Cree preoccupation was hunting and the fur trade, not warfare. For many years the Cree were the main suppliers of meat for the fur trade. So long as the fur trade flourished, Cree fortunes remained relatively good. However, the gradual loss of culture, the introduction of disease, and the free flow of liquor eventually began to take their toll and many Cree found themselves caught in the economic cycle of the ups and downs of the fur trade.

Alexander Mackenzie on the Cree and Chipewyan

"Who the original people were that were driven from it [the Northwest], when conquered by the Knisteneaux [Cree] is not now known, as not a single vestige remains of them. The latter, and the Chepewyans [sic, Chipewyans], are the only people that have been known here; and it is evident that the last mentioned consider themselves as strangers, and seldom remain longer than three or four years, without visiting their relations and friends in the barren grounds, which they term their native country. They were for sometime treated by the Knisteneaux as enemies; who now allow them to hunt to the North of the track which has been described, from Fort du Traite upwards, but when they occasionally meet them, they insist on contributions, and frequently punish resistance with their arms. This is sometimes done at the forts, or places of trade, but then it appears to be a voluntary gift. A treat of rum is expected on the occasion, which the Chepewyans [sic] on no other account ever purchase; and those only who have had frequent intercourse with the Knisteneaux have any inclination to drink it."

The Bungees

When the Hudson's Bay Company trader, Peter Fidler, travelled to Lac La Biche in 1799 he made a cryptic reference in his journal to the "Bungees." According to Fidler, Native groups around the Lac La Biche region greatly feared the Bungees.

The term Bungee, or Bungay, was often applied to Ojibwa (Ojibway and Chippewa) people of the Lake Superior region. They were also called Saulteaux (a term which was spelled many different ways) from their meeting place at the falls of Sault Ste. Marie. The Ojibwa were heavily involved in the fur trade and, like the Cree, they expanded west. Many ended up in the present day United States, particularly Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and North Dakota. Others moved into present day Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Before 1760 the Ojibwa usually supported the French. During the American Revolution and the War of 1812 they were allied with the British.

In his "General Report of the Manetoba District for 1820," Peter Fidler stated that the "Bungees or Soteaux ... obtained the Name of Bungees by us from the word Bungee in their Language signifying small

or little which they so frequently repeated when their supplies was not adequate to their wants, that they have thus obtained the word as a fixed term to the whole Tribe. These Indians are not originally natives of these Parts, but were first introduced by the North West Company about the year 1797 - before this there were a very few Straglers [sic] - they being then Industerous [sic] they was induced by the Report of the Canadians that Beaver abounded here & was invited to leave their original Lands about the Rain Lake & the Western borders of Lake Superior - now they finding this Country so much more plentiful in Provisions than their own & the Beaver being then plentiful - they have become quite habitutated to these parts & I believe will never return to their own Lands again "

Although the Bungees appear to have travelled as far west as Lac La Biche, there is very little evidence to suggest that they settled in the area.

Native Stories

Much has been written about the origins, customs, and life of the Native peoples of Canada. Less is known about how the Native peoples themselves viewed these matters. Part of the problem has to do with the fact that the Native peoples of Canada traditionally passed knowledge and wisdom from generation to generation through a powerful oral tradition rooted in stories told by elders. With the onset of various epidemics many of the elders, who were the "textbooks of knowledge," died and the stories often died with them.

Another problem involves translation. Native stories tend to have a special meaning in the Native language in which they are told and much of that meaning can be lost in translation. The stories are also sacred so that collecting and recording them can be very difficult.

Of those stories which have survived

and been recorded, many begin in a sort of pre-world where people had extraordinary powers, such as the ability to turn themselves into animals. At some point the "old world" is left and a "new world" begins. Some of these stories bear an uncanny resemblance to stories in the Bible. While this may have been the result of missionary influence, it also led to speculation about whether some of the Natives peoples of Canada descended from one of the lost tribes of Israel!

There are generally two basic types of characters in Native stories: the "culture hero" and the "trickster" - although they can exist in the same character. There are other, sometimes very dangerous, characters as well. The culture hero brings blessings of animals, food, fire, and happiness. The trickster is often a mischievous character who deals with such subjects as



Native Cultural Arts Program, Portage College. Artist: Rossalynd Kathrein

One of the more enduring Cree symbols: two crossed feathers. hunger, pride, and sexuality. While tricksters can perform good deeds, they are more often playing tricks and fooling other characters. Occasionally, tricksters can even fool themselves.

In addition to being a way of passing knowledge from one generation to another, Native stories give meaning and direction to life. In much the same way as the Bible, the Koran, or other forms of worship, Native stories also provide spiritual guidance. The big difference between Native spirituality and Christianity, however, is that Native religions view life as a circle. Christians view life as a linear path from beginning to end. "Everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the power of the world always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. In the old days when we were a strong and happy people, all our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation. ...Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood and so it is in everything where power moves."

-Black Elk, Sioux Holy Man

Woodland Cree Traditions and Legends

Roger Vandersteene, O.M.I., spent ten years at Wabasca, Alberta as an Oblate missionary. During that time he recorded some of the Cree stories told in the Wabasca area. In 1960 he published an

"In a way resembling every man, the Cree is a philosopher by temperament. The haunting question possesses him: how does the body and the soul form an indivisible unity in man? The reasoning is simple. A body without a soul is some dead thing which is today buried and was formerly hung in the trees. But, on the other hand, the Indian does not really know what to make of a soul without a body. This problem, to tell the truth, inspires him with some degree of fear.... In Cree eyes, the ultimate reason for life and death, as of all great mysteries, can only be the will of God. The final justification for other smaller mysteries is always the will of somebody. To signify that a pheaccount of his experiences under the title Wabasca: Dix Ans de Vie Indienne. He also provided some very interesting insights into Cree traditions, legends. and philosophy.

nomenon is natural or naturally necessary, fortuitous, freely willed, permitted or deliberate, the key word otchitaw will ceaselessly come to their lips. It is otchitaw that an airplane hums when passing through the clouds, that a submarine dives under water, that a rifle shell flies a great distance and that a stone goes only a short distance. It is likewise otchitaw that a child is born with one eye, that twins come to surprise the parents, that someone is born with one leg longer than the other, or that he be humpbacked. It is likewise otchitaw when the trigger of your rifle releases by chance and the bullet becomes buried in the breast of your neighbor, otchitaw when a tree falls
with a crash on your tent; but it is also *otchitaw* when, after many hours of unrestrained hunting, Tchos succeeds in bringing a caribou within the sights of his rifle, but also *otchitaw* - how is it conceivable? if he misses.

One day Sister Denis asked Peki why she squinted. Translating otchitaw into English, Peki replied: 'On purpose' when she meant simply 'that she had been born that way.' According to Cree ideas, she was perfectly correct to say 'on purpose.' This expression signifies a deeply rooted opinion: in everything which happens, the will of someone always intervenes to a large degree: mine, that of my neighbor, that of the devil, or that of God. And the great Otchitaw, that which dominates all, is called Kisemanitou: God. This supreme Otchitaw is self-explanatory. The cause of its will in its will itself. It is otchitaw otchitaw.

In our own philosophy this supreme *Otchitaw* rightly constitutes the object of our most profound reflections. It is quite otherwise in Cree philosophy. *Otchitaw* for the Cree is a reply sufficient by itself. A Cree never seeks to know *why*; what interests him is the *how* of things. How did the first bird start to fly? How was the earth born and how did the episodes of the flood take place? The *why* is found in the free will of that which is the *cause*, and that cause will indeed know why it acted in such a way, but that is its own business and not yours - nor mine!

In the comprehension of the Cree, all which lives possesses not only a language but also a soul. In short, the Cree is partly right in not searching for the *why* of normal things. There is truly nothing very extraordinary in an airplane which flies, in a dead tree which falls: is this not found in the logic of things? It would be, however, strange if an airplane did not fly, if a rotten tree did not fall, or if the wife-mother did not have children. In these abnormal cases, the Indian asks himself the question: 'Why? *Taneki ituke*?'

Evidently one should not expect to find



Native Cultural Arts Program, Portage College. Artist: Vicki L. Montour

in this collection of short questions and long savoury answers a scientifically ordered synthesis. The living tradition of a people is never systematic. All the elements of tradition are, so to speak, compartmentalized. I see myself forced to make a choice. It is impossible to retrace all the tales which are spread orally by the 'grandfathers.' A good number of traditions have been irredeemably lost since the whites upset everything; especially since the teachers (who are rarely disposed to listen) introduced so many stories involving elves and fairies, nymphs and satyrs,

Father Christmas and Snow White. Many elements of legend, as well as superstition, are kept carefully secret.

No Cree doubts the existence of his soul. The old Cree believed in a single God, in good and bad spirits, in the survival of the soul, and in certain exchanges between the living, the dead, the good and the evil spirits. These spirits are *otchitaw*, the justification of all beings and all mysterious events.

The Cree does not designate anything and everything under the label of mystery and enigma. The destiny of the soul in the other-world is, for example, a mystery; but thunder and lightening are not.

What is thunder? It is giant birds who make their nests in a part of the far West on the inaccessible heights of the Rocky Mountains. In the mating and brooding season (June), but especially when the young begin their first flight (August), these giant birds are very capricious. Their giant wings make roaring sounds - they throw glowing rocks on anything which does not please them. Once, one of these young thunderbirds fell into Lake Wabasca and unfortunately drowned. Mistikospwagan (Wooden Pipe) saw it with his own eyes, and he told his sons Tchani, Atwolp and Piele, who told me. The young bird struggled so frightfully that the water of the lake was transformed into a tempest. The wind caused by the innumerable wings of the adults trying to help the unfortunate one broke down enormous pines on the bank. When the young bird finally drowned, the parents were so saddened that they set fire to a mikiwap [an old form of lodge built of bent poles and covered with hides] not far from the lake. Three people lost their lives: Old Niyanemahou, his wife, and his daughter. The other children of Niyanemahou, Tchos

> and Maskle, are still alive. The existence of these birds is an established fact. No, thunder is not a mystery for the Cree. Wemishkosu told me one day, 'If at least I could capture an egg of the thunderbird, I could have good teeth! These eggs should be as big as the moon!' In the eyes of an Indian, a 'mystery' is far more deep than the enigmas of thunder and lightning. Even if no one has ever discovered a thunderbird's egg,



Native Cultural Arts Program, Portage College Artist: Beatrice Jackson

many have seen their arrows - these usually weigh dozens of kilos. The strength of these birds surpasses anything we could imagine!"

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Native Cultural Arts Program, Portage CollegeArtist: Ruby Sweetman

Cree Story of the Birth of the World

There are a number of Cree stories about the birth or creation of the world. This one was recorded by Roger Vandersteene during his stay at Wabasca. Scholars now know that many Native stories changed over time as they began to reflect Christian teachings, although it is impossible to tell how much any particu-

"At the beginning nothing existed except a flat surface surmounted by a cupola or firmament where lived the sun, the moon, and the stars. In this eyrie, in the company of giant animals, whom we would call prehistoric, lived primitive beings strangely resembling men. Over this first creation, God reigned lord and master: the good spirit. His enemy was the devil: the evil spirit. The first beings, from whom the human race arose, had received from God and the devil all sorts of magic virtues. These were more than necessary because, from that distant epoch, a merciless battle lar story was influenced. This story may have been influenced by the accounts in Genesis. What is even more significant is how this story, and many like it, supports the theory of a migration from one world to another.

was waged between good and evil in all corners of the universe.

Neither rivers, nor lakes, nor streams, not even the sea existed. It did not rain and the days were always warm, irradiated by the sun; the nights were cool and were presided over by the moon. Giant trees found a way to grow, but there was neither fruit nor grass, neither copses [an area of undergrowth and small trees] nor shrubs. All animals ate meat, even the buffalo and the primitive horse. Existence on earth in that original era went on under the inexorable law: eat or be eaten. There were no high rocky mountains and fire was the sacred secret of one single human being.

Lost in this cosmic world, a man lived in his mikiwap -- or tipi -- with his wife and two young sons. The man was gifted with unimaginable strength and knew many secrets. The wife was very beautiful. Of the two children, the elder was promising but he was ugly, whereas the younger resembled his mother. He was so small that he was unable to run far. The man hunted successfully with bows and arrows, spear and knife, to take care of his family's needs. He needed a supply of meat and numerous animal hides for clothing and bedding. The wife was very industrious and the two boys looked fine in their beaded moccasins and their breechcloths delicately embroidered in lively colours. They slept warm in their soft beds made of buffalo hides softened by tanning.

However, all was not well in that apparently perfect household. More than once while he was preparing for the hunt, the man had noticed that his wife was decorating herself with her shell jewelry and gold; and when he came back in the evening she had again put on her ordinary dress. The bracelets no longer decorated her arms, her waist was not girdled with rich wampum, and on her breast no trinkets sparkled. Such a curious attitude worried the husband. He became suspicious, and one day he was determined to learn the final word. He started off for the hunt, furnished as usual with his bow and arrows; as soon as he was beyond view, he turned around and hid behind a fallen tree trunk. From his hiding place he could see the comings and goings of his wife.

He had not very long to wait. He saw her come out dressed like a bride on her wedding night: her body, covered with jewels, sparkled and shone. With a light and lively step, she turned towards a crooked tree trunk not far from the place where her husband was hiding. Three little taps on the bark. Then in a tender murmur:

'My husband, here I am. Come quickly to meet me!'

An enormous snake came out of the

crooked tree. It slithered towards her and wrapped itself lavisciously about her body. She patted the slimy body and lovingly kissed the pointed mouth of the reptile. The man was seized with such anger that he left his hiding place immediately. For a whole day he ran about to dissipate his rage. In the evening he did not come home, but spent a sleepless night preparing his vengeance.

The next day he came home. His wife was waiting for him.

'Why did you not come home last night, my husband?'

'I went very far away to hunt. Prepare my food immediately, wife.'

Without any delay the wife left; for it is a man's duty to hunt and kill, but it is a woman's duty to bring back the meat to the lodge. As soon as she was out of sight the man put on the beautiful dress, arrayed himself with jewels, and in haste approached the crooked tree. He gave three knocks and murmured tenderly:

'Husband, I am here. Come quickly to meet me!'

At once the horrible snake came out. The man gave it a blow which cut off its head, and pulled the long body out. Without waiting, he boiled the meat and called his two sons, who were playing with a javelin. He gave them four jewels, four powerful spells. From now on it would be impossible for him to protect his children.

'By means of this spell, you will be able to make fire in case you need it.' This secret fire he had won in an epic battle against the primitive wolf Misimahigan.

The second spell will be useful when you have need of spines, brambles, and bushes. The third spell will enable you to raise mountains which will change into stony walls. As for the last, when you throw it on the ground a torrential river will arise. Go, my sons! Good luck.' Then he hid his children under the ground and forbade them to reveal the magical secrets he had bequeathed to them. He went around his tent and conjured all the objects, one after the other:

'Do not tell my wife what you have seen!' Hardly had he given this order to each object, but his wife came into the tent. She had not found the game and she was happily surprised to find fresh meat in the pot.

'What meat is this and where did it come from?' she asked her husband. And he answered her in a cold, calm voice:

'It is the meat of the snake hidden in the crooked tree, the detestable animal who you called your husband.' The woman turned pale, ran to the tree, knocked on it, calling:

'Husband, here I am. Come quickly to meet me!' In vain! No snake came out of the trunk. Wailing with sorrow, she rushed back to the tent where her husband waited, his arms crossed and with wrathful gaze. With a single stroke of his knife, he cut off her head. He waited until the convulsions of the corpse quietened down and the bloodied face became fixed into a dolorous (distressed or painful) mask. Calmly he left the tent, raised his eyes towards the heaven and rose up into the air. He rose until he reached the highest firmament where he still shines today, a star among thousands in the middle of the night.

On earth, abandoned in the middle of the deserted tent, the cut-off head was not dead. The mother's head opened its eyes and looked about.

'My children,' it said, 'I hasten to see you again!' The children fled into subterranean regions below the primitive world. Suddenly the head began to roll about in the tent. It looked everywhere, finding nothing. Impatiently it went out of the tent, looking outside. At the end of its resources, it questioned the household objects:

'Knife, where are my children?' But the knife did not reply.

'Petticoat, where are my children?' But the petticoat was silent.

'Buffalo skin, where are they?' But the buffalo skin made no answer. Thus she questioned each of the objects which surrounded her as though enemies:

'Where have my children disappeared?' Hidden under the buffalo skin, a little stone had escaped the conjuration. Timidly it ventured a reply:

'Your husband has transferred his magic power to the children before he flew up into the stars. There they are, fleeing in the distance.'

The mother's head bounded out of the tent. By leaps and bounds it rolled about in pursuit of the children. They were far away, but the head was swift. Over yonder she spied the little one riding piggy-back of the elder. The head coaxed them to stop:

'I am your mother,' she yelped. The young one recognized the voice, threw a furtive glance behind and cried out, horrified:

'Hurry, run fast, big brother; it is not our mother! It is a devilish monster which will swallow us up!'

And the older brother sped up, but the head rolled with such speed that the boy could not keep the advantage he had gotten. Like a light, the memory of the spells crossed his mind.

Throw the first magic stone behind us!' he ordered his younger brother. Hardly



Native Cultural Arts Program, Portage College. Artist: Judy Sirois

had the stone touched the earth when flames enveloped the landscape. The flames crackled and whistled, but the head crossed the curtain of fire. What horror! The face was now covered by a reddish scarf, stretched like the skin of a drum. Two torches of calcined hair twisted in the air. The children fled faster and the burned head pursued them without respite.

Throw the second spell!' ordered the big brother. And in the wink of an eye, behind them intertwined thorn bushes, spines, and underbrush of all sorts. The head was stopped, immobilized. It struggled, caught in the bushes. A strident cry awoke a monstrous serpent, Misenkinepik. He wriggled under the brush, breaking a passage for the head, which again started in pursuit, more frantic than before.

'Throw the third spell!' Suddenly behind them rocks rose to the sky. The monstrous head crashed into them. At her cry, Misamisk, the giant beaver, ran up and with its teeth of steel broke a passageway through the rock. The head had now become a skull with hollow orbs and grimacing teeth. Rage increased the speed of the mother's head.

'There it is again!' said the elder, out of breath.

At the moment the little brother wished to throw down the fourth spell, it slipped out of his weak hands. And there at their feet before them a large crack opened, at the bottom of which roared a river. A cry of astonishment escaped both of them; they felt themselves caught between the waves on the one side and the sinister grin of the skull behind them. But Misikinepik, another enormous snake, advanced towards them on the waves.

'Jump on my back!' it cried to them, and swimming towards the opposite bank it set them down safely. Tired out, the two brothers stretched out on the bank. The skull uttered more piercing cries, for it felt itself powerless before the waves. But implacably it gave orders to the snake:

'And me! Help me cross over also!' The snake put the head onto its back and left from the shore. 'Faster! Faster!'

'Be quiet,' warned the snake. On the snake's back, the head did not restrain its impatience. But it was quite a journey across the waves. In a moment, Misikinepik became angry, bent his back, and threw the head into the boiling foam. Swallowed up by the waves, she heard the curse of the elder son:

'May you be transformed into a monstrous sturgeon, the most voracious of all fish! You will henceforth be called Misinamew.'

The two boys slept a deep sleep. On awakening, Wesakitchak (for it was he who was carrying his younger brother) confirmed that they were on a new earth: they saw there trees, bushes of every sort, and fresh green plants. In the distance they saw mountains crossed by innumerable valleys where ran majestic rivers and little streams, which formed here and there into swamps and lakes before becoming lost in the infinite sea. Wesakitchak had all sorts of adventures: He became the prisoner of a giant. The giant abandoned the younger brother in a forest, where he was transformed into a being half-man and halfwolf, to be finally torn apart by the monster sturgeon, its former mother. Wesakitchak finally married one of the giant's daughters. To repay his wife's love for him, he changed himself into a fine young man; he thus became the most handsome of men. He undertook to avenge his younger brother on the sturgeon. He saved himself and his wife by escaping from the hands of his sister-in-law and his father-in-law, who called up innumerable monsters into battle. Wesakitchak witnessed the decline of the original race of men. The latter were engulfed in indescribable perversity, such that Kisemanitou (God) decided to destroy the perverse race by a flood. Wesakitchak was then chosen by God, with the task of saving creation from disaster. After the flood, Wesakitchak released the animals onto the new earth which he had saved by means of seeds of the old earth. But God in his goodness and wisdom decided to create new companions for him. All things considered,

Wesakitchak

Wesakitchak, also spelled Wisaka, Wisakedjak, Weesack-kachack, and anglicized as Whiskey Jack, is the central character in many Cree legends. Wesakitchak is a mythological trickstertransformer who is the personification of the human race, especially its comical side. Nearly all the stories involving Wesakitchak are jokes and there are literally hundreds of them. As the mischievous trickster, Wesakitchak was particularly fond of playing tricks on animals and many of the stories explain why animals are the way they are. Although Wesakitchak was present at the creation, he did not have the power of creation. That belonged to the Creator. There is a story told that Wesakitchak once had total power over people and animals but the Creator became angry with him, took away his powers and left him only the power to flatter and to deceive.

Kisemanitou did not have great confidence in Wesakitchak. Kisemanitou had already experienced the sorts of foolishness this rascal was capable of.

At the order of God, Wesakitchak made two clay statues; a statue of a man and a statue of a woman. After breathing life into them, God extirpated one side of each clay statue. Opening his eyes, the man-statue uttered instinctively his first word:

'Nipity (Water)!' Then he cried, 'Food!' The first man was given the name 'Crooked Canoe.' From the two sides which God had taken away from the clay statues, he made a boy and a girl: this was the first family. The Cree follow their own line of descent from those two clay beings right down to the present. From the two beings born from the sides, other men are descendants down to the present. The first men were never sick because they possessed magical remedies. They also possessed the secret of fire which Wesakitchak had taught them. They lived very happily. The first man was killed by a bear when he was two hundred years old. When he arrived in the hereafter, he found himself entrusted by Kisemanitou with the task of inspector of the realm of the future dead."



Native Cultural Arts Program, Portage College Artist: Elizabeth Sadlowski



Native Cultural Arts Program, Portage College Artist: Debra Lynn Nowdlak



Native Cultural Arts Program, Portage College Artist: Trina Eagle Tail Feathers

Witigo

In 1901 the Calgary Herald reported that a Cree man had been put to death at Wabasca, Alberta when the community feared he had turned into a Witigo (sometimes spelled Wetigo). No other creature in Native legend strikes such fear as the Witigo. For the Witigo will turn a person into a cannibal monster. Roger

"I do not know of a single Indian who does not immediately tremble with fear at the thought of the Witigo. No one doubts the existence of Witigos. This is a portrait of a Witigo: wild and haggard, barefoot, tall and thin, ragged, sometimes completely naked. Usually the face is mutilated, and the most frequent mutilation is of the lips; these have been gnawed by mice or other little parasites, so that the teeth show menacingly. He wanders in the forest in search of prey. A constant thirst torments him and only human blood can quench it and warm his heart, for his heart is a block of ice contained within a frozen thoracic cage. He kills his victims in order to suck the still-warm blood; then he is satisfied. Sometimes he eats the flesh of his victim. He attacks men as well as women: old people as well as children. This description faithfully reproduces the appearance of the Witigo as he is in the imagination of the Cree. The Witigo is not a creature, made, as such, by the hand of the Creator. It is a human being who has 'become' a Witigo at a given moment. No one knows the reason for this radical transformation."

There is only one way for a person to defend themself against a Witigo: to kill it. That is not so simple. In some cases the cannibal has to be killed by a relative. In other cases a whole series of special precautions and prescriptions have to be observed. There is a Cree story told about a Witigo who gave his victims a last chance. This Witigo preyed only on men. He would offer the victim a knife and challenge the victim to stab him: Vandersteene, O.M.I., had some very interesting things to say about Witigos in his book, Wabasca: Dix Ans de Vie Indienne. Apparently, the Pelican and Marten Hills in the Wabasca area were favourite haunts of Witigos.



Glenbow Archives

Artist Norval Morrisseau's depiction of a Witigo

"Take it and pierce me. But if you cannot kill me, I will drink your blood.' He stood there and bared his breast. The trembling Indian was forced to take the knife, but the blade struck something as hard as ice: an impenetrable breast. When, hopeless or worn out with struggle, the victim tried to flee, the Witigo pierced him coldly and gorged himself on the hot blood. But it happened that, at a curve in the path, the monster met a young man. As was his custom, he offered him his knife. The young man seized it, but in the twinkling of an eye he substituted his own knife, by means of which he pierced the heart of the Witigo.

What had this young hero done? Before acquiring a stone knife, he had been prepared for a long time. He had undergone a strict fast, far off on a hill he had isolated himself in prayer. Kisemanitou had then chosen him to deliver his people from calamity."

Pakakos

Although the Witigo is probably the most feared spirit in Cree culture, Pakakos is nearly as dreaded.

Pakakos is a skeleton-like spirit of the forest which can fly through the air and attack a hunter. The Cree believed that Pakakos sought out poor hunters, especially those who wounded animals, let them escape, or killed them unnecessarily. Pakakos could paralyze a hunters arms or do other nasty things which would render them incapable of further hunting.



Native Cultural Arts Program, Portage College Artist: Aaron Half

Emile Petitot

"When we read Father Petitot's work, we hear the voice of a man who loved the North and its people and who was loved, in turn, by them." - Indian and Northern Affairs Minister Judd Buchanan, at Mareuil-lès-Meaux, France, 1975

Emile Petitot was a very interesting but rather tragic figure. The son of a watchmaker, he was born near Marseilles, France in 1838. He opted for a career with the Church and became a missionary in the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate. In 1862 he was sent to the Canadian Northwest and for the next twenty years he served at a number of missions in what are now the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, including the Oblate mission at Lac La Biche (see Part Three).

Unlike most of his colleagues, who were interested in "saving souls" or "converting the heathen" - as the saying went at the time - Petitot became interested in geography, anthropology, and the languages of the Canadian North West. From the 1870s to the 1890s he published more than a dozen books and several articles on aspects of the North West, many of which contain Native stories and legends. After presenting some of his findings to the Royal Geographical Society in London, England in 1883 he was awarded the Back prize in recognition of his scientific contributions. He was also awarded a silver medal from the Société de Géographie de Paris for his map of arctic regions.

Petitot was intrigued by the many similarities between some of the Native stories and the stories in the Bible: a great flood, the creation of a new earth, and snakes and serpents who enticed women. In one Native story, Petitot noted, the world became flooded but "Old Man" had built a raft and saved the animals in pairs.

Petitot believed this was more than mere coincidence. He thought he had stumbled upon one of the twelve lost tribes of Israel. So convinced was Petitot that he wrote a book, Six légendes américaines identifiées



Oblate Collection

Emile Petitot. He often shed his European style missionary dress in favour of buckskin.

à L'Histoire de Moïse et du Peuple hébreu, in which he claimed to have traced the history of the Natives back to the descendants of Jacob.

Some of Petitot's views did not endear

him to his superiors. Some have argued that Petitot was stripped of his O.M.I. designation when he returned to France in 1883 and that he spent time in a mental institution. In fact, he was suffering from exhaustion and he received a dispensation from his vows in 1866. His health eventually recovered and in 1886 he joined the secular clergy and became the parish priest of Mareuil-les-Meaux, just east of Paris. He died there in May 1916 at the age of 79. In 1975 the Canadian government erected a plaque at Mareuil to commemorate his work in Canada.



Courtesy of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

In September 1975, Judd Buchanan, then Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, travelled to Mareuil-lès-Meaux, France to present a plaque honouring Emile Petitot and the contribution he made to the further understanding of Canada.



Native Cultural Arts Program, Portage College. Artist: Trudie Allen



Native Cultural Arts Program, Portage CollegeArtist: Lillian R. Meyers

Cree Story of the Origin of the Whites

Much has been written about how the Europeans viewed the Native peoples of Canada. Less is known about how the Native people viewed the Europeans. The

"Long time ago in a large town of the 'Ayislyiniwok' people started to notice that each night a young child would be missing. Even though they were very small they would disappear one after the other. This created much anxiety.

In another place, another little child was putting his mother to a real test by weeping and crying continually. So one day, being pushed to the limit, the mother grabbed her little brat and started to shake him, so much so that this little one just slipped away from his swaddling-clothes and like a butterfly leaving its chrysalid, flew away in the sky, now in the form of a large white owl.

Nevertheless, that same night, another little child disappeared from the camp in the same way as before and nobody knew who got ahold of him.

But the mother of the 'owl-child,' watching for the return of her little sorcerer, had seen him penetrate the lodge of her neighbour, grab the child in his claws, fly to the top of a tree and tear him to pieces as he would have done with a mouse!

The same thing happened the following

following story was recorded by Emile Petitot. It was originally told by Wiyasuwemaw, a Cree from Water-Hen Lake, in 1880.

night; and after each happening the 'owl child' would come back to take his place in his regular clothes and in his bed with the most innocent composure. Child he was during the day, owl he would become at night!

The mother then hurried to alert all her people, the Cree.

This is my son,' she said, 'the son of a white man who is the cause for the disappearance of our children. He is a vampire. Each night he eats them disguised as a big white owl!'

So then the Cree people held a council to decide what to do with the unusual child. Some said: 'We have to kill him!' Others added: 'It is better to abandon him, because he is a Manito!' The more humane ones thought that it was better to exchange him with another child from an enemy tribe.

In the end, the conclusion was reached: the vampire-child must die.

But suddenly, overtaken with fear at this decision, the child started to talk for the first time. He pleaded for mercy and asked to spare his life, promising that if they did grant his request they would witness a great marvel that would turn to their benefit.

'What then are we to do with you?' asked the warriors.

'Very well.' said the child, 'build me a small coffin out of round logs and put me in there. Then come back to the same place in three years to get me.'

This suggestion seemed wise to the Cree people and pleased them, so they executed the plan very carefully. They built him a small cache in which they deposited a few provisions, placed the child alive in it, and then departed.

Three years after, the Cree people remembered about the owl-child and said: 'Let us go and visit his tomb.'

But instead of a small box built on four posts, they found a large wooden house

surrounded by a large number of smaller ones. And in all these houses lived white people whose language they didn't understand.

It was a commercial factory.

But amongst all these strangers with the pale face, they recognized the owl-child and they asked him who were these people entirely new to them.

He answered that they were the many Cree children that he had taken away and devoured when he was living with the Ayis-Iyiniwok.

Himself, having since become a great white chief, gave arms, clothing, and utensils to the Cree people. And since then, the two nations have lived in very good harmony."

The Coming of the Europeans

"Long time ago, the Cree people were living alone on this side of the Great Waters where the sun sets, and the Whites lived alone on the other side of the Great Waters where the sun rises. They didn't know each other, had not even heard of such neighbours.

One night, the Cree people dreamt they had seen a large dugout canoe coming towards them on the Great Waters where the sun rises. They got very convinced of this dream, and so they got up and started to walk toward the Orient.

That same night, the White people thought that on the other side of the Great Waters where the sun goes down, there must be a people in need of them. They believed in their inspiration, took to their large dugout canoe and set out toward the Occident [Western Europe].

... The meeting took place on the east side of the Great Land and at the edge of the Great Waters. While the Cree people were arriving guided by their dreams, the White people were coming guided by their own reason. But these last were pale, tired, ragged and dying of hunger. The Cree people, on the other hand, were strong, vigorous and rich in provisions and precious furs."

-Recorded by Emile Petitot, 1880





The Beaver

Caesars of the Wilderness

"We were Caesars, being nobody to contradict us." - Pierre-Esprit Radisson

They came Northwest, these Caesars of the wilderness, "like crusaders of the middle ages," to use the words of Peter C. Newman. Fearless explorers and fur traders, their canoes manned by brave voyageurs, spearheaded the drive. Onto the next portage! Then, with one, two, sometimes three ninety pound packs called "pieces" on their backs they sweated and toiled and paddled further inland in search of precious furs and beaver pelts to satisfy the hungry European market. By the end of the 1700s, the prize they sought was the vast riches of the Athabasca country. And a part of Canada that had been unknown was soon dotted with small trading posts and recognizable place names.

Although Aboriginal peoples were the first to inhabit the Lac La Biche region, modern settlement and development began with the fur trade. In fact, Lac La Biche owes its existence and early development to two things: a quirk of geography and the fur trade. For it was the existence of a portage over a height of land to help in the search for furs that brought the Europeans, specifically David Thompson, to a place known as Red Deers Lake in early October, 1798.

That was 813 years after the Icelandic merchant trader Bjarni Herjolfsson became the first European to sight North America; 798 years after Norse explorer Leif "the Lucky" Ericson became the first European to set foot on North America; 301 years after John Cabot claimed parts of present day Labrador and Newfoundland for England; and 264 years after Jacques Cartier sailed up the St. Lawrence River in search of diamonds, gold, and a passage to India.

Cartier found neither. There was no passage to India. His gold turned out to be pyrite and his diamonds were likely quartz - thereby leading to a saying that is still used in France, "voilà un diamant de Canada" (fake as a Canadian diamond). Cartier was not impressed. "The land God gave to Cain," was how he described Canada.

The early Europeans came, they saw, and they left. John Cabot certainly had an appreciation of the potential for fishing before he perished on the Atlantic. And Europeans continued to fish the area off the Newfoundland coast. However, after Cartier left Canada in 1542 - never to return - Europeans lost interest in the country for nearly half a century.

When they returned it was for a number of complex political and economic reasons. But one of the reasons was fur, particularly beaver. Starting in the late 16th century fashion styles changed and the beaver hat became all the rage.

The question was where to find the beaver fur to make the hats. By the mid-1500s the beaver was extinct in England and fast becoming depleted in Europe. Europeans knew that Canada had fur, a commodity which Jacques Cartier said was "a thing of little value." The problem was that the voyage to Canada could be dangerous and risky. But when a man named Bellenger forked out 40 crowns to outfit a fur-trading expedition in 1583 and sold the furs for 400 crowns, the great Canadian fur rush was on. And it is no great exaggeration to say that a revolution took place.

It was not a revolution in the sense of people suddenly taking up arms against political authorities. No, the revolution created by the fur trade was much more subtle and occurred over a long period of time.

The French, along with Native allies and middlemen, dominated the early Canadian trade. Then, in 1665, two renegade French traders named Pierre-Esprit Radisson and Médard Chouart des Groseilliers, showed up in London, England.

They went there because the Governor of New France had punished them for an illegal expedition and they thought they

AND WHEREAS the said undertakers for theire further encouragement in the said designe have humbly besought us to Incorporate them and grant unto them and theire successors the sole Trade and Commerce of all those Seas Streightes Bayes Rivers Lakes Creekes and Soundes in whatsoever Latitude they shall bee that lye within the entrance of the Streightes commonly called Hudson's Streightes together with all the Landes Countryes and Territoryes upon the Coastes and Confynes of the Seas Streightes Bayes Lakes Rivers Creekes and Soundes aforesaid which are not now actually possessed by any of our Subjectes or by the Subjectes of any other Christian Prince or State.

-Section of the Hudson's Bay Company Charter outlining the territory over which the King granted the trade monopoly. The document, titled "The Royal Charter for incorporating The Hudson's Bay Company, A.D. 1670," was dated May 2, 1670

might strike a better deal with the British. Although the British had trouble pronouncing the names (settling on "Mr. Radishes and Mr. Gooseberries"), they were impressed with the Frenchmens' idea of starting a trading company to reach the interior of Canada via Hudson Bay instead of the St. Lawrence River.

In 1670 King Charles II of England granted a charter to the Hudson's Bay Company, giving it exclusive trading rights over all the territory traversed by rivers flowing into Hudson Bay. One of the investors and the first Governor of the Company was Prince Rupert, cousin of King Charles II. The vast territory over which the new company was granted exclusive rights was named "Rupert's Land" in honour of the Prince.

The establishment of the HBC in 1670 changed the character of the fur trade in Canada. Before 1670 most Canadian fur moved through the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes trading system which operated out



National Archives of Canada

The evolution of the Beaver hat.

of Montréal and extended west and southwest. The HBC system consisted of coastal "factories" or major trading posts along Hudson Bay. The chief difference between the two systems was that the Montréal traders went inland to trade while the HBC waited for the Natives to come to the posts.

The Montréal traders more or less retained the upper hand in the fur trade. Nonetheless, the HBC posed a serious threat. The existence of two companies meant competition and that led to a great commercial rivalry which pitted the English based HBC against the French and French-Canadian traders. Ultimately, the rivalry got caught up in a much greater struggle between the English and the French for dominance in Canada. It led to greater attempts at expansion, claims to territory. and the necessity of one company getting its hands on the furs before the other. The rivalry also led to the European discovery of what is now the province of Alberta, and subsequently Lac La Biche.

So far as is known with any certainty, the first white person to set foot on what is now Alberta soil was a man named Bouchier de Niverville. In 1751 the Governor of New France sent him west to establish a fort beyond those built by the great French explorer Pierre La Vérendrye and his sons.

De Niverville is seldom mentioned in history books, partly because the fort he claimed to have built, Fort La Jonguiere, has never been located, but mostly because he was overshadowed by Anthony Henday, a labourer, netmaker, and one-time smuggler who worked for the Hudson's Bay Company. Henday's claim to fame is the first written account of a European travelling to present day Alberta. In 1754 the HBC sent him inland to report on the activities of the Natives and the possibility of getting them to travel to Hudson's Bay to trade. Accompanied by a group of Cree, Henday travelled to an area

near present day Red Deer. There he met the Blackfoot and tried to convince them to go to Hudson's Bay to trade furs.

The Blackfoot turned down Henday's offer, apparently on the grounds that the trip was too long and they did not know how to use canoes. Those were more likely excuses. The Blackfoot obtained all the goods they needed through the Cree. They had no reason to make the long journey to Hudson Bay to trade.

The Blackfoot refusal to travel to HBC posts to trade and the activities of the French convinced Henday of the necessity for a change in policy. When he returned to York Factory, the HBC's main post, in the summer of 1755, he wrote a report in which he strongly recommended that the HBC send traders inland to bring the Natives out. Only that way, Henday informed his superiors, could the HBC "root out the French." Henday had seen only too well how effective the French traders were. "The French talk several languages to perfection: they have the advantage of us in every shape, and if they had Brazile tobacco would entirely cut our trade off," he wrote. The report fell upon deaf ears. The HBC Committeemen in London refused to even consider a change in policy.

This period of HBC history has often been characterized as the "sleep by the frozen sea." The Hudson's Bay Company stuck to its policy of waiting for the Natives to come to its posts along Hudson's Bay while the enterprising French traders continued to siphon off the

best furs by intercepting Natives bound for the HBC posts. But good fortune was on the side of the "Honourable Company." For Henday had no sooner left for his inland journey in 1754 when a young Virginian Major of Militia named George Washington ambushed a small French detachment near the forks of the Ohio and Allegheny Rivers, not far from present day Uniontown, Pennsylvania. Although he could not have possibly known it at the time, Washington fired the first shots in what was to become the Seven Years' War - the first global war. By the time Henday returned from his year and a half exploration, the Royal Navy had set sail with orders to intercept supplies from France bound for Canada. In 1756 full scale warfare broke out. The French suffered a cat-



David J. Bercuson, et al., Colonies: Canada to 1867, Toronto, 1992, p.78

Map showing the major trade routes into Western Canada.

astrophic defeat at the Plains of Abraham in Quebec City in 1759 and Canada passed into British hands in 1763.

Although the Seven Years' War did not greatly disrupt the fur trade, when it was over English and Highland Scots moved in to replace the old French Canadian "bourgeois" who had controlled the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes system. Led largely by agents such as the Frobisher brothers, Simon McTavish and William McGillivray, this new group of independent traders called "peddlers" in those days - further expanded into western Canada and established new commercial links with London.

The HBC, for its part, continued with its old policy. The Company did send traders such as Louis Primeau and William Pink inland to "collect" Natives. Pink in particular came close to Lac La Biche when he arrived at the forks of the Beaver and Amisk Rivers in 1767, though there is no evidence that he travelled any further. But these traders had no lasting success. By 1772 Andrew Graham, Master of York Fort, was warning his superiors in London that "the Situation of your Affairs in this Country is very unpromising. ...Your Trade at York Fort & Severn is greatly diminished, the Keskochewan Indians Who are the Support of it being intercepted by the Canadian Peddlers who are yearly Gaining fresh Influence over them by supplying them with Goods Inland."

So serious was the challenge posed by the Canadian Peddlers that in 1774 the HBC reversed its long standing policy of maintaining coastal trading posts and began expanding inland. The construction of Cumberland House by the important HBC explorer Samuel Hearne in northern Saskatchewan in 1774 was the first step in that direction. Thereafter, the HBC, and the Canadian Peddlers - who banded together as the North West Company in 1776 to resist the inland advances of the HBC - began leap-frogging further and further inland, always with the aim of finding a more direct route to fur-rich areas in order to undercut the competitor.

By the late 1770s the fur traders were beginning to focus their attention on the



Edward J. McCullough and Michael Maccagno, Lac La Biche and the Early Fur Traders, p.8

Although the King of England granted the Hudson's Bay Company a vast piece of territory known as Rupert's land, by the late 1790s Athabasca Country became a prize area for furs.

Athabasca country. Of particular importance to Lac La Biche during this period was an American born trader named Peter Pond. Described by one trader as "a little crack-brained and variable as the wind." Pond was the first white man to cross the Methye Portage (or Portage La Loche), near present day Fort McMurray, into the Athabasca country. His expedition was significant for three big reasons. One was that the large quantity of furs he brought out in 1779 were of extremely high quality. Another was that the Athabasca country was technically not part of the HBC charter since the Athabasca River did not flow into Hudson Bay. Finally, Pond solved some of the food supply problems associated with the inland trade.

That same year saw the formation of the "new" North West Company. Pond became one of the shareholders. After being implicated in several murders, he left the fur trade in 1788. His importance, however, can not be underestimated. He paved the way into Athabasca country and demonstrated that deep inland trade could be very profitable.

There was one other important development that must be factored into the history of Lac La Biche: the signing of Jay's Treaty in 1794 between Great Britain and the United States. That treaty, which resolved some problems in Anglo-American relations left over from the American revolutionary war, effectively ended the southwest trade. As a result, fur traders focused even more attention on the Athabasca country and the necessity of finding safe, direct, and economical routes in and out of the region. Jay's Treaty also intensified the leap-frogging between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company as the two companies started a fort and fur trade post building contest in the 1790s.

This was the context in which the North West Company sent the venerable explorer David Thompson west in 1798 to find a shorter route into the Athabasca country via the Beaver River. Although the route had appeared on maps, its existence was not confirmed.



Common items used in the fur trade. The term carrot was used as a measure in the fur trade, as in a carrot of tobacco.

Koo Koo Sint

"He can create a wilderness ... or climb the Rocky Mountains with you in a snow storm, so clearly and palpably, that only shut your eyes and you hear the crack of the rifle, or feel the snow flakes melt on your face as he talks."

-Dr. J.J. Bigsby on David Thompson, 1850

Koo Koo Sint is what the Cree called him, the man who looks at the stars. But David Thompson did not gaze at the stars to ponder the mysteries of the universe. He was constantly taking "readings" measurements of longitude and latitude. Although he was first and foremost a fur trader, his real love was exploring and mapping the vast expanse of land that is today Canada. It was something he did with great ability. And it was primarily that ability that brought him to Lac La Biche on October 4, 1798.

David Thompson was born in the parish of St. John the Evangelist at Westminster, England on April 30, 1770. The parish record names his parents as "David Thompson and Ann his wife." A second boy, John,* was born in late

January 1772. David senior, who was of Welsh descent and whose name may have originally been David Ap-Thomas, died about one month after the birth of his second son.

Little is known of David Thompson's early years. But on April 29, 1777, one day shy of his seventh birthday, he entered Grey Coat School, Westminster.

Grey Coat was a charity school which devoted itself to the education of poor boys. By all accounts it was a first rate institution. Certainly Thompson believed he received a good education in the seven years he stayed at the school. He later wrote that Grey Coat was a "royal foundation" where "I received a mathematical education for the Royal Navy."

Many of the boys who entered Grey Coat were being groomed for the Royal Navy and Thompson was no exception. However, reductions in the Navy following the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783, which ended the American revolutionary war and established peace between Britain and the United States, closed this option and Thompson's lot fell to the Hudson's Bay Company.

The following entry appears in the minutes of the quarterly meeting of the Board of Governors of Grey Coat School, June 29, 1784:

(Note the use of super-script for abbreviations).

David Thompson bound to the Secretary of the Hudson's Bay Company for seven years & paid. On the 20th May David Thompson, a mathematical Boy belonging to the Hosp¹[Grey Coat school] was bound to the Hudson's Bay Company & the Trea^r then paid M^r Thos. Hutchins, Corresponding Secretary to the said Company, the sum of five pounds for taking the said Boy appren^{Ce} for seven years.

*What became of David Thompson's brother, John, remains a bit of a mystery. The records indicate that he signed on with the Hudson's Bay Company in 1789 and again in 1794. He appears to have left the HBC in 1797 and, according to the family, eventually became a sea captain.



"His figure was short and compact, and his black hair was worn long all round and cut square, as if by one stroke of the shears, just above the eyebrows. His complexion was of the gardener's ruddy brown, while the expression of deeply furrowed features was friendly and intelligent, but his cut-short nose gave him an odd look." -Description of David

Thompson in 1817

There is no known portrait of David Thompson. Perhaps no artist could keep him still long enough to paint one. Above: C.W. Jeffrey's engraving of David Thompson taking a reading is one of the few impressions we have of the great explorer. Below: John Bunyan, author of The Pilgrim's Progress. One of David Thompson's daughters said he bore a striking resemblance to the famous British writer.

On December 30, 1783 the Master of Grey Coat informed the Board of Governors of the school that he had received an application from the Hudson's Bay Company for four boys to serve in America. The Master noted that the school had two boys suited for the job, Samuel John McPherson and David Thompson.

The story goes that Thompson accepted his fate. The other boy had probably heard too many horror stories about North America, for he ran away and never returned to Grey Coat (the school record claims McPherson "eloped" and was eventually expelled). Thompson was bound to the HBC for a period of seven years on May 20, 1784. The school paid the HBC a sum of five pounds (about \$25 at that time) to take young Thompson off their hands. Nine days later Thompson boarded the *Prince Rupert* for Canada. He was all of fourteen years old.

David Thompson spent the winter of 1784-85 at Fort Churchill, the HBC's most northerly post on Hudson Bay, under the tutelage of Samuel Hearne. Hearne was



The Beaver

the important HBC explorer who had journeyed to the Coppermine River and who built Cumberland House, the first inland HBC post, in 1774. In early September 1785 Thompson was sent to York Factory, about 275 km southwest of Fort Churchill. Accompanied by two Native men, called "Packet Indians" because they delivered mail to various HBC posts, he made the journey on foot, with one blanket, and no provisions. On several occasions Thompson and his companions encountered polar bears. He later wrote that "The Indian rule is to walk past them with a steady step without seeming to notice them." It was a journey the fifteen year old Thompson did not forget.

For the next year Thompson settled down to his clerking duties at York Factory. He might have remained at York for a longer period, but the HBC was eager to expand into the Saskatchewan River district in an effort to compete more effectively with the rival North West Company. In the summer of 1786, Thompson was "fitted out" with a trunk, clothing, a gun, and a cup and sent inland to help establish more trading posts.

Three years later he met with a stroke of bad luck: he badly fractured his leg in a sled accident. Thompson's bad luck, however, turned out to be incredibly good luck. For, during the period of his recovery, he studied under the guidance of Philip Turnor, the HBC's surveyor and map maker. Turnor must have made quite an impression on the young man because Thompson decided to devote as much time as he could to surveying and mapmaking.

To that end, in 1790 he began writing to the Secretary of the HBC asking for a sextant and other instruments instead of the usual suit of clothes given to those who finished their apprenticeship. The Company granted the request and Thompson began surveying on his own time. The HBC was impressed with his work, especially a survey he made of the area between Cumberland House and York Factory. In 1792 he was assigned the job of finding a more direct route from Hudson Bay to Lake Athabasca. After a number of delays the expedition got under way in the spring of 1795. By that time Thompson had been promoted HBC surveyor at the handsome salary of sixty pounds a year -

A Meeting with the Devil

"During the winter at times we had much leisure and we employed it in playing at Draughts [a game similar to checkers] for which we had two chequer boards, one with twelve, the other with twenty four men on each side; it is a game of skill and I became expert at it. Having nothing to do, it was my constant employment; and for want of a companion frequently played by myself. A strange incident now happened to me and which some[times] happens to mankind which brings with it a strong influence on their conduct for the rest of their lives. I was sitting at a small table with the chequer board before me, when the devil sat down opposite to me, his features and color were those of a Spaniard, he had two short black horns on his forehead which pointed forwards; his head and body down to his waist (I saw no more) was covered with glossy black curling hair, his countenance mild and grave; we began playing, played several games and he lost every game, kept his temper but looked more grave; at length he got up or rather disappeared. My eyes were open it was broad daylight, I looked around, all was silence and solitude, was it a dream or was it reality? I could not decide. Young and thoughtless as I was, it made a deep impression on my mind. I made no vow but took a resolution from that very hour never to play a game of chance, or skill or anything that had the appearance of them and I kept it."

-David Thompson's Narrative 1784-1812

This bizarre experience came to light in 1957 when the scholar Victor Hopwood found one of Thompson's "missing" manuscripts. Richard Glover, who edited the 1962 edition of Thompson's Narrative containing this story, wrote: "Nobody except an accomplished demonologist would be adequately equipped to comment on such a passage as this." considerably more than the fifteen pounds a year he had been receiving.

Nonetheless, increasingly frustrated with what he thought was a lack of support for his surveying work, Thompson left the HBC on May 23, 1797 and defected to the North West Company. It was almost thirteen years to the day since he was apprenticed to the HBC.

There is a great deal of controversy surrounding Thompson's decision to leave the HBC. J.B. Tyrrell, who did so much to draw attention to Thompson's role in Canadian history by editing the first edition of David Thompson's Narrative, said very little about the matter, except that his term of service had expired. Others, such as Richard Glover, question this. Not only was Thompson still under contract to the HBC, Glover argued, but he left without giving the required one year's notice and then had the audacity to ask the HBC to pack up everything he had left behind and ship it to England for him. It would also appear that Thompson lied when he later claimed that the HBC had ordered him to stop his surveying work.

Whatever the reason behind his decision to leave the HBC - and it is unlikely the real reason will ever be known - Thompson became a Nor'Wester and spent the next fifteen years surveying and mapping much of Western Canada. In 1797 Thompson's new employers entrusted him with a very important assignment - surveying part of the border between Canada and the United States. Jay's Treaty of 1794 effectively closed the southwest trade and forced more attention on the Athabasca country. The Treaty also cast some doubt over whether certain North West Company posts, and especially NWC headquarters at Grand Portage, were situated on American soil (Grand Portage was in fact located on American soil. The NWC abandoned it in 1802 and moved to Fort William, located not far from present day Thunder Bay, Ontario).

Over the next year Thompson worked at blinding speed. He completed an initial survey of the major rivers and lakes from Lake Superior to Lake Winnipeg, then south along the Assiniboine and Souris Rivers, over to the Missouri River and up the Red River and back over to Lake Superior. It was an astonishing journey, during which he helped pinpoint the headwaters of the Mississippi River.

On May 20, 1798 he arrived at Sault Ste. Marie, commonly known at the time as the Falls of St Maries. He rested for nearly two weeks and then, on June 1, he left Sault Ste. Marie for Grand Portage in a light canoe with eleven men. It was the beginning of his journey across Canada to Lac La Biche.

Sunday School Hero?

With rare exceptions, David Thompson has been portrayed by historians as a "Sunday school hero." He did not smoke. He did not drink. He was very religious - to the point that his idea of a good time was reading his *voyageurs* passages from the Bible while gathered around the evening fire. He was also violently opposed to liquor in the fur trade. Yet, David Thompson was not above inflicting insult, as an excerpt from a stinging letter he wrote to his boss, Joseph Colen, Chief of York Factory, shortly after his defection to the North West Company in May, 1797 indicates:

"Many of us acknowledge with readiness that you have some good qualities, and I had once the greatest respect for you; I have some yet, but it is not my wish to say those things which I know you do not wish to hear. How is it, Sir, that everyone who has once wished you well should turn to be indifferent to you, and even some to hate you, altho' they are constant in their other friendships, - there must be a defect somewhere.

The fact is, that from your peculiar manner of conduct, you are also one of those unfortunate men who will have many an acquaintance, but never a real friend."



Edward J. McCullough and Michael Maccagno, Lac La Biche and the Early Fur Traders, p42

1. June 1, 1798. Thompson left Sault Ste. Marie for Grand Portage. 2. He arrived at Grand Portage on June 7 and departed again on July 14, 1798. 3. On August 9, he arrived at the mouth of the Saskatchewan River at Lake Winnipeg. 4. Thompson reached Cumberland House, August 18 and left the following day for Lac La Biche via the Sturgeon Weir River and Portage du Traite. 5. He crossed Portage du Traite on August 25, 1798 and started up Churchill River. 6. On September 8, he arrived at the mouth of the Beaver River and the south

After completing his first survey for the North West Company, David Thompson travelled to Sault Ste. Marie, arriving there on May 20, 1798. He rested for nearly two weeks and then, on June 1, he left Sault Ste. Marie in a light canoe with eleven men for Grand Portage. He arrived at Grand Portage on June 7 and stayed there until July 14.

Grand Portage was the inland nerve center for North West Company operations. It was an impressive fort with a fifteen foot high palisade reinforced with a bastion and massive gate. Inside were the Great Hall, living quarters, warehouses, shops, end of Île à la Crosse. 7. At Green Lake. September 11. Thompson sent the canoes up the Beaver River while he travelled on horseback to Fort George. 8. Arrived at Fort George on September 18 and departed again on September 22 to meet the canoes on the Beaver River. 9. On September 25 Thompson made his rendezvous with the canoes and began up the Beaver River. 10. Thompson arrived at Portage La Biche on October 3. The following day, October 4, 1798 at 1:00 p.m. he arrived on the shores of Lac La Biche.

and a special stone room to store gun powder.

Each year, usually around May 1, the canoe brigades made the mad dash from Lachine, near Montréal, to Grand Portage at the western end of Lake Superior. This trip, which took between six and eight weeks, created much of the romantic image and pageantry of the fur trade.

The voyageurs would gather at Montréal's Old Market and party for a few days before making their way to the North West Company's staging area at Lachine. The bourgeois - the name given to commanding officers, partners, and agents - would bustle about, taking inventory and directing the loading of canoes. When all was ready the chief guide would hold a steersman's pole over his head, bring it down in a chopping motion, and yell "Avant!" The thirty-six foot birchbark canots de maître lurched forward and the race to Grand Portage was on. A brigade could number anywhere from four to 10 canoes.

The annual dash was such a time-honoured tradition that even Hudson's Bay Company Governor George Simpson repeated it long after the North West Company was dead and gone and the route out of Lachine ceased to have any practical significance for the fur trade.

In David Thompson's time the Lachine brigades bringing in supplies (porkeaters) would rendezvous with traders bringing in furs (winterers) at Grand Portage. Those who continued inland would do so in the smaller *canot du nord*, or north canoe, which was typically twenty-four feet long.

At Grand Portage the *bourgeois* would gather to discuss business, formulate policy, and gorge themselves on wild duck, trout, buffalo humps, and other delicacies washed down with gallons of West Indies rum and French brandy.

The voyageurs, for their part, did not participate in these festivities. In fact, few *voyageurs* were even allowed to enter the fort much less the inner sanctum. They spent much of their time drinking and fighting. If matters got out of hand they might spend time in the dreaded pot au beurre - the "butter tub," which one unfortunate soul described as "a small square building made of hewn logs, without any light, wherein was a quantity of human excrement" (the conditions must have been terrible because this same person wanted out of the butter tub so badly that he gave three years free labour to be released early).

Grand Portage was a hive of activity for much of the summer and Thompson's journal entries for June and July 1798 certainly indicate a great deal of hustle and bustle. The *Journals* also read like a who's who of the fur trade. Roderick McKenzie, who built Fort Chipewyan, Cuthbert Grant, father of the Métis leader of the same name, and Duncan McGillivray, a leading figure in the NWC, were just a few of the famous traders Thompson encountered.

David Thompson left Grand Portage on July 14, 1798. Travelling with one of the McTavish clan, he went to Fort Charlotte. Named in honour of George III's queen, Fort Charlotte was little more than a ragtag collection of log shacks located above a series of falls on the Pigeon River. Thompson recorded in his journal that he went to a place called Perdrix to view one of the falls.

From Fort Charlotte the brigade began the long trek over the height of land between Lake Superior and the Lake of the Woods. Some of the places Thompson visited - "the Goose," "little Vausies," little Portize Newve," and "Grand Portize Newve" - are all but lost to history. At the time, however, they were important stopping places, known to the canoemen as *poses*. Although longer trips were most often measured in "pipes," meaning the number of smoke-breaks between different places, some of the portages were measured by *poses*. Thus, Grand Portage was sixteen *poses*.

Few places were as sacred as the Height of Land itself. And going over Hauteur de Terre, as it was called, was a rite of passage. Every year the brigades would stop to observe a solemn ceremony as serious as any in the fur trade. The oldest guide would preside over the initiation of any newcomer. There is a story told of the first time William McGillivray, who was the nephew of the great Simon McTavish, arrived at the Height. When the brigade stopped, McGillivray stood watching the streams flowing in two directions. It was a hot day so he took off his hat but soon felt a prickling sensation on the back of his neck. The guide had cut a cedar bough, which he then dipped in a nearby stream. McGillivray was ordered to kneel. The guide drenched him with the water soaked bough. McGillivray was then forced to make two promises. One was to never allow a newcomer to go over the Height of

The North Canoe

The North Canoe, or canot du nord, was the principal means of transportation west of Lake Superior. It was a light, graceful craft approximately 24 feet (six meters) long and between 4 and 6 feet (one to one and three-quarters meters) wide. The North Canoe was made of cedar and birch bark sewn with spruce root and well gummed with a concoction of spruce gum and animal fat to make it waterproof. Most of the canoes were gaudily painted on the bow and stern with those mythical figures which superstitious voyageurs believed increased their speed. It was not uncommon for canoes to have names and banners.

The average North Canoe carried 3000 pounds (1360 kg). 8 or 9 *voyageurs*, up to 3 passengers, provisions for a month. and an array of trade goods which included axes, beads, blankets, copper kettles, guns, gun powder, lead balls, knives, flour, sugar, tobacco, and kegs of "high wine" - the fur trade euphemism for overproof rum.

A version of the North Canoe, the light or express canoe, made the transcontinental journey from Montreal to the mouth of the Columbia River on the Pacific Coast in 100 days. In 1822 Hudson's Bay Company Governor Sir George Simpson's hand picked *voyageurs* made the journey from York Factory on the shores of Hudson's Bay to the Pacific Coast in 90 days, 16 of which were spent at various HBC posts along the way. Governor Simpson's legendary exploits earned him the title, "The Birchbark Napoleon."

But the all-time record was set by a crew of six *voyageurs* who, in a light express canoe, paddled North West Company trader Roderick Mackenzie from Rainy Lake, Ontario to Fort Chipewyan in a month and four days. The distance from Rainy Lake to Fort Chipewyan is 2000 miles (approximately 3200 km).

Although the North Canoe enjoyed a special place in the fur trade, it was gradually eclipsed by the York boat, which the Hudson's Bay Company introduced in the 1790s to gain the advantage over the North West Company.



The North Canoe.

Land without observing the ceremony. The second promise was never to kiss a *voyageur's* wife without her consent. The promises made, the brigade fired a black powder salute and drank a toast to "*Je suis un homme du nord!*"

By July 19, Thompson was passing through a series of portages that took him to Lake Seiganagah (probably Saganaga Lake in present day Quetico Provincial Park in Ontario), then over the Knife Portage, and on to Lake le Mecan.

He left Lake le Mecan on the morning of July 22 bound for Rainy Lake. The canoemen would have paddled the Rainy River, which fur-traders often described as the most beautiful river in the north. Beyond lay Rainy Lake and the North West Company post Lac-la-Pluie (often referred to as Rainy Lake House). Thompson and his band of canoes arrived there on July 23.

Lac-la-Pluie served as an advance post for the Athabasca brigades and Thompson mentions some of the comings and goings of the crews in his journal. The post also served as a depot for collecting large quantities of wild rice which had been harvested by Native peoples in the region. But Thompson did not stick around. He left Lac-la-Pluie on July 24 and arrived at Lake of the Woods the following afternoon. He let his men rest before pushing on to Lake Winnipeg.

From Lake of the Woods to Lake Winnipeg there were some 29 portages averaging 203 meters in length. It was a tough journey and for several days Thompson ran into heavy weather and a number of accidents when the *voyageurs* attempted to shoot the rapids. On July 27 the stern of one canoe was broken and the next day he lost another canoe on the Winnipeg River.

By July 29 the weather had cleared and Thompson was approaching the last series of portages before Lake Winnipeg. He recorded in his journal that he was safely through the last portage - the Bonnet Portage - at 7:30 PM on July 30. His brigade stopped to trade some sturgeon and fresh meat with a group of Chippeways (Ojibwa). They also met a brigade of canoes from Slave Lake.

The next morning the crew pushed on to Lake Winnipeg, arriving at Winnipeg House in the afternoon. Winnipeg was adopted from the Cree name, *win-nipi*, meaning "murky water." Murky or not, Thompson breathed a sigh of relief when he arrived safely. He wrote in his journal "Thank God."

From Lake Winnipeg, Thompson's next destination was Cumberland House. Over the next few days progress was slowed somewhat by bad weather, although on August 2 Thompson reported that they hoisted sail to take advantage of the wind. The next day found the brigade heading for shore when "dark cloudy weather" moved in.

The weather remained unstable for a number of days. Thompson wrote "to the 9 August we were in Lake Winnipeg - with variable winds & as variable weather - so that we sometimes put up & set off 2 or 3 times in the 24 Hours." He also reported that on several occasions he and his men had to sleep on stony beaches. Thompson's journal entries during this period provide an excellent illustration of how the weather could dramatically affect travel during the 18th century.

Finally, on August 9 he arrived at the mouth of the Saskatchewan River and the next day travelled up the Grand Rapids. He entered Cedar Lake on August 11 and stopped to trade with a group of Chippeways. More trading followed with another group of Natives the next evening, after which, Thompson wrote rather cryptically in his journal, "we put off to avoid any farther [sic, further] trouble."

On August 13 the weather cleared but a strong westerly gale dogged progress. Then, uncharacteristically, Thompson stopped entering daily events in his journal for five days. The next journal entry occurred on August 18, when he recorded that he had arrived at Cumberland House after days of fierce westerly winds which "very much retarded our Progress." The weather must have been very bad, for Thompson rarely missed a day writing in his journal. The Cumberland Houses were major hubs in the fur trade in David Thompson's time. The first Cumberland House was built by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1774 and named in honour of Prince Rupert, Duke of Cumberland. In addition to being the oldest continuously occupied site in Saskatchewan, it was a place of major historical significance for three rea-



Map showing the location of Cumberland House, the Hudson's Bay Company's first inland post.

sons. First, it was the first inland post built by the HBC. Second its establishment marked a major change in HBC policy away from waiting for Natives to come to HBC posts to actively pursuing the inland trade. Third, the construction of Cumberland House marked the beginning of the intense rivalry between the HBC and the Montréal traders who later formed the North West Company.

The NWC, perhaps in an effort to mock the HBC or, more likely, to capture some of the HBC trade, named their post Cumberland House as well. It functioned until the merger of 1821.

As for the HBC Cumberland House, it continued as a major centre until the mid-19th Century, when new trade routes to the interior rendered it less important. Thompson left Cumberland House on August 19, 1798. The next day he entered the Sturgeon Weir River. He then moved up through Amisk Lake and on August 23 he arrived at Pelican Lake. He was travelling at breakneck speed. Indeed, he recorded in his journal that on August 23 his brigade was in such a hurry that one of his men, Quartier, had left his gun and a good cutlass behind.

From there Thompson travelled through a series of lakes and on the morning of August 25 he arrived at Portage de Traite, later known as Frog Portage. Thompson referred to it as the Trade Portage, or Athuloeeukapitchegun. The nearest present day place name is Pelican Narrows on Route 135. When he crossed Portage de Traite, he entered the Churchill River system. The Churchill River flows through a series of interconnected lakes from Lac La Loche to Hudson Bay. Thus, when Thompson crossed Portage du Traite on August 25, he entered Trade Lake - which is part of the Churchill River system. From there his brigade paddled and portaged their way to the mouth of River aux Rapid, or Rapid River. There, Thompson noted in his journal, they found a lone trader named Roy. The brigade then travelled up the Rapid River and entered Lac La Ronge on August 28. They made their way to an old post where Simon Fraser had wintered in 1795-96.

By that time the brigade was travelling light, for Thompson recorded in his journal that the weather had turned bad and they were forced to lay about all day "without a morsel of any Thing to eat," save for a few pounds of meat. Fortunately, Thompson was able to pick up some supplies at a place he called the "House of Versailles," probably Rapid River House at the northern end of Lac La Ronge. His men also managed to kill a few moose.

From Lac La Ronge the brigade returned to the Churchill River and travelled through Dead Lake and Trout Lake before arriving at Black Bear Island Lake on September 2. The brigade continued travelling up the Churchill River and arrived at Île à la Crosse Lake on September 5. It had been tough going. The day before Thompson recorded in his journal that "we were much troubled to get here - from the darkness of the Night & the Shoals." On September 6, the brigade travelled down Île à la Crosse to the North West Company's new fort at the south end of the lake. As usual, Thompson wrote, "Thank God."

Île à la Crosse was a very important fur trade post and cross-roads. It was so named because the lake seemed to resemble a bishop's staff, although some believe that it got its name from an island in the lake where Indians played lacrosse. When Thompson arrived in 1798, the lake was a connecting route from the Churchill River to Methye Portage - then the gateway to Athabasca country. After Thompson established the viability of going into the Athabasca country by way of Portage La Biche, fur trade

brigades used Île à la Crosse as a sort of meeting place. The area was more or less the exclusive stomping grounds of the North West Company until the Hudson's Bay Company built a post there in 1799. Later, in 1846, Fathers Laflèche and Taché established a mission. It was here also that David Thompson met and married his life-long partner, Charlotte Small, in 1799.

The North West Company's post at Îl à la Crosse was managed by Alexander McKay. Thompson left goods for McKay and rested his men for a day before pushing on. The brigade left on September 8 -"a very fine day" according to Thompson and travelled to the mouth of the Beaver River. His destination was Green Lake,



Map showing the area between Cumberland House and Lac La Ronge.

which he reached on September 11.

The North West Company had built a post at Green Lake in about 1781. During a period of heightened activity in the late 1790s, the Hudson's Bay Company constructed a post there and another at Waterhen Lake. That the HBC considered the Green Lake area to be very important is reflected by the fact that the person sent to build the post was William Auld, who was listed in company records as "second" only to Thomas Stayner, the Chief at Churchill Factory. HBC records clearly indicate that company personnel were deliberately seeking to "exert themselves in opposition to the Canadians" (meaning the North West Company).

"My neighbour [the NWC] has already told me if I build a house in every place where he builds, he will make me divide my Goods in small Quantities and so he may well tell me when he arrived with 375 pieces of Goods which is a very unequal match for my 70. In short we are only a laughingstock to them."

-HBC Factor William Tomison, 1792



Map showing the area between Lac La Ronge and Île à la Crosse.

That was pretty strong language. But it must be recalled that the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company were entering a period of intense competition which later developed into open warfare. The culmination of the NWC-HBC rivalry came in 1816 with the Seven Oaks Massacre (referred to in typically Canadian fashion as the Seven Oaks Incident) near present day Winnipeg. NWC forces led by Cuthbert Grant encountered and killed HBC Governor in Chief Robert Semple and twenty of his men.

The growing rivalry and the need to secure sources of fur in advance of the competition was the primary reason why Thompson travelled to Lac La Biche. And there can be no doubt that he was aware of the importance of his mission. Nevertheless, he allowed his men to rest for a day before packing the goods for the final leg of the journey. It is rather interesting to note that in his journal Thompson referred to his destination as "Lac La Biche" - not Red Deers Lake.

On the morning of September 14, Thompson sent his brigade - which numbered eight canoes - up the Beaver River. Thompson himself travelled by horse to Fort George. Located not far from present day Elk Point, Fort George was built in 1791. There is confusion over who built it. Some historians believe it was John Hughes. Others claim it was Angus Shaw. In any event, as was so often the case, the HBC built a rival post, Buckingham House in 1792. Named in honour of the Duke of Buckingham, the post was built by William Tomison and Peter Fidler. Thompson had wintered at Buckingham House in 1793-94 when he was with the HBC.

Thompson arrived at Fort George on September 18. As usual, and always with deep religious conviction, he wrote in his journal "Thank God." He and his companions rested the following day. On September 20 he sent Simon, a "Frenchman" and three Native men to the Beaver River with provisions for the rest of the brigade. Thompson lingered around Fort George for another day before leaving to rendezvous with the canoes around Moose Lake, situated near present day Franchere, Alberta.

Thompson's journal entries for September 22 and 23 are interesting, informative and worth quoting at length:

"Septr 22 Saturday - A fine Day At 81/2 AM set off & went about due north - & at 101/2 AM came to the Tents of the Little Child - he was a hunting - at 11/2 past Noon came to the old Blind Man, his son was making Paddles & his pitching the Canoe - staid about 11/2 Hour 'till they were ready, when I departed - & at 6 PM came to the long bad Swamp. The men and the Indians were camped across it, & it being dark, we did not dare to cross it, put up for the Night - our Course has been mostly North about 10 Miles.

Septr 23rd Sunday - A Cloudy Morn & Day - a trifle of hard Snow this Morn - At 61/2 AM crossed the Swamp, we found it very bad, & with great difficulty we crossed the Horses, we continued on among thick woods to the Moose Lake & Moose River to the House - say N b E 6M - the Grand Picota fortunately tenting at the Moose Lake. he came with his Canoe & crossed us over the Moose River - we then went on thro' thick woods about N N E 9M or perhaps only 8 Miles - 7M gone we came again to the Moose River - it is about 20 to 25 Yds wide, deep with little or no Current at end of Co, at 4 PM put up at the fine piece of Meadow - The Grand Picota killed a young Moose - & tents in Co with us - woods of Fir, Pine & Aspen - much of it burnt -Buffalo plenty, but saw none."

The most significant thing about these two journal entries is the recognition of the important role Native people played in the exploration process during the fur trade era. In the past, Canadian historians tended to focus on the explorers themselves and their great "discoveries" in the face of incredible danger. The earlier works of Canadian history generally overlooked or ignored the role of Native people. Although most Canadian historians today acknowledge the crucial role Native people played in the fur trade and the exploration of Western Canada, that role is still not widely recognized or acknowledged.

Of course, something must be allowed for the fact that in recording their heroic and almost superhuman feats, many of the explorers failed to give due credit to the Native people who helped them along the way. Some did, but not all. In a telling letter he wrote to Roderick McKenzie just before he departed for the Pacific Coast in 1793, the great Alexander MacKenzie stated that *"Without the help of Indians, I have little hope of success."*

While David Thompson did not go quite that far in his journal, the two entries quoted here provide a good example of just how much the early explorers relied on Native peoples for support. Thus, when Thompson arrived at the Beaver River on September 25 he was again forced to turn to Native people for help: "At 9 AM being anxious to see the Canoes, took the Grand Picota with me & went in his canoe down this, the Beaver River to meet the Canoes."

Thompson found his brigade near the junction of the Beaver and Moose Rivers and made the final preparations for the



Map showing area between Île à la Crosse and Lac La Biche.

journey to Lac La Biche. According to Thompson's journal he started with four canoes - three "North" canoes and one small canoe. Each canoe contained three men. The North canoes, which were about twenty-five feet long, carried 13 pieces, or about 1200 pounds of goods. Thompson recorded that the river was about 14 inches deep.

On September 29 Thompson and his brigade arrived at the junction of the Beaver and Amisk Rivers near present day Briereville. Here, Thompson wrote in his journal, he was met by his guide Laderoote. Despite the fact that the Beaver River was high that year, it was tough slogging. The brigade had barely begun its final trek up the river before one of Thompson's lead men, Baptiste la Valle, broke his canoe. The following day Thompson commented that the canoes were "exceeding leaky," probably from dragging the bottom of the river.

The shallowness of the Beaver River forced Thompson's brigade to unload and reload the canoes at several points. As usual the *voyageurs* who accompanied Thompson used these occasions to demonstrate feats of strength and endurance. At one point, noted an astonished Thompson, Baptiste la Valle carried ten pieces (about 900 pounds). Thompson rewarded him with a dram of rum.

On October 3, after several days of dragging, poling and sometimes stopping to patch the canoes with pitch, Thompson arrived at the portage he was looking for. This is how he described the approach to what became known as Portage La Biche: "at 21/1 PM embarked ... [the river is] very crooked & has large Stones ... very full of stones ... only 2 Men in the Canoe - the rest walked along shore - Canoes came up on the Poles with difficulty - end of Co [coordinate] a Rapid & a portage - the Portage leads into a Lake & wholey leaves the little Beaver River waters - the Portage is 370 yds long"

David Thompson was describing the first part of Portage La Biche, better known as the "Short Portage." And, when he portaged from the Beaver River to the

ARDEVANT les NOTAIRES de la Provis

Lawrence Lande Collection of Canadiana, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill University

This voyageur contract, dated March 22, 1806, contracted Joseph Ladouceur of Ste Anne to the firm of McTavish, Frobisher & Co and John Ogilvy and Thomas Thain by partner John Gregory for the trip to Timiscaming at a pay of 96 livres. Timiscamping (now spelled Timiskaming) lies on the present day Ontario-Quebec border.



Glenbow Archives

A fur trade "piece." Most pieces weighed 90 lbs. or approximately 35 kg. This one appears to have weighed 115 lbs. or about 45 kg. south end of present day Field Lake, he travelled over the height of land that divides the Churchill/Saskatchewan River basin from the Athabasca/Mackenzie River basin.

Thompson's brigade camped at the south end of Field Lake the night of October 3. Despite the cold and a skiff of snow, the explorer was impressed with what he saw: "The Ground of to Day every where low & is in general a marshy Appearance - the woods Pine & Juniper with Poplar & Aspin [Aspen] - but saw very little Birch - The Pines, Junipers & Aspins are of a fine Building Site - very fine woods on the portage."

On October 4, 1798 Thompson and his brigade woke to a cold, cloudy day. By 7:00 a.m. it had started to snow and the wind had picked up. With his guide, Laderoote, and another person he described as the "Indian," Thompson landed on the shores of Lac La Biche at 1:00 p.m. "Thank God," he wrote in his journal.



Glenbow Archives

Sketch of voyageurs in camp by the famous American writer and artist Frederic Remington (1861-1909).

Excerpt from David Thompson's Journal, October 4, 1798

Indian & Lever to for the the D as like, here fine a cours the true to same every thing to the brown D and there want my later of Mathe? the - Sid of "of this truck, we wan oblig is to came the lift a choice (anen to the little detre, factors there's to, C vome your to the truck where we attempted to free a topoge, but also able to come the Ponese to the Party atthe Beaver Dam - for the to stop Mossilith Ponese to the Party atthe Beaver Dam - for the to stop Mossilith and the Party atthe Beaver Dam - for the the top Mossilith Ponese to the Party atthe Beaver Dam - for the the top Mossilith and the Party atthe Beaver Dam - for the top Mossilith and the Party atthe Beaver Dam - for the top Mossilith and the Party atthe Beaver Dam - for the top Mossilith and the Party atthe Scare and the top of the top the dam at an forther and the top the top the top of the top of the top of the top of the Mossilith at 10th there of the top of the top of a fact where the top of the top of the work for the top of the top full and former actions at the work for - the instantly atturn full and former actions of the Indian work of the top of the state of the top of the top of the Mossilith at 10th there of the top of the state of the top of the state of the top of the state of the top of the state of the top way of the top of the top of the top of the top of the tow of the top of the tow of the tow of the top way of the top of the top of the top of the tow of the tow of the tow of the top of the top of the top of the top of the tow of the towned by the tow of the tow the tow of the towned towe of the t

Public Archives of Ontario

"[I set off with the] Indian & Laderoote for the Red Deer Lake, having ordered the Men to carry every Thing to the Beaver Dam & then wait by return - Co N 22 E 1/2M - 250 yds of this Brook, we were obliged to carry the light Indian canoe to the little Lake, paddled thro' it & came again to the Brook where we attempted to force a Passage, but were obliged to carry the Canoe to the Portage at the Beaver Dam - Co to the Portage N 50 E 1/3 M little or no Water in the Brook & it 2 to 3 feet with marshy Ground on both Sides - carried over the Portage N 12 E 1 M when we put down again in the small Brook - went down it with plenty of Water to the Red Deer Lake N 20 E 1/6 M N 64 E 1 1/4M at 1 PM Thank God - We instantly returned & in a 1/2 of an Hour - we arrived at the end of the Portage, here we put our Canoe ashore & the Indian went a hunting, while I returned to the People, who were camped as I had ordered - to walk from the Brook to where the People were put up took me 40' of tolerable walking by way of the Portage - I put up on the North Side of the Swamp by myself - Gave the Men a Dram - ."


Forgotten by Canadians after he died in 1857, a stamp was eventually issued commemorating Thompson's important contribution to Canadian history.



Although known as an explorer and geographer, David Thompson was still primarily a fur trader. The sketch above depicts a trader appearing before an Indian council meeting.



Sketch of voyageurs portaging a North Canoe. Note how the canoe was carried upright.

David Thompson's Contribution . to Lac La Biche

"Elliot Coues's description of Thompson as 'the greatest geographer of his day in British America' errs, if it errs, only in being an understatement." -Richard Glover, David Thompson's Narrative, 1962

David Thompson essentially put Lac La Biche on the map. While it is true that Lac La Biche had appeared as "Esclave Lake" on Peter Pond's map of 1787, and as "Red Deer Lake" on Philip Turnor's map of 1795, there is no evidence that either explorer ever visited the lake. So far as is known, David Thompson was the first European to record a trip to Lac La Biche and confirm its existence.

Thompson built Red Deers Lake House and spent the winter of 1798-99 at Lac La Biche. His journal lists a number of North West Company personnel at Lac La Biche that winter, including Louis Noile, Louie Drouine, Pierre Arsinoe, Marseilles, Francois Raymond, Pierre LeFreniere, Jos. Herbert, Baptiste Herbert, Mathierin, Baptiste la Valle, Ant. St. Martin, Simon Reaume, Hyppolite D'ase, Francois Quartier, Joe Quartier, Charles Neph, LaLaberté, Ducoinge, someone named Holmes, and a Mr. McTavish, likely Donald McTavish, a first cousin of fur trading giant and nominal head of the NWC, Simon McTavish.

The construction of Red Deers Lake House marked the beginning of European settlement at Lac La Biche. Although Thompson left in the spring of 1799 and would not return for a dozen years, he paved the way for other explorers, fur traders, and free traders who eventually settled in the area. One of the more notable explorers and fur traders who followed Thompson was Peter Fidler of the Hudson's Bay Company. David Thompson may very well be one of the most famous forgotten heroes in Canadian history. "Never heard of him." was the answer Priit Vesilind, senior writer for the National Geographic, received when he asked Canadians about David Thompson in the last decade of the twentieth century. When Maclean's presented its 100 greatest Canadians, Thompson was not included on the list.

During his career, Thompson travelled more than 100,000 kilometers. He mapped the Columbia River system to the Pacific, helped pinpoint the sources of the Mississippi River, and explored much of the territory east and west of the Rocky Mountains. He later surveyed extensive portions of the border between Canada and the United States. He also left an astonishing thirty-nine volumes of journals that ranks as a major contribution to Canadian history. In 1812 he produced one of the most remarkable maps of Western Canada in existence.



Map showing extent of David Thompson's explorations in Western Canada.



When David Thompson arrived in Canada in 1784, most of Western Canada was "terra incognita," unexplored territory, as Captain James Cook's Map of the World at left indicates. Cook's map appeared in his Third Voyage, which was published the same year David Thompson arrived at Fort Churchill (as a point of reference Great Slave Lake appears on Cook's map as Arathapescow Lake and this map has it located considerably west of where it really is). Thompson's great contribution was to map much of that unexplored territory, as one of the maps he produced for the North West Company pictured below clearly shows. None of Thompson's maps were published under his name and for many years he was denied the recognition he deserved.



David Thompson's Later Years

After leaving Lac La Biche in the spring of 1799, David Thompson travelled overland to Fort Augustus (present day Fort Saskatchewan). From there he began searching for a new route from the North Saskatchewan River to the upper reaches of the Athabasca River via Lac la Nonne and the Pembina River.

By the summer of 1799 he had travelled down the Athabasca River to the Clearwater River and over the Methy Portage to Île à la Crosse. There, on June 10, 1799 he married, "according to the custom of the country," Charlotte Small.

Over the next few years Thompson traded primarily at Fort George and Rocky Mountain House. He was made a partner in the NWC in 1804, but was again becoming dissatisfied at the lack of time he was able to devote to surveying.

Then, in 1806, the NWC, deeply concerned about the success of the famous Lewis and Clark expedition to the Pacific Coast, decided to send Thompson to find a route over the Rocky Mountains and down the Columbia River. Thompson's activities over the next five years were complex and controversy still exists over some of his decisions. His plan appears to have been to cross the Rocky Mountains by way of the North Saskatchewan River and Rocky Mountain House. This he did in June 1807, using the pass later named after the HBC trader Joseph Howse. He then travelled down the Blaeberry River in present day British Columbia to a place he first named Kootana. Initially, Thompson did not realize that he was in the upper reaches of the Columbia River.

For the next three years Thompson traded with the Kootenay Indians and continued his surveying work. He built a number of posts and mapped uncharted territory. These activities roused the anger of the Peigan Indians, whose position as middlemen had been undermined by the extension of the fur trade across the Rockies. In the spring of 1810 Thompson left for Montréal to take up an overdue furlough. When he reached Rainy Lake he was instructed to turn around and go back to the Pacific. The NWC had learned that the American fur baron, John Jacob Astor, was planning to trade through the Pacific Coast and wanted to beat him to it. Exactly what the NWC ordered Thompson to do is still a matter of debate, but he set off in haste for the Columbia.

Once again, he headed for the Rocky Mountains on the North Saskatchewan River, but before he reached the mountains he encountered the Peigans. Some historians have argued that Thompson lost his nerve because he fled the Peigans and his brigade was scattered. Thompson was found half starved and hiding in the bush some three weeks later. Had it not been for the efforts of Alexander Henry the Younger in pulling together the expedition, it would have been a complete failure. Henry wanted to continue over the Howse Pass. Thompson would have none of it. In a move that has attracted much criticism, he abandoned the North Saskatchewan route and went north to cross the unexplored Athabasca Pass. By now he had been delayed for more than a month and the Athabasca Pass was crossed in December and January. Many of Thompson's men deserted (only 3 of 13 men made the crossing).

Once over the mountains, Thompson and his men built a crude cedar strip canoe and set off for the Pacific. On July 15, 1811 he arrived at the mouth of the Columbia River, at present day Astoria, Oregon, a few weeks after John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company. Thereafter, from 1812 to 1825 the North Saskatchewan route was abandoned in favour of the route through Portage La Biche.

The trip to the mouth of the Columbia River was Thompson's last. In 1812 he retired from the fur trade and settled with his wife and children at Terrebonne, Quebec. It was there that he completed the magnificent ten-foot-long map of the Northwest which today hangs in the Provincial Archives of Ontario.

In 1815 he moved to Williamstown, Upper Canada (Ontario) and two years later he became an astronomer and surveyor for the boundary commission struck to determine the border between Canada and the United States. He continued in that position until the late 1820s, enduring all sorts of criticism for his efforts. Then his fortunes began to decline.

A series of financial disasters ensued, beginning with the 1825 bankruptcy of the NWC agent McGillivrays, Thain and Company, in which Thompson had placed a large portion of his life savings. He tried running two general stores and starting a potash company but those failed as well. By 1831, in his early sixties, he was close to bankruptcy. Although he managed to get employment as a surveyor for a few

Columbia and Canoe Rivers 21 February 1811

My dear Charlotte,

I was thankful to receive your letters and Christmas greetings when Pareil and Cote last returned from William Henry's camp. I had not dared hope for any letters, it being mid-winter and travel difficult. I am indeed grateful to Mr. Alexander Henry.

I share your pleasure in Fanny's little letter and I am returning it to you as I know you will want it as a keepsake. She seems to be learning very quickly, which is good. I have hopes of being able to give all the children an equally good education.

Tomorrow I will be going out after some birch rind. I don't think it is too early and I am most anxious to get on with building the canoe.

I trust this finds you well. God bless you and the children.

Yours, As ever, David.

Charlotte Small

On June 10, 1799, at Île à la Crosse, David Thompson married, according to the custom of the country, Charlotte Small. Charlotte Small was the daughter of a Cree woman and Patrick Small, a NWC partner who retired from the trade in 1791 and abandoned his family. Charlotte was about 14 years old, and, by all accounts, a very striking young woman. Thompson was 29.

They had a very close and stable relationship, raising 13 children, seven sons and six daughters. Charlotte often accompanied her husband on his journeys. Unlike so many fur traders, Thompson did not abandon his family when he retired in 1812. In fact, one of the first things he did when the family went to Montréal was to have his wife and children baptized. He and Charlotte were then properly married.

Charlotte Small died in 1857, about three months after Thompson, and was buried beside him.

years, he was always in financial difficulty - to the point where he had to pawn his instruments and even his coat to live.

Finally, he and his wife moved in with one of his daughters, first in Montréal in 1845, and then Longeuil in 1850, where he began to write an account of his travels. Failing eyesight and bad health prevented him from finishing the work and he died in 1857. So low had David Thompson's fortune sunk by then that he was buried in an unmarked grave.

David Thompson's contribution to Canadian history might have passed unnoticed had it not been for Joseph Burr Tyrrell. In the 1890s, Tyrrell managed to obtain a copy of Thompson's manuscript and edited it for publication by the Champlain Society in 1914 under the title David Thompson's Narrative. Then, in 1927, on the 70th anniversary of Thompson's death, a special ceremony was held to place a monument on his unmarked grave.

The Role of Women in the Fur Trade

Famous explorers and hearty voyageurs these are the familiar characters of the Fur Trade but there are other stories to be told. Historians have begun to uncover the important roles Native women played in the fur trade.

In fact, much of the demand for trade goods originated with women. David Thompson claimed that he had only to "Show them an awl or a strong needle and they will gladly give the finest Beaver or Wolf skin they have to purchase it."

In the early days of the fur trade the French were quick to discover the additional advantages of settled alliances with Native women. The North West Company continued this tradition and sanctioned marriages "in the custom of the country." These marriages were contracted with little ceremony but the customs of the bride's relatives were respected. Generally, after receiving the consent of the girl's parents, the alliance was confirmed through the payment of goods. Among the Cree it was also the custom for the couple to live with the wife's relatives with the husband giving the produce of his hunt to his in-laws until he proved himself capable of supporting his family and the first child was born. Native people viewed marriages as a way to cement economic relationships and, while the bride's family expected privileges such as free access to the post and provisions, the traders found that these relationships enhanced trade connections.

The Hudson's Bay Company did not officially give its blessing to country marriages, but as the company began to move inland traders found that Native wives were vital to the trade. While wintering at Fort Wedderburn, HBC Governor George Simpson quickly discovered that one of the reasons for the North West Company's strong position was because their women were "faithful to their cause and good Interpreters whereas we have but one in the Fort that can talk Chipewyan." David Thompson praised his Métis wife, Charlotte, in his *Narrative*: "My lovely wife is of the blood of those people, speaking their language, and well educated in the English language, which gives me a great advantage."

The women brought many skills to the Forts, including fishing, capturing small game, gathering berries, preparing furs, tanning hides, making moccasins and other leather clothing. The importance of these skills is evident in Alexander Mackenzie's complaint to his cousin at Fort Chipewyan in 1786: "I have not a single one in my fort that can make Rackets [snowshoes]. I do not know what to do without these articles see what it is to have no wives. Try and get Rackets - there is no stirring without them." Without women to provide them with moccasins and snowshoes a trading post faced disaster.

Pemmican, the staple food of the transport brigades, was largely prepared by Native women. Although men got the credit for exploring the North West, they could not have done so without the assistance and cooking skills of women. Charlotte often travelled with David Thompson, but she was not an idle passenger. Alexander Henry observed in his journal in 1810 that "Mr. Thompson embarked with his family for Montreal, in a light canoe with five men and a Saulteur. Set women to split and dry meat, having more than we can eat."

"Take the scrapings from the driest outside corner of a very stale piece of cold roast beef, add to it lumps of rancid fat, then garnish all with long human hairs and short hairs of dogs and oxen and you have a fair imitation of common Pemmican." -H.M. Robinson, The Great Fur Land

Peter Fidler

"When you arrive at Cumberland House you are to dispatch six canoes to the northward Two of these canoes are to be stationed in the Beaver River and the other four to proceed up it to the Red Deers Lake. Mr. Peter Fidler is deemed to be the most proper person to conduct this undertaking...."

-William Tomison to James Bird, June 27, 1799

Peter Fidler was the first trader of any significance to follow David Thompson to Lac La Biche. He was in many respects Thompson's counterpart in the Hudson's Bay Company. But, where Thompson's star shone, Fidler's has long been obscured. Thompson may have suffered misfortune in his later years, but Fidler's entire career was dogged by bad luck.

Born at Bolsover, in Derbyshire, England on August 16, 1769, Peter Fidler joined the Hudson's Bay Company as a labourer in 1788. He had evidently received a decent education because he quickly rose through the ranks of the HBC to become one of Philip Turnor's two assistants. The other assistant was David Thompson. After a brief apprenticeship, Fidler accompanied an expedition to Lake Athabasca between 1790-92. He then spent several years surveying and mapping along the North Saskatchewan River as far as the Rocky Mountains. In 1795 he built Carlton House, near present day Kamsack, Saskatchewan. The following year he was placed in charge of Cumberland House.

By 1799 the HBC's London Committee had decided to make a push into Athabasca country. To that end, William Tomison, Chief of the Inland Trade from York Factory, ordered Fidler to travel inland to establish a post at Lac La Biche (Red Deers Lake in the official HBC documents) via Green Lake and the Beaver River. Fidler left Cumberland House in early August of that year. In the meantime, Churchill Factory, having been informed by London that York Factory traders had been ordered to withdraw from Athabasca country, sent William Auld to spearhead a drive via Green Lake.

Fidler caught up with a surprised Auld near Île-à-la-Crosse. Auld was not amused. He thought Fidler was part of a York Factory plot to poach on Churchill Factory's claims to Athabasca country.* Since he was more senior than Fidler, Auld pulled rank and told Fidler to go somewhere else. The result was that Auld stayed at Green lake. On the advice of his guide, White Boy, Fidler went to Barren Ground (Meadow Lake), where he built Bolsover House, undoubtedly named after his birthplace, and started preparations for the trip to Lac La Biche.

Then, another snag appeared when Fidler discovered that White Boy, who had

*Auld might have been right. He remarked that Tomison must have known about the Churchill Factory expedition. Tomison had run into a trader from Churchill Factory who told him of an expedition between the Churchill and Saskatchewan Rivers. Tomison, who had previously opposed a move into Athabasca country, may have suspected that Churchill was planning to move up the Beaver River and decided to beat them to the punch. In any event, Fidler's expedition was a direct challenge to Churchill Factory and Tomison did not inform Churchill Factory boss, Thomas Stayner, of his intention to send men up the Beaver River. That would have only further strained the already uneasy relationship between York Factory and Churchill Factory. In fact, the relationship between York and Churchill Factory was just about as competitive as that between the HBC and the NWC. There is evidence that Tomison had been planning the Beaver River expedition since before May, 1799 and did not inform Stayner until September 11, 1799. been hired to guide him to Lac La Biche, did not know the way and no local guide could be found because, as Filder wrote, "all the Indians in this quarter being frightened of the Bungees." So, on September 8, 1799, Fidler and three men set off by canoe to "grope our way" to Lac La Biche.

According to Fidler's journal, he had obtained from local Natives a rough idea of where he was going. He believed it would take about fourteen days to reach Lac La Biche. He also started his journey with slightly more than 1 kg. of meat per man, which meant that they would have to hunt for food along the way.

On September 21, 1799, Fidler reached the mouth of Moose Lake Creek near Moose Portage. Fortunately, he discovered that a group from Buckingham House guided by some free Canadians had come through with supplies bound for Lac La Biche. Fidler pushed on and arrived at Lac La Biche five days later to find the party from Buckingham House already building a post, which Fidler named Greenwich House. It was the first Hudson's Bay Company post built in Athabasca country.

Despite an expedition marred by hardship and bad luck, Fidler had a successful season.* His trade returns for 1799-1800 amounted to 1073 made beaver. More than that, Fidler surveyed the route to Greenwich House and then the route from Lac La Biche to Lesser Slave Lake.

After wintering at Lac La Biche, Fidler was sent to the South Saskatchewan River, where he established Chesterfield House. Two years later he was sent to



Like David Thompson, there appears to be no portraits of Peter Fidler. The likeness above, painted by Lorne Bouchard for the Hudson's Bay Company, depicts Fidler acting as an assistant to Philip Turnor during the Lake Athabasca expedition.

Lake Athabasca to build Nottingham House near Fort Chipewyan. He spent four difficult years there competing against the North West Company. Again back luck plagued Filder's efforts. For, he had the misfortune of having to endure the likes of Samuel Black, the NWC clerk who was the closest thing to a 19th century terrorist. HBC Governor George Simpson later wrote of Black: "... a cold blooded fellow who could be guilty of any Cruelty and would be a perfect Tyrant had he had power."

Some of Black's activities included slashing Filder's fishing nets, burning his winter supply of wood, tearing up his garden and preventing Natives from entering Nottingham House. By 1806 Fidler had enough and he pulled out after the NWC agreed to give him provisions and 500

*This is an understatement. For example, on September 17, Fidler ran into a Canadian and his wife who had just come from Lac La Biche. The Canadian was only too happy to supply Fidler with a rough map of the way to Lac La Biche. It later turned out, as Fidler noted, that the Canadian had been sent by Angus Shaw, the North West Company trader then at Lac La Biche, to "give us every discouraging account he could in order to induce us to return & that he [Shaw] might have the whole Trade from the Bungees & Touows [Ottawa Indians]." Then Fidler's interpreter, John Richards, deserted. A trader later told Fidler that Angus Shaw had "debauched" the poor Richards. Richards. who was apparently "beloved by the Indians," never re-joined the HBC. As for Shaw, Fidler reported that he "used every mean and roguish method" to force the HBC out of Athabasca country.

made beaver so long as he did not return for two years. Fidler spent the next few years at Cumberland House surveying and mapping territory around Lake Winnipeg and Reindeer Lake. In 1810, in recognition of his service, he was appointed surveyor at a salary of 100 pounds per year.

Then, more bad luck. He was ordered back to Athabasca country, to establish a post at Île-à-la-Crosse, where he again came face to face with Samuel Black. This time matters were worse because Black had acquired a new sidekick named Peter Skene Ogden, a young swashbuckler who strutted around with two daggers stuck in his belt. Together, they wreaked havoc on Fidler by shooting up his HBC flag, stealing his fishnets, and stealing his firewood. On one occasion they even shot at his twelve year old son. In his journals, Fidler described one encounter with the NWC terrorists:

"I told one of our men to shut the west gates - which was at last done - they persevered in passing when I struck Mr. Black with a stick two or three times -Ogden immediately drew his dagger and cut two large holes in the side and back of my coat and pricked my body - but no further - Mr. Black then took up part of the stick I had broken over him and struck me on the thumb close to the upper end of the nail and smashed it to pieces - Ogden also struck me twice with a stick - all our men looking on the whole time without giving me any assistance - Mr. Black and Ogden vet followed me into my room with their guns and daggers and abused me very much while my thumb was dripping'

So harsh was the treatment that Fidler pulled out after a year. By that time he was depressed and discouraged. "Too few to do anything for the Company," he wrote of his experience in Athabasca country. The HBC shipped him off to England for a one-year holiday.

Fidler returned to Canada in 1812 and was appointed postmaster at Brandon House in the Red River Colony, where Lord Selkirk's colonization scheme was in full swing. Fidler surveyed many of the river lots there. In 1815 he was placed in tem-

The Everyday Life of the Fur Trader - Excerpts from Peter Fidler's Journal

"1791. September 4th. ...I took with me neither Leather nor stuff for Socks, which made me very badly off the greatest part of the Winter for those articles for Winter's rigging ... We have no Tent with us."

"September 6th. ... I had no watch with me, consequently could make no Observations. ...The Nautical Almanack & requisite Tables composed the whole of my Library - with 1 Shirt besides the clothes I had on my back composed the whole of my wardrobe. ... I have a Boats compass with me card 3 Inches diameter."

"October 22nd. ... On the 10th Inst. I was under the necessity of cutting off both sleeves of my Leather Coat to make a pair of Shoes."

"November 9th. ... We are all very badly off for want of a Kettle. ... I have neither Shoes, Stockings, Mittens, or Trousers, or anything to make them off. ...He [a Native] lent me his old Stockings & a Blanket I am obliged to rap around me like a petticoat."

"December 14th. Finished making my Leather Trousers which is a very great acquisition to me - broke all my needles in making them, the leather being so stiff & hard & went to work in the Indian manner with a Awl & Sinnews before I completed them." "March 13th. Very bad yesterday & day before, having sore throat & a violent pain in my head."

porary command of the Colony. But more bad luck was in store for him. The NWC viewed the Colony as a major threat and constantly harassed the settlers. Fidler was forced to withdraw. He returned, only to have his post plundered by a group of Métis led by NWC trader Cuthbert Grant in early June 1816. Two weeks later, in what is known as the Seven Oaks Massacre, Grant attacked Winnipeg and

Peter Fidler's Strange Will

At five feet nine and a half inches in height, Peter Fidler was half a head taller than the average fur trader. In 1794 he married, country style, a Swampy Cree woman named Mary. They had 14 children. Fidler's fondness for brandy and rum took their toll and he died in December 1822 at the age of 53. Whether he had a sense of his impending death will never be known, but on August 14, 1821, he and Mary were formally married. Two days later, on his birthday, and only sixteen months before he died, he executed a will. Located in the records of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury at Somerset House in London, the will is one of the more bizarre documents in Canadian history.

In it, Fidler left his journals and maps to the Hudson's Bay Company. His five hundred volume library and surveying instruments were left to the Governor of the Red River Colony. He made provision for his wife and ten surviving children. Then came the strange clause - clause 7:

"All my money in the funds and other personal property after the youngest child has attained twenty-one years, to be placed in the public funds, and the interest annually due to be added to the capital and continue so until August 16th, 1969 (I being born on that day two hundred years before), when the whole amount of the principal and interest so accumulated I will and desire to be then placed at the disposal of the next male child heir in direct descent from my son Peter Fidler."

The records indicate that at the time of his death, Fidler left a property in Bolsover, 1,575 English pounds invested in three per cent Consols (British government securities), and 500 pounds owing to him by the HBC. The estate was worth about 2,500 English pounds, a considerable sum in those days. Fidler named three executors, the Governor-in-chief of the HBC, the Governor of the Red River Colony, and the secretary of the HBC.

When Fidler died, the executors read the will, scratched their heads, and carried out all the instructions except for clause 7. So far as is known with any certainty, the executors renounced probate of the will, and following the death of Mary Fidler in 1826, administration of the estate was turned over to Thomas Fidler. Peter's eldest son. What happened next is a matter of speculation. Most historians believe that the courts set aside clause 7 and the estate was divided up among the remaining children. Many of Fidler's descendants, however, believe that the HBC kept the estate and passed nothing on to the family.

killed the Colony's Governor, Robert Semple, and 20 others.

The Seven Oaks Massacre was a shocking incident which represented the culmination of the rivalry between the HBC and the NWC. It was a major turning point which led to the merger of the two companies in 1821. It also left a deep impact on Peter Fidler.

In the aftermath of the massacre, Fidler returned to the fur trade as Chief Trader at Brandon House and Fort Dauphin. In August 1821 he learned that, following the merger of the HBC and the NWC, he was to be pensioned off. Within a week the thunderstruck Fidler had his wife and some of his children baptized, formally married his wife, and prepared his will one of the strangest wills in Canadian history. Dejected, disillusioned, and in failing health, Peter Fidler died at Fort Dauphin in present day Manitoba on December 17, 1822. The York Factory list of servants for 1821-22 described him as "a faithful and interested old Servant, now superannuated, has had a recent paraletic [sic] affection and his resolution quite gone, unfit for any charge."

Although not an insignificant figure in the Canadian fur trade, Fidler lacked that cutthroat spirit so common in many of the leading traders. He preferred to keep cordial relations with his North West Company competitors. He was also often overshadowed by David Thompson. Indeed, it sometimes seemed that he was following in Thompson's footsteps - as was the case when Fidler showed up at Lac La Biche a year after Thompson. Nevertheless, as at least one historian has pointed out, when the HBC and the NWC were merged, Peter Fidler's maps were ordered to be sent to England while David Thompson's map remained in Canada.

Peter Fidler and A-ca-oo-mah-caye

In 1801, a Blackfoot Chief, A-ca-oomah-ca-ve - sometimes known as The Feathers and Old Swan - drew a map for Peter Fidler depicting the Rocky Mountains and part of the plains for a distance of about 500 miles (about 850 km). Fidler sent the map to the London Committee of the HBC, who then turned it over to Aaron Arrowsmith, the famous London cartographer and publisher. Arrowsmith believed the map, along with Fidler's surveys, contributed significantly to geographical knowledge of an area which was "until now unknown to Europeans." A-ca-oo-mahca-ye's map was quickly incorporated into an 1802 edition of Arrowsmith maps. To his credit, Peter Fidler fully acknowledged the Blackfoot Chief's contribution.



The Beaver

Part of the 1802 Arrowsmith map based upon information supplied by Peter Fidler and A-ca-oomah-ca-ye.

Portage La Biche

The North West Company did not send David Thompson west in 1798 to find Lac La Biche. It sent him west to see if he could find a transportation route that crossed an almost imperceptible height of land dividing the Churchill and Athabasca River systems. By the late 1790s, the existence of such a route was important for three reasons. First, it would establish where the dividing line lay between Rupert's Land, where the Hudson's Bay Company technically had a monopoly on trade, and territory where the HBC had no monopoly. Second, the route might provide a shorter and more direct way into the southern portion of Athabasca country,



Legacy, February-April 1998, p.25



Edward J. McCullough and Michael Maccagno, Lac La Biche and the Early Fur Traders, Edmonton, 1991, p.24

The principal fur trade routes into Athabasca country. The Methy and Wollaston Lake Portages are situated in present day Saskatchewan. Portage La Biche, located on the height of land which divides the Athabasca and Churchill River systems, was designated a Provincial Historic Resource in 1993. It is the only portage to be so designated in the province of Alberta.

thereby providing the North West Company with a competitive edge over the HBC. Finally, the route was far enough north of Blackfoot territory to be free of the types of destructive raids hampering trade along the North Saskatchewan River.

Portage La Biche - also known in fur trade days as the "Swampy Portage" - was the name given to that transportation corridor. It was one of three principal fur trade routes into Athabasca country from Rupert's Land. The other two were the Methy Portage, better known at the time as Portage La Loche, and the Wollaston Lake Portage.

The Wollaston Lake Portage, situated in present day north-eastern Saskatchewan, ran from Wollaston Lake to Hatchet Lake. It was a route which linked the Lake Athabasca drainage system with the Churchill River system. The portage was used primarily by Southern Cree, Chipewyan, and Beaver travelling to HBC posts before the fur trade expanded into Athabasca country. After fur traders began to move into the Athabasca region the portage was used infrequently.

The Methy Portage and Portage La Biche became part of the major transcontinental fur trade routes. Although both portages provided a link between the Athabasca and Churchill River systems, they were used for different purposes.

The Methy Portage, located in present day Saskatchewan, was a gruelling 20 km portage from Lac La Loche to the Clearwater River. The longest route in the regular fur trade, it was used principally by traders entering Lake Athabasca and the Mackenzie and Peace Rivers.

Portage La Biche was used by traders going to the Lesser Slave Lake District and also by those who were travelling to the Pacific Ocean via the Columbia River. Located on an almost imperceptible height of land often called the "Little Divide," Portage La Biche was essentially a route which linked the Beaver River to the Athabasca River via Lac La Biche.

Fur traders would travel up the Beaver River to the junction of the Beaver and Amisk Rivers near present day Brièreville (named after J.C.O. Brière, the postmaster). They would then travel up the left branch of the Beaver River, often referred to as the Little Beaver River. At a point just south of present day Field Lake (known as Le Petit Lac de Biche in those days), the Little Beaver River winds close to the lake. The fur traders would portage from the Little Beaver River to the south end of Field Lake, a distance of about 300



Edward J. McCullough and Michael Maccagno, Lac La Biche and the Early Fur Traders, p.66

Peter Fidler's 1799 sketch of Portage La Biche is the earliest known map of the portage.

meters. At that point they were crossing the divide. The Beaver River flows into the Churchill River. Field Lake drains into Lac La Biche, which drains into the Athabasca River. This part of the journey was known as the "Short Portage" and the fur traders would usually camp at the south end of Field Lake. From there they would paddle to the north end of Field Lake, unload their gear, and make their way to Lac La Biche by one of two routes: either by carrying the goods the entire way or by using sections of Red Deers Brook. That part of the journey was known as the "Long Portage, a distance of approximately 7 km.

Although the existence of Portage La Biche was first documented by David Thompson in 1798, he was not the first person to use it. Judging by the number of artifacts found along the route, it is clear that the portage was used as a transportation corridor in prehistoric times. As the fur trade advanced into Western Canada, it is almost certain that Cree middlemen and Métis free traders used the portage. David Thompson's guide, Laderoote, knew exactly where he was going when he took Thompson over the portage in early October 1798.

The Beaver River - Portage La Biche route was generally acknowledged as the best and safest way to Athabasca country. Sir George Simpson is reputed to have said that Portage La Biche was "the shortest, easiest, and in every respect [the] best route to the Athabasca Region, and even to Athabasca Lake, and ... moreover the straightest route, almost in air line to Lesser Slave Lake and ... when the water [was] not at its lowest, the best and safest road to Jasper's House." That last comment, that it was the "safest road," meant that the portage was out of the range of Native groups, especially the Blackfoot, who raided along the Saskatchewan River. Fur traders could travel the Beaver River route safely and without much fear of attack.

Portage La Biche came into prominence after David Thompson abandoned the North Saskatchewan route after running into trouble with the Peigans in 1811. Between 1812 and 1824 the portage served



Lac La Biche Archives

Hudson's Bay Company trade knife found along Portage La Biche by Lac La Biche resident Jerry Tratch.

as the main gateway into the southern part of Athabasca country. It was also used by the "Columbia Express," the Hudson's Bay Company's mail carrier.

But the Beaver River Route suffered from two flaws which eventually proved fatal. The first was the exasperating way the river wound its way around the countryside. Second, and even more exasperating to fur traders who were in a hurry, was the shallowness of the river. The fur traders often had to dam sections of the river to proceed and that took time and a great deal of energy. The historical record indicates that as early as 1799 traders passing through the area were searching for alternative overland routes. Then, in 1824, George Simpson travelled the portage and delivered his edict: close it down.

Governor Simpson's Edict

"[T]he circumstance of M^r Rowands having got to this place [Fort Assiniboine] from Edmonton after accompanying his loaded Brigade from York thereby performing the Voyage in ... Days shews how much shorter the route is by the Saskatchawaine than by the Beaver River ... For this purpose I would recommend that the route by the Beaver River be abandoned altogether ..."

-George Simpson, 1824

Born at Loch Broom in Ross-shire, Scotland, sometime between 1786 and 1796, George Simpson was an illegitimate child. Little is known about his early life except that he appears to have received a good education. In 1809 he moved to London, England and began working for a company that was involved in the West India trade. At some point he drew the attention of Andrew Colvile, a powerful influence and later Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company.

In the spring of 1820 Simpson was sent by the HBC to North America to take charge in the event Governor William Williams, who was under indictment in the courts of Lower Canada*, should be arrested by the North West Company. Simpson spent his first year wintering at Lake Athabasca and learning the trade. When the HBC and the NWC amalgamated in 1821, he was made Governor of the Northern Department. Five years later he became Governor of all HBC territories in British North America.

When Simpson took over the Northern Department in 1821, the fur trade was in a great deal of turmoil. As a result of the war that had existed between the HBC and the NWC, there was exhaustion of fur areas, duplication of trading posts, ongoing bitterness between the old rivals who



Glenbow Archives

Known as "The Birchbark Napoleon," George Simpson, Sir George after 1841, served as Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company from 1821 until his death in 1860.

*Between 1783 and 1867 Canada was commonly known as British North America. In 1791 the old Province of Quebec was divided into Upper and Lower Canada - respectively, the present day provinces of Ontario and Quebec. Upper and Lower Canada were joined in 1841 to form the Province of Canada. On July 1, 1867, the Province of Canada united with the British North American colonies of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia to form the Dominion of Canada. now worked for the same company, and a general condition of excess drunkenness and lack of discipline.

From Simpson's point of view it all added up to inefficiency, waste, and sloth, and he was determined to do something about it. His basic aim was to whip the HBC into an efficient and profitable organization. Accordingly, he was an early promoter of "cutbacks" and "streamlining," concepts which he applied with a vengeance. Between 1821 and 1825 the number of employees was reduced from 1,983 to 827, wages were cut in half, perks were taken away, the liquor traffic was cut, and fur prices standardized. The new Governor also overhauled the transport service: new forms of transportation, such as the York Boat, were introduced, new routes were opened, old ones improved, and inefficient routes done away with. No part of the fur trade escaped scrutiny and no part of it was sacred, not even Fort Edmonton.

Fort Edmonton had been established on the banks of the Saskatchewan River in 1795. After the amalgamation of the HBC and the NWC, John Rowand, a former NWC trader, was appointed Chief Trader. When Rowand learned that Fort Edmonton might be on the chopping block he travelled to York Factory with the aim of demonstrating that the Saskatchewan River route was better than the Beaver River route. At that time the Beaver River route was the main route from York Factory to the Pacific Ocean.

Although there is no evidence to suggest that Rowand actually challenged Simpson to race, that was what in effect happened. In late July 1824 Rowand and Dr. John McLoughlin, who was to take charge of the Columbia River District, left York Factory. Simpson, who was delayed by twenty days, left on August 14. McLoughlin and Simpson took the Beaver River route via

Simpson's Cutbacks

When it came to cutting costs, nothing escaped George Simpson's eye. The following directive was issued regarding the proper set of dinner utensils:

"The Table Appointments throughout the Country have hitherto been upon much too large a scale, far exceeding the consumption of most respectable families in the civilized world, and I think you may safely reduce the usual supplies by 50 p Cent - the descriptions to be of the cheapest, vizt. Tin plates: ... no table cloths, which with Towels are considered private property. No [fancy] Dishes: a few Tumblers which answer for Wine glasses. Knives and Forks ought to last at least half a dozen years - in private families they sometimes last 20."

Portage La Biche. Rowand took a route via the North Saskatchewan. The plan was to meet at Fort Assiniboine on the Athabasca River.

Simpson did not enjoy his journey up the Beaver River, over Portage La Biche, and especially down the La Biche River. He wrote in his journal:

"Left our Encampm^t on Portage La Biche before Day break the 22nd [September] crossed the Lake of that Name about 20 miles and fell on River La Biche which we descended and a more disagreeable navigation or piece of Road I never travelled; the River itself was nearly dry so that it became necessary to carry the Baggage at least four fifths of the way, two men took down the Canoe light with great difficulty and M^T McMillan and I walked the whole way and most abominably dirty Walking it

was, the banks of the River having been recently overrun by Fire and while still smoking a light rain had fallen so that we

"Big Athabasca, is, in vegetation in its singular force and nature, the rankest part of America, North of the Torrid Zone." -George Simpson, 1828



The respective routes of John Rowand and George Simpson to Fort Assiniboine in 1824.

were up to the knee every step in Charcoal and ashes, and by the termination of each Days March as black as Sweeps."

If Simpson was grumpy about the journey, John McLoughlin was downright foul. Despite the fact that the Doctor had a 20 day head start, Simpson caught up to him. The Governor described McLoughlin's mood in his journal:

"On the 26th [September] at 7 O'Clock came up with the D^r [McLoughlin] before his people had left their Encampment altho we had by that early hour come from his Breakfasting place of the preceding Day; himself and people were heartily tired of the Voyage and his Surprise and vexation at being overtaken in Riviere la Biche notwithstanding his having a 20 Days start of us from York is not to be described; he was such a figure as I should not like to meet in a dark Night in one of the bye lanes in the neighbourhood of London...."

George Simpson's ability to travel very quickly was legendary and he set speed

records which have never been broken. But John Rowand beat him to Fort Assiniboine by four days - an especially impressive feat considering Rowand was travelling in slower freight canoes. As if to add insult to injury, Rowand left a letter for Simpson in which he wrote that he could not stick around. Rowand returned to Edmonton a happy man.

John Rowand's feat, when combined with the fact that Simpson had caught up to McLoughlin (and probably the bad experience of the journey itself) led the Governor to one conclusion: abandon the Beaver River route and close Portage La Biche.

Simpson wrote of his decision in his journal when he arrived at Fort Assiniboine:

"[T]he circumstance of M^r Rowands having got to this place [Fort Assiniboine] from Edmonton after accompanying his loaded Brigade from York thereby performing the Voyage in ... Days shews how much shorter the route is by the Saskatchawaine than by the Beaver River and accounts for some arrangements I am about to suggest and have taken steps for carrying into effect without further delay which I have no doubt the Hon^{ble} Committee & Council will approve. From several remarks in the course of this narrative will be seen the tediousness and uncertainty of the Beaver River Navigation even to half laden North Canoes rendering the Voyage extremely harassing to the people requiring much expensive and precautionary arrangement in regard to provisions from Freemen &c &c [etc] and in dry Seasons incurring the risk of not getting to the Wintering Grounds before the Ice sets in, but above all, the heavy expense occasioned by this route in Men's Wages it being impossible to substitute Boats for

Canoes. ... For this purpose I would recommend that the route by the Beaver River be abandoned altogether and by forming one Brigade of Seven Boats to start from York at the usual time say about the 20th July Forty Five Men instead of Seventy Nine will do the transport business of those Districts...."

Thus, with one deft stroke of his pen, George Simpson wrote Lac La Biche out of the mainstream of the fur trade. After 1824, fur trade traffic bypassed Lac La Biche via a road which was built from Fort Edmonton to Fort Assiniboine. The person who built that road, ironically enough, came from Lac La Biche. His name was Jacques Cardinal, a well known freeman and "horsekeep."

The Columbia Express

"At 6 A.M. got to the Committees Punch Bowl where the people had a Glass of Rum each and ourselves a little Wine & Water which was drunk to the Health of their Honors with three Cheers." -George Simpson, 1825

The Hudson's Bay Company's "Columbia Express" was one of the first mail services in Western Canada. The service ran from York Factory at the mouth of the Hayes River on Hudson Bay to the Pacific Coast and back again. All HBC goods going to the interior and all furs coming out passed through York Factory.

The Columbia Express, which essentially functioned as a separate department of the HBC, came into its own after David Thompson of the North West Company discovered the Athabasca Pass in 1811 and established the first safe Canadian transcontinental route to the Pacific. For nearly a half a century the Athabasca Pass was part of the main fur trade route between Canada and the Oregon country.

The express route ran from York Factory to Cumberland House, then up to the English River, along the English River to the Beaver River, over Portage la Biche to

the Athabasca River, and up the Athabasca River to Athabasca Pass. At the top of Athabasca Pass there is a small lake which flows in two directions. Located on the Great Divide, the lake is the source of the both the Athabasca and Columbia Rivers. The fur traders and express crews who travelled over the pass developed a tradition of making a toast on the shores of the lake, which HBC Governor George Simpson named the "Committee's Punch Bowl" in honour of the London Committee of the HBC. After making the toast, the crews crossed the pass and continued down the Columbia River to the Pacific Coast. After the amalgamation of the NWC and the HBC in 1821, the express crews moving west from York Factory were bound for Fort Vancouver, the HBC's headquarters on the Pacific. Not to be confused with Vancouver, B.C., Fort Vancouver was located on the North Bank

of the Columbia River approximately 12 km north of the present city of Portland, Oregon.

The express trip usually took a little more than three months in specially made express canoes manned by the absolute elite of the *voyageurs*, usually Iroquois. In 1821 George Simpson made the journey in 90 days, including 16 lost days making inspections at various posts. The Columbia Express operated through Lac La Biche until the abandonment of Portage La Biche in 1825 (and even after the closing of the portage the express crews occasionally travelled the Beaver River route). With the withdrawal of the British from the Oregon Territory following the Oregon Treaty of 1846, the Athabasca Pass route fell into disuse.



At left a rare photograph of an express canoe crew in action taken by T.A. Sinclair in 1898. The foreman and steersman both stand. Note the wake behind the canoe indicating that it is moving along at a good clip. Below is a map showing the Columbia Express route from York Factory to Fort Vancouver.



The Voyageurs

"There is no life so happy as a voyageur's life; none so independent; no place where a man enjoys so much variety and freedom as in the Indian country. Huzza! Huzza! pour le pays sauvage!" -Unknown Voyageur to Alexander Ross, 1822

Few figures in Canadian history have captured the public imagination like the *voyageurs*. As the late historian John Foster wrote: "Today, the term "voyageur" suggests the romantic image of men paddling the canoes in the fur brigades which traversed much of the continent, living lives full of perilous adventure, gruelling labour and boisterous camaraderie."

That the *voyageurs* lived such lives is true. But there are two sides to the question of what the *voyageurs* were really like and how romantic was the life they really led.

Certainly there is the picture postcard image of brightly dressed *voyageurs*, com-

plete with *L'Assomption* sashes, singing gaily as they paddled through the magnificent Canadian wilderness. They shared a powerful *esprit de corps* that bound them together as a group and drove them to perform almost inhuman physical feats of which they proudly boasted. They were the blood, sweat, and toil that made possible the transcontinental expansion of the fur trade.

Against this view of the *voyageurs* is the image of a filthy, profane, uncouth, and even cowardly lot of men who hardly deserve the kind of adoration they have received. Daniel Harmon, a wintering partner in the North West Company, wrote



Lawrence Lande Collection of Canadiana, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill University

An artist's sketch of three voyageurs who travelled with Sir John Franklin in 1811. At left is Francois Forcier. The center figure of Enfant La Vallée. On the right is Malouin, the steersman of the canoe.



Lac La Biche Archives

that the *voyageurs* "are not brave; but when they apprehend a little danger, they will often, as they say, play the man. They are very deceitful, and exceedingly smooth and polite, and are even gross flatterers to the face of a person, whom they will basely slander, behind his back." Harmon claimed they could not keep a secret, they rarely expressed gratitude and were not overly faithful servants. Others thought they were intolerable braggarts who did not respect authority and engaged in immoral acts.

These two rather different portraits of the *voyageurs* begs the question: what were they really like?

The first thing to bear in mind is that the *voyageurs* themselves were divided into classes. The upper crust of *voyageur* society was made up of *les hommes du nord*, the fabled Northmen who wintered in fur country. There was also one other tiny elite who paddled the special express canoes used to deliver mail and to transport senior partners and dignitaries. The lower class were known as *les allants et venants*, the comers and goers who pad-

"Carrying Pieces"

The voyageur's life was one of considerable hardship and toil. But the most back-breaking part of the job was portaging. Voyageurs would carry 'pieces' - tightly wrapped bundles or packages weighing 90 lbs each (approximately 36 kg) over the portage. In most cases the voyageurs would carry two or three or more pieces. Small wonder that most voyageurs died of strangulated hernias.

dled back and forth from Lachine to Grand Portage. They were often called porkeaters. But even here there were divisions, from the lowly *milieux* to the *avant* and *gouvernail* - respectively, the paddlers, bowsman, and steersman.

These divisions aside, the *voyageurs* were the "grunts" of the Canadian fur trade - the galley slaves who paddled up to eighteen hours a day under appalling conditions battling hordes of mosquitoes and black flies. Despite the numerous stories of tremendous feats of strength and endurance, the average voyageur was a small man by today's standards, between five and five and a half feet tall, and probably not much more than 135 or 140 pounds (if that). It is well to remember that excess weight on board a canoe costs time and money. Perhaps it was because of their small stature that the feats of the *vouageurs* seem so incredible. During the numerous portages they often carried two or more "pieces" - ninety pound bundles on their backs. There were stories told of specially strong men carrying up to 400 pounds. Small wonder that so many

Lac La Biche in 1817

In 1817 an Irish born North West Company clerk named Ross Cox published an account of his life and times in the fur trade bearing the rather lofty title Adventures on the Columbia River including the Narrative of a Residence of Six Years on the Western Side of the Rocky Mountains, among Various Tribes of Indians Hitherto Unknown: Together with A Journey Across the American Continent. He provided an engaging description of what it was like to travel through Lac La Biche and over Portage La Biche in 1817:

"June 12th. We had good deep water for paddling from daybreak until six A.M., when the river for about four miles spread over a stony bottom, which obliged us to land while the men worked up with the lines and poles. It then became narrower and deeper, and continued so for several miles, until eleven A.M., when it entered Lac de la Biche, which we crossed in three hours with calm weather. As we approached the eastern shore, we observed smoke issuing from a small cove, and immediately after the white canvas of a tent met our delighted eyes. A few minutes more brought us to land, when we had the inexpressible pleasure of meeting Mr. Alexander Stewart and the Slave Lake Brigade, consisting of eight canoes and about forty-five men. This was a fortunate circumstance. We had not eaten a mouthful that day, up to two o'clock, with starvation staring us in the face, no natives on our route, and our chance of killing animals more than doubtful. We now, however, recompensed ourselves for all these uncertainties and apprehensions by a plentiful repast of roast buffalo and white-fish.

This lake, from the time we took to traverse it, I should suppose to be about thirty miles in circumference. It is nearly circular, and abounds in white-fish. The surrounding country is extremely low, without any rising ground in sight, and on the western side the land is quite marshy. The shores are tolerably wooded, principally with pine, birch, and poplar.

During the night, a number of the men were employed on the lake catching fish by torch-light, and were rather successful.

June 13th. About three miles to the eastward of our encampment lies a small lake, called by the Canadians Le Petit Lac de Biche [present day Field Lake]. The country between the two lakes forms the height of land which divides the waters that fall into the Arctic Ocean from the eastward, from those which fall into Hudson's Bay from the westward. Mr. Stewart's men had commenced this portage yesterday, and it took us the greater part of this day to finish it; which will not appear extraordinary, when it is considered that ten large canoes, and between two and three hundred packs of beaver, each weighing upwards of ninety pounds, had to be carried three miles through a swampy marsh, full of underwood, during the greater part of which time it rained heavily. Encamped at four P.M. on the shore of the little lake which we had previously crossed, and which was not more than half a mile in breadth.

June 14th. It continued raining the greater part of the night. Commenced another portage this morning, of two hundred and fifty paces in length, which brought us to a small stream called Little Beaver River, into which we threw the canoes. There was not sufficient water to float them when loaded, in consequence of which we had to construct dams at intervals of four or five hundred paces. This was both a tedious and laborious work; and we encamped at six P.M., having advanced only five miles" voyageurs died of strangulated hernias.

Although clothing was an important part of *voyageur* culture, it was only on special occasions that they dressed up. That dress has often been described as a "gaudy array" with beaded firebags, bright sashes, scarlet leggings, beaded garters and elaborately embroidered moccasins. H.J. Moberly, who spent forty years in the fur trade, including a stint as factor at Lac La Biche, wrote that "The young men, in full dress, beaded leggings, cloth caps, glorious with feathers and ribbons, strutted about showing themselves off like wild turkey cocks."

That last comment reveals something about Moberly's none too high an opinion of the *voyageurs*. It was an opinion widely shared. The *voyageurs* were treated by their employers as unsavory characters to be tolerated rather than respected. They were not allowed to camp inside NWC forts, they seldom socialized with the *bourgeois*, and they were never promoted to the upper ranks of the company.

That seemed to suit the *voyageurs* just fine, for there is little evidence that they aspired to be *bourgeois*. Instead they preferred to boast about their various exploits, when they had the chance, at *la cantine salope*, a place which Peter C. Newman, in his study of the fur trade, compared to a modern motorcycle gang's safe house.

By all accounts, the *voyageur's* life was not easy. Yet, it appears that they would not have had it any other way. One of the very few statements made by an actual *voyageur* was recorded by the fur trader and author, Alexander Ross, in 1822. The story goes that Ross picked up an old man in the fur country and when they started talking the old man said:

"I have now been forty-two years in this country. For twenty-four, I was a light canoe-man; I required but little sleep, but sometimes got less than I required. No portage was too long for me; all portages were alike. My end of the canoe never touched the ground till I saw the end of it. Fifty songs a day were nothing to me. I could carry, paddle, walk, and sing with

any man I ever saw. During that period, I saved the lives of ten Bourgeois, and was always the favourite, because when others stopped to carry at a bad step, and lost time, I pushed on - over rapids, over cascades, over chutes; all were the same to me. No water, no weather, ever stopped the paddle or the song. I had twelve wives in the country; and was once possessed of fifty horses, and six running dogs, trimmed in the first style. I was then like a Bourgeois, rich and happy: no Bourgeois had better-dressed wives than I; no Indian chief finer horses; no white man betterharnessed or swifter dogs. I beat all Indians at the race, and no white man ever passed me on the chase. I wanted for nothing; and I spent all my earnings in the enjoyment of pleasure. Five hundred pounds, twice told, have passed through my hands; although now I have not a spare shirt to my back, nor a penny to buy one. Yet, were I young again, I should glory in commencing the same career again, I would willingly spend another half-century in the same fields of enjoyment. There is no life so happy as a voyageur's life; none so independent; no place where a man enjoys so much variety and freedom as in the Indian country. Huzza! Huzza! pour le pays sauvage!"

A Voyageur Tale

In 1863, François Beaulieu, a Métis who was Grand Chief of the Yellow-Knives, told Emile Petitot a story about an incident which he claimed took place at Great Bear in 1799. At the time Beaulieu was in the employ of the North West Company under Alexander Mackenzie. Although the incident probably took place about ten years

"In the spring of 1799, a top executive of the North West Company came to Bear Lake by water. His name was Mackenzie. He was Scotch and we the hired men called him Long-Neck!

The French despised him and did not like him because he was proud and though they were working hard he gave them little to eat. During the winter for twelve hours of work he would give them six fish to eat. Then as today, Great Bear Lake supplied great quantities of herring, but they were small, the size of the hand.

At that time also, the white leaders who were trading furs with the Tchippewayans [Chipewyans] did not dress as now. They wore a red coat with forked tail, large hemmed buttons, boots to the knee, a hat with three points, and a large, long knife balancing to their side. They were really dressed in a funny way!

So the workers of Long-Neck were dying of hunger, but still working hard, while him, the chief fed on fat meats, on tongues of reindeer, on cakes, and often had his moonshine. That's why we were never happy with him.

One day, as usual, we were in the forest, falling big spruce trees, squaring large beams to build a house, when suddenly Mackenzie arrived. At that moment, some were smoking while sitting on a tree, and I was there with them, holding my gun. I had hunted all day and got only one pheasant which I now had at my belt. I was 17 winters old at the time, and even though much older now, I still remember it clearly. before Beaulieu claims it did - Mackenzie left the West in 1795 and returned to England in 1799 - it provides an interesting snap shot of the voyageur's life in the West. Alexander Mackenzie, contemptuously referred to as "Long-Neck," is not portrayed in a very favourable light.

A Frenchman, Desmarets by name, was making a door, but resting at the moment and us with him when Long-Neck arrived.

'Come on! Come on! Get to work, you lazy bunch,' he said in French.

'Lazy?' said Desmarets. 'We are not lazy. We are just catching our breath! And remember, we are eating only herring, which does not give us much strength. We are not lazy!'

'Shut up, and get to work,' said Mackenzie, angrily. He said no more, but put his hand to his sword.

'Ah, you Englishman, you threaten me? You want to draw your sword against me?' said Desmarets. 'Because we work for you, you think we are slaves? While you eat like a pig four times a day, we barely subsist on unpalatable herring. Your sword you better not touch, or my axe I will use.'

But before he had finished these words, Mackenzie drew his sword, and hit the Frenchman to the leg.

Blood rushed out immediately from the wound and Desmarets fell to the ground.

'You have killed me,' you villain. His wound was as large as my hand.

Upon seeing this, I became very angry. My grandfather was French, and I loved the Frenchmen I was with, to the point that if Mackenzie had done anything else, I was ready to shoot him.

But he said nothing more, and wiping his sword on his boot he put it back in place and ran quickly to his house where he locked himself in.

Desmaret's friends immediately went to get a blanket, covered him up and took

him to his cabin, all the while swearing against the bourgeois.

'Very well, Very well!' they said. 'We are treated like dogs, they hit us with the sword, they think we are slaves, so then we shall leave, and let The Company take care of itself. If it wants workers, let it go and find some. We will leave and go into the forest and be with the Indians, this is no problem to us.'

But Mr Leblanc arrived unexpectedly. Mr. Leblanc was French and of small stature. The French liked him because he was not proud. He would easily talk to the people, not like the other one.

Mr. Leblanc tried to calm the Frenchman, saying his superior's attitude and action were vile. He took care of Desmaret's wound and treated him well. He then went to the hangar, got some fat, foods, tongues, lard, flour, sugar, tea, tobacco.

'Here, my friends,' he said, 'take and eat! Have a feast! The great chief gives you all these. Just forget a few things and don't talk about some others!'

'Well, then,' they said, 'this way we can understand each other. If we are treated well we will be able to work harder. If the bourgeois doesn't draw the sword against us, then we will respect him.'

This is how things got worked out. Since then, 4 over ten (80) winters have passed for me. This is a long time, but I still remember it. And it is as I say!"

The *voyageurs* were an important part of the history of Lac La Biche because many became free traders - o-tee-paym-soo-wuk - after they had served out their contracts. And it was those free traders who formed the nucleus of the first permanent settlement in the area.



Lawrence Lande Collection of Canadiana, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill University

A typical voyageur contract. This one, dated, November 24, 1803, contracted Hiacynthe Thibeau of Berthier to the firm of McTavish, Frobisher & Co by agent Jean Marie Boucher. Thibeau was to winter three years "in the far reaches of the North West Posts" at a salary of 700 livres a year. This contract would have made Thibeau one of "les hommes du Nord."

"Without the help of the Indians, I have little hope of success." -Alexander Mackenzie, 1793

Fur Trade Tales

"Friday [July] 13th Fine weather. One of my hunters came in for Rum. I settled with him and sent him off again. T. Deschamp's son brought in a Moose Deer. Desjarlaix, Challifoux & co arrived at the H.B. House, and five young straggling vagabonds from Lac La Biche came in to us. [They are] on their way they say to the Columbia, where they [are] in hopes of finding the Beaver as numerous as blades of grass in the Plains. ... I gave myself much trouble in attempting to form a division among those Freemen to prevent them crossing the Mountains where they will be greater nuisance to us there than even here.

Saturday [July] 14th. Troubled with those Freemen mongrels and Indians all day. There is no dependance to be placed upon them, they have neither principle nor honor, honesty nor a wish to do well. All their aim is folly and extravagance and caprice of the moment, devoid of all steadiness of conduct, and by far more troublesome than the most savage Blackfoot in the Plains. I gave some of them Debt &c. Cardinalle arrived with his family. ...





Ted Byfield, ed., Atlas of Alberta, p.11

Above: Section of David Thompson's map with present day Alberta outlined. Below left: Detail showing Lac La Biche, which appears as Red Deers Lake.

Sunday [July] 15th. Still pested in settling with those Vagabonds all day

Monday [July] 16th At 8 Oclock Cardinal set off for Lesser Slave Lake with Jo^s Desjarlaix's son. They go on horse back as far as Lac La Biche. I sent a boat with four men down the River to cross my hunters over upon the South side to hunt Buffalo. ... Still plagued by those Freemen and Straggling Vagabonds of Lac La Biche." -From the Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger, 1799-1814

An Early Letter From Lac La Biche

Greenwich House. Red Deers Lake, October 7th 1799.

Dear Sir, After a very tedious passage from Bolsover House (by our having to hunt for our living all the way) we arrived here the 26th September and found that Mr Richards had again run away and gone to the Canadians; he being the only person who understood the Bungees and Ottoways, his leaving us will be a great detriment to us and to the Honourable Company here. We have built a small house to put our little goods into, and parts of our dwelling house is logged to the windows but it will be some considerable time before we shall be able to live into it not having a saw of any sort whatever here.

On Saturday last two of our men with four horses arrived here from Buckingham House with a few small articles of trading goods and now they return to winter there with all the horses that was left here before.

Yesterday twenty Canadians in five canoes embarked from this place to erect a settlement at the Slave Lake to the SW of the Peace River and very near it. I would also have gone with a few men and have built there, but we had neither provisions or stores fit for that expedition. Most part of the Bungees winters here, but their long attachment to the Canadians, and this being our first year amongst them, our prospect of trade in consequence I doubt will not be much this winter. Wishing you health and a good trade I remain dear sir your humble servant, P. Fidler.



Le "portageux."



J.W. Tyrrell, Across the Sub-Arctics of Canada, 1908, p.276 Carrying the mail to Moose Factory.

"Petit Vermillion havg [sic] nothing to drink - he traded a good Pistol for 5 Pints of Rum - In the Afternoon the Fils de Lievin & the Little Pine came in with about 16 skins - ... I promised them a drinking about here if they would agree to return the Morrow to their Lodge & continue to work Beaver - after much talk, they agreed & with what was given them tonight & promised them on going away they cost me full what is charged per Expenses - confound the Rascals." -David Thompson to his Journal, February 16,1799

O-tee-paym-soo-wuk

"We caught up to a party from Lac-la-biche going the same way. They were French half-breeds on their way into Red River with their furs. We found them first-rate travelling companions."

-John McDougall, Saddle, Sled and Snowshoe, 1896

The periods from 1800 to 1812 and from 1825 to 1853* are black holes in the history of Lac La Biche, largely because there is so little that seems to have survived from those times. With the closing of the fur trade posts at Lac La Biche in 1800, and then the abandonment of the portage in 1825, the movers and shakers in the fur trade, especially those who kept journals, used other routes. As a consequence, there are few descriptions of what was happening around Lac La Biche. Nevertheless, it is known that free traders who had moved into the area during the early 1800s stayed and formed the nucleus for a permanent settlement.

Les gens libres - or as the Cree termed them, O-tee-paym-soo-wuk, "their own boss" - were the freemen or free traders who had served out their contracts with fur trade companies. The vast majority of freemen were what are today known as Métis, an old French word meaning "mixed," though there is still some dispute about Métis spelled with a capital M and a small m. Capital M Métis is often used to refer to those from the Red River Colony in present day Manitoba while small m métis refers to those of North American Indian-European descent elsewhere in Canada. In fur trade days, they were also called bois, brûlé, chicot, michif, country-born, halfbreed or breed, and mixed blood. In Western Canada the Métis population was part French, English, Scottish, Irish, or Scandinavian (and later Lebanese in the case of Lac La Biche) and part Native, usually Cree or Ojibwa.

After they had served out their contracts, many freemen chose to stay in fur trade country, where they hunted and trapped. Although they were highly mobile, a few of them began to settle in various places in Alberta, such as Lac Ste Anne and Lac La Biche.

It is possible that freemen lived around Lac La Biche before the Europeans came. For example, David Thompson's guide, Laderoote, could have lived in the Lac La Biche area, but there is no way of confirming it through documentary evidence.

After the Europeans came, however, there is evidence of occupation and two names in particular stand out: Desjarlais and Cardinal.

Antoine Desjarlais (sometimes appearing in the record as Desjarlaix and Déjarlais) was one the earliest residents of Lac La Biche. He was actually born Antoine de Charlois at Verchères, not far from Montréal in present day Quebec. The historical record indicates that he worked as a guide and interpreter for North West Company. In 1803 he was in charge of a

^{*}The dates here may seem confusing but they are deliberate. According to Hudson's Bay Company records, Red Deers Lake House I, built by David Thompson, operated for about a year. Greenwich House, established by Peter Fidler in 1799, was closed in 1801. No fur trade post was erected again until 1817, when John Lee Lewes of the HBC built a temporary post. However, David Thompson's return to Lac La Biche in 1812 and the subsequent use of Portage La Biche as part of the transportation route to the Pacific meant that a number of well-known fur traders passed through Lac La Biche and left descriptions of the area. Those descriptions dry up after 1825, when the HBC abandoned the portage. The people who stayed behind do not appear to have had the ability to read or write. It is not until the coming of the missionaries and the return of the HBC in 1853 that the written record begins again.

NWC post at Lake Manitoba and the following year he was sent to Dog Lake. After serving out his contract, he left the trade in 1805 and moved to Lac La Biche, where he appears to have survived by hunting, fishing, and dabbling in the fur trade as a freeman.

David Thompson met Desjarlais when he passed through Lac La Biche in May, 1812, on his way to Montréal. Thompson noted that Desjarlais was living at Lac La Biche with a large Métis family and he traded with the Hudson's Bay Company. Two years later, Gabriel Franchère ran into him and wrote that Desjarlais was married to a Native woman and "lived with his family on the produce of his chase." At that time Antoine Desjarlais was one of very few who were living at Lac La Biche. Franchère wrote: "Nobody at least disputed with him the sovereignty of Red Deer Lake, of which he had, as it were, taken possession."

It must have seen a very secluded life because Desjarlais asked Franchère to read to him two letters he had received two years before. Antoine Desjarlais also appears to have been a generous man. He gave Franchère and his companions duck eggs, about fifty pounds of dried meat, and ten pounds of tallow. Desjarlais's generosity and knowledge of the Lac La Biche region did not go unrewarded. Hudson's Bay Company records list him as the Lac La Biche Post Manager and Interpreter in 1819 and again from 1820-21. He was still at Lac La Biche when HBC Governor George Simpson travelled over the portage in 1824 (Simpson referred to him as "old Dejoilais").

In 1833 one of Antoine Desjarlais's sons,

also named Antoine Desjarlais, guided an expedition headed by the Arctic explorer George Back (later Admiral Sir George). Back had accompanied Sir John Franklin on three Polar expeditions. In 1833 he went in search of Sir John Ross, another Arctic explorer who was mistakenly thought to have gone missing.

In addition to Antoine Desjarlais, travellers frequently wrote of a Cardinal (also Cardinalle) in the Lac La Biche area. It was probably Jacques Cardinal, who appears to have been a well-known Métis freeman and "horsekeep" who lived between Lac La Biche and Jasper, Alberta. Unfortunately, little more is known about him except that he met some rather important people and completed some important jobs in his day. In 1824, for example George Simpson hired him to cut the trail between Fort Edmonton and Fort Assiniboine which was the undoing of Portage La Biche.* Again, in 1827, David Douglas, a botanist sent out by the London Horticultural Society to study plant life in the North West, met Cardinal near the Rocky Mountains. "I quickened my steps," Douglas wrote, "and soon ... found Jacques Cardinal, who had come to the Moose Encampment, and brought with him eight horses to help us on our way. He treated me with an excellent supper of mutton ... and regretted he had no spirits to offer me. Pointing to the stream he jocularly said, 'there's my barrel and it is always running." It would appear that, if nothing else, Jacques Cardinal had a keen sense humour.

There was one other Cardinal at Lac La Biche, Joseph Cardinal. He was born at St. Laurent, near Montréal. Cardinal was

^{*}It is difficult to tell whether Simpson hired Cardinal for his expertise or for some other reason. Simpson was not happy when he discovered that Cardinal and others had been attacking the Shuswap Indians. He wrote in his journal that "this unprovoked warfare was likely to defeat my plans [of encouraging the Shuswaps to do more trade with the HBC] ... I therefore spoke my Mind very plainly to those freemen, told them we meant to protect the Shewhoppes and if they did not instantly abandon their cruel intentions they should not this Winter have even a particle of ammunition at any of our Establishments and that next Season they should be bundled down to Canada where starvation & misery would follow them." It is entirely possible that Simpson hired Cardinal to keep him and others away from the Shuswaps.

rumoured to have accompanied Alexander Mackenzie on his expedition to the Pacific Ocean in 1793, although there is no way of verifying it. In 1797 or 1798 he married Louise Frobisher, who might have been the daughter of the prominent fur trader Joseph Frobisher. Cardinal had likely served out his contract and then settled at Lac La Biche. He was certainly at Lac La Biche when the first Roman Catholic missionaries passed through in 1844. The venerable Bishop Taché later wrote that Joseph Cardinal was "the living history of this country."

The period between the arrival of David Thompson in 1798 and the closing of the Portage was a formative era in the history of Lac La Biche. From the beginning of the European discovery of the lake and the geographical quirk that made it a viable part of the fur trade route, it served as a staging area and transportation corridor. It meant little more to the fur traders and when it was abandoned for what was thought to be a better route in 1825 the traders gave it no second thought. However, David Thompson had placed Lac La Biche on the map and, as traders and voyageurs travelled the corridor, a few were attracted by the beauty and bounty of the waters of Lac La Biche. They came back to form the nucleus of a permanent settlement, making a living in whatever way they could. It is impossible to gauge how many settled around the shores of the lake by the 1850s. But those who did were there to witness the onset of a new era as the missionaries began to spread their influence across Western Canada.



B. Wilson, The Great Company

Voyageurs "tracking" a canoe





Lac La Biche Archives

St Jean Baptiste day, Lac La Biche, 1914. From Left to Right: Mr. Leo Ouellette, Dr. Sévérin Sabourin, Fr. Bélanger, Louis Trudel, Fr. Joseph Albéric Ouellette, Mr. Adalbert Gascon, and Mr. Augustin Simoneau.

The Missionaries

"Let us work to civilize the poor Indian" -Petit Manuel Pour Apprendre A Lire La Langue Crise, 1886

"The fur-trade era," Howard Palmer wrote in his *Alberta: A New History*, "was a period of equality between whites and Indians, when the Indians went about their own lives. The two groups met briefly at the posts, and exchanged goods. Each received from the other what it could not produce." The fur traders had no desire to change Native culture or Native habits. Any cultural impact the fur trade had on Native societies was indirect.

Not so with the missionaries. Their aim was direct and intentional. They wanted to replace the fur trade with agriculture and a settled lifestyle based on Christian values. The goal was to Europeanize the Native people, who the missionaries viewed as "uncivilized and heathen." Even the Methodist missionary Henry Bird Steinhauer, himself an Ojibwa Indian, wrote of "the savage heathen, thirsting for human blood," always on the "warpath."

The missionaries and the fur traders often disagreed over the matter of "civilizing" the Natives and settlement. Fur traders knew only too well that the fur trade and settlement did not mix. The Hudson's Bay Company spent no small effort trying to argue that most of Rupert's Land was useless for agriculture. George Simpson (Sir George after 1841), Governor of the HBC, once told a Select Committee of the British House of Commons: "I do not think that any part of the Hudson's Bay territories is well adapted for settlement; the crops are very uncertain." That was poppycock and Simpson knew it. But he had a vested interest to protect. As for the missionaries, the West was their oyster.

Although the Roman Catholics, led by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, became the dominant influence in the north, they were not the first missionaries to enter what is now Alberta. That claim must go to a Methodist missionary by the name of Robert Rundle,* who arrived from England in 1840. While Fort Edmonton was his main headquarters, he travelled widely in an effort to convert Native people and spread the Christian word.

This activity brought him into conflict with the fur traders, notably, John Rowand, Chief Factor at Fort Edmonton and one of Sir George Simpson's favourite traders. Among other things, Rundle and Rowand locked horns over the observance of the Sabbath. Rowand was bitterly opposed to allowing Native people to take a day off. "The worst thing for the trade," he wrote, "is these ministers and priests - the natives will never work half so well now they like praying and singing."

There is some dispute over just how much praying and singing Native people were doing. Nevertheless, Rundle believed that he had made progress during his eight year stay in Alberta and his activities paved the way for other Methodist missionaries, such as Benjamin Sinclair, Thomas Woolsey, Henry Bird Steinhauer, and the father and son team of George and John McDougall. Although the first Methodist mission was not established until 1848, the Methodist missionaries were able to exert influence among the Cree and Stoney. However, they were never able to match the Roman Catholics (today,

John Rowand on the Missionary Influence

Born at Montréal in 1787, John Rowand joined the North West Company in 1803 as an apprentice clerk. He was sent to Fort Augustus, which was later moved and renamed Fort Edmonton. He became a partner in the North West Company in 1820, and, after the merger of the NWC and the HBC in 1821, he was promoted Chief Trader. In 1823 he was promoted again to Chief Factor in charge of the Saskatchewan District, a position from which he exercised enormous authority in Western Canada. The Indians called him "Iron Shirt" or "Big Mountain" (owing to his size - Rowand probably weighed about 300 pounds). He died from a heart attack in 1854 while trying to break up a fight between two Métis boatmen.

Rowand counted HBC Governor Sir George Simpson among his best friends. But he had no time for missionaries, as a letter he wrote in June, 1843 indicates (note especially how he refers to Father Thibault):

"The worst thing for the trade is those ministers and priests - the natives will never work half so well now - they like praying and singing. Mr. Thingheaute [Father Jean-Baptiste Thibault] is allowed to go back again to the Saskatchewan. We shall all be saints after a time. Rundle says that all Catholics will go to ... for himself he is sure of going straite to heaven when he dies, but he longs to get a wife. Had Mr. Evans [Rev. James Evans] been sent to F.D.P. [Fort des Prairies, i.e., Edmonton] at once he would have done better than fifty Rundle's [sic] - but it is too late now."

more than 60% of Alberta's Native people are Catholic).

The first Roman Catholic missionary in Alberta was Father Jean-Baptiste Thibault, a diocesan priest who arrived in

^{*}While it is true that two Roman Catholic missionaries travelled through Alberta in 1838, Rundle was the first long-term missionary in Alberta.

1842. He was followed by a small army of Catholic missionaries, the vast majority of whom were members of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. They left an enduring mark on Alberta. More than one town in Alberta has been named after a member of the Oblate Order: Grouard, Lacombe, Leduc, Morinville, and Vegreville, among others.

The Oblates began establishing a series of missions in northern Alberta, starting with Lac Ste Anne in 1844. A second mission was built at Fort Chipewyan in 1847, where the venerable Father (later Bishop) Alexander Taché began to make his mark. The third mission was established at Lac La Biche in 1853. Dunvegan followed in 1866.

The arrival of the Oblates sparked a sometimes none too friendly competition with other missionary groups. Shortly after Father Thibault began his work, Robert Rundle sourly noted that "Several of my old friends among the Indians, both men and women, keep away from me. I went to some of their tents but it was no use. O my God! when shall these things end! The Priest was telling them yesterday that neither the Governor or the Queen had any right to send missionaries, the power belonged to the Pope." In a similar vein, Thomas Woolsey complained bitterly about having to "endure more opposition for [from] the papacy, than from all the aboriginal tribes with whom we come in contact. Not only do the emissaries of Rome negate our acts, but they speak of us as impostors, and warn the people against

having anything to do with us."

Worse still, from Woolsey's point of view, the Roman Catholics were two-faced: "whenever we meet them, their 'bland smiles and fair features' are enough to throw us off our guard, if we were not acquainted with versification to the effect: 'Will you walk into my parlour, said the spider to the fly'." Still, Woolsey gave high marks to the Oblates at Lac La Biche. "Romanists in that section are seeking after truth," he wrote, after handing out copies of a book which Roman Catholic priests in other areas were trying to suppress.

From the Roman Catholic point of view, the Protestant missionaries were meddlesome liars. Particularly upsetting was a rumour Protestants were spreading in the early 1860s to the effect that the Oblates were all secretly married. Some innuendo was also directed towards Bishop Henri Faraud, who, it was claimed, spent a little too much time with the Sisters. Of course, there was nothing to substantiate these rumours. It was all part of the rivalry. One Oblate priest later described the actions of the Methodists as "a war to the death."

In the early years of missionary activity, the rivalry between the Catholics and Protestants served, at best, to amuse Native people and, at worst, to scare them off. But Native people were not above exploiting the rivalry for their own ends.

Their differences aside, the Catholic and Protestant missionaries still shared one important goal: to Christianize the West on the European model of settlement. They

"An old Canadien 88 years of age, named Joseph Cardinal, native of St. Laurent near Montreal, pleaded with me to go as far as Lac La Biche, where his family was gathered awaiting me. This good old man weighed down with his 88 years, guided me through the woods and a thousand obstructions up to Lac La Biche after six days of walk. ... From this lake it took me eight long days again on foot to come back to Fort Edmonton. I felt so exhausted that I could feel the pain in all the muscles of my body even to the end of my fingers."

-Father J.B. Thibault to Bishop F.N. Blanchet, December 23, 1844

Joseph Cardinal played an important role in the early development of Lac La Biche. His greatgreat-great grandson, Mike Cardinal. became an MLA and Cabinet Minister in the Alberta might disagree on means but they saw eye to eye on the ends. And the "ends" posed a threat to the fur trade.

Fur traders from Sir George Simpson on were caught between a rock and a hard place when it came to the question of the missionaries. The Hudson's Bay Company could not prevent the missionaries from entering Rupert's Land. To have even suggested stopping the missionaries would have been tantamount to committing political and moral suicide. But neither was the HBC very happy about the missionary intrusion. Peter C. Newman perhaps put it best when he wrote that Sir George Simpson viewed the missionaries "as necessary evils at best." Simpson's own verdict, which he expressed in a letter to his superiors in London, England, was that missionary activity did little more than fill "the pockets and bellies of some hungry missionaries and rearing the Indians in habits of indolence." The missionaries, then, had to be watched and care had to be taken to prevent Catholics especially from "extending their operations too rapidly."

Others were not even that charitable. Fur trader Donald Ross wrote of having "let fly his first fling at the mission, endurance at an end." The wife of another fur trader wrote that the moral character of certain Methodist missionaries was as "base as can be. ... They tell the greatest fibs with perfect coolness and are always believed."

It was not always tooth and nail with the fur traders and the missionaries. There was evidence of strong friendships and a spirit of cooperation at the various posts. One of the more notable was that between Émile (later Bishop) Grouard and Roderick MacFarlane, who would become Chief Factor of the Athabasca District. Still, the overall relationship was one characterized by friction and mistrust. Sir George Simpson, in the words of Bishop Taché was a "sly governor" and the fur traders in general, wrote Émile Grouard, were a "plague extending across the country."

Although many of the squabbles stemmed from interests which were being advanced and those being threatened, they were also symptoms of the growing pains the West was beginning to experience. Starting in the 1850s, Western Canada was entering a period of transition, marked, above all, by a shift away from the fur trade to a settled existence based upon agriculture. This did not happen overnight, nor did the fur trade suddenly decline in importance. But the signposts of change were there: the expansion of missionary activity in the 1850s and 60s, the transfer of Rupert's Land to the Government of Canada in 1870, the beginning of the treaty process to secure land for settlement, and the Riel Rebellion of 1885.

Lac La Biche was not immune from these developments. Indeed, it was an important part of them.



La Societé historique de Saint Boniface

Father Jean-Baptiste Thibault, the first Roman Catholic missionary in Alberta. HBC Chief Factor John Rowand called him "Mr. Thingheaute."

Notre Dame des Victoires

"Lake La Biche! ... I have heard of it so many times! I have finally arrived: What joy! It was formerly the departure point for the convoys for the Great North. The annual supplies were transported by ox carts and horses across the prairies from the Red River. These supplies were put up in a big shed which is still found there, when spring came, they were despatched to their destination by way of the La Biche River, tributary of the Athabasca River whose rapids are so dreaded."

-Mgr. Gabriel Breynat, O.M.I., 1945

First established in 1853, and moved to the west shore of Lac La Biche in 1855, Notre Dame des Victoires became one of the most important Oblate missions in Western Canada. For more than a quarter of a century the mission served as the main supply depot for all the Catholic missions in the North West. It acquired such a legendary status that Mgr. Breynat was awestruck long after the mission had declined in importance. In 1914 Emile J. Legal, O.M.I., then Archbishop of



Right Rev. Emile Legal, O.M.I.

Edmonton, compiled a book, Short Sketches of the History of the Catholic Churches and Missions in Central Alberta - now a rare book. Legal was no stranger to Lac La Biche, having served as Bishop Grandin's coadjutor in the diocese of St. Albert. Although there is a tremendous amount of self-promotion in Legal's account of the founding of Notre Dame des Victoires, it nevertheless provides some interesting insights into the early efforts of the Oblates.

"Lake La Biche is a magnificent sheet of water dotted with islets of more or less considerable size, which are covered with woods of aspens and birch trees, and interspersed with little stretches of virgin prairie. It was to these islands that the native Indians came, each autumn, for the fishing season, so as to secure a supply of fish for their subsistence during the winter. The lake, in its greatest length from Northwest to South, measures about thirty miles, with a shore line of approximately 120 miles. The depth is, on an average, five to six fathoms (30 to 36 feet).

Although its period as a mission station is not recognized till the autumn of 1853, nevertheless its inhabitants had not been altogether neglected, for they had already been honored by the Rev. J.B. Thibeault [Thibault] on a first visit, in the autumn of 1844.

This man of God came to instruct them on three different occasions, and, in 1851, Rev. Joseph Bourassa also came to offer the aid of his ministry. In the course of
these visits, many of the natives had been baptized. Some had received the sacrament of Christian matrimony and four or five had been admitted to the Eucharistic banquet.

In 1852, Bishop Taché, whose diocese then extended all over the North West, came accompanied by Father Lacombe, as yet a secular priest, and paid a visit, the principal purpose of which was to take all the necessary measures to discover if Lake La Biche could provide the means for the support of a missionary settlement, and to inquire into the disposition of the natives in the matter. The result of these investigations being favorable, Bishop Taché determined to send a priest to them as soon as possible. In the spring of 1853 good Father Remas left Red River for Lake St. Anne. but Divine Providence directed him to Lake La Biche, where he commenced his apostolate amidst privations and hardships of every kind, but the same holy Providence inspired Father Lacombe to come to his relief from Lake St. Anne. with many indispensable articles, and even to take him back with him for the rest of the winter. It was there that Bishop Taché found them later.

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate were founded in France in 1816 by the Rev. Charles Joseph Eugene de Mazenod (later Bishop of Marseilles). The new religious order's aim was the evangelization of the poor and the most neglected.

In 1841 Bishop Ignace Bourget of Montréal invited the Oblates to set up their first foreign mission in Canada. They began in the Ottawa Valley and in 1845 moved into the North West. The first two Oblates to travel to Western Canada were Rev. Father P. Aubert and Brother Alexandre Taché.

In 1848 the Oblates founded the College of Bytown, which was renamed College of Ottawa in 1861. It later became (by papal charter) the University of Ottawa.

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate are today a world wide order, with more than a thousand of their members stationed in Canada alone.

In the beginning of the year 1854 he had left Isle-à-la-Crosse, in the severest season, in the very depth of winter, in company



Provincial Archives of Alberta

Notre Dame des Victoires - better known locally as the Lac La Biche Mission. This picture was taken in the 1890s. The long shed on the left housed a boat-building workshop.

with a hired servant and two Otchipwewan [Chipewyan] Indians, and after making a passing call at Fort Pitt and Fort Edmonton he had arrived at St. Anne, on Palm Sunday. These good Fathers had the consolation of entertaining His Lordship for three weeks, after which they journeyed with him to Lake La Biche, where he consecrated the mission to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, under the title of "Our Lady of Victories."

In the meantime, Father Vegreville came from Isle-à-la-Crosse to pay a visit to his old schoolfellow and fellow countryman, needless to say to the intense joy and gratification of Father Rémas.

This Father was badly housed and troubles came to him from many quarters Yet, in spite of this, his zeal did not flag in his arduous labors for the salvation of the souls entrusted to him and he kept to his post, till news came for him, by the February prairie mail, that another post



Rev. Father René Rémas, O.M.I., the first resident pastor of Nortre Dame des Victoires.



Oblate Collection

Alexandre-Antonin Taché, one of the first Oblates to enter Western Canada. As Bishop, Taché exerted a powerful influence in the west and he was largely responsible for making the Mission at Lac La Biche as important as it was.

was assigned to him by an order of obedience for the winter of 1855, when he went again to Lake St. Anne to act as novice master to Father Lacombe, who still desired to be enrolled under the banner of Mary Immaculate. During this first sojourn at Lake La Biche, he had baptized seventy-two, of which there were as many children as adults, conducted seven marriages and four burials. This success, in spite of his numerous difficulties, was very consoling and gave testimony to his untiring energy in the instruction of souls, especially as at that time he spoke the Cree language only with great difficulty.

To fill the vacancy about to be caused by his departure Fathers Maisonneuve and Tissot received orders from Bishop Taché to betake themselves to N. D. des Victoires. The former was stationed at Red River and the latter at Isle-à-la-Crosse. Father Tissot left Isle-à-la-Crosse on June 11th, and arrived at Lake La Biche the 24th of the same month.

Father Maisonneuve left Red River on the 2nd of July on the barge of the Hudson's Bay Company and arrived at Lake La Biche toward the end of September, bringing with him, but not without much trouble, the goods destined for the maintenance of the mission.

Further trouble was now in store. The site which Father Remas had chosen had soon to be abandoned by reason of its too close proximity to the Fort or Trading station which the owners talked of extending up to the mission house. Thus the missionary could have no land left then but a narrow place, which afforded no means of approaching the lake for water. Finally the fishing was not very abundant at this spot and this was a serious deficiency, for fish was the chief means of subsistence.

All these reasons determined the Fathers to change their place of abode. They made repeated visits to the borders of the lake to find some better position. At last, after many attempts, the site on which the present mission stands today seemed to offer most advantages, and it was chosen, in spite of all the obstacles which arose on all sides.

The new location was six miles away and to establish the mission house at this great distance was no easy enterprise.



Oblate Collection

Brother Patrick Bowes. He served as a carpenter at Notre Dame des Victoires from 1857-61; 1864-65; 1871-72; and 1875-78.

After removing all that he could of the scanty furniture of the house built some years before by Rev. Fr. Rémas with so much trouble and fatigue, Father Tissot abandoned it on the 20th of March and came to rejoin his religious brothers in his encampment.

"... At the time of the arrival of the Bishop, the trail for the carts had been started and opened up to the Little Beaver River. On Aug. 10th., through a native guide accompanying one of our men, the news came to us that indeed the carts and oxen that we had asked for from the Red River were on their way, but had been stopped because of the trees blocking the trail. We immediately set out to go and help our man get here, leaving behind the carts until the trail could be opened. On the 20th. of the same month, Fr. Maisonneuve taking along four men with him set out for Fr. Pitt. Fifteen days after, they arrived at Ft. Pitt having mapped the trail and opening it at the same time. During this time, the whole country around had been talking about the sure failure of this undertaking and was just waiting for it to happen when suddenly our fully loaded carts appeared. This silenced the critics!"

-Account of the first cut trail linking Lac La Biche to the Red River Settlement, Archives of St. Boniface, Manitoba, 1856 At the new site of the mission, every Sunday, however, he left it to offer Holy Mass for the Catholics still residing near the Fort. This service he continued to render them as long as the ice on the lake remained solid.

By dint of hard work the missionaries succeeded in clearing some acres in which they sowed fourteen barrels of potatoes, a little barley and a quantity of cabbages and radishes. Meanwhile, the work on the house had been started and advanced, it is true, very slowly, for the carpenters were only beginners. Nevertheless, it was habitable by the 13th of June, 1856, the day of the arrival of Bishop Taché on a visit to the house.

It certainly was not a palace, yet the sorry piece of work though it was, the missionaries congratulated themselves on having a shelter to protect them a little against bad weather, and in which they could entertain His Lordship. Bishop Taché remained at Lake La Biche till the 14th of June, sharing with the missionaries their modest and ill prepared hut.

While on his visit, Bishop Taché took the desired opportunity of now determining the exact limits of the mission. He also blessed the property, and the presence of the men who had accompanied him was

"On Monday we left on horseback, and after five long days we arrived at Lac La Biche on Oct. 28 at one o'clock in the afternoon. At that same moment the rain stopped, the sun was coming out to brighten the scenery and help us to contemplate and admire the magnificent establishment of NOTRE DAME DES VICTOIRES. The gun-shot salutes fired by the first inhabitants that we met announced our approach. The amiable Fr. Tissot and the excellent Br. Bowes greeted us with great cordiality. Here also the good Sisters of Charity devote their time and energy to the population, and shared in the joy of our arrival.

Our establishment of Lac La Biche is really excellent, not only as a whole but also in every detail. It is a complete victory of intelligent work over rugged nature. All local resources have been utilized, and the fact that is much more noteworthy is that the Missionaries have done the work by themselves. They have done the whole thing with their own hands, and have directed what they could not do themselves."

-Alexandre Taché on his arrival at Lac La Biche in 1856





Fathers Augustin Maisonneuve (left) and Père Jean Tissot (right).

made use of by placing the old house, which still stood at the former site, upon a raft and bringing it thus along over the lake.

At the time of the Bishop's arrival a cart road had been decided upon to put the mission in communication with Fort Pitt. Indeed, it had already been begun and carried as far as the Little Beaver river, about forty miles from Lake La Biche.

By the 10th of August, the news of the arrival of the oxen and carts ordered from Red River was brought by the Indian guide, who had left the caravan at a standstill on the route, unable to approach for want of a practical road.

On the 20th of the same month, then, Father Maisonneuve started off with four men to continue the work already taken up. On the fifteenth day of this work the road was laid out and opened as far as Fort Pitt, a distance of 100 miles more. All the country side was waiting to see the efforts of the missionaries fail. In fact, they spoke of it as a foregone conclusion. when the arrival of the carts themselves put an end to all their idle talk. The Company and the neighborhood were glad enough now to make use of this means of communication, ready to admit that without the courageous and constant efforts of the poor missionaries, the appearance of carts at [Lac] La Biche could not have been brought about so speedily.

It was in 1857 that the first two houses were built near the mission, a good sign that the natives were beginning to come to the priests of their own accord. During this year, too, Brother Bowes prepared the frame work of a much larger building, destined in the near future to receive the Sisters.

In the spring of 1858, as the result of great labor and perseverance, a considerable quantity of limestone was extracted from the lake. A limekiln was immediately constructed and the Fathers had at their disposal more than 300 bushels of excellent lime. They commenced at once to construct very strong and solid, in stone, the new building the wood work for which was set up in the course of August. During the summer of the years 1859 and 1860, Fathers Tissot and Maisonneuve, assisted by Brothers Bowes, became masons and brought the house for the Sisters to a satisfactory state of completion. A part of the ground floor was, however, reserved to serve as a public chapel.

At the end of the summer of 1860, after eight years of laborious endeavor, Fr. Tissot and Fr. Maisonneuve had the consolation at last of seeing their mission each year progressing materially and spiritually, and being placed more and more on a lasting basis. They had a house of their own, rude enough, it is true, but still comfortable. In addition, they had built a fine house in stone of two floors, measuring 30 x 50 feet. It was now time to think of arising and offering the poor, ignorant natives of Lake La Biche more abundant means of religious instruction. It was time, also, to establish a good school and, in due course, to open an orphanage.

To the regeneration of people it is a point of absolute necessity to start by looking after the young; an impossibility without a school conducted in a wise and Christian spirit.

It was resolved upon, therefore, by the Fathers, that they should obtain Sisters for the mission of N. D. des Victoires. Bishop Taché again applied to the Superioress General of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal to be kind enough to send a little colony of her good nuns to Lake La Biche. Three Sisters received their order of obedience and made ready to depart, glad to co-operate with the Fathers in the establishment of Catholicism in these far off territories now being opened to their zeal. These three Sisters were Rev. Sister Guenette, Superior; Sister Daunais and Sister Tisseur.

In the beginning of May 1862, Fr. Maisonneuve left with some men for Red River to meet the Sisters there, where he arrived after a journey of 32 days. On reaching Lake La Biche the Sisters had the consolation of seeing the Indians grouping themselves around the mission. In the course of the summer ten new houses had been begun. Thus they could see, from the first, that there would not be wanting plenty of work for their zeal [sic]. They courageously took up duties at once, sharing the labor in a spirit of mutual charity. They took charge of the chapel, the sacristy and vestry, the wardrobes of the missionaries, the kitchen arrangements and the school. Oftentimes, too, according to their strength, they helped on the farm, which was being developed more and more each year, but the principal aim of the constitution of this order is rightly the conduct of schools and orphanages.

A year after the coming of the Sisters, the Fathers rejoiced that God was each year blessing their first attempts and began to think of means of providing bread for their colony. At the end of June 1863, they had the satisfaction of being able to build a mill on a little water course about a mile from their residence.

This mill held on well for many years, rendering valuable service in spite of the damages it received, which, however, were repaired every year. Meanwhile, Father Tissot was sent to St. Albert to replace Fr. Lacombe, who was now destined a special manner for the evangelization of the Halfbreeds and the Blackfoot Indians.

Father Maisonneuve, now worn out with toil and fatigue, and threatened moreover with complete deafness, received an order of obedience to repair to Red River, whither Bishop Taché had recalled the good Father to have him near himself, there to secure for him the rest he so greatly needed.

Father Vegreville was in charge of the mission, when Right Rev. Bishop Faraud, Vicar Apostolic of Athabasca-McKenzie, came to take up his residence there. This post could be easily made a point of distribution for all the goods and supplies of the northern missions. There boats could be built and laden with their cargoes and the La Biche river, being the outlet of the lake of the same name into the Athabasca river, it was an easy matter for the boats to go down stream to the said river.

By an agreement concluded in 1877, by Archbishop Taché, delegated for this purpose by the Very Rev. Superior General of the Oblates, it was decided that the Mission of Lake La Biche, while remaining part of the Diocese of St. Albert, would be temporarily considered as a dependency of the religious vicariate of Athabasca-McKenzie, and administered by Right Rev. Bishop Faraud.

This state of affairs was to be maintained for twelve years more until 1889, when a new road, through Edmonton, was opened, giving communication with the same river Athabasca, at Athabasca Landing.

During all this period the Mission at Lake La Biche, being an episcopal residence, took on great importance and became prominent over all other missions after St. Albert. Large warehouses were constructed in which to store and keep the supplies of all the northern missions. There, early in the spring of each year, boats were built in order to be ready to be launched at high water time in the rainy season. And when the goods were arriving from Red River or when they were transferred to the boats and the little fleet was getting ready for the trip, there was, around the mission's buildings, and along the shore of the lake, a busy and picturesque scene of noisy and bustling activity.

Bishop Henry Faraud, O.M.I., Bishop of Ananour [Anemour], Vicar Apostolic of Athabasca-McKenzie, arrived at Lake La Biche on the 27th of July, 1875."*

*Bishop Legal was here referring not to the initial arrival of Bishop Faraud at Lac La Biche, but to his return from a trip he made to Europe in 1872.

The Bishop of Anemour

"In the month of November 1869, I received at the mission of Providence, a letter from my illustrious and devoted friend Bishop Taché, in which he said: 'faced with the absolute refusal from the honorable Company to henceforth take charge of your freight, we have had all your cases and packs transported to Lac La Biche. Up to you to find the means to get them out of there and bring them to destination.' It was like putting a mountain on my shoulders."

-Henri Faraud, O.M.I., 1889

The youngest of six children, Henri Faraud was born at Gigondas in the Vaucluse region in the southeast corner of France. The official dictionary of biography of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate lists his birthdate as March 17, 1823.

He was educated at Notre-Dame-de Lumières in Goult and Notre-Dame de l'Osier in Isère, where he took his perpetual vows in 1844. He then moved to Marseilles to pursue further religious studies.

While Faraud was studying at Marseilles, Bishop Joseph-Norbert Provencher was looking for missionaries to work in the Canadian North West. Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod, who was the Bishop of Marseilles and the founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, chose Faraud to go.

Faraud left France in early June 1846 and reached St Boniface, Manitoba in November. He continued his religious studies under Abbé George-Antoine Bellecourt. In addition to his regular theological work, Faraud learned a great deal about Native customs and languages - a subject in which he pursued a lifelong interest. He was ordained priest on May 8, 1847.

During the summer of 1847 Faraud went with Pierre Aubert, the Oblate superior of the region, to minister to Ojibaw people in Ontario. The following summer he was sent to Île-à-la-Crosse to replace Louis-Francois Laflèche. It was here that Faraud became very good friends with Alexandre-Antonin Taché.



Provincial Archives of Alberta

Henri Faraud, O.M.I. - The Bishop of Anemour. His motto was Non recuso laborem - "I don't refuse the work."

In 1849 Faraud was appointed missionary in charge of the Lake Athabasca district, a vast area which took the young Oblate missionary (he was only 26) from Île à la Crosse to Fort Chipewyan, where he established the first Catholic mission in the region. He named it La Nativité. In 1852 he was joined by Father Pierre-Henri Grollier and another mission was established at Fort Resolution on Great Slave Lake.

When Bishop Provencher died in 1853, Taché succeeded him as superior of the Oblates in the West. Bishop Taché, as he had now become, was a shrewd judge of the times. He believed that the Hudson's Bay Company would eventually lose its fur trade monopoly and, in the face of mounting competition from independent traders, stop transporting missionaries and their supplies. He was also growing more concerned about competition from Protestant missionaries, particularly in the North West.

In order to meet these potential problems, Taché wanted to create a vast network of missions and schools through which the Catholics would be able to exert more influence over the local populations. Part of Taché's plan was to establish a key point - an entrepôt - to supply the northern missions and act as a sort of nerve centre. He chose Lac La Biche as the place for that entrepôt and turned to his old friend Henri Faraud for help.

Taché had already chosen Faraud as one of his councillors and by 1855 had convinced him of the need to make the mission at Lac La Biche the main supply base for all the northern missions. Fathers Jean Tissot and Augustin Maisonneuve were sent to Lac La Biche to find a more suitable location for the mission, about 10 km away from the HBC post on the west shore of the lake. They, along with Father [later Bishop] Vital-Justin Grandin, Brother Patrick Bowes, and Brother Alexis Reynard, introduced large scale farming, grew some of the first wheat in Alberta, and built a 100 mile road from Lac La Biche to Fort Pitt in present day Saskatchewan.

In 1860, Taché and Grandin, apparently without Faraud's knowledge, joined the archdiocese of Quebec. Their aim was to

Bishop Faraud's Tobacco

In this anti-smoking age people might find it strange that an Oblate Bishop grew tobacco with a passion that almost defies logic.

Yet, Bishop Faraud. in charge of the Lac La Biche Mission from 1869 to 1889, did just that. Every year he planted his garden he was always sure to plant tobacco shoots, which he had carefully cultivated indoors months before.

So serious did the Bishop take his tobacco that during the height of the Riel Rebellion of 1885 he took the time and care to make sure his tobacco was planted. And once, when the Mother Superior's dog managed to get into the garden and tear up the tobacco, the Bishop reacted with haste. His journal entry was a curt: "**Death Sentence!**".

Father Le Treste, who often observed Bishop Faraud fussing over his tobacco. wrote: "Once it was ripe, he knew how to ready it like the experts. He had made molds from which he would get twists just as good as the "T.B." that the HBC [Hudson's Bay Company] sold. He especially liked to present some of his tobacco to his guests, who would be impressed and claim they had never smoked such good "Virginia" or "Maryland" which had such a perfect flavour. It is true that some grumps, who undoubtedly had a defective sense of smell, would declare that it smelled up the house."

The Edmonton Bulletin also waxed eloquently on the Bishop's tobacco. noting on March 4, 1882 that Hudson's Bay Company Factor Richard Hardisty and Reverend Wood "brought excellent specimens of oats and tobacco with them from Lac La Biche. The tobacco was grown and manufactured there last season at the Catholic Mission."



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As the main supply depot for the North, Nortre Dame des Victoires needed a rather large warehouse. It was dubbed "Hangar du Lac la Biche." The Missions of the Missionary Oblates for 1880 recorded that "We owe it to the care and direction of Bishop Faraud, for having been able, this spring, to put up the frame of ... two buildings which will now be completed at a proper time." The "Hangar" was 72 feet long (about 23 meters) with two stories.

make a request to Rome to detach the Athabasca-Mackenzie district from the diocese of St. Boniface as a vicariate apostolic and to have Faraud appointed as coadjutor. It was all part of Taché's grand plan. He knew that he would need a permanent resident at Lac La Biche to oversee matters and it is perhaps a sign of his strong belief in the rightness of his plan that he was willing to push hard to get a permanent resident even though it would most certainly mean the establishment of an administration detached from his own diocese.

Accordingly, Taché travelled to Paris to attend the general chapter of the Oblates and then to the Vatican to plead his case. The Vatican agreed and the papal bulls were signed on May 13, 1862 establishing the vicariate apostolic of Athabasca-Mackenzie. Faraud was appointed vicar apostolic. He subsequently travelled to Europe and, on November 30, 1863, was consecrated Bishop of Anemour by Archbishop Guibert of Tours, France, the oldest of the Oblate prelates. After a short stay in Europe, Bishop Faraud returned to Canada. He stayed in Montreal for a few weeks to oversee the publication of a few books he had written on Native languages. At the end of the summer of 1865 he travelled back to La Nativité.

The next four years were busy ones for Bishop Faraud. He had already foreseen



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Bishop Faraud's "Hangar."

Bishop Faraud's Trip to Lac La Biche

"On Jan. 3, 1870, about two o'clock in the afternoon, with a temperature of minus 43-45 centigrade, our dogs elegantly harnessed, bearing red, blue and green colours agitated their small bells, I bid farewell to our dear mission of Providence and started for Lac La Biche, a distance of about 800 kilometers, accompanied by the good Brothers Alexis Reynard and L.P. Boisramé. In conformity with the custom we asked hospitality from the forest.

On Feb. 12, at twelve noon precisely, we were starting the fire at the confluence of the small [La Biche] river. At six o'clock we made a final halt at the end of the lake [Lac La Biche]. Two and a half hours should have been enough to reach the Mission, but instead of following a straight line, our group would hit shore every time they would see the top of a spruce tree, thinking it was the cross of the Mission. Consequently it was only the following day at two o'clock in the morning that we woke up the good Fathers and Sisters of the Mission. Thank God! We are here!

Upon my arrival at Lac La Biche, I found the luggage for the missions all stored in an old shed. Many parcels were deteriorated; mice had attacked the food and made their nests in the bundles. Something had to be done immediately about this situation. As the snow was too deep to allow us to start on the road construction, I sent my men to cut down big trees, and had them put up a large twostory hangar. I was acting as architect and foreman. After three weeks, our construction was standing proudly on its posts; it could brave the storm. Our "Lac La Bichers" were marvelling and expressed admiration.

On April 8, the guides and the men armed with sharp hatchets, the carts loaded with good provisions, started to move at the given signal, and soon began

to work on the road expected to connect the missions of the north to the rest of the world. Brother Alexis Reynard was in charge. On June 12, he wrote back saying: '... if only I had two or three more men!" On the 14 I left hurriedly with three men, but daily torrential rains delayed our march. It was only after seven days that we reached their camp. That same evening we held council: more than two thirds of the work remained to be done, and that last portion would always remain impassable for carts. There was no hesitation, we had to retreat and try to find another way to get the absolutely necessary provisions of the missions to their destination, no matter how costly or dangerous it could be.

Upon our return here, an old barge poorly built and half rotten was given to me by the agent of the honourable Company [HBC]. I had to entrust it to a guide, for lack of others, who was not inspiring much confidence, not so much because of his lack of ability, but because of his faint-heartedness. Nevertheless, in the first days of August the barge was leaving our shores. ...Then we hurried to build two flat boats. They could contain all the luggage. They left this time under the guard of a good guide and a good helmsman. I had less to fear, and indeed this trip was successful!

For eighteen years now, under the eye of God, this expedition has been repeated, and where we were supposed to fail at the first attempt, no harm has ever come to us."

-Bishop Henri Faraud, Forty Years with the Indians of Athabaska-Mackenzie, 1889 the increase in responsibilities and had asked Pope Pius IX for permission to name an auxiliary without right of succession. This was granted and Faraud named his long-time assistant Isidore Clut, who was made Bishop in 1864.

By the late 1860s, Bishop Taché's plans were moving along. In the period between 1853 and 1865, fifteen new parishes had been created and the network of missionaries was growing. By 1867 the Grand Rapids had been successfully run and the Athabasca River showed promise as the highway to the north. But there was also trouble looming. By 1869 the Canadian government was negotiating with the Hudson's Bay Company and the British government for the annexation of the west. Taché feared that the Canadian government was not paying enough attention to the needs of the people who lived in the West, especially the fate of the Métis (Taché was particularly worried about who would benefit from the annexation of the West. Behind this, of course, was his fear that the West would be overrun by Protestant British settlers with a subsequent loss of Catholic and French Canadian influence). And then, that same year, Taché's old fear came true: the Hudson's Bay Company announced that it would no longer transport supplies for the missionaries.

Once again Bishop Taché turned to his old friend. In 1869, Bishop Henri Faraud

The Trials of Missionary Life

"The work-load on the farm is heavy, more so because of the short summer. which forces us to be everywhere at the same time. When frosts are not too early, we harvest a certain quantity of wheat and barely, sometimes enough to meet our needs. To make use of these cereals, we have acquired a flour-mill which operates on the edge of a small river. To retain the waters and provide enough pressure for the mill, the beavers had started a dam which their successors, the missionaries completed. Not only is a Brother employed at the mill, but our patience is drained by the fact that, this dam being made out of mud, the muskrats take a cunning pleasure to pierce it through to build their winter palaces, so that every spring we have to start all over." -Bishop Henri Faraud

reluctantly accepted an appointment to Lac La Biche at Mission Notre-Dame-des-Victoires, which became his episcopal see. He later wrote: "It was like putting a mountain on my shoulders."

Faraud spent the next twenty years at Lac La Biche. He left it only three times during that entire period - in 1872 to travel to Europe on a begging mission; in 1879 to tour his vicariate; and in 1889 to travel to St Boniface to attend the first council

Homoeopathic Medicine

"As I learned from the brothers, Bishop Faraud has a considerable reputation as a good doctor. He treats the sick through the homeopathic [homoeopathic] method, having a large provision of little glass tubes filled with lilliputian pills, which he distributes more or less generously, depending on the case and the infirmity. They tell me that he has had extraordinary successes, almost miraculous. Fr. Leduc, when he was at Lac-la-Biche as a representative of the diocese of St-Albert, joked about those minuscule pharmaceutical products. He went as far as to claim that he could swallow the contents of these tubes of hundreds of tiny grains, without worrying in the least about any colic. So, one day, he decided, in front of the community, without Bishop Faraud knowing of it, to swallow a good dose. Apparently he regretted his joke as a terrible intestinal war was then declared."

-Father Le Treste, Mes souvenirs

held in Western Canada. By that time, 40 years of hardship and a liver disease had taken its toll on the 66 year old Bishop. At the request of Bishop Taché, Faraud resigned in March 1890. He died a few months later, on September 26, after collapsing during an ordination at the Collège de Saint-Boniface.

The Bishop of Anemour was buried beside Bishop Provencher in the crypt of the cathedral of St Boniface. In 1972 his remains were transported to the cathedral at Fort Smith.

Bishop Faraud wrote a number of books during his lifetime. Two of the most notable are *Petite histoire sainte, en montagnais et en caractères syllabiques, pub*lished in 1876 and 1932; and *Dix-huit ans chez les sauvages: voyages et missions ... dans l'extrême nord de l'Amérique britannique d'après les documents de Mgr l'évêque d'Anemour, published in 1866 and again in 1966.*

Le Saint Evêque d'Anemour Qui donne à Jésus-Christ, aux pauvres, son amour,

Avance Et Lance Ses prédications avec votre support, Aussi bien qu'il peut dans le Nord.

Sa grandeur qui vous doit le respect de sa Mitre

Vous est soumise avec ses pouvoirs et son titre.

Je me souviens toujours de Monseigneur Faraud,

Jadis auprès de vous, il a dit quelque chose

Pour m'aider. Maintenant je peux en dire un mot,

Ce mot: c'est merci; c'est le mot couleur de rose.

- Excerpt from Louis Riel, L'Archevêque de Saint Boniface, 1884 "Our wheat crop is on average 300 barrels, measure of the country here, equivalent to about double decalitre: 100 barrels of barley and 600 barrels of potatoes. As for oats, we owe its introduction to our farm to Bishop Faraud. Three years ago, he managed to find a few isolated heads which he then kept preciously; the following year they became bundles, and now we can sow a large field."

-Missions of the Missionary Oblates, Paris, March, 1880

The holy Bishop of Anemour Who gives his love to Jesus Christ and to the poor,

Advances And Lances His preachings with your support, To bring to the far North.

His Excellency, who owes you the respect of his Mitre

Is submissive to you in power and attire.

I will remember always Bishop Faraud, Formerly, he addressed to you words he chose

To help me. Now, I can say, as I go, This word is: thank you; a word the colour of rose.

Alberta's First Printing Press

"... [W]e have printed right here books in the following dialects: Cross-Eyed [Londreux], Rabbit-Skin [Hareskin] and Montagnais; first a hymn book printed in 1877, and last winter a second one containing prayers, catechism, hymns, etc. A book in the Beaver idiom is waiting for the paper. But it is not enough to print, we also have to bind, and for that part we had nothing. By planning my time, I built a few presses, made trimming knives, a stapler and a sewing machine. During the past winter and spring, with the help of Fr. Grouard, I have managed to bind four hundred volumes with cardboard made up of old recycled paper." -Bishop Henri Faraud

Lac La Biche was home to the first printing press in Alberta.

The press was brought to Lac La Biche by the Rev. Emile Grouard, O.M.I. in 1877. Father Grouard was stationed at Notre Dame des Victoires from 1876 to 1888. He had gone to France for health reasons and while there he learned the art of printing. He had a syllabic type specially designed for him in Brussels and he returned to Canada lugging a small press and type. Over the next dozen or so years, Grouard printed books in five languages, Montagnais, Hareskin, Loucheux, Castor, and Cree. The first volume off the Lac La Biche press was a new edition of Bishop Faraud's selections from the Bible in the Chipewyan language. It was titled *Histoire Sainte en montagnais*. The volume appeared in 1878 and stands as Alberta's first imprint. After that, Grouard rolled off a 232 page prayer book in Cree, which appeared the same year; a prayer book in Loucheux in 1879; *Peau de Lièvre* prayer book in 1881; *Prieres, cantiques et catéchisme en langue Montagnaise ou Chipeweyan* in 1887; and *Prières, catéchisme et cantiques dans la langue des Indiens Castors* in 1888.



Example of a work from Father (later Bishop) Grouard's press. Brought to Lac La Biche from France in 1877, several books in five languages were printed on the press. When he left Notre Dame des Victoires for Fort Chipewyan in 1888, he took his press with him. In 1897 Inspector Jarvis of the North West Mounted Police reported that the Bishop still had his press in operation and was now printing in six languages.

is [now] a real rapid under the wheel. It was then that your brother Alexis sweated for he was sawing even by moonlight as it was late and even the fathers were still milling flour." -Brother Alexis Reynard, 1873

Alberta's First Water-Powered

"The dam at lac des Oeufs is working marvelously ... We have finally made

turns with a frightening speed and nothing stops it. The six inch planks or the eight inch ones do not slow it down much. The belts slip everywhere, but it keeps on turning. The wheel is fifteen feet in diameter, at that height it was pretty low in the water; when it turned it was two to three feet in the water and that is why it kept a slower speed not going any

faster or slower. When I saw that I began widening the mill stream ... there

a large wheel for our mill and have succeeded far beyond our hopes; it

Alberta's first water-powered sawmill appears to have been built near Notre Dame des Victoires in 1871.

Sawmill

There were two factors that prompted the construction of a sawmill. The first was the growing demand for lumber to construct more buildings at the mission and to build boats to supply the northern missions. The second was the existence of a water-powered flour mill. Father Albert Lacombe had lugged a grist mill from St. Boniface, Manitoba in 1862. The Oblates then laboriously built up a beaver dam and dug, by hand, a 200 metre canal. The pond behind the dam became known as "Lac du Moulin" or Mill Lake.

Although more improvements were needed to provide the water power necessary to drive a sawmill, the Oblates proved equal to the task and on October 5, 1871 the sawmill began operating. Much of the work had been directed by Bishop Faraud.

Observers were impressed. Father Hippolyte Leduc, for example, was amazed at the speed of the mill. "At this time," he wrote, "Monseigneur Faraud has provided an eminent service to the Mission by adapting the power drive of our little flour mill to a second drive for a circular saw designed to supply boards and timbers needed at our establishment. This capability is of greatest value to us; one can appreciate the great cost which had accrued to us through the need to saw by hand the eight to ten thousand boards or timbers needed to build the cathedral in Saint Albert. I was proud then when two men could deliver 25 planks per working day. Today, thanks to the energy and mechanical knowledge of Monseigneur Faraud, I can get up to 150 planks in eight hours of work."

The sawmill boasted a 30-inch diameter circular saw capable of handling logs up to a foot in diameter, or two feet if the log was turned. To supply the extra power, a 15 foot diameter water wheel was constructed. Water pressure was always a problem and the Oblate brothers were constantly digging out the channel to improve the flow. During times of heavy rain, the sustained force of the stream provided enough force and they sawed steadily. Brother Alexis Reynard wrote of sawing lumber by moonlight when the going was good.

The sawmill operated until the late 1890s. In the winter of 1898 it was dismantled and hauled to St. Paul de Métis. No evidence of it remains except for the 200 metre canal the Oblates dug by hand.



Courtesy of Peter J. Murphy

Map showing the location of Albert's first water-powered sawmill. It operated from 1871 to 1898, when it was dismantled and moved to St. Paul. Unfortunately, no pictures of the sawmill appear to have survived.



Provincial Archives of Alberta

Grandin vs Faraud

"... I would rather deal with the Grand Turk than with Bishop Grandin." -Bishop Henri Faraud

Between the early 1870s and the late 1880s Bishops Grandin and Faraud were locked in an acrimonious jurisdictional dispute and personality clash that threatened to paralyse Oblate missionary activities in the North.

The fight originated with Bishop Taché's decision to make the mission at Lac La Biche, Notre Dame des Victoires, the central supply base for the northern missions should the Hudson's Bay Company refuse to transport supplies for the Oblates. When, in 1869, the HBC announced that it could no longer guarantee the transport of goods and supplies for the northern missions, Taché was ready to put his plan in motion.

At that time present day northern Alberta (and all of Western Canada) was under the diocese of St. Boniface, headed by Bishop Taché. Northern Alberta was further split into two vicariates, the Athabasca-Mackenzie vicariate under Bishop Faraud, and the Saskatchewan vicariate under Bishop Grandin. Faraud and Grandin were "titular" bishops or "vicar apostolics" who answered to Bishop Taché. Although the mission at Lac La Biche was in the diocese of St. Boniface, it was under the local authority of the vicariate of Saskatchewan.

In an effort to meet the emergency created by the HBC's decision to stop transporting goods for the Oblates, Taché proposed to transfer full authority for the mission at Lac La Biche from the vicariate of Saskatchewan to the vicariate of Athabasca-Mackenzie. Both Faraud and Grandin agreed and at a meeting at Île à la Crosse in June 1869, they signed an accord which transferred the administration of Notre Dame des Victoires from Grandin to Faraud.

In the meantime, however, Grandin had travelled with Taché to attend the council of Quebec Bishops. That council discussed the reorganization of religious boundaries in Canada and recommended that Rome create a new diocese of St. Albert and make St. Boniface an archdiocese. In September 1871 Rome issued the orders creating the diocese of St. Albert. Grandin was appointed its bishop.

His status now considerably elevated, Grandin began to have second thoughts about handing the mission at Lac La Biche over to Bishop Faraud in 1869. In 1873, for example, Grandin sourly wrote that "When leaving St. Albert, I went to spend five days with Bishop Faraud, Frs. Vegreville and Remas at Notre-Dame-des-Victoires. This is the mission I gave up to Bishop Faraud to help him better get the supplies to his Vicariate." He might have added: "And I want it back." For, by then Notre Dame des Victoires had become a prize plum in the Oblate empire.

After a considerable amount of howling

on the part of Grandin, a new accord was drawn up and signed in 1874. The agreement essentially divided the Lac La Biche mission between Grandin and Faraud. Grandin got religious jurisdiction and Faraud maintained control over the supply and transportation network. The material of the mission was common to both Bishops and any surplus farm produce was to be shared equally between the diocese of St. Albert and the vicariate of Athabasca-Mackenzie.

Infirma mundi elegit Deus

Born in Saint-Pierre-la-Cour, France in 1829 as Justin-Vital, Vital Grandin was the son of hotel-keepers and farmers. He entered the Petit Séminaire de Précigné in 1846 with the intention of becoming a parish priest. In 1850 he decided to become a missionary instead, but owing to his pronounced lisp and health problems, he was turned down for the Séminaire des Missions Étrangères and a career in the Far East. He eventually approached the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and was accepted. He took his religious vows in 1853, was ordained in 1854, and sent to Canada the same year, apparently the only person to volunteer for Canada.

Grandin served at Fort Chipewyan and Île à la Crosse before returning to Europe to be consecrated by Bishop Mazenod in 1859. He chose as his motto, *Infirma mundi elegit Deus* - "God hath chosen the weak things of the world" or "God chose what is weak in this world" - from 1 Corinthians 1:27-28.

Often described as "timid and hesitant," in 1861 Grandin turned down Bishop Taché's offer to become bishop of the new vicariate in the Mackenzie River basin and suggested that Henri Faraud was better qualified. Faraud subsequently became vicar apostolic of Athabasca-Mackenzie in 1862. Grandin became the vicar apostolic of Saskatchewan in 1868 and then Bishop of the diocese of St. Albert in 1871. Shortly after taking charge of the diocese of St. Albert, Grandin came to the conclusion that attempts to "civilize" adult Natives were failing and he began to advocate educating and evangelizing the young. To that end he fought for the establishment of industrial schools in Alberta. He also supported the establishment of a Native clergy and in 1890 took pleasure in ordaining Édouard Cunningham, the first Métis priest in the Northwest.

Grandin maintained a strong sympathy for Native peoples in Western Canada. Although he more or less condemned the Riel Rebellion of 1885, he believed that the Métis had been provoked to rebel by English-speaking people who were stealing their land.

Plagued by bad health, Grandin tried to resign in the 1890s, but Rome refused to accept his resignation and appointed Émile-Joseph Legal as coadjutor bishop of St. Albert in 1897. Bishop Grandin continued to be Bishop of St. Albert until his death in 1902. In 1929, canonical investigations were started for sainthood. An important landmark in that process came in 1966, when he was declared venerable. The process for sainthood still continues.

Bishop Grandin was sometimes accused of lacking the determination to protect his own interests, even by the superior general of the Oblates. That may have been one of the contributing factors in his long dispute with Bishop Faraud over the mission at Lac La Biche.

The 1874 agreement turned out to be a disaster. On the one hand, Faraud complained bitterly about being cheated. He was spending a great deal of money on improvements and equipment and getting, or so he thought, little in return - and not much in the way of support from the diocese of St. Albert. From his point of view, Grandin was being obstinate. "I would rather deal with the Grand Turk than with Bishop Grandin," Faraud wrote in a fit of anger. On the other hand, Bishop Grandin believed that Faraud was getting the better deal, particularly with regard to the sawmill and the mission farm. From his point of view Faraud was spending all his time on business matters and ignoring his spiritual duties. At one point, Grandin went so far as to accuse Faraud of "neglecting the cult," a rather serious thing for one Bishop to say of another in the 19th century. The entire matter was further compounded by the personality clash between the two Bishops. Faraud was simply a better businessman than Grandin and that may have been one of the reasons why Grandin believed Faraud was getting the better part of the bargain.

By the mid-1870s the fight had become a crisis. As one author later noted, the Lac La Biche "affair" was in its worst crisis. Each Bishop considered the mission as vital and essential and they refused to abandon it. Soon both Faraud and Grandin were writing letters to the Superior General of the Oblates, complaining about the situation. That did not reflect well upon Bishop Taché, who, after all, had a hand in the previous agreements. Nevertheless, wanting the matter resolved, in 1877 the Superior General gave Taché special powers to resolve the Grandin-Faraud dispute.

The decision came in the form of a complicated six page document containing forty-six clauses. The bottom line was that the Bishop of St. Boniface placed the mission at Lac La Biche in the vicariate of Athabasca-Mackenzle. As a "religious institution" Notre Dame des Victoires was to be administered by Bishop Faraud. However, Lac La Biche still remained under the episcopal or religious jurisdiction of the diocese of St. Albert. That essentially meant that while Grandin could claim authority over Lac La Biche, Faraud was free to run matters as he saw fit.

It was a crude attempt at a compromise which served to put an end to the immediate controversy, but never really wiped out all the animosity between the two Bishops. The struggle really came to an end only after Faraud retired in 1889 and Notre Dame des Victoires came under the direct jurisdiction of Bishop Grandin.



Notre Dame des Victoires in its heyday.

Provincial Archives of Alberta

Lac La Biche in 1874

"This Lac La Biche is assuredly the most beautiful I have seen yet." -Rev. Fr. Fourmond, 1874

"No doubt you will be surprised to receive a letter from me from this new post. What can I say, I have been tossed here by the holy obedience, and it's enough to feel satisfied. ...

Rev. Fr. Leduc, appointed Superior, having unfortunately a delicate health, as well as Rev. Fr. Vegreville and Rev. Fr. Rémas of this same Mission, worn out by the hardships of a long apostolate, has requested me from His Majesty to assist them as a kind of manager. Given the fact of my rather good health, I was forced to pack my belongings to come and winter here, about two hundred leagues [about 1000 km] further north than last year. Everything is different here: the country and the people. The country: it is not the vast imposing plains, the gigantic mountains with their thousand picturesque forms of the yet untouched Notre-Dame-De-La-Paix-Mission.* At Notre-Dame-Des-Victoires it is only bush, marshes and lakes. As for lakes, we have Beaver Lake, Mhale [Buck] Lake, and the large and beautiful Lac-La-Biche! I still don't know the first two which are about a days walk from here, but there are many Métis families already established in these different places. I think that very soon I will have to go and evangelize them.

As for Lac La Biche, you must already know it since a long time. Notre-Damedes-Victoires is one of the oldest missions of the district of St. Albert, it is also one of the most complete. We already have an excellent establishment for the Sisters, with an orphanage and a good farm. Unfortunately, the Fathers' House is not large enough to lodge the Fathers and Brothers, so we are somewhat piled one on top of the other. But thanks to the care of

*Near present day Calgary.

our hard working predecessors, a larger two story house, a marvel in this part of the country, is already up and opened. We most likely will be able to move in this summer.

The Sisters' chapel which serves as parish church is also very inadequate. But how lucky we are to have here as superior the great architect and contractor of the beautiful St. Albert Cathedral. He is already planning to put the axe to the wood to erect here a church in conformity with the importance of the Mission. That is made easier because the construction timber is close by and the genius of Bishop Faraud has endowed us with a hydraulic [water-powered] sawmill along with our flourmill.

This Lac La Biche is assuredly the most beautiful I have seen yet. It is at least half larger than Lac Saint-Anne. Its banks higher, form all around it like a vast belt of bays, peninsulas, hills and valleys, giving it at first glance a much more picturesque aspect. A few large islands scattered here and there, a few small houses of primitive simplicity, surrounded by a small patch of land, built on the hillsides, complete this charming landscape which surprises the traveller through bush and marshes, rivers, and creeks. The Mission especially, with its many establishments, and its small river that winds its way close by through a marsh of high reeds to end up in the lake just at its feet, sits majestically on the incline of a rich knoll, strikes you immediately as the queen of this beautiful lake!

It is true that these beauties of nature are somewhat hidden at this time by a thick coat of snow that the biting north wind has spread all around, so that if you wish to make only a short promenade, you have to be ready to walk in snow knee deep, or have recourse to the bright invention of snowshoes, or dog-sleighs, a very cheap system that replaces, in this country, the less economical and especially the less apostolic one of your railways and state-coaches. If the system of civilization is incomparably more marvelous and faster, that of primitiveness has its advantages and pleasures also. Thus these stately snowshoes, while allowing you to walk, can using your hands if you so wish, help you over snow banks, where without them you would be buried alive, give you a certain air of dignity that could be envied by many persons of the smart upper class of your civilized world! Then this light sleigh made of parchment, pulled by three or four racers of the canine race, in this time and country, could challenge your best harnessed teams. With it, you travel long distances without concern for rivers, lakes or snow banks. It's not all, how many times these faithful companions of the road, after having pulled a long day without eating, content with the fish you throw them at night camp, come to warm you up by lying obediently at your feet, a service not to be spurned, on a cold clear night under the moon and stars in minus forty degrees temperature. ... Then how to describe the funny tricks they play on you to amuse you along the way; now and then while running with their tail in trumpet, they turn anxiously toward you, to reassure themselves that you are following and you are still around them. Sometimes they forget and violate the code by launching toward you to caress you, then the driver, who is usually not appreciative of the process, calls them back to duty with the whip, thus making you witness peculiar scenes: the poor animals, suddenly confused in their most legitimate feelings, roll in resentment, howl under the blows, and sometimes to take revenge against their inflexible guide, free themselves from their harness by clever maneuvering, luckily not all know the trick, run away and laugh at the man with the whip. He is then forced to resort to more polite proceedures and negotiate with the cunning fugitive to bring him back to the post.

A few words now on the inhabitants of the country. While at Notre-Dame-de-la-

Paix, we are in the very centre of ferocity, especially today, as they tell us that peace is once again broken between the Cree and Blackfoot. Here, as in St. Albert, we have Christians, who though not perfect, nevertheless give us consolations. They are almost entirely Métis, French-Canadians, some full blood Canadians, quite peaceful, living mostly from hunting and fishing. As for farming, they have at the most a little patch cultivated around the house. Each year they put in a little barley or wheat and potatoes. Having always as much excellent fish as they want, they do not see the need for heavy farming that would cost them a lot of sweat because, generally speaking, to earn your bread at the sweat of your brow is something unknown. Nevertheless, when travelling, they can work like a horse, not to say like a dog; but it seems to be in their nature to run an entire day instead of working the soil. This passion to move, hunt and travel makes it difficult for us to gather them around our Missions, and we are forced to run after them to evangelize them and give them the sacraments, making our ministry that much more difficult.

Because of this, a certain number of these houses built by the first settlers in these undeveloped places are today abandoned, their inhabitants having taken domicile elsewhere as prompted by their fancy.

The same in St. Albert, the larger number of settlers have moved to the open prairie for the buffalo hunt. They spend the winter at Buffalo Lake, where they have built about sixty houses. Fr. Doucet is with them. Besides this, about one hundred Métis families from St. Boniface have come to camp in the same prairie at Cypress-Hills. It is from there that Fr. Letang has come to replace Fr. Leduc at St. Albert.

Your humble servant, V. Fourmond."



The census of 1872. Note the population of Lac La Biche in relation to that of Edmonton.

Q. What do you live on, mainly.

A. Generally on fish.

Q. I have heard that sometimes you suffer a good deal when the Indians do. The Committee would like to know if that is the case?

A. Generally our food is fish, almost altogether fish. When I first went there the moose and reindeer and other large animals were more numerous than they are now. They are becoming more scarce, and we are obliged to live mainly on fish. Sometimes for months through the winter, and even in summer, we live on fish and barely soup.

-Evidence of Bishop Isidore Clut, O.M.I. given before the Select Committee of the Senate Appointed to Enquire into the Resources of the Great Mackenzie Basin, Ottawa, 1888



"L'évêque missionnaire martyr."

The Gruesome Death of Brother Alexis Reynard HERE LIE THE REMAINS OF

LIE THE REMAINS OF BROTHER ALEXIS O.M.I. MURDERED BY HIS IROQUOIS GUIDE IN 1875 R.I.P.

-Inscription on the gravestone of Alexis Reynard

In 1872 Bishop Faraud travelled to Europe to go on a "begging" mission. He returned to Lac La Biche on July 27, 1875 to a tragedy which shook the community, as the account of the death of Brother Alexis Reynard in annals of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate reveals. The annals pick up the story the day after the Bishop's arrival at Notre Dame des Victoires:

"On the day following the arrival at Lake La Biche of Rt. Rev. Bishop Faraud, a good half-breed, named Thomas Hupe, reached the mission. 'Brother Alexis Reynard, where is he?' was his first question. 'If the Brother has not yet returned, then I greatly fear some misfortune has happened. A month ago we left Lake Athabasca together to come here, in company with my family and an Iroquois half-breed named Louis Lafrance. The journey was being made satisfactorily when all at once we found ourselves confronted by the sudden swelling of the waters in the Athabasca river.'

We had already passed Fort McMurray at some considerable distance, when we realized that it was impossible for us to row our way up stream in our canoes. Our provisions, alas, were so reduced that we were quite unable to make for our destination at Lake La Biche. Then,' said I to Brother Alexis, 'We have nothing else to do but to retrace our steps to Fort McMurray and wait there till the river returns to its normal height. We can then obtain the



A. Philippot, O.M.I., Une Page D'histoire des missions artiques: Le Frère Alexis Reynard, 1931

Brother Alexis Reynard, O.M.I.

necessary supply of provisions from the Hudson's Bay Company, and we shall then be able straightway to ascend the stream again in safety.'

'But Brother Alexis replied: Monseigneur Faraud is waiting for me at Lake La Biche to construct the boats that are absolutely necessary for the transport of the supplies indispensable for his mission. I must at all cost arrive at the appointed time, otherwise all the missions of the north will be in suspense and deprived of their needful supplies. Return with your family to Fort McMurray while I and my guide, Louis the Iroquois, will go by land to Lake La Biche. We will live as best we can by our guns, and after six or seven days march across the forest we shall arrive at the mission.'

'My wife and I,' added Thomas Hupe, 'returned to Fort McMurray. It is now three weeks since Brother Alexis and his guide left us, and they ought to have been here fifteen days ago. Since they have not arrived I can only conclude that some misfortune has occurred.'

The following day, two half-breeds engaged by Father Leduc, left Lake La Biche to go to the relief of the missing Brother and the guide. Twelve days later they returned, arriving at the mission at four o'clock in the morning.

'I have found your Brother,' said one of them. 'He is buried under a slight covering of sand at the entrance of the mouth of the River des Maisons into the Athabasca river, and what is very extraordinary,' added the man, 'the bones were already fleshless, but I recognized the Brother easily by his beard and his hair.'

Brother Alexander Lambert immediately set out with a canoe and four men to discover the remains of our poor Brother. [They] Arrived at the spot that had been pointed out to them, they were proceeding to exhume the dead body, when, to their horror, they found only dried bones, scattered pell mell, while many were completely missing. None of them bore the marks of an animal's teeth, but they had been chopped in various places, apparently by the axe that was found by the side of the body, bearing the stains of blood. The victim's head was pierced through and through. There was no doubt but that Brother Revnard had been killed and the charred bones found at some paces from the spot gave indication that he had served the purpose of appeasing the hunger of his Iroquois guide.

The scattered remains were gathered together by Brother Lambert with deep respect and unspeakable emotion. Twenty



A. Philippot, O.M.I., Une Page D'histotre des missions artiques: Le Frère Alexis Reynard, 1931

days afterwards we gave reverent burial to these dear remains after I had examined them myself and had ascertained the identity of the Brother by the inspection of his hair and his beard which had been left intact. A shoulder blade was missing. We learnt that it had been found later in the forest, a day's march from the scene of the crime.

The murderer had been forced to satiate his hunger on the spot. Then, doubtless, he had stripped the flesh off the bones and carried away as much of it as he was able, after having first dried it after the manner the Indians on the prairie dry the flesh of the buffalo. Had the wretched guide himself finally to succumb to his fate? We may well forecast, for he has neither been seen nor heard of since.

Brother Alexis Reynard had labored for more than twenty years in missions of the North with unstinting devotedness. He was always the model of a perfect Religious. His death was terrible from a natural viewpoint, but God will have received His faithful servant, to be Himself his eternal recompense."



A. Philippot, O.M.I., Une Page D'histoire des missions artiques: Le Frère Alexis Reynard, 1931

Brother Alexis Reynard's grave at St. Albert, Alberta.

Geneviève Duquette

Brother Reynard was not the only person to make that fateful trip up the Athabasca River with the Iroquois guide, whose real name was Louis La France, in 1875. They were joined by Geneviève Duquette, a fifteen year old orphan girl who had travelled north in 1870 and was apparently returning to Lac La Biche to get married.

Although Reynard's body was discovered near the mouth of the House River (there is evidence to suggest that he had been shot in the head), Geneviève was never seen again and no trace of her body was ever found. Legend has it that Emile Plamondon composed a fiddle tune, *La fille du Paradis*, after hearing strange crying sounds while hunting near the scene of the crime. The sounds were attributed to the girl's uneasy spirit. Bishop Grandin believed that Brother Alexis had been killed trying to defend the girl from La France.

As for Louis La France, who became known as Louis l'Iroquois, he was rumoured to have been killed by a band of Beaver Indians when he menaced their camp, but that has never been confirmed.

"I regret to inform you that the person on whom we depended for the translation into French of His Excellency's reply to the address read by His Grace the Archbishop was through drink unfit to make the translation this morning and is now not to be trusted with the work. I have consequently the honor to request that you be kind enough to have the translation made in St. Boniface. I regret having to give you this trouble but I see, under the circumstances, no alternative."

E.G.P. Littleton, Governor General's secretary to His Grace the Archbishop of St. Boniface (Bishop Taché), August 9, 1877

Sowengisik

"A foreigner either as a missionary or otherwise, will never take so well with the natives of this country ... there is always a distrust on the part of a native to the foreigner, from the fact that the native has been so long down-trodden by the white man."

-Henry Bird Steinhauer, 1875

Known as Sowengisik or Shahwanegezhick, he was born between 1816 and 1818 in Upper Canada (present day Ontario). He was the eldest son of Bigwind and Mary Kachenooting and he might have been baptized as George Kachenooting in 1828. But from 1829 on, the Ojibwa Indian called Sowengisik was known as Henry Bird Steinhauer.

Sowengisik took the name Steinhauer after a Methodist missionary, William Case, found an American benefactor who agreed to support the education of a Native child if the child adopted his name. The offer was accepted and young Henry entered the Grape Island school on Lake Couchiching in 1829. From 1832 to 1835 he attended the Cazenovia Seminary in Cazenovia, New York (where, interestingly enough, his registration included his Native name). He was appointed to teach at the Credit River mission on Lake Ontario in 1835, but the following year he enrolled at the Upper Canada Academy in Cobourg, Upper Canada. Although his studies there were interrupted by various teaching appointments, he graduated at the head of his class in 1839.

In 1840, following an invitation from the Hudson's Bay Company to the British Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society to minister to Natives in HBC territory, Steinhauer was posted to Rainy Lake (Lac La Pluie in present day Ontario). Although the mission failed owing to the inability to convert the Natives, it was there that Steinhauer began translating the liturgy into Ojibwa. In 1843 he was transferred to the Rossville mission near Norway House (Manitoba), where he learned the Swampy Cree language and began translations of



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Sowengisik, better known as Henry Bird Steinhauer. His middle name, Bird, is believed to be a translation of his Native nickname. Steinhauer excelled in languages. His son Robert later wrote that his father had prepared all his sermons from the original Greek. This is probably the most famous photograph of Steinhauer. It was taken by G. Sawes at Cobourg, Ontario. The date is unknown.

the scripture into Cree syllabics (which had been developed by the missionary James Evans). By 1846 he was the chief translator and had completed translating the Bible from Psalms to the end of the Old Testament and from Romans to the end of the New Testament. The same year he married Jessie Joyful Mamenawatum (also Mamanuwartum), a Cree woman from the area. They had five daughters and five sons (a great-grandson, Ralph Steinhauer, was Lieutenant Governor of Alberta from 1974 to 1979).

In 1850-51 Steinhauer was sent to establish a mission near Oxford House, the HBC post on the Hayes River between York Factory and Norway House. He laboured under difficult conditions there until 1854, when he accompanied John Ryerson to England to raise awareness about Methodist missionary work in Canada.

Steinhauer returned to Canada in the spring of 1855. He was ordained at the conference of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Canada held in London, Upper Canada in early June. The same month he received his first posting: Lac La Biche.

According to the record, Lac La Biche was chosen "on account of its being out of reach of the enemy, the murderous



Glenbow Archives

Benjamin Sinclair. A Swampy Cree, Sinclair might have been the first permanent missionary at Lac La Biche. A close friend of Steinhauer, he died during the influenza epidemic of 1884. Blackfoot." Still, Steinhauer was not happy about the appointment. He travelled west with Thomas Woolsey and the pair reported being "surrounded by Romanists" and "very closely watched by their two priests." If that were not enough, Steinhauer had doubts about Lac La Biche because he believed he could not encourage there the type of settled existence necessary to what he believed was a proper Christian community.

Nevertheless, he travelled to Lac La Biche, where he joined Benjamin Sinclair and his family. Sinclair was a Swampy Cree who had been recruited by the Methodists some years before. There is some evidence to suggest that Sinclair had established a mission at Lac La Biche in 1850, making him the first permanent missionary at Lac La Biche. He became a life-long associate of Steinhauer.

Although he tried to make a go it, Steinhauer's initial misgivings about Lac La Biche never left. Some of those doubts come across in a letter he wrote to Thomas Woolsey in 1856:

"A year has passed away, and not many manifest trophies of the Gospel are as yet brought in to cheer the heart of the lone Missionary in this waste howling wilderness. I must confess that the weight of increasing years is sensibly felt by me now-a-days. I am not so strong as formerly - a little extra exertion and hardship oppresses my physical energies. In Canada, where Methodism is rife, the people pride themselves in supplying their Ministers with almost everything for their comfort; but in the Hudson's Bay Territory a great difference exists ... I have tried to make a comfortable burrowing place. The large room has been converted into three two bed-rooms, and one which serves for all purposes, viz., meetings, school-house, reception room for strangers, and dining room. I have made several light window sashes; but not, of course, secundem artem. ... So, I tell you you we have some appearance of civilization!

There has been a failure in our fall fishery this year; only a few more than 3000 have been caught. I have employed a hunter to kill twenty animals for the Mission. He has already brought part of three, so that with the dried meat and grease bartered from the Indians last fall, we have been sustained thus far."

The lack of "civilization," the ongoing rivalry with the Oblates, and his inability to direct the Cree in the Lac La Biche area to adopt a settled existence (he complained constantly about the "wandering" Cree in the Lac La Biche area). led Steinhauer to look for another area. In the early summer of 1858, he moved his mission from Lac La Biche to Whitefish Lake, near present day St. Paul, Alberta. From Steinhauer's point of view the location was ideal. There was good agricultural land, a lake teaming with fish, close to buffalo hunting grounds, and, most important, a band of semi-settled Cree. The only drawback was that the settlement was within Blackfoot range and there were the occasional raids. But Henry Steinhauer had found his calling at Whitefish Lake and it was there, excepting the odd sabbatical, that he would spend the rest of his life.

At Whitefish Lake, Steinhauer established the first Protestant church in the region. The settlement also had a schoolhouse and private homes with gardens. From Steinhauer's point of view the community had to be self-sufficient. There were hardships of course - among them the smallpox epidemic of 1871 which claimed the life of his eldest daughter, Abigail, who was the wife of the prominent missionary, John McDougall.



Glenbow Archives

Jessie Steinhauer.

Although Henry Steinhauer remained a devout Christian with what can only be described as exceedingly strong religious convictions, by the mid-1870s he was undergoing something of a conversion. He eventually severed his obligations to the missionary society and began to assert his own Indian identity.

The immediate cause of this change of heart was probably the transfer of the Hudson's Bay Company territory to the government of Canada in 1869-70 and the

"For a long time, a vast field has been open to the missionaries of Lac La Biche and St-Paul-des-Cris; but the lack of workers and its inopportunity have delayed its development until now. The Wesleyan ministers who serve White-Fish Lake and the nearest protestant missions have led their Indians to commit fairly serious misdeeds against the Catholic Mission of St. Paul; not only did they repeatedly steal from the Mission openly by force or secretly, but they went as far as to strike Fr. Dupin and gestured as if to stab him. The news of this last crime immediately spread over all the country more than sixty leagues around. The chief Wesleyan Minister solemnly denounced these atrocious deeds, but it helped to bring out the scandal."

-Fr. Valentine Vegreville, O.M.I., 1871

subsequent Treaty process to secure the surrender of Indian land. In a report he wrote in 1875, he stated that "... the native has been so long downtrodden by the white man."

The negotiations and final settlement that became Treaty Six in 1876 did little to change that view. Steinhauer had acted as an advisor to Chief Pakan - and it is significant that Pakan was the only chief to put his demands in writing - only to witness government surveyors invade the reserve. Steinhauer exerted his influence and an agreement was subsequently negotiated. But what if he had not been there? Henry had only to look to nearby Saddle Lake, where conditions were so appalling that the Edmonton Bulletin felt compelled to warn that "An Indian outbreak, if one occurs, will be entirely caused by the present mismanagement of affairs ... Golden promises will not keep hunger and cold from a red skin any more than a white one."

By 1884 conditions were worse. Chief Pakan had a meeting with Chief Big Bear about what they believed was the unfair treatment of their people. Pakan asked Steinhauer to accompany him to Ottawa to talk to the government. Ironically, John McDougall, his son-in-law, refused permission. Not long after, in December 1884, there was an outbreak of influenza. Henry Bird Steinhauer succumbed on December 30. Within two days his long-time friend, Benjamin Sinclair died. They were buried in a single grave on New Year's Day 1885.

As the final rites were being delivered for Reverends Steinhauer and Sinclair, in a neighbouring town a Métis spokesman named Louis David Riel was contemplating what sort of reply he might receive from the petition he had recently sent to Ottawa. The answer was none. Two months later the West erupted into open revolt and Lac La Biche felt a terror it had never before experienced.



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Sketch of the Rev. Henry Steinhauer delivering his first service at Whitefish Lake.

Lac La Biche and the Riel Rebellion

"It is feared that Lac La Biche has been taken, as no news has been received from there for some time." -Edmonton Bulletin, April 18, 1885

The Riel or North-West Rebellion of 1885 was the outcome of grievances which had been growing since the transfer of Hudson's Bay Company lands to the government of Canada in 1869-70.

The Canadian government has often been accused of negotiating the terms of the transfer as if no population existed in Rupert's Land, particularly in the Red River Colony. As settlers began to move into the area, the local population, Métis and others, began to fear for the future. A leader emerged in the form of Louis David Riel. In late 1869 Riel and a group of insurgents seized Upper Fort Garry, located at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, and proclaimed a provisional government. Their aim was to negotiate the terms of entry into Confederation.

Despite outbreaks of armed conflict, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald sent a few emissaries, among them Jean-Baptiste Thibault and later Bishop Taché, on goodwill missions with promises of amnesty if Riel and his followers laid down their arms. Matters seemed to be progressing until Riel made the incredible blunder of ordering the execution of Thomas Scott, an Orangeman. Scott's death caused outrage in Ontario and calls for Riel's head. The government sent troops west and Riel fled to the United States just before they arrived in August 1870.

So ended the Red River Rebellion, or Red River Resistance of 1869-70. Although the Métis secured their major objectives a separate province with cultural and land rights - they soon found themselves at a disadvantage and many began to move further west. By the 1880s a number of Métis, along with other Native groups,



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Louis David Riel. "I have devoted my life to my country. If it is necessary for the happiness of my country that I should now soon cease to live, I leave it to the Providence of my God."

were facing destitution. The disappearance of the buffalo, coupled with the tough transition from hunting to farming and discontent with the Treaty process, created an explosive situation. In the summer of 1884, a delegation travelled to the United States and brought Riel (who had become an American citizen) back to Canada.

Riel returned to Batoche, north east of modern day Saskatoon, to find an unhappy and angry population - Métis, white, and Plains Indians alike. In the fall of 1884 he prepared a petition which was sent to Ottawa. The government turned a deaf ear. Then, on March 10, 1885 Riel and his followers passed a 10-point "Revolutionary Bill of Rights." About one week later they formed a provisional government with Riel as President and Gabriel Dumont as military head. Then, on March 25, Dumont and his troops ransacked a store at Duck Lake and the following day ran into a contingent of North-West Mounted Police and volunteers. In the ensuing skirmish, 12 were killed and 11 wounded. Dumont and his troops claimed the victory.

In the meantime, during the summer of 1884, the Plains Cree Chief, Big Bear, and his followers had met at Poundmaker's reserve for a thirst dance and to formulate plans to gain more concessions from the government. As a result of the government's refusal to negotiate with Big Bear, several of his warriors, led by Little Bad Man and Wandering Spirit, took a more militant stance. Big Bear tried to prevent an outbreak of violence, but, fired up by



Glenbow Archives

Gabriel Dumont, Louis Riel's brilliant military commander. After the rebellion he joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show as a crack marksman. He returned to Canada in 1888 after being granted amnesty. the Métis victory at Duck Lake, Wandering Spirit attacked and killed nine whites at Frog Lake on April 2 and subsequently laid siege to Fort Pitt. Among the dead were two priests and Sub-Indian Agent Thomas Quinn. Several others were taken hostage.

The Frog Lake massacre horrified people and aroused a deep hatred of Louis Riel in English Canada - even though he had nothing to do with the incident. Prime Minister John A. Macdonald decided to crush the revolt and called upon Major-General Frederick Dobson Middleton to lead the charge. Despite Dumont's brilliant military tactics, the Métis were no match for Middleton's troops and the revolt was more or less over by May 12, 1885. The last shots were fired on June 3, when a contingent under Sam Steele of the North-West Mounted Police battled with retreating Frog Lake Cree.

Gabriel Dumont managed to escape to the United States, but Riel surrendered on May 15 and was taken to Regina to stand trial for high treason. He was found guilty and hanged on November 16, 1885. Ten days later, on November 26, eight Natives, including war chief Wandering Spirit, were hanged. Chiefs Poundmaker and Big Bear, who surrendered on May 26 and July 2 respectively, were tried and sentenced to three years.

The Riel Rebellion, as historians Bob Beal and Rod Macleod have pointed out, "had profound effects on western Canada. It was the climax of the federal government's efforts to control the native and settler population of the West. Indians who had thought themselves oppressed after the treaties of the 1870s became subjugated, administered people. ... It took native peoples of western Canada many decades to recover politically and emotionally from the defeat of 1885."

While not central to the events of the Riel Rebellion, Lac La Biche did not escape completely unscathed. The Hudson's Bay Company post was ransacked and emissaries who claimed to be sent by Big Bear threatened to pillage Notre Dame des Victoires. For several weeks, especially in mid-April, there was tremendous fear that Lac La Biche would be the scene of massive bloodshed.

Although he was in his declining years, Bishop Faraud was still sharp and a towering figure in the Lac La Biche region. He was present during the Rebellion and recorded the events for the posterity of history. Although lengthy, Bishop Faraud's account of the Rebellion has been reprinted here in full. Of particular significance is how the Métis in the Lac La Biche area responded to developments.



Glenbow Archives

Poundmaker. He was sentenced to three years for his part in the rebellion but was released after a year and died shortly after.



National Archives of Canada

Big Bear (Mistahimaskwa) shortly after his capture in 1885 (note the chains). He is reputed to have said: "I am old; my face is ugly; I am in chains. Never did I put a chain on any man. In my body I have a free spirit." Sentenced to three years imprisonment, he was released after 14 months. A broken man, he died about one year later.

"Had I been born on the banks of the Saskatchewan, I would myself have shouldered a musket to fight against the neglect of governments and the shameless greed of speculators."

-Wilfrid Laurier

"He [Riel] shall hang though every dog in Quebec bark in his favour." -Sir John A. Macdonald

Bishop Faraud's Account of the Riel Rebellion

"Panic was general. Enemies would be seen everywhere." -Bishop Henri Faraud

"We were already at April 17th and I didn't have the slightest idea of what was gathering up. That day, around three o'clock in the afternoon, Mr. Young, agent for the Honourable Company and Justice of the Peace or local Magistrate, came to visit me accompanied by four persons: Pakan, cree chief of the White Fish Lake station; Mr. Stennor,* Presbyterian Minister of the same locality; Peter Erasmus, interpreter for the government; and Alexandre Hamelin, a Métis who has established a small trading post nearby. All these gentlemen were terrified and had their faces crippled with fear. Mr. Young started to speak and made the following point: 'We are being menaced in a very short time, of the invasion from hordes from the prairies. Pillage and death are upon us. Big Bear, chief of Fort Pitt, is in open revolt against the government and has sworn to put all the whites to death, all those residing in the North West. He has already passed from words to acts. Being established close to Frog Lake (post and mission located between Lac La Biche and Fort Pitt, closer to this one rather than the other) leading from 700 to 800 wild warriors, he has already put the garrison in full flight, plundered the Fort, taken the agents as hostages and keeps them under his surveillance. At Frog Lake everything has been ransacked in the same way: the businesses, the teachingfarmer, the Mission. The persons were

being led in slavery between two rows of warriors. At one point, the Agent-Farmer seemed to indicate that he wanted to turn back, at that very moment he was shot through the heart. Rev. Fr. Fafard, who was preceding him, immediately turned his head to look at the victim, when he was also shot. All the other prisoners who were walking in line having been shot, the young Fr. Marchand, who was at their head, piously trying to recite his Divine Office, was mortally shot. He stumbled a few feet and fell dead at the door of Big Bear.** (Later information told us that the two Fathers were thrown, fully clothed and covered with blood, in the basement of their ransacked chapel. At the very moment when the Indians who had brought the bodies were going out, they saw, or thought they saw, the large Crucifix or the painting of the Sacred Heart of Jesus taking on a menacing figure and making a sign by the hand that they would be punished. To free themselves from this vision, they set the Chapel on fire. After the blaze, it was reported that the bodies of the two martyrs had been entirely consumed, except for the tibias of two legs that the fire had respected).

Big Bear twice sent an invitation to Chief Pakan, here present, and with threats of vengeance, if he refused to come to Lac La Biche to stir the hate and cupidity of the Métis and Indians and then to ransack the Fort, to loot the businesses and the

^{*}This was most likely the Methodist Minister Egerton Steinhauer, Henry Bird Steinhauer's son. **It is now known, of course, that Big Bear tried to prevent bloodshed. It would appear, however, that Young mistakenly believed he was behind the Frog Lake Massacre. The "teaching-farmer" to whom Young refers was actually a government farming instructor. In many respects his death symbolized the Native aversion to the government's attempts to turn them into good farmers.



Left: Map showing the location of Lac La Biche in relation to the main scenes of action. Frog Lake is situated about 200 km from Lac La Biche. Below: Sub-Indian Agent Thomas Quinn, who was killed at Frog Lake.



William Bleasdell Cameron, The War Trail of Big Bear, Boston, 1927, facing p. 110

Mission, and then to enroll all able men as soldiers for the revolt, and to treat all recalcitrants as prisoners. Pakan, too honest, and too intelligent not to understand the fatal consequences for them and the crimes being suggested, refuses absolutely. He has come here to tell us to be on our guards, and to ask for some powder to defend himself and his people, in case Big Bear and his warriors come to attack him. Métis and Cree, adds Mr. Young, want to imitate Pakan: defend themselves and defend us. I have already summoned the people for a general meeting tomorrow at the Fort to organize the defence.' After this statement, a meeting was held that same evening and all day the following day. I had advised Fr. P. Collignon to attend so he could hear and see. All said they were satisfied with their present situation, and promised to defend the colony with arms. A first detachment was to guard the avenues to the Fort and defend it. The others were to stay here. It was understood that as soon as the guards from the Mission learned that those of the Fort were being attacked, they would go to help them, and they would do the same.

But all these strong resolutions in the absence of the enemy left me a little cold. I

Bishop Faraud on the causes of the 1871 Red River Uprising

"Protestant fanaticism along with Freemasonry seem to be the cause of the St. Boniface revolt. If this party triumphs, it is difficult to foresee what will happen to us."



Glenbow Archives

Pakan, also known as James Seenum, Chief of Whitefish Lake, pictured here in 1886. He did not lead his people into the uprising, later commenting that "I owe a great debt to my old missionary who recently left us, Mr. [Henry Bird] Steinhauer."

felt quite certain that if some had a real desire to defend us, the greater number were ready to join in the pillage if it happened. Nevertheless, anxiety was high. Time was running out, for if Big Bear was to come, he should not delay. As for myself, I had no apprehension: for to die at my age, and to die for the cause of God, appeared to me as a great happiness, and too great an honour to have merited it. But I was preoccupied with the thought that if the equipment for our Missions of the North was stolen, then these Missions were lost. All I wanted in this as in all the rest, was that God's holy will be fulfilled. And as I know that His will tends exclusively to the good of those who love him, there was in the secret sanctuary of my heart, the strong and unshakable conviction that God would not permit that.

During this first period of panic, the Fathers and the Brothers were spending the major part of the nights hiding in the sand, in the basements, under the floors, in the barns, the indispensable articles to prevent our Fathers of the North from perishing: powder, lead, shells, lines for nets, Mass wine. In all that, we were standing alone. During the night of April 25 to 26, the emissaries of Big Bear arrived on the shores of Beaver Lake (about 10 km from here). They were only ten, but they said they were being followed by one hundred! The few Crees who were camped on the shores of the lake being awakened by the sound of the gun shots were very much afraid. Suddenly they found themselves surrounded by the emissaries who were inviting them, in the name and by written order of His Majesty Big Bear,* to join their brothers, in the ranks of the patriots and under their flag, under the threat of being taken captive if they refused, even being put to death. In a moment they saw all their good resolutions of the previous day evaporating. They were in need of being supported and counselled, but they were alone, and few.

They suddenly found themselves pressed and urged to show their neo-patriotism by going immediately to loot the Fort of the Honourable Company. They consented half-heartedly, hoping that somewhere along the way, they would find a resolute Métis who would help them out, and prevent them from being responsible of such a robbery. Indeed, they found a few Métis from the east side of the lake [residents of Big Bay]. They were simply coming to take part in the pillage. All together, therefore, they ordered the guardian of the Fort, Pat Pruden [Patrick Pruden], to hand over the keys. There followed an indescribable scene: men, women and children hurled

*No such order from Big Bear has been found.

themselves on the store and invaded the house. In less than a quarter of an hour there was not a needle left: dry goods, groceries of all sorts, furs, everything had disappeared. And, like all revolutionaries, they broke the windows, the doors, the tables; chairs would fly in pieces under the axe; books of all kinds were torn in thousands of pieces and blown to the wind. The women amused themselves in tearing the tapestries and sharing the dresses of Mrs. Young, and cutting them up in pieces. They had orders not to burn, so they didn't but all those who saw this little Fort after this feat, said it presented the picture of complete desolation.

Around three o'clock in the afternoon, Pruden came to notify us as to what had just taken place. The pillagers, whose numbers were increasing constantly, were to come to the Mission next morning and ransack it in turn. The prospect was not nice, and fear had overtaken all hearts.

The night of the arrival of the emissaries of Big Bear, the old mother of our good and faithful servant Julien Cardinal had left in great haste, through woods and marshes to come and inform us of the



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Harrison Young, in charge of the HBC post at Lac La Biche from 1881 to 1889.



Glenbow Archives

Mrs. Harrison Young. Her dresses were shredded by those who pillaged the HBC Post.

danger. She arrived around six o'clock in the morning. Her son Julien, notified first, and having given us the waking call, left on horseback to warn all the residents on the west side of the lake, the most numerous and the most civilized, that the time of danger had arrived, and that all those who were strong of heart had to show it by gathering immediately around the Mission to defend it. The warm words of Julien had been heard, and when Pruden brought us the news of the devastation of the Fort, already about fifteen men had been gathered. At night, there arrived again about an equal number. It was something, and though these people were not completely sure, nor absolutely brave, they knew that the lots were now drawn with warriors as cowardly as them.

After a night of anxiety, on the morning of April 27, I was conferring with our

The Man With a Dream.

"I dreamed that a very old man came to me and, taking me by the hand, led me to the top of a high hill. Look to the east, he said, and tell me what you see.

I see many black clouds churning and rolling in many queer shapes and forms. ... What does it mean?

It means that there will be war and bloodshed and troubled times for many people...."

-Peter Shirt to Peter Erasmus, March 1884

Peter Shirt was the foster son of Peter Erasmus, the guide and interpreter who came to Lac La Biche during the rebellion. In March of 1884 Shirt spoke to his father of a troubling dream he had been having

"Peter [Shirt] had been home for some time when he came to visit me [Peter Erasmus]. It was around the beginning of March, 1884. He seemed troubled, as I could see. somewhat hesitant in speaking of what was on his mind.

'What is troubling you? You should know that if you are in need of anything at home you have but to mention it and it is yours.'

'No,' said Peter, 'it's not that. ... I have had an odd dream that bothers me a lot. ... I dreamed that a very old man came to me and taking me by the hand, led me to the top of a high hill. Look to the east, he said, and tell me what you see.

I see many black clouds churning and rolling in many queer shapes and forms. Yet they seem to cover the same area and are not drifting with any wind. What does it mean?

It means that there will be war and bloodshed and troubled times for many people. Now look to the west and tell me what you see.

I see a big valley along the Saskatchewan River. There are many tents, wagons, and Police. They are very busy and there are a lot of horses picketed to one rope. I think I know the place. Yes! There are buildings and a church there. It must be Victoria.

If you take your people to that place, all your people will be safe from the trouble and death that is coming from the East.

Then I asked the old man when this would take place. How would I know? Your family will own a white horse. The horse will die. When that happens. then you will know that the trouble has already happened. Take heed that you follow this warning. for some time. The story, first recorded by Henry Thompson in the 1920s, later appeared in Peter Erasmus's posthumous book, Buffalo Days and Nights (1976).

I said, 'Well, Peter, that is a strange dream, but it is unlikely that the dream will repeat itself in your mind. Don't worry."

During the summer of 1884. Peter and some others were out hunting moose and deer when some Indians passed and stopped to purchase a few articles. They were going north and wanted to trade a horse. ... I went to look at their horse and was immediately taken with his splendid formation and attractive intelligent appearance. ... 1 gave them a roan for their horse and they went away perfectly satisfied that they had made a good deal. I was pretty well delighted at my horse also, and it wasn't until they had been gone a half-day's journey that I recalled Peter Shirt's dream. The horse was a pure white, with pink nostrils and the same around the eyes. I felt a little uneasy but shrugged it off as a stupid superstition.

... The next day Peter Shirt returned from the hunt alone and as usual stopped at my place to leave some meat.

'... Father.' he said. 'you have traded for a white horse?'

Yes,' I replied. '... But who told you about it?' '... I knew you had the horse for I had that dream again last night.'

... During March 1885, Peter Shirt came to invite me to a dinner at his home. I closed the store, caught up a horse from the corrals, and rode along with him. ... I decided that we had time to look up the horses that ranged along the creek and hills between Peter's place and mine. We found the horses almost at once but the white horse was not with them. ... I
asked Peter to help me locate the horse.

... We were following a long chain of sloughs considerably south of where our horses usually ranged. ... Peter had not yet caught up with me when I found the horse. He was lying on his back, stone dead.

... Neither us had a word to say but I could see that Shirt was deeply affected by my loss or. more likely, convinced of the significance of the accident in relation to his dream.

... There were several people standing in groups in front of Peter's house when we got there. I was surprised at the number of people he had invited, especially when we went inside. The house was packed and excited voices came from all parts of the room. ... When our entrance was noticed the talk died down.

Big Louis came forward to greet us. I knew for certain he was not among the invited guests. We shook hands with him.

'My friends, I bring you bad news. The halfbreeds under Louis Riel have taken up arms against the government and there has been fighting. Big Bear has joined and is sending our riders to stir up all the tribes he can reach. There has been a massacre at Frog Lake. They killed two priests and several other white men. Some Saddle Lakers have gone to join in the fight. Others are planning to make a raid on the Hudson's Bay store at Victoria. The rebels claim a victory against the Police. I came to warn you in case they send men here.'

... Only then did the significance of his dream register on my mind. It was all the more astounding in view of the dead white

guide, Louis Lavallée, when a gun shot blasted at a close distance from us. A moment later we saw an Indian, alone, all armed, coming towards us. The multicoloured feathers of his head-dress, and the red yellow and black paintings of his face indicated to us that he was the ambassador of Big Bear. He came forward in a friendly way, touching the hand of each one. His knees were shaking, sign of the fear our guards were inspiring in him.

He sat down, and soon surrounded by all our soldiers sitting on their heels, he said



Glenbow Archives

Peter Shirt, pictured here as an older man. He is standing beside the grave of Henry Steinhauer and Benjamin Sinclair.

horse that he had mentioned almost twelve months before to a day. If I had given the matter any thought at all, it was with irritation and annoyance that his education and all his Christian faith could still leave him open to such utter nonsense. Now I was faced with facts beyond my ability to understand or in any way account for as accidental or mere coincidence."

to them: 'I come to you as a friend. Big Bear has sent us to know your opinion: are you of the party of Riel? Are you following the government? This is what we have to know. To support the battle we need men and powder of which we are poorly stocked. Can you, will you, supply us these two things? We have not come to hurt anyone. All, and Big Bear first, we regret the murders that were committed at Frog Lake by a few hot heads and against the order and will of our leaders. We are convinced that these assassinations will hurt our cause very much.'

After a moment of silence, our volunteers answered, first by voice then in writing: 'You will know that we do not have a well defined political opinion. We are on the side of the government who gives us the peace and tranquillity that we need. We are all poor and have great difficulty to feed our families. We couldn't leave them without putting them in danger. None of us will consent to become soldiers for Big Bear. As for the powder, we have very little. We need it, first of all to live, and the little that will be left, we would not let you have it. We have to keep it to defend ourselves in case we are attacked.'

The messenger left without saying anything; he was afraid, but did not like this answer. Just at a short distance from us, he told our braves that Big Bear would be very unhappy with their answers; that he would most certainly revenge himself by sending from a hundred and fifty to two hundred of his best warriors to take them by force along with the things they were refusing him; that in eight or nine days at the most, just the time to go and return from Lac La Biche to Frog Lake, they would be there!

Our people had exhausted all their bravery and courage in their answer. Fire, stirred by the wind in accumulated combustibles, does not propagate itself more rapidly in spreading its ravages than fear among our Indians. Panic was general. Enemies were seen everywhere. The next morning, April 28, by nine o'clock, all our soldiers had fled. Families overtaken by fear came to take their children from the school. All, shaken by fear, were leaving without knowing where they were going, with no provisions, without any kind of help, abandoning their homes to looters, and forgetting about their seeding.

In this state of general panic, our Sisters were overtaken also. It was impossible to retain them any longer. Though my conviction was that they would be more exposed to danger anywhere else than here, I consented to their departure. During the night of the 28 to the 29, they left, carrying a small amount of baggage, for an island



Glenbow Archives

Peter Erasmus. He accompanied Harrison Young to view the damage at the HBC post at Lac La Biche and later recalled that Young was outraged at the wanton killing of his dog - a little water spaniel which had been gutted and left to die on its back. A few moments later Erasmus found Young laughing until tears came to his eyes. The pillagers had made a tripod, from which hung an iron cauldron, presumably to brew tea. The cauldron was a child's chamber pot.

about three kilometers from here and where we have a small fishing cabin. They thought, the poor Sisters, that if the Cree came, they could not reach them there. The alarms and the fears started again and increased out there in exile.

Therefore we were alone, or rather I'm mistaken: we had our faithful Julien and the brave Hamelin, ready to shed their blood rather than let the Cree take over the equipment of our Missions, or touch our persons. Our Brothers were calm and resolved to combat in the name of the Lord. They would not have been the least brave in case of an attack.

We have to admit that the position was critical, the danger real and the moment solemn. We had to fear that our Crees from Beaver Lake, wishing not to stay

Father Joseph Le Treste on the Rebellion

"After learning of the massacre of Frog Lake, Mr. Young, the chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Co. store, seeing his wife in mortal apprehension, left his post in a hurry for Edmonton, along with a free trader. ... The chief factor had hardly left his post, when the Beaver Lake Cree arrived, damaged and ransacked everything, not sparing even the personal dresses of Mrs. Young, who was a rather slim person. It was no spectacle of little amusement to see the rather heavy set Indian women dressed in these narrow dresses of the latest styles and tearing at the seams. They did not burn the residence, but nothing was spared, not even a superb piano that they smashed to pieces.

The day after the looting, one of the Indians, probably the Chief, dressed with new clothes from head to foot, arrived at the Mission. He had in his hand, as a tomahawk, a piece of wood with many screws which indicated it had belonged to the piano. ... It seemed he came to observe, and find out, if like at the Fort, fear had led the personnel of the Mission to flee.... No doubt he was disappointed to see that nobody was even thinking of leaving, and that his tomahawk was not stirring emotions.

... Nevertheless, fear was spreading among the Métis. ... They told Fr. Collignon that they wished to talk to him after Benediction. He accepted their request, and at the appointed time, the room was filled with men, and the chief representatives of the place. After smoking a good pipe and some confused chatter, there set in a loaded silence. It reminded me of the one at the Minor Seminary of Ste. Anne d'Auray where I studied, when on Friday, after the clatter of two or three hundred spoons in the dishes, all having eaten their soup, would peel the couple of potatoes served with oily sardines. We called the solemn moment: the silence of the potatoes."

behind while waiting for the others to come, would forget all their good resolutions, and knowing that we were alone would come and attack themselves. From the very first day and the following days, they sent one of theirs to tell us that we had nothing to fear from them, but that we had everything to fear from the bands of Big Bear, who would certainly come. We believed in their promises, and we were acting as if we believed them.

April 28, 29, and 30 were very painful days. During the night of the 30, around eleven o'clock at night, Mr. Young arrived from Edmonton where he had been to get more exact information. He told us that an army of 6000 to 7000 men had arrived in the country: 2000 were going towards Duck Lake, 1500 towards Battle River, and 1000 to 1200 towards Edmonton; therefore the riot could not last very long. It was encouraging, but we were still under the weight of the menace of Big Bear. Since there were still three days before the extreme date indicated by the emissary,

Mr. Young decided, after consultations, to appeal to all those of good will for the purpose of forming a small army of volunteers. He sent for recruitments all around the lake, and himself chased the runaways in the small La Biche River. There, he could recruit no one, fear was too great; but others who had not distanced themselves too much, or who were not so much afraid and had not left their homes. answered his call. On May 4, in the evening, he enrolled 27 men, promising them in the name of the government, pay and rations. During the night of May 4 to 5, half the mobile guard was on the lookout around us; the other was to watch during the day. At the first sign of danger, a signal of four gunshots was to convene them all. It was something. Mr. Young, having received the assurance from all the looters of his Fort that they had done so only to protect it from the men of Big Bear; that they were sorry for what they had done, and were ready to give it back, left on May 5 to join his wife and children

who had followed the population. He was to bring them to Edmonton, via Tawatinau, and then come back to find supplies for the colony. That same day he sent a courier to General Strange in Edmonton, asking him for a picket of soldiers to guard us. The courier was to make haste, and within eight days at the most, to bring news back to us.

On the whole, things seemed to quiet down. May 6, 7, and 8 went by without the enemy showing up. We started to believe that he would not come. But the uneasiness was there, and our volunteers were on guard night and day.

On Tuesday, May 12, I had our barge put in the water, and we went, amidst the broken ice, to deliver our prisoners on the island. What blessings I received at that moment! But our guard was losing patience; we were not getting any news. On the 17 though, we had a new alert: the enemy was there, in large number, well armed, ready for everything. He had been



Lac La Biche Archives





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Julien Cardinal, his wife, and grandson, Modest. Julien was the grandson of Joseph Cardinal, who had invited the Oblates to Lac La Biche in 1844.

seen and heard; the panic was starting all over, the Sisters want to leave again, our improvised soldiers wanted to run away. Julien, always Julien, left alone, on horseback, to get information on the real cause of the alarm. It was a blunder. But the visionary risked getting in a bad situation.

Anxiety was increasing: what could be the meaning of these three long weeks of absolute silence? On Friday, May 22, Julien and his brother-in-law left through the forest, taking the shortest way, determined not to come back until they had gathered sure information. On the 28, they were back, carrying a long letter with the address bearing this word in large letters: VICTORY! The army was victorious at Duck Lake and Riel was taken prisoner; victorious also at Battle River. Big Bear had broken camp and was trekking through the prairies toward Carlton. It was a great relief and joy though we still had the apprehension that small separate bands, starved and hungry for loot, could suddenly fall upon us. A small banquet

was served for our very mobile soldiers, then before nightfall they all dispersed.

From now on though, one thought would preoccupy us: have our barges leave as soon as possible. The rowers were coming forward in large numbers. We hastened the preparations, and on Wednesday, June 3, our two barges, carrying 825 kilograms, were on their way at three o'clock in the afternoon. Rev. Fr. Collignon was following them. The day before we had sent 825 kilograms for the missions of St. Charles and St. Bernard.

After all the fears, this departure was an immense relief. The evening of the same day, Colonel Ouimet and the St. Albert Rifles sent us four men asking us if we needed soldiers. We answered that soldiers would have been useful a little earlier, but presently we could do without them; that the uneasiness in which some Indians found themselves because they were feeling more or less guilty, would necessitate sending a judge accompanied by eight or ten police officers in uniform, to restore peace. We are awaiting the arrival of this judge any day."



Provincial Archives of Alberta

The powder house Bishop Faraud built. It was still standing when this picture was taken in 1929.

-Henri, Bishop of Anemour, O.M.I.

The St. Albert Mounted Rifles

The St. Albert Mounted Rifles was a unit in the Alberta Field Force of 1885. The small squadron of about forty-five provided their own horses and saddlery. Although issued "Snider" rifles, they were not given uniforms. Their transport was Red River carts. They were sent to Lac La Biche after Big Bear managed to elude forces led by General Strange and was reported heading for Lac La Biche. The Rifles arrived at the Lac La Biche Mission on June 15 after a week long journey from Edmonton. Although Bishop Faraud sourly commented that their arrival was "not unlike the soup after dinner," the presence of the Rifles certainly calmed those panic stricken people who believed Big Bear was on his way. The small squadron spent much of its time with

patrols, drilling, and rifle practice until Faraud put them to work helping to change the foundation beams for his house. On July 13, the Rifles received orders to return to Edmonton (Big Bear had surrendered on July 2). About a dozen men stayed behind until everything had settled down. There was later some dickering over paycheques. Some of the members of the St. Albert Mounted Rifles included Capt. Samuel Cunningham, 2nd Lieut. O. Bellrose, Colour Sergt. A. Cunningham, Privates J.B. L'Hiroudelle, F.G. Dumas, D. Courtpatte, John Ladervute, Michael Callio, Robert Bellrose, Xavier L'Hiroudelle, John Callioux, Jos. Chelifoux, and Baptiste Supranout.

"We are for ourselves, we do not want to help the Red Coats, soldiers of the government against the Cree, nor help the latter against the former. We have foodstuffs for our families that is all, and we are keeping our ammunition to defend ourselves against all aggressors."

-Sister Youville on the Métis response to Big Bear's emissary

"In the north the Beaver Lake Indians, near Lac La Biche, were, so Inspector Piercy reports, much disappointed at not receiving treaty money this year. The payment of this band was stopped owing to their conduct in the rebellion."

-Annual Report of Superintendent A.H. Greisbach, December 5, 1887



Archives Deschâtelets

In the aftermath of the rebellion, Louis Riel became a hero to Métis as well as French-Canadians.

Satirical cartoon of the Riel Rebellion by John Wilson Bengough, one of Canada's most famous political cartoonists.



Glenbow Archives

The Treaties

"The Plain and Wood Cree Tribes of Indians, and all other Indians inhabiting the district hereinafter described and defined, do hereby cede, release, surrender and yield up to the Government of the Dominion of Canada, for Her Majesty the Queen and Her successors forever, all their rights, titles and privileges, whatsoever to the lands...."

-Treaty No. 6

"Do you not allow the Indians to make their own conditions, so that they may benefit as much as possible? Why I say this is that we to-day make arrangements that are to last as long as the sun shines and the water runs."

-Chief Keenooshayo at the Treaty 8 negotiations, 1899

"The Whites think the Indians get too much and Indians think they do not get enough. Government has to hold the balance and see that the Indian is protected. In fact the Government is the guardian of the Indians ... We cannot allow them to starve, and we cannot make them Whitemen." -Sir John A. Macdonald to the House of Commons, 1880

After the Canadian government took possession of Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1870, it set about the task of "extinguishing Native title to the land." The government's primary aim was to obtain title as quickly and as cheaply as possible in order to pave the way for settlement and the development of telegraph and transportation networks. Never far from the minds of Canadian officials was the example of the United States, where the government was spending upwards of \$20 million a year fighting Native people. That was greater than the entire budget of the Canadian government. Federal officials in Canada chose the safer, established, and peaceful route of negotiating treaties. Between 1871 and 1920 the government negotiated eleven treaties - the so-called numbered treaties - with the Native peoples of Western Canada, excepting portions of present day British Columbia. Treaties 1-7 were completed between 1871 and 1877 and Treaties 8-11 were concluded between 1899 and 1920. Of the eleven treaties, two apply to the Lac La Biche area: Treaties 6 and 8.

Treaty 6 covered one of the largest areas

of the first seven numbered treaties, including most of modern day south-central Alberta and Saskatchewan (a total of 121,000 square miles, or about 200,000 sq. km, in the official documents).

Negotiations for the surrender of this territory began in 1876 and subsequent "adhesions" (those who signed the treaty later) continued until 1956. The Indian Commissioners were the Hon. Alexander Morris, Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Territories; the Hon. James McKay, Manitoba's Minister of Agriculture; and Chief Factor W.J. Christie of the Hudson's Bay Company. At different times the commission also included James F. Macleod, Inspector James F. Walker and others of the North West Mounted Police, Bishop Grandin, Father Constantine Scollen, the Rev. John McDougall, Dr. Alfred Jakes, Secretary of the Commission, Mary McKay, and Peter Erasmus, who served as chief interpreter. In the first round of signing, eighty-five Chiefs and councillors signed the treaty with an "x" nineteen of whom had French or English names.

Under Treaty 6, the Native people did "cede, release, surrender and yield up to

the Government of Canada, for Her Majesty the Queen and Her successors forever, all their rights, titles and privileges, whatsoever." They also gave up their rights to all other lands in the Northwest Territories and Promises - meaning they could not move to another part of Canada to claim land.

In return for this, the government undertook to put aside land for farming and other purposes. The land formula was one square mile for each family of five, with smaller or larger pieces of land depending on the size of the family. All land so given was to be administered by the Federal government. In addition, Native people would receive a signing bonus of \$12; farm animals and equipment; and flags, medals and wagons or cars for the Chiefs. Each person would receive an annuity of \$5 per person, with Chiefs collecting \$25 and Headmen \$15. The government also agreed to supply \$1500 per year for ammunition and twine for nets; "triennial" clothing (clothing every three years); and \$1000 per year for provisions for the first three years - to be distributed at the discretion of the Indian Agent.

The Native negotiators were a shrewd

lot. They managed to wring from the government a concession no other group had yet to receive: a "medicine chest." Under this provision of the treaty the government agreed to provide a medicine chest to be kept in the home of each Indian Agent. They also secured from the government a commitment to provide assistance in the event of a famine. In addition, the government agreed to maintain schools "whenever the Indians of the reserve shall desire it."

Debates over what the Native people lost or gained through Treaty 6, or any of the first seven treaties, will continue for years. But one thing is clear. At the time, the government was passing out considerable amounts of money - even if the individual payments seem small - and the cost of the treaties was causing considerable alarm among politicians in Ottawa. By 1885 Indian Department expenses had climbed to nearly 15% of total federal expenditures under supply bills, and this during a time of depression. The growing financial burden prompted heated debates in the House of Commons, especially over the "relief clause" in Treaty 6, which, by the early 1880s, was costing roughly \$500,000 dollars per year. Put into perspective, that



Arthur J. Ray, The Canadian Fur Trade in the Industrial Age, Toronto, 1990, p.31

Map showing the boundaries of the eleven "Numbered Treaties" the Canadian Government signed with the Native people of Western Canada between 1871 and 1930. Treaties 6 and 8 cover the Lac La Biche Region. was about 30% of what the government had paid for Rupert's Land to start with. After negotiating Treaty 7 in 1877, the government stayed away from the treaty making business for twenty-two years. No new treaties were made in old Rupert's Land between 1877 and 1899.

What triggered the next round of treaty negotiations were the activities of George Washington Carmack, Skookum Jim and Tagish Charley. In August 1896 the trio discovered gold on Rabbit Creek, a tributary of the Klondike River. The discovery remained reasonably quiet until an American newspaper article about "a ton of gold" sparked a stampede of more than 100,000 feverish goldseekers into the Canadian Northwest.

The massive influx of would-be prospectors caused considerable apprehension among Native peoples in the region. Although most of the stampeders travelled north by water, or via the White Pass and Chilkoot Pass, more than 2000 took the "all-Canadian" route from Edmonton to Dawson City. Native peoples quickly began complaining of intruders stealing horses and ruining the hunting. By June 1898 some 500 Indians had blockaded the Edmonton to Dawson trail at Fort St. John. They refused to stand down until their demands for a treaty were met.

The idea of a treaty between the Canadian government and the Native people of the Northwest was by no means new. There had been talk of making a treaty since 1890. But the increasing uneasiness among Native people over the Klondike gold rush, coupled with the memory of the Riel Rebellion and the desire to maintain an all-Canadian route to the Klondike, forced the government to act. In late June 1898 a Privy Council Committee set out the parameters for a treaty commission. The following month the private secretary to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs reported that Clifford Sifton, the Minister responsible for the area, was "quite convinced that it will be necessary to take immediate steps to assure the Indians that the Government has no intention of ignoring their rights

Farmers All

Treaty 6 is not a long document. But one of the most detailed passages concerns farming:

"It is further agreed between Her Majesty and the said Indians who are now cultivating the soil, or who shall hereafter commence to cultivate the land, that is to say: Four hoes for every family actually cultivating; also, two spades per family; ... one plough for every three families; ... one harrow for every three families; ... two scythes and one whetstone, and two hay forks and two reaping hooks, for every family ... and also two axes; and also one crosscut saw, one hand-saw, one pit-saw, the necessary files, one grindstone and one auger for each Band; and also for each Chief for the use of his Band, one chest of ordinary carpenter's tools; also, for each Band, enough of wheat, barley, potatoes and oats to plant the land actually broken up for cultivation by such Band: also for each Band four oxen, one bull and six cows; also one boar and two sows, and one handmill when any Band shall raise sufficient grain thereafter. All the aforesaid articles to be given once for all the encouragement of the practice of agriculture among the Indians."

Although Treaty 6 gave Native people the right to pursue their traditional lifestyle of hunting and fishing within certain limits, the Canadian government clearly assumed that by providing farming equipment it could encourage Native people to become farmers. Thus, a people who had more or less followed a nomadic way of life since they could remember were expected to become tillers of the soil.

and has already arranged for the making of a treaty next summer."

Arrangements were thus made to conduct negotiations for Treaty 8, the largest land settlement undertaken in the 19th

Negotiating

"The Governor advanced and shook hands with the chiefs, saying, 'I have come to meet you Cree chiefs to make a treaty with you for the surrender of your rights of the land to the government, and further I have two of the most efficient interpreters that could be obtained. There stand Peter Ballenden and the Rev. John McKay.'

... Big Child answered, 'We have our own interpreter. Peter Erasmus, and there he is. Mr. Clarke (he pointed directly at Clarke) advised me that Peter Erasmus was a good man to interpret the Cree language. Further than that, he recommended the man as the best interpreter in the whole Saskatchewan valley and plains. Why he did so. only he knows. On Clarke's advice, though I have no Acquaintance with the man, I went to a great deal of trouble to fetch him here and though I know nothing of his efficiency, I am prepared to use his services. All our chiefs have agreed.'

... 'It was quite unnecessary to send for the man,' said the Governor. 'We have two interpreters hired by the government and it is up to the government to provide the means of communication.'

... 'Very good,' said Mista-wa-sis, 'you keep your interpreters and we will keep ours.'

... 'There is no need for you to assume this extra expense for an interpreter when the government is willing to pay for the interpretations,' reiterated the Commissioner. The chief replied rather heatedly, 'Our man will interpret as well as yours. I can speak Blackfoot and I know what it takes to interpret. If you do not want the arrangement, there will be no talks. We did not send for you, you sent for us.'

... The Governor's party were huddled at the table in low conversation, none of which I could hear. In the meantime the chiefs gathered together and were about to leave the room when the Governor looked up and saw they were going to leave.

'All right,' he said. 'You can have your interpreter. My tent will be pitched on the prairie where we will meet. There will be a band playing to notify you of our presence.'" -Peter Erasmus. *Buffalo Days and Nights*

century. It encompassed roughly 325,000 square miles or more than 500,000 sq. km. The Treaty 8 Commission was headed by 66 year old David Laird, the former Minister of the Interior and Lieutenant-Governor of the North West Territories who had introduced the first Indian Act in 1876. He was joined by Commissioners James Ross and J.A. McKenna. In an effort to ensure success, the government turned to the celebrated Father Lacombe for help. Lacombe initially refused the invitation to join the Treaty Commission but gave in to his sense of duty. Father Lacombe was accompanied by his bishop, Emile Grouard. In order to avoid the appearance of Catholic dominance, Anglican Reverends George Holmes and G.D. White were invited along. A Halfbreed Script Commission headed by Major James Walker and J.A. Côté travelled with

the Treaty 8 Commission. The Commission was also joined by writer Charles Mair, who served as English Secretary for the Half-breed Commission and later published an account of the proceedings in *Through the Mackenzie Basin*.

Sifton gave the Treaty 8 Commissioners their final instructions on May 12, 1899 and the Commission departed for the west end of Lesser Slave Lake. The 26 person entourage of accountants, cooks, interpreters, Mounted Police, secretaries, along with a big safe, arrived at a place called Willow Point on June 19 after a gruelling 480 km trek from Edmonton.

The following day the North West Mounted Police presented a royal salute and, after the tobacco was passed out, Commissioner Laird announced to an assembly of Natives and Métis almost 2000 strong: "Red Brothers! we have come here today, sent by the Great Mother to treat with you." He then unrolled a large document with an enormous great red seal. "This is the paper she has given to us, and is her Commission to us signed with her Seal, to show we have authority to treat with you."

The terms Laird proceeded to spell out were not unlike those of Treaty 6. Each family of five would receive 640 acres of land or 160 acres for individuals. Every person would receive a \$12 signing bonus and \$5 each year thereafter. Chiefs would receive \$25 per year, a silver medal, a flag, and a new suit every three years. Councillors would get \$15 per year and a new suit every three years (though "not quite so good as that of the chief"). Equipment, supplies, training in farming methods, medical assistance, police protection, and education were also part of the deal.

The terms were similar to those contained in Treaty 6 but the response was somewhat different. Having had the benefit of learning something about reservation life, the Native peoples of the Treaty 8 area were considerably apprehensive. "I will consider carefully what you have said," Chief Keenooshayo, the principal spokesman for Treaty 8 Crees told the Commissioners. "You say we are brothers. I cannot understand how we are so. I live differently from you. I can only understand that Indians will benefit in a very small degree from your offer." Chief Keenooshayoo essentially told the Commissioners that his people greatly

Father Lacombe and Treaty 8

"[T]he Hon. Mr. Sifton, Minister of the Interior, called upon the old missionary and requested him to give his services to the Government in this connection, to urge the Indians and half-breeds to make the Treaty peaceably. Although decidedly pleased at the compliment conveyed by the offer, Father Lacombe refused to go.

'It too much for me,' he said to the Minister, 'I am too old to travel hundreds of miles in little boats, and I will only bother your people to take care of me if I fall sick. Try to find somebody else.'

'No, we want you,' Mr. Sifton persisted. 'You will have everything at your disposal to make the trip comfortable.'

The Prime Minister [Wilfrid Laurier] also added his persuasions.

'Bien,' Father Lacombe said finally, 'Telegraph to Bishop Grandin. If he orders me to go, I will go.'

... On May 11 [1899], Father Lacombe wrote from Montreal to Bishop Legal - 'I have decided to accept the offer of going on that Commission. Pray for your old missionary. It is finished. There is no more repose for me. May the good Saviour have pity on me!'"

-Katherine Hughes, Father Lacombe: The Black-Robe Voyageur, Toronto, 1920

"The crowd of Indians ranged before the marquee had lost all semblance of wildness of the true type. Wild men they were, in a sense, living as they did in the forest and on their great waters. But it was plain that these people had achieved, without any treaty at all, a stage of civilization distinctly in advance of many of our treaty Indians to the south after twenty-five years of education. Instead of paint and feathers, the scalp-lock, the breech-clout, and the buffalo-robe, there presented itself a body of respectable-looking men, as well dressed and evidently quite as independent in their feelings as any like number of average pioneers in the East. ... One felt disappointed, almost defrauded."

-Charles Mair, Through the Mackenzie Basin, 1908

Land Scrip

The Half-breed Commission decided that every Métis who had been living in the North West Territories on July 15, 1870 was entitled to \$160 or 160 acres of land. Métis children born after that date were allowed either \$240 or 240 acres.

The government proceeded to issue "scrip," transferable certificates which acknowledged land title or a money equivalent. Over the years the government occasionally issued new scrip to Métis who either had not initially registered or had lost their scrip.

One of those new issues of scrip was made in 1900 after the negotiation of Treaty No. 8. This prompted a rush of "scrip hunters" who followed the Treaty 8 Half-breed Commission when it set out to issue the scrip. Many historians have argued that the scrip hunters were unscrupulous land speculators who hoodwinked Métis into selling cheap (for example, \$240 certificates were often sold for between \$70 and \$130). While a great deal of scrip was snapped up in such a fashion, it is also clear that some, such as Richard Secord, were accepting scrip from some Métis so they could clear their debts with him. In later years Secord, and his business partner, John McDougall, faced legal battles over their purchase of scrip, which amounted to about 47,000 acres by 1902. They were never convicted of wrong doing.

The Roman Catholic missionaries initially voiced strong opposition to the sale of scrip on the grounds that "the Halfbreeds ... have no adequate conception of the real value of money." Many missionaries later wanted the sale of scrip to occur only with the benefit of legal aid. By 1900 most of the opposition was withdrawn, perhaps because the Métis themselves were opposed to having legal advice because it would scare away potential buyers.



Lac La Biche Archives

A 1900 land script certificate in the name of Edward Spencer, son of James Spencer, who managed the Hudson's Bay Company post at Lac La Biche.

feared losing their traditional lifestyle and being forced onto reservations.

Although not all the Native people agreed with Keenooshayoo, the Commissioners declared that there was no intention on the part of the government to make the Native people live on reserves. Additional assurances were given by Father Lacombe, who said: "your forest and river life will not be changed by the treaty, and you will have your annuities as well, year by year, as long as the sun shines and the earth remains." With such promises by trusted men like Father Lacombe - who the Cree had named Kamiyoatchakwêt, "the noble soul" - the Native people consented to the treaty. There is a story told that those who favoured the treaty were asked to stand up. One Cree Headman named Felix Giroux jumped up and threatened to club anyone who would not stand up. Amid laughter, the Cree stood up. The next day, June 21, the terms of the treaty were read

aloud. With still some apprehension and reluctance, the Native peoples signed the treaty.

After the treaty was signed the Commission began issuing "scrip," certificates for land or money. Initially, the Commissioners, and most of the missionaries, wanted to make scrip non-transferable. The Métis objected so strongly to this that the government backed down and made scrip transferable. Recent research has suggested that most Métis never even saw the scrip - it went directly to the banks.

The Treaty Commission completed nine sessions in the summer of 1899. By the time the Commissioners returned to Edmonton in September, some 2217 people had accepted Treaty 8 and 1243 had taken scrip.

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Lac La Biche Archives

Bishop Grouard on Treaty 8

"You know that the Government will make a Treaty with the Indians. This makes me extremely worried. Alas, our good days are over!" -Bishop Emile Grouard to Father Lacombe, March 31, 1899

"[I]f Bishop Grouard had not advised the chiefs to sign the treaty, telling them there was nothing which was not to their advantage; the treaty would still be waiting to be signed today."

-Constant Falher to Bishop Breynat, August 13, 1937

Treaty 8 was signed at Willow Point, not far from present day Grouard. Situated at the west end of Lesser Slave Lake, Grouard was named in honour of Bishop Emile Jean Baptiste Grouard in 1909. Along with Father Lacombe, Bishop Grouard was present at the signing of Treaty 8. He wrote a first-hand account of the proceedings in a letter to Rev. P. Antoine which was published in the thirty-eighth annal of the

"The year 1899 has seen quite an important event in our poor Vicariate ... I mean the treaty that the Canadian government has made with the Indians of the District of Athabasca.

This country is part of Canada and belongs to England, but until these last times, neither England nor Canada has bothered with it, except to collect the furs as the object of a very lucrative commerce. They had not even given us the favour of establishing a Post Office in this whole vast territory! But all of a sudden the news of rich gold mines having been discovered in the high Yukon spreads throughout the whole world and large crowds rush towards this new California. All roads lead to Rome, says the proverb, and many people thought that this could be true also about the Klondyke [Klondike], specially those who did not want to incur the cost of the trip by the Pacific Ocean. So they took the road of the Mackenzie or the Peace River, or just went blindly through the forests. In short, it was a real invasion that changed completely the way of life of the Aboriginal People, creating new relaMissions de la Congrégation Des Missionnaires Oblates de Marie Immaculée (Paris, 1900). Of particular interest in the following excerpts is Bishop Grouard's observation about the hesitancy on the part of the Native peoples in signing the treaty. Grouard appears to have been convinced that the treaty would change forever the Native lifestyle and the role of the Catholic Church, as it indeed did.

tions and thus was forcing the government to intervene. On top of this, rumors were circulated of the discovery of gold mines of fabulous wealth in the rocks at the bottom of Great Slave Lake. Companies were already being formed, gathering considerable amounts of capital, sending explorers, engineers, experts, miners, etc. Finally, the project of pushing the railway from Edmonton towards the Nelson River or the Liard River and from there to the Yukon was obliging the government to establish some kind of system of administration in that part of the country. This is why it had decided to make a treaty with the Indians of the north, as it had done with those of the prairies.

The plan was to bring the tribes, until now free and independent, to recognize the authority of the government and give up the rights to their lands, receiving in return certain amounts of money and other advantages as compensation. The Métis were to receive also what we call 'scrip,' that is, legal title making them owners of considerable pieces of land. The government at Ottawa was not without

apprehension concerning the success of its undertaking. Some alarming reports printed in the newspapers were describing the Indians as ill-disposed, discontented, even hostile. It seemed therefore important to the government to use all means to succeed, and knowing that the greater majority of Indians are Catholic, it thought that the influence of one of their missionaries would be very helpful, so it called upon Rev. Fr. Lacombe, universally known and esteemed both by the Indians and the whites. With the approval of his bishop, Rev. Fr. Lacombe accepted the government proposition and became part of the appointed commission to the treaty as counsellor and advisor.

... [T]he head of the Commission invited me along, and as I had planned to assist at the deliberations and preliminary discussions of the treaty, wherever I could go, I accepted this invitation with gratitude, and accompanied by Rev. Frs. Husson and Calais and two Sisters of Providence, I left for Athabasca Landing, where the personnel of the Commission soon joined us. There, the Saint Bernard boat was to come



Bishop Emile Jean Baptiste Grouard, O.M.I.

The Policeman's Son

The son of a policeman, Emile Jean Baptiste Grouard was born at Brûlon in the Department of La Sarthe, France on February 2, 1840. He came to Canada in 1860 and continued his studies at Laval University. He joined the Oblate Order, was ordained by Bishop Taché in 1862, and then sent to the Northwest. A little man with a long flowing white beard, Emile Grouard spent 69 years ministering in the Northwest. His first posting was to Fort Chipewyan on Lake Athabasca. From 1863 to 1874 he was stationed at Fort Providence but travelled to a number of other missions. After a two year sabbatical, during which he became interested in the publishing industry, he returned to Canada and brought the first printing press in Alberta to Lac La Biche. He served at Notre Dame des Victoires from 1876 to 1883 and again from 1885-1888. In 1890 he was named vicar apostolic of Athabasca with the title of Bishop of Ibora. He moved to present day Grouard in 1902. Elevated to Archbishop in 1930, he died at Grouard the following year at the remarkable age of 91.

Although he played a key role in convincing the chiefs to sign Treaty 8, from the beginning Bishop Grouard expressed doubts. "Alas, our good days are over!" he wrote to Father Lacombe in March 1899, some three months before Treaty 8 was signed. He was particularly opposed to making scrip negotiable on the grounds that Métis and others would sell the scrip, spend the money, and end up with nothing. Grouard's pessimism only increased with time, so that by 1901 he was writing to Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier that "Treaty promises are far from being fulfilled ... The Indians. as well as myself, have some right to be treated with a little more generosity."

and take our missionaries, and a squad of voyageurs from Lesser Slave Lake were expected to come and tow the three government barges. We were supposed to leave at the same time and travel together, but to my great regret, we had to be separated, and on June third, I embarked with Rev. Fr. Lacombe and the members of the commission, leaving my companions at the landing. But before going any further, I wish to make known to you the personalities entrusted to negotiate the treaty with our Indians and Métis, and forming two distinct commissions. The first was made up of Mr. David Laird, first Lieutenant-Governor of the Northwest, presently Superintendent of Indian Affairs; then Mr. Ross, Minister of Public Works for the Northwest; Mr. Mackenna, Secretary to the Minister of the Interior in Ottawa; finally Rev. Fr. Lacombe, which I need not describe to you. He is exactly as you have known him, except that old age with its ensuing infirmities are starting to weigh heavily on him, and he cannot as formerly defy the severity of the air and seasons. Two secretaries, one treasurer, one doctor are part of the first commission, along with many men of service, cooks, etc.

The second commission entrusted with giving the "scrips" to the Métis is composed of Major Walsh and Mr. Coté, a French-Canadian and two secretaries. A group from the Mounted Police, twelve men under the command of an officer, form an escort of honour. Mr. Round from the Hudson's Bay Company is the organizer for the transportation of this numerous caravan, of its provisions and luggage. He has already found a few men to work on the boats, but as I have said above, it is from Lesser Slave Lake that the major part of the crew must come from.

June 8 was given as meeting date to the Indians of Lesser Slave Lake. This month is started and we should have already left. Finally, June 3. The Governor wants to leave, but we have too few men to tow the line. We load the boats to full capacity. We try to find some kind of comfortable place among all the luggage. The trumpet gives the signal for departure, and the too few oars manage with great difficulty to push the boats from shore. The water is high and the current is swift. We have travelled about only four miles when we stop and set up camp.

Sunday morning, the war-like trumpet call sounds the wake-up call. Fr. Lacombe has seen a barge coming to shore. Mr. Round is there immediately. 'Who are you? Where do you come from?' he asks. 'We are miners coming back from the Peace River country where we have lost many of our companions dead from scurvy.'

June 8, date set for the meeting at Lesser Slave Lake and we are still on the Athabasca River.

June 13, Fr. Lacombe and myself are alone in our tent. It is evening. Suddenly there is a knock at the door of the tent. It was the whole personnel of the commission, led by the Governor himself, coming to pay homage to Fr. Lacombe on the day of his gold jubilee to the priesthood. The tent was too small, so we went outside to greet these stately visitors. Mr. MacKenna, Mr. Prudhomme, Mr. Coté each read well composed, and appropriate compliments, all of which were written on birch bark!

June 19, in the afternoon we disembark at Lesser Slave Lake. The people were waiting for us since June 8, and there were no signs of the hostile feelings that had been anticipated.

June 20, the first general meeting of the government commission and the Indians of the country. A huge tent has been set up in a large open area. The company has regained its martial style and put on its parade costumes. At the sound of the trumpet it comes to the edge of the tent and presents the arms to the government commissioners, who then take their places. I stand by Fr. Lacombe and Fr. Falher. On the opposite side, three protestant ministers of the Anglican Church are also present. The Indians arrive. The prairie grass serves to sit on. The Métis and white population surrounds them. The Governor stands, states his title and his commission, then produces his letters patent bearing the Royal Seal as authentic proof of his authority to conclude the

treaty. He then outlines the intentions of the government, the area of the territory it wants to annex to Canada, and the obligations it promises to fulfil.

The Indians are free to hunt and fish as in the past, but if they want to settle on lands to cultivate the soil or raise domestic animals, they are guaranteed sufficient land, agricultural machines, seeds, livestock, etc. Each year they are to receive \$5 per head. The chiefs will receive \$25 and the councillors \$15. This year the amount will be doubled, the reason, no doubt, being the happy occasion. Schools will be established for the instruction of the children.

The Indians are not obliged to accept the treaty; they are to deliberate on the government's propositions, to choose a chief and councillors to speak in the name



Provincial Archives of Alberta

An accomplished artist, Bishop Grouard painted the interior of the original church at Notre Dame des Victoires.

of all. These words being said, and having been very well interpreted in Cree by an English Métis, ex-clerk of the company [HBC], the Governor adjourned the meeting, indicating the time of the second meeting.

At the second meeting, the Indians come back with chief and councillors. Many questions were asked and answered on various points of the treaty. It was evident that these people were hesitant, afraid of not sufficiently preserving their liberty and involving themselves in ties they could not break.

Again, on the question of schools, the government declares in a general and vague manner that schools will be built and teachers sent to instruct their children. Mr. Laird stands and solemnly declares that the intention of the govern-

ment was to respect their freedom of conscience. 'I see here,' he said, 'missionaries representing different churches. I am hereby authorized to tell you that the government will give you teachers according to your church affiliation.' Even then. there remained some indecision in their minds, so Fr. Lacombe addressed them, and showed them that it was in their best interests to accept the propositions that were being made to them. The elders remembered that he was the first Catholic missionary of Lesser Slave Lake, the others knew him by name and reputation; all trusted him and his words must have convinced them, because they decided to adhere to the government's propositions.

At the third meeting, the final reading and signing of the treaty took place. There were still some hesitations at the thought of seeing all their past freedom and independence vanish forever. But the Chief, accompanied by his four councillors, took the pen and the treaty was signed. Immediately the safe filled with paper dollar bills was opened and each one hurried to receive the approved amount. But close by, merchants had already set up their counters, where in a very short time, the money was spent. The Métis in turn received their 'scrip.'

As we had suffered long delays and still had a large number of places to visit, and could still encounter mishaps, the commissioners held counsel and decided to divide the work among themselves. Instead of going all together to each designated place, they divided in small groups, each one having its own special destination: Mr. Laird and Fr. Lacombe at Peace Landing, Fort Vermillion and the Small Red; Mr. Ross and Mr. Mackenna at Dunvegan and Fort St. John. Major Walsh and Mr. Coté were to give 'script' to the Métis. General rendezvous was given at Fort Chipewyan on Lake Athabaska [Athabasca]. From there we would separate again, some going to Fort Smith, others to Fond Du Lac, Fort Macmurray, Lake Wabaskand [Wabasca] and finally Athabaska Landing."



Members of the Treaty 8 Commission at Pelican Portage. Seated from left to right are transportation manager H.B. Round; Commissioner David Laird; and secretary Harrison Young. Standing are interpreter Pierre Deschambeuault; two N.W.M.P. constables; camp manager Henry McKay, camp manager; and the cook, Lafrance.

R.C.M.P. Museum





A Different Tale of Treaty 8

The Oblates were not the only missionaries to attend the Treaty 8 negotiations. The Anglicans also attended and Rev. George Holmes wrote a rather different account of how the treaty negotiations

"... The first meeting took place on

Tuesday the 20th a week ago. ... Bsp. Gruard [Grouard] & Pere La Combe [Lacombe] were invited to occupy seats on one side of the Commissioners (the left side), and Mr White & myself on the other side (the right of the Gov^{nt} [government] for once at any rate). The terms were read by Mr. Laird & interpreted by Mr. Tate. After which the Indians - such as intended to take treaty, were asked to speak.

... The school question was opened by one of the Indians who had been posted by the priest in charge here to state that they wanted no one but himself. So this was done before the whole crowd, while the priest and & his followers chuckled in their sleeves. But the business was not yet closed, & there still remained one more opportunity of their withdrawing that statement in public - so I went up to the Chief & his Councillors....

... Next day ... He said pointing to the R.C. Bishop and then to myself. 'As we like the Bsp. to help us by his prayers schools & in any other way, so do we in like manner like the 'Akayasewayamehaweyi' now to come to us & help us in the same say.' ... I did not look at the priests myself, but Mr White [Anglican missionary] said that they looked as tho they had been struck by a bullet. I ought to have said that Pere La Combe addressed the Indians only after they had all accepted the Gov^{nt} terms, but you will see that that Church will try & claim the credit for him of being the means of its success. Pere La Combe tried to get the reporter afterwards to insert a clause - an untruthful one, to the effect that the Indians asked for French and

went. Rev. Holmes was convinced that Father Lacombe and Bishop Grouard were interested only in advancing the interests of the Roman Catholic Church.

English, whereas the Chief expressly said English leaving out French entirely. However, Mr. Laird, who has no love for the Priests; put a stop to that little game. We have every reason to thank God for the men sent up as Commissioners. ... The Commissioner remarked to me as follows. You need not think that because Pere La Combe is with us in such an important position we favour them because we have no sympathy with him or his Church.'

... In connection with the Halfbreed 'Scrip,' Pere La Combe & his Colleague had a great scheme. That was of inducing the people here to take land instead of money 'scrip' & to go on to Saddle Lake or somewhere near, where Pere La Combe has a large tract of country on which he hopes to settle Halfbreeds in order to keep them out of the way of Protestant contamination; and, in the end, secure the land for the Church having the poor halfbreeds as their tenants. I did all in my power to warn the people against being caught in this snare, and, thank God, the whole scheme fell thro. I dont think they have succeeded in one single case. Since then Pere La Combe & the priests here will not notice me in the road. The old gentleman was very genial before the treaty began; and they are all the same until you meet them on the battlefield."

-Rev. G. Holmes to Bishop Richard Young, June 24, 1899

The Treaties and Lac La Biche

"...[W]hen the Saddle Lake reserve was laid out, it was the intention to induce the Beaver Lake Indians, or such of them as would care to come, to settle at Saddle Lake reserve. It is also seen that the area of Saddle Lake reserve is nearly double of that which should be allotted to the Indians now resident there together with the Beaver Lake Indians. The total area of the Saddle Lake reserve is about 129 square miles. The Saddle Lake Indians number 244; the Beaver Lake Indians number 92, a total of 336, entitling them to a little more than 67 square miles."

-S. Bray, Chief Surveyor to Deputy Supt. General, May 18, 1906

Although there is still some confusion over who signed what, where, when, and how, two treaties technically apply to the Lac La Biche region: Treaties 6 and 8. At one time there were two distinct bands in the area who collected treaty money. After 1880 there were three bands. Another group, the Orphans of St. Albert, received treaty money but were not listed as a separate band.

The Peeaysis (also Peeasis, Payasis, and Peenaysis) band signed Treaty 6 on September 9, 1876. While it cannot be confirmed, the band appears to have taken its name from Okemow Peeaysis, Big Bear's third son. According to government records, the band was largely composed of Métis who lived in the Big Bay area at the northeastern end of Lac La Biche. In a memo dated October 10, 1876, Indian Commissioner Christie noted that Chief Peeavsis wanted his reserve established on the north side of Lac La Biche. At the time government paylists recorded a membership of 50. The following year it was 97, and by 1879 the band had grown to 309 with a land entitlement of 39,552 acres. However, in 1880 the band split into two groups, with 145 members going to Beaver Lake. After 1884 many Peeaysis band members opted out of Treaty 6 to take land scrip. Thereafter the numbers declined steadily until there were only eighteen left in 1900. The last recorded treaty payment occurred in 1909, after which the government paylists note that the remaining members, numbering only 13, were transferred to the Wabasca band



William Bleasdell Cameron, The War Trail of Big Bear, Boston, 1927, p.80 facing

Okemow Peeaysis, Big Bear's third son, and probably the founder of the Peeaysis band. Once the largest band in Lac La Biche, it virtually disappeared after 1910.

("Wabiscow" band in the official records). According to government records no land was ever surveyed or confirmed for the Peeaysis band.

Originally part of the Peeaysis band, the Beaver Lake band was formed in 1880 as a breakaway faction under the Headman, Rolling Thompson. The cause of the split remains unknown. From 1882 to 1888 the band was often known as the Kakwanum or Kahquanum band.

As punishment for taking part in the Riel Rebellion, the Beaver Lake band was stripped of its treaty rights. The band's horses were taken away and annuity payments were stopped for five years. The treaty rights were eventually returned and, for a time, the band received farming stock and implements to which it was not entitled because band members had not settled into farming.

The lack of farming at Beaver Lake was a source of concern for the Department of Indian Affairs and several attempts were made to have the Beaver Lake band move to Saddle Lake. The government wanted both to save money on administration and to "give the Beaver Lake Indians an example in the Indians who were already there [at Saddle Lake] and doing well for themselves." The government backed down. In a letter dated January 10, 1893, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs wrote to the Minister of the Interior that the policy was to let the Beaver Lake band "... remain hunting Indians as long as sufficient game can be found to support them." As the hunting slowly died out, the Commissioner continued, "... they [would] begin to come in by twos and threes until eventually the desired end is accomplished."

The "desired end," of course, was to have the Beaver Lake band become farmers. It never happened quite the way the government had hoped. With the help of Bishop Legal, Bishop of St. Albert, the Beaver Lake band began pushing for a reserve. The official request was made in 1906, by which time the band numbered 105. A reserve was subsequently established and confirmed on May 31, 1911 as Beaver Lake Indian Reserve No. 131 under Order-in-Council P.C. 1262. The band was given 13,852.4 acres of land, increased to 15,359.8 acres in 1930 and later revised to 15,232.9 acres in 1952.

Treaty 6 or Treaty 8?

"In connection with the controversial matter of Heart Lake, I am forwarding documents for your perusal ascertaining that the Heart Lake Band of Indians belong in Treaty 6. ... The I.A.A. [Indian Association of Alberta] has established this fact based on thorough archival research." -Joe Dion, President I.A.A. to

Jack Tully, Indian and Northern Affairs, October 1, 1979

Although today the Heart Lake Indian reserve lies in the region covered by Treaty 8, nobody has ever explained how a Chipewyan-Métis band came to collect treaty money since 1877 on a site bearing a Cree name.

The Heart Lake band appears to have originated from the union of a French Canadian employee of the Hudson's Bay Company named Desson or Descard and a Northern Chipeweyan woman. At some point they moved to Heart Lake, located about 125 km north-east of Lac La Biche. The name, "Heart Lake," was likely a misreading of "Miteo Sagahegan," meaning Conjurer Lake or Lake of the One Who Makes Bad Medicine (apparently there was some confusion of the word "miteh" with "heart").

In early September 1876, Chipewyan Chief Kin-oo-say-oo and his headman, Antoine Xavier, signed Treaty 6 at Fort Pitt. Subsequent adhesions to the treaty were made at Fort Pitt on August 9, 1877 and at Edmonton on August 21, 1877. On August 13, 1877 M.G. Dickieson, acting Commissioner for these adhesions, reported that he paid 36 "Heart Lake Indians" for the first time at Victoria (Pakan). Dickieson wrote: "There are a small number of Indians residing at Hearts' Lake who are farming a little. I paid them and told them I would report their situation to the Government, and though they did not number enough to form a band they might be allowed a headman." Each member of Heart Lake received \$17 - \$12 for 1876 and \$5 for 1877.

The government Paylist for the following year showed 89 members, now listed as "Hearts' Lake Chipeweyans," paid at Lac La Biche. The Paylist recorded Antoine as the Headman.

In the summer of 1881, Antoine wrote to the Indian Agent complaining that "[W]hen we entered the treaty Mr. Dickieson promised as [us] Chipewyans of Heart Lake that he would give us 6 cows, 1 bull and 4 oxen. We have so far received 2 oxen only." Shortly after this request, Anderson received another one from a person named Michel, "who has never taken treaty, wishes now to do so, and join Antoine's [Heart Lakel band." The requests would seem to indicate that the Heart Lake band had signed Treaty 6 and that was the official view. Commenting on the situation, E.T. Galt, the assistant Indian Commissioner, wrote that the "Chipewyans are Mackenzie River Indians and do not belong to Treaty 6 country. In one case however a Band under Chief Kinoosayoo has been allowed to take treaty and the man referred to in Mr. Anderson's letter, 'Michel' wishes to join this particular band."

That was how matters remained until 1912, when the Heart Lake band requested a reserve. In August of that year, J.D. McLean, the Saddle Lake (Treaty 6) Agent, wrote to his superiors in Ottawa "that in accordance with the terms of the treaty made with the Indians it is intended to survey a reserve for a Chippewayan [Chipewyan] Band of Indians on the West shore or [of] Heart Lake." There was one problem with McLean's letter - he forgot to mention which treaty. The government then directed J.K. McLean, an experienced surveyor, to include the Heart Lake survey in his schedule for 1913. Unfortunately, McLean died, and J.J. Steele took over. Steele had no experience with Alberta surveys. As a result, the following note appears on his plan of the survey for the Heart Lake Reserve:

"Plan of Heart Lake Indian Reserve No. 167 ... selected under instructions from the Department of Indian Affairs, and in accordance with the provisions of Treaty 8 ..."

Then, in April 1914, J.D. McLean, the Treaty 6 Agent, wrote to the Department of the Interior requesting that the Heart Lake Reserve be confirmed by Order-in-Council. It must have been a bad day for the Agent because in part of his letter he wrote: "The selection was made by Mr. I.J. [J.J.] Steele, D.L.S. under instructions from this Department, and the Reserve has been allotted in accordance with the provisions of Treaty No. 8."

That the Treaty 6 Agent ought to have known better goes without saying. But the mistake was passed all the way up the line so that the entry for Heart Lake in the Reserve General Register at the Department of Indian Affairs reads: "This land joined Treaty No. 8 June 12, 1899." How the Heart Lake Band managed to join a treaty which was not even negotiated until June 20, 1899 will forever remain a mystery. The question of whether the band was in Treaty 6 or 8 was addressed by Ottawa in 1967. A Department of Indian and Northern Affairs memo prepared for the Centennial declared that "it must be assumed that this band adhered to Treaty #6 and not Treaty #8." This was later confirmed by H.J. Ryan of the Land Titles Section of Indian Affairs and by the Indian Association of Alberta.

Why was Heart Lake's Treaty Status an Issue?

The question of whether or not Heart Lake was under Treaty 6 or 8 appears to have come to light in the late 1970s during an Indian Association of Alberta election. Apparently Heart Lake used Treaty 8 ballots. Then, someone noticed that the band was receiving its ammunition allocation of just under four cents (\$.04) per capita under the terms of Treaty 6 instead of the one dollar (\$1.00) allowed under Treaty 8.

Although the Register of Indian Bands listed the Heart Lake Band adhering to Treaty 6, Order-in-Council P.C. 2307 of September 20, 1916 set aside a little more than 11,000 acres of reserve under the terms of Treaty 8. Moreover, the Reserve General Register had the Heart Lake Band signing Treaty No. 8 on June 12, 1899. That could not have happened because the negotiations for Treaty 8 did not begin until June 20 (the Treaty was first signed on June 21, 1899) and Chipewyan bands did not sign until later in the summer of 1899. There is also no evidence that Heart Lake signed Treaty 8 - in fact there is no real evidence that Heart Lake ever signed Treaty 6.



Glenbow Archives

Members of the Heart Lake band in front the Lessard Store in about 1924. The historical record contains references to the noted hunting and trapping abilities of the Heart Lake Band.

The Orphans of St. Albert

Very little is known about a group which appears in official records as the Orphans of St. Albert. It was not an official band because it had no chief. But Treaty 6 annuity payments were made to Orphans of St. Albert attending school at Lac La Biche until 1908.

The Fur Trade in the Mission Era

"Lac La Biche ... [has] ... become the resort of a large body of retired servants and halfbreed families, who since the free trade movement at Red River have given much trouble and found ways & means to convey considerable quantities of furs to the Settlement."

-Sir George Simpson, 1853

Although missionary activities were more or less the primary force behind the development of Lac La Biche from 1853 to the coming of the railroad in 1915, the fur trade was by no means dead.

In a report to his superiors in London, England dated June 29, 1853, Hudson's Bay Company Governor Sir George Simpson expressed some apprehension over the impact that the Red River Colony free trade movement was having on HBC trade in the Athabasca country. Of particular concern to Simpson was Lac La Biche, which he had ordered abandoned in 1825. "There has been a Roman Catholic Mission for several years past established at Lac La Biche," he wrote, which has "become the resort of a large body of retired servants and halfbreed families. who since the free trade movement at Red River have given much trouble and found ways & means to convey considerable quantities of furs to the Settlement." Simpson was convinced that the people at Lac La Biche were hoarding and hiding the best furs to trade with the Red River free traders.

The next day Simpson sat down and wrote a letter to Bishop Taché complaining that Oblate activities were injuring HBC trade because the missions were providing a haven for free traders. Lac La Biche, he informed Taché, was becoming "a rendezvous for the petty traders." The Governor wanted the Bishop to "ensure your best endeavours to check the evil which must have sprung up without your knowledge."

In diplomatic language, Bishop Taché replied that there was no Roman Catholic mission at Lac La Biche as yet. When the mission became established, he would do all that he could to ease Simpson's complaint - adding that it probably would not be much since there was little he could do to stop the free traders from going where they wanted, when they wanted. It was a polite brush-off but a brush-off nonetheless.

Sir George Simpson's complaint about Lac La Biche becoming "the resort of a large body of retired servants and halfbreed families" highlighted the growing reality of a development fur traders had long feared: settlement. European style civilization and settlement were the enemies of the fur trade. As one HBC shareholder put it, "The policy of the Hudson's Bay Company from the beginning was to keep out every vestige of civilization and every attempt at colonization." Simpson believed that once places like Lac La Biche developed into settlements, they would not only become centres of commercial opposition to the HBC, but would foster a spirit of insubordination among HBC employees. That had to be avoided at all cost.

The upshot of all this was the return of the HBC to Lac La Biche in 1853, the same year the Oblates arrived to establish a mission. Simpson's primary aim was to head-off the free traders who were cutting into HBC profits. The HBC never fully succeeded at that task. But for the next 66 years, from 1853 to 1919, the Hudson's Bay Company maintained a post at Lac La Biche.

From 1853 to 1855 the new HBC post at Lac La Biche was managed by Peter C. Pambrun. He was replaced by the legendary Henry J. Moberly, who took charge from 1856 to 1858. Looking every inch like a crusty old fur trader, Moberly wrote that he "had the melancholy satisfaction and distinction of hunting ... the last wood buffalo killed" in the Lac La Biche region. Moberly left under somewhat dubious circumstances which he refused to elaborate in his fine book, *When Fur was King*. The post then came under the direction of Edward McGillivray. McGillivray left in 1861 and Peter Pambrun returned.

The late 1860s and early 1870s was a period of transition in the fur trade. The Hudson's Bay Company territory, Rupert's Land, was sold to the Canadian government and the increasing number of free traders in the Northwest was creating stiffer competition. The HBC laid claim to a thousand acres of land surrounding the post at Lac La Biche but Pambrun found the trading increasingly difficult. By 1873 he was complaining about the low trade returns and blaming the HBC on the grounds that the company was not supplying him with the proper trade goods. particularly shirts, cotton, capotes, and pants desired by Native people.

By 1874 the HBC had enough of

Pambrun's complaining and replaced him with William E. Traill. Son of Catharine Parr Traill, who wrote seven books, including her famous The Backwoods of Canada, William Traill had joined the HBC in 1864. His initial impression of the transfer to Lac La Biche was not overly favourable. "Lac La Biche is a very dull out of the way hole," he wrote. However, over time, he came to appreciate the beauty of the lake. As an educated person from a distinguished literary family, he also expressed some gratitude for the presence of the Oblate mission and a number of very intelligent men. As for the nuns, in typical 19th century fashion Traill thought of them as "very nice creatures."

Traill described Lac La Biche as the "centre of a heterogeneous population of around 600 souls" - 200 French Métis, 300 Woods Cree, and 100 Chipewyans or French Chipewyans. Under normal circumstances, such a population base would have given the HBC trader a fair



Photo courtesy of Mary Watson

Hudson's Bay Company post at Lac La Biche. Reestablished in 1853 on a small bluff at the east end of present day Lac La Biche, the post was destroyed by fire in 1873, plundered during the Riel Rebellion of 1885, and heavily damaged by fire again in 1915. The HBC closed the post in 1919. It was destroyed by fire in the 1930s. Some local residents claim that a secret tunnel, which housed a canoe, ran from the post to the lake - perhaps a bit of insurance in the event of another uprising.



Glenbow Archives

William Traill. The son of author Catharine Parr Traill, he joined the Hudson's Bay Company in 1864. He served at Lac La Biche from 1874 to 1881. Traill left the HBC in 1893 and began farming near Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. He died in 1917.

return and it is clear from Traill's letters that he believed that he would not remain at Lac La Biche for more than three years before moving up the HBC ladder. But the 1870s were times of change and by the end of the decade Traill was complaining that the company's introduction of "low tariffs" (the price paid for fur), attempts to end the debt system, and stiff competition from free traders was ruining him.

Indeed, it seemed as if George Simpson's

fears had come to pass. Traill wrote that the low prices did not "suit the tastes of the Lac La Bichers at all and they [were] clubbing together to hold on to their furs till they force me to pay higher." In many cases the free traders from Lac La Biche, such as Peter "Peachy" Pruden, Joseph Ladouceur, Antoine Ducharme, and someone named Stobbarts,* simply sold to the growing number of independents who were willing to pay higher prices. Newspaper reports of the day indicate they were willing to travel to Edmonton to do so.

Traill struggled at Lac La Biche until 1881, when he was posted to Lesser Slave Lake. He was replaced by Harrison Stevens Young, who had rejoined the HBC in 1871 and served at Edmonton and Lesser Slave Lake before coming to Lac La Biche. But even an experienced trader like Young found it tough going against the free traders at Lac La Biche. In letters to his superiors he claimed that he was doing "his utmost to secure the bulk of the trade" but was "surrounded by petty traders" who were cutting into his profits. Matters were not helped by the fact that the HBC post was ransacked during the Riel Rebellion in 1885. Despite the fact that Young was able to recover about half of the stolen goods, he began to face another new enemy: the cash transaction.

In many respects, the cash transaction transformed the fur trade economy. Before the introduction of money, people tended to live by a process of barter and trade. The HBC would issue "outfits" or other consumer goods in return for fur. The trappers were often in debt to the HBC and the debt could be paid only with fur. Even those who were not in debt bought

"Messrs. Pruden. Hamelin and Ladouceur, traders. of Lac la Biche, left for home this week with outfits of goods. They brought in about \$3,800 worth of fur, which was purchased by the H.B.Co., Norris & Carey and C. Walsh." -Edmonton *Bulletin*. March 16, 1889

^{*}Little is known about Stobbarts. In 1877, however, he traded 45 cart loads of furs. Pruden, who was considered a successful trader, managed only 7 cart loads.

The Little Thief

"On the night of the 11th Instant [of October, 1877], a son of William Ried [Reid], formerly of Fort Pitt [entered the shop]. The thief, a lad of about 13 years, had entered by one of the gable windows on which I had nailed cotton instead of parchment or glass. As it is several feet from the ground, I deemed it impossible almost for anyone, much less a child, to effect an entrance and am of opinion that he did not enter unassisted. He was detected by lighting matches to choose the articles he wanted. He had already taken to the amount of 110 Skins and had not done. I called the father in, who merely said, "How did the little scamp get in?" He did not so much as say a word to the boy, which with other circumstances would lead to the belief that he was not unaware of what his son had been about. I [sent] a dispatch to the Officer in Command at Fort Saskn., requesting his immediate presence to sift the matter to the bottom.

goods with fur. So long as the HBC trade monopoly continued, there was no need for money. With the loss of the monopoly and the introduction of cash, the free traders could outbid the HBC. Indeed, by the late 1880s the HBC was losing ground to the growing number of fur buyers who were travelling around paying cash at what HBC officials described as "extraordinary prices."*

*The introduction of cash into the fur trade economy led to a significant development in the Northwest and one which had a great impact on Lac La Biche: the appearance of the "pedlar" and travelling merchant. The most famous of these merchants in the Lac La Biche area was Alexander Hamilton (see Part Four: The Railway Era). Hudson's Bay Company officials viewed the pedlars as intruders and compared them to "sharks following a sinking ship." A few days after, a corporal & interpreter were sent for to apprehend the young scamp. He was on an Island with his father fishing. The weather was rough and no large craft so we had to wait several days [sic]. When the wind went down they secured their game and took him off to Victoria but before going, Subpoenaed myself and two other to appear at Fort Saskatchewan to testify what we knew about the affair. Altho I was daily expecting H[Harriet] to be confined [with Henry] I was obliged to leave her with her mother and shut up my shop and off we came.

The trial took place the day we arrived. He was found guilty and a true bill being found against him he was remanded till the arrival of a stipendiary magistrate who is competent to try criminal cases. I trust the young rascal will get a few years in the Reformatory which is all that will save him from the gallows."

-William E. Traill, 1877



By the late 1880s fur buyers were scouring the countryside, paying cash for furs. This ad appeared in the Edmonton Bulletin in 1916.

In 1889 the free traders of Lac La Biche sent out between \$8000 and \$9000 worth of fur. That cut so heavily into HBC profits that the company considered closing its post at Lac La Biche and diverting trade elsewhere.

Young was adamantly opposed to such a move. Despite the loss of trade at Lac La Biche, he argued, it was better to keep the free traders busy there. "[S]o long as opposition traders employ these men," he wrote, "we [the HBC] must do also, they can travel anywhere, depend on their gun for living. Set traps along their route, and kill for themselves, as well as trade. If Indian traders are to be discontinued. I cannot venture to hire other men & send them through the same country. Correct & regular accounts cannot be expected from these men, but taking one year with all other, good years, with bad years, I think the trade pays us as a whole. If we abandoned it. we only allow the opposition to get closer to our preserves in the north. Lac La Biche Post even if it does not pay very much - keeps the general interest by opposing even [those] who if allowed their own way would penetrate ... and damage the trade to a greater extent, than is now the case" (emphasis added). In other words, keep the free traders busy at Lac La Biche so they don't interfere in HBC operations elsewhere.

Company officials must have listened to Young because the Lac La Biche Post remained opened. However, its importance

*Young was not impressed with his replacement and believed the company had misunderstood him. "I think that Mr. Gairdner might be well employed at some trading Post in [the] North where there was no opposition," he wrote, "but at a Post like Lac La Biche where the officer in charge must move about, and keep track of all movements of his opponents, and have the sympathy and confidence of some of the people he deals with he [Gairdner] is hardly the right man in the right place."

******Company records list W.T. Livock as head of Lac La Biche Post, but all the evidence suggests that James Spencer was in charge.

"Furs of every description, for the last few years have been very scarce in the neighbourhood of Lac La Biche, and there has been a gradual decrease in fine fur, so that the local trade of that Post has been very small."

-Chief [HBC, Edmonton] Factor Richard Hardisty to Chief Commissioner J.A. Grahame, June 20, 1880

had declined. Thus, Young's replacement in 1889 was one W.F. Gairdner, whose services, according to company records, "do not appear to be valuable."

Despite opposition to his posting at Lac La Biche,* Gairdner ran the post until he retired in 1897. According to company records, he managed to earn a decent living. Still, Lac La Biche was viewed as a semi-retirement home for HBC employees who were past their prime.

That was certainly the case for James Spencer, who eventually managed the HBC post at Lac La Biche.** Spencer was an old hand by the time he came to Lac La Biche, having served the Hudson's Bay Company for 37 years. Company records described him as "getting a little deaf, and ... too lenient with customers to be advantageous to the Company." While those attributes made Spencer a liability to the HBC, they were qualities that the people of Lac La Biche respected and admired.

Spencer does not appear to have made much profit at Lac La Biche. One HBC official who examined the books claimed that the post showed only one profitable year as far back as the records went. The result was that the company closed all the outposts operated from Lac La Biche so that Spencer could focus on local affairs. How well Spencer did after that remains unclear, but when he retired in 1911 the HBC rewarded him with a pension of 100 pounds (about \$500) per year. That would have provided him with a very comfortable lifestyle.

By the time Spencer retired, the HBC post at Lac La Biche was in a state of rapid decline. Company records for 1914 indicate that only \$350 worth of furs was collected and in 1915 a paltry \$197 worth. The new manager of the post, Mr. Long, attempted unsuccessfully to diversify operations by extending credit and trade relations, first with a local sawmill, then with settlers. Finally, he began to extend credit and trade with local fisherman. Initially, at least, the trade with the commercial fishery was very profitable, but a severe downturn in the market in 1919 forced the closure of the HBC post.

"P. Pruden and Alex. Hamelin, traders of Lac La Biche, arrived on Friday afternoon with a large quantity of fur, to be sold here. Trade has been fairly good at Lac La Biche this winter, chiefly in bear skins. There was a good catch of fish. No snow on the prairie near the lake, but the roads are icy. Towards the north there is very little snow for about 100 miles. Beyond that point it is about two feet in depth. Fish are plentiful at Lake Athabasca this winter, so there is no starvation. The Indian department sent in 100 sacks of flour last fall to relieve distress should any exist."

-Edmonton Bulletin, March 9, 1889



Lac La Biche Archives

Portrait of James Spencer, seated, with his daughter, Tanny, and one of his sons, probably Marvin.



Harrison Young in his later years. After leaving Lac La Biche he was posted to Lesser Slave Lake. He served as a secretary on the Treaty 8 Commission of 1899.

Glenbow Archives

Part of a five year contract James Spencer signed with the HBC in 1872. Under it he was paid twenty pounds a year (about \$100).

Agreement made this Anday of Jam in the year one the cight hundred and between - 2 kervin years, formerly of the Panish of Jar of the one part, and the Governor and Company into Hudson Bay, represented by Arian and for other part, as follows. The said Arnes in ol dventurers of England, trading CKA contracts and agrees to serve the said Company in North America in the capacity of Clala for the term of five years to be computed from

Lac La Biche Archives

A Fur Trade Legacy

Of all the independents and free traders who plied the Lac La Biche area - the Prudens, the Hamelins, the Elmore Brothers, and the Revillon Freres - few were as successful or as long-lived as the Ladouceurs.

The original namesake, Joseph Ladouceur, came west from Quebec in 1804. He travelled with David Thompson and Alexander Henry. At some point he served out his contract and moved to Lac La Biche, where he married the daughter of Joseph Cardinal - the same Joseph Cardinal who had invited Father Thibault to Lac La Biche in 1844.

In 1813 Joseph Ladouceur's wife gave birth to Joseph, who married Julie Auger in 1843. It was this Joseph - listed in official records as Joseph Sr. - who established a trading post near present day Plamondon on what eventually became River Lot 3. Joseph and Julie had five surviving sons, four of whom were engaged in the fur trade: Joesph (Jr.), Augustin, Narcisse, and David. The fifth son, Adam, became a farmer. (Jr.). He moved it to River Lot 45, near Nortre Dame des Victories. It was a impressive two storey building with hardwood floors and an upright piano. From this vantage point, Ladouceur competed very successfully against W.E. Traill and other HBC traders. Ironically, he did it with goods he purchased from the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Garry.

Ladouceur harboured such a deep suspicion of banks that he kept all of his money in a big trunk hidden somewhere at the post. Legend has it that when he died after suffering a fall down the stairs, the money was never found.

Joseph's brother, Augustin, was also extremely successful. He was the first person to raise and breed fox in the Lac La Biche area. He made a small fortune selling fox to farmers on Prince Edward Island during the great fox boom shortly before the outbreak of the Great War (it is estimated that Augustin sold up to 200 fox breeders which were fetching prices as high as \$6000 each).

When Joesph (Sr.) died in 1890 the trading post came under the control of Joseph



Right. Joseph Ladouceur (Jr.). He built a trading post on River Lot 45, near Notre Dame des Victoires. A very successful trader, he competed against the Hudson's Bay Company using their own goods, which he purchased from Fort Garru. At left. one page of a four page HBC bill of lading, dated June 29, 1877. The total bill was more than \$1000. a considerable sum in the 1870s.



Provincial Archives of Alberta



Provincial Archives of Alberta

The trading post Joseph Ladouceur (Jr.) established near Notre Dame des Victoires. He died when he fell down the stairs and broke his neck. A suspicious man, he did not believe in banks and kept all of his money at home in a big trunk. Legend has it that after he died the post was searched from top to bottom but the money was never found. His wife later moved to Yellowknife. The old trading post remained a local landmark until it burned down in the late 1960s.

0/9 19 Se & M Sittie chante q. mette à 81/2 pour Joseph Ladoueux et en hormens de la félére IL Joseph.

"March 19, 1895. Father Tissier sang a high mass for Joseph Ladouceur in honour of the feast of St. Joseph." This entry from the Mission Codex gives some idea of the high esteem in which the Ladouceur family was held. The Joseph Ladouceur referred to here was Joseph Sr., who died in 1890.

Augustin Ladouceur and family. The first person in the Lac La Biche area to raise and breed fox, he made a small fortune by selling an estimated 200 breeders to Prince Edward Island farmers during the great fox boom between 1911 and 1914. Good breeders fetched prices between \$2000 and \$6000 each. An extremely frugal man, locals often joked that Augustin would "rip apart the sidewalk for a penny."



Provincial Archives of Alberta

The King of the Scowmen

"From Edmonton to the North Pole, everybody knows by sight or by reputation, CAPTAIN SHOT, he is not described otherwise!" -From the Notebook of a Young Missionary, 1911

At six foot three, with hawk-like features, scraggy beard, and piercing eyes, he looked more like a gunslinger from the American wild west than the king of the Athabasca scowmen. To be sure, Louis Fosseneuve could handle a gun. From his buffalo hunting days he had acquired the nickname "Sure Shot" and a reputation for fearlessness. But he turned away from hunting and lent his considerable talents to conquering the Athabasca River.

Louis Fosseneuve was born at St. Boniface, Manitoba in 1841, the son of Baptiste Fosseneuve and Marguerite Beaulieu. Though better known as Louis, his real given name was Louison and though his surname has appeared in various places as Fassoneure and Fousseneuve, so far as the Roman Catholic Church was concerned, the correct spelling was Fosseneuve and that was how it appeared on his certificate of marriage.

As a boy he watched for the fabled Red River Carts rolling in and out of the Red River Settlement during the buffalo hunts, trying to measure the success of the hunt by listening to the squeal of the axles. Quiet axles meant hunger, loud axles meant plenty. As a young man he took part in the hunt and began driving the carts.

Somewhere along the way Fosseneuve drove a cart to Lac La Biche for Bishop Henri Faraud. Like so many before him, he took one look at the beautiful lake and fell in love. He built a house near Notre Dame des Victoires and made a living packing goods for the Hudson's Bay Company and serving as a guide and dog-sledder. He was enormously strong. During one of the Hudson's Bay Company's famous "packing contests," he carried 800 pounds. He later began running scows on the Athabasca



Lac La Biche Yesterday and Today, p.24 Louison Fosseneuve - "Captain Shot"

River and it was here that he left his mark on Alberta history.

In 1867 Bishop Faraud was given the task of transporting five Grey Nuns from Lac La Biche to Fort Providence, located on the Mackenzie River about 200 km southwest of present day Yellowknife. He hired the 26 year old Fosseneuve to help carry out the important assignment. The original plan to travel with one of the Hudson's Bay Company barges so that the crews could help each other fell through because the Nuns were 26 days late arriving at Lac La Biche. Water levels were falling at an alarming rate, making the already dangerous trip down the Athabasca River and through the Grand Rapids extremely treacherous. The HBC boat departed and Bishop Faraud was left on his own.

5 Certificate of Louison Former fra F things labo is to certify that having France of age of Baftirle Formene to Reception on the one fact. and march age of Joseph in on the Julie 10 Au een drela Vid tathe security O. m.i. male 120 sel- he augh Ze Oblate Collection

Certificate of marriage of Louison Fosseneuve and Thérèse Ladouceur

This is to certify that Louison Fosseneuve, son of age of Baptiste Fosseneuve and of Marguerite Beaulieu, on the one part, and Thérèse Ladouceur, daughter of age of Joseph Ladouceur and of Julie Auger, on the other part, have been duly married in the church of Notre-Dame des Victoires of Lac-la-Biche, by Reverend Father V. Végreville o.m.i. on the 12th of november, in the year eighteen hundred and seventy-two.

E. Lacombe o.m.i.

note 1: The Fosseneuve are also known under the nick-name of "Shot".

note 2: Thérèse Ladouceur who was at least twenty one years old when married in 1872, is evidently old enough to get her pension.

Faraud had undoubtedly picked the young Fosseneuve because he knew he could trust him. He was not disappointed. Fosseneuve completed the mission in dashing style by successfully shooting the Grand Rapids - something not thought possible in a partially loaded freight scow until then. News of the amazing feat spread and "Sure Shot" the buffalo hunter became "Shot" the scowman and eventually "Captain Shot," the highly respected businessman.

Legend has it that Fosseneuve singlehandedly opened a new trade route to the North by running the Grand Rapids in 1867. But legends are a polite form of exaggeration. Scows had already been plying the Athabasca. What Louis Fosseneuve demonstrated was that the Athabasca River could be a viable, navigable waterway to the North which could cut transportation costs and he believed that fully loaded scows could be run safely over the rapids.

Not everyone agreed. After all, there were, among others, the Brulé Rapids, Long Rapids, Crooked Rapids, and Cascade Rapids to contend with. As late

"This lake [Lac La Biche] is at the height of land. We had to find the means to freight our luggage from there to the confluence of the two Athabaska Rivers. Two courses could be attempted: one by land and the other by water. One and the other were considered as unworkable. The first because of its bottomless and unending swamps; the second, because of its numerous and dangerous rapids. It was admitted as unquestionable by the Indians travelling these areas, and by the rowers in general, that if any barge ever tried to overcome these obstacles, no one could save his life. Even allowing for the part of some large exaggerations, the undertaking was not inviting."

-Bishop Henri Faraud, alluding to the important feat Louison Fosseneuve accomplished

as 1881 Hudson's Bay Company Factor, Richard Hardisty, doubted whether the rapids could be overcome. Even the venerable Fosseneuve was not sure which



Provincial Archives of Alberta

Running the Grand Rapids. Located approximately 260 km north-east of Athabasca Landing, the Grand Rapids presented a serious problem for transportation on the Athabasca River - that is, until Louison Fosseneuve demonstrated that they could be overcome.

rapids could or could not be run with fully loaded scows and it was not until sometime between 1883 and 1885 that he successfully guided a fully loaded flat bottom scow over the Grand Rapids. Nevertheless, in 1881 Hardisty was ordered to run a brigade of scows from Athabasca to Fort McMurray. The crews struggled but made the journey safely in the spring of 1882 and thereafter the Athabasca-Fort McMurray river route became the principal transportation route to the North.

Determined to capitalize on this development, Fosseneuve started a business and, as more people began to move into the North, he prospered - particularly during the Klondike gold rush of the late 1890s. No doubt his legendary reputation of being the first man to guide a scow over the Grand Rapids helped. But he also handpicked his crews. Each spring, fierce, hard men would come from Lac La Biche, Saddle Lake and Whitefish Lake to work the scows to Waterways (Fort McMurray) and then walk back. Fosseneuve paid them \$45 for the trip.

By the first decade of the 20th century, "Captain Shot," as he was now known, had become an institution unto himself. It has often been said that the mere mention of his name could hush a noisy crowd or stop a barroom brawl. He was certainly famous enough to attract the attention of Emily Murphy, the writer who became the first woman magistrate in the British Empire.

She met him in 1912 and published the account in *Seeds of Pine* under her pen name, Janey Canuck:

"Antoine presents me to Captain Shot, an Indian who has been on this river for forty-eight years. The captain is seventythree*. ... I say that Antoine "presents me" and I say it advisedly, for the North levels people, by which is meant the primitive north where they live with nature. In this environment, the man who builds boats and supplies food or fuel, is the superior of the man or woman who writes, or pro-



Some writers have claimed that Louison Fosseneuve "dealt the death blow" to the Methy Portage when he shot the Grand Rapids on the Athabasca River in 1867. However, it was not until the mid-1880s, after the construction of the 161 km Athabasca Landing Trail, that the major transportation routes to the North shifted and the Methy Portage was displaced. By the turn of the century almost all northbound traffic passed over the Athabasca Landing Trail and then down the Athabasca River, as the popular Hudson's Bay Company advertisement shown above illustrates. Although eclipsed by the development of railways, the old trail was used for the building of the Alaska Highway during World War II.

*Murphy was mistaken about this. Fosseneuve was actually 71 years old.

nounces theories. I may be able to hoodwink the people up south as to my importance in our community, but it is different here." Fosseneuve was later featured in the Saturday Evening Post.

Although Captain Shot spent much of his time at Athabasca Landing after it became the main departure point for scows, he always returned to Lac La Biche. Then one day in the spring of 1914 he injured his foot - perhaps by stepping on a nail or some other sharp object. The next day he could not walk and the day after found him in hospital. He had contracted blood poisoning, a fatal disease in those days. His friends departed quickly to bring his wife from Lac La Biche. On May 16, 1914, before she arrived, Captain Shot died.

His funeral was allegedly the largest ever held at Athabasca Landing. The procession was led by a squad of Mounted Police, the town band, and 150 fellow Métis, followed by a line of well-wishers which stretched for a mile. Captain Shot may have had a fierce stare but behind it was a generous

Fosseneuve Remembered

"I can recall an incident that I witnessed myself as a boy of fifteen. A man by the name of David Caron had brought a binder into the country from Vegreville, where he lived. He was a bachelor and lived by himself. We borrowed his binder to cut our small acreage. Before we had had an opportunity to take it back he agreed to loan it to the Fosseneuves, who arrived at our place with wagon gear on which they had fastened two poles to the bunks. The old man and his two sons picked up the binder. lifted it with the bull wheel intact, and placed it on the poles on the wagon in a matter of seconds. I do not know what the exact weight of the binder was, but I am sure it weighed at least a thousand pounds." -Frank Bouvier

nature which could bring out the best in people and they loved him all the more for it.



The Beaver

A typical crew from Lac La Biche and surrounding region. This photo was taken in about 1906 on Grand Rapids Island. The man kneeling in front with the pipe in his mouth is Julian Cardinal, the head guide.
Although Louis Fosseneuve will always be remembered as the first man to run the Grand Rapids in a scow, that was not his lasting legacy. Even a generous writer like J.G. MacGregor felt compelled to admit that Captain Shot was lucky. "His life ended at the close of his era," wrote MacGregor. "Even as they carried him to his grave the new railway was brushing out its right-of-way around the shore of his beloved Lac La Biche - the AGW which was eagerly reaching towards McMurray with the avowed purpose of doing away with the scows and scowmen of the middle Athabasca."

No, Louis Fosseneuve's legacy was not just running the Grand Rapids, but his ability to break down some of the social and racial barriers of the day. A hint is to be found in Emily Murphy's comments about Captain Shot and the levelling effect of the North. Murphy, who was not noted for her anti-racist beliefs, was right, though for the wrong reasons. It was not so much the North that levelled people as a person's worth and accomplishments were held to be more important than their social or racial background. As a Métis, Louis Fosseneuve may not have been a



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Packing at the Grand Rapids.

regular guest in the homes of the élite of Northern society, but the turnout for his funeral was a telling demonstration of how the vast majority of Northern society judged him.



Although scows could be guided through the Grand Rapids, it was very risky. Goods were often drenched and had to be unpacked and dried out before the voyage continued. In an effort to increase safety and reduce cargo loss, the HBC built a short tramway on a small island at the foot of the rapids. Goods were transported across the island at a rate of \$2.50 a ton. It is estimated that the tramway netted about half a million dollars a year in profit. It remained in operation until the Alberta & Great Waterways Railway was constructed.

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Athabaska Dick

When the boys come out from Lac La Biche in the lure of the early Spring, To take the pay of the "Hudson's Bay" as their fathers did before, They were all aglee for the jamboree, and they make the Landing ring With a whoop and a whirl, and a "Grab your girl," and a rip and a skip and a roar.

For the spree of Spring is a sacred thing, and the boys must have their fun; Packer and tracker and half-breed Cree, from the boat to the bar they leap; And then when the long flotilla goes, and the last of their pay is done, The boys from the bank of Lac La Biche swing to the heavy sweep. And oh, how they sigh! and their throats are dry, and sorry they are and sick; Yet there's none so cursed with a lime-kiln thirst, as that Athabaska Dick.

He was long and slim and lean of limb, but strong as a stripling bear; And by the right of his skill and might he guided the Long Brigade. All water-wise were his laughing eyes, and he steered with a careless care. And he shunned the shock of foam and rock. till they came to the Big Cascade. And here they must make the long portage, and the boys sweat in the sun; And they heft and pack, and they haul and track, and each must do his trick; But their thoughts are far in the Landing bar, where the founts with nectar run: And no man thinks of such gorgeous drinks, as that Athabaska Dick. -Robert Service, Rhymes of a Rolling Stone



At left, Robert W. Service's poem, "Athabaska Dick." Born in England in 1874, Service came to Canada in 1894. He eventually joined the Canadian Bank of Commerce and was posted to Whitehorse and Dawson City. He published his first book of poems, Songs of a Sourdough, in 1907. An instant success, it was followed by Ballads of Cheechako in 1909 and then, in 1912, by one of his most well-known collections, Rhymes of a Rolling Stone. These works earned him the titles "the Canadian Kipling" and "the Poet of the Yukon." He returned to England during the Great War and served as an ambulance driver. After the war he travelled widely but settled in France, where he died in 1958. Service once travelled down the Athabasca River with Louison Fosseneuve and there can be little doubt that "Athabaska Dick." was written in honour of the venerable Captain Shot.

"Here we are, at the beginning of December, back from Rome to Edmonton, last stop for the railway and modern civilization. ... Winter has come early, it is very cold and the snow is thick on the ground. I hire as guide, an excellent Métis. Louison Fosseneuve. He has come from Athabasca Landing to Edmonton just in time. ... We arrive at Athabasca Landing, but the great hope promised by our guide [of no snow] are soon gone. The snow has fallen here in great abundance and forces him to modify his plans. ... [H]e finds an old one [sleigh] in the shed of the Hudson's Bay Co., and having found also nice oak boards of the proper dimensions at the lumber yard, he started to build a second one with the help of another Métis. The whole thing took only one day. I'm supposed to ride in it, special class, jokes Louison."

-Oblate Annals, 1908

"Antoine presents me to Captain Shot, an Indian who has been on this river for forty-eight years. The Captain is seventythree, and his name is really Fausennent. He is called 'Shot' because he was the first man to shoot the rapids of the Athabasca. I say that Antoine 'presents me' and I say it advisedly, for the North levels people, by which is meant the primitive north where they live with nature. In this environment, the man who builds boats and supplies food or fuel, is the superior of the man or woman who writes, or pronounces theories. I may be able to hoodwink the people up south as to my importance in our community, but it is different here. And this is as it should be.

Captain Shot is engaged in building a boat for the Honourable the Hudson's Bay Company, and there is even a smoking-room in it. But, Blessed Mother! it is no trouble to build a boat now - none at all, for presently the railway will be completed and the boilers and metal fixings will come in over it, but in the old days - that is to say up till now - it was different. When the Northern Navigation Co. brought in the boilers for their boats, they hauled them a hundred miles over the trail from Edmonton, and it took seventy-two horses on each boiler.

'Didn't the government help any?' I ask. Oh yes! the late government at Ottawa tried to help transportation by sending in fifty reindeer; but the Captain has heard tell that some men swore terrible oaths at the government, and set their dogs about eating up the deer, for these men hold a kind of an idea it is railways the country hereabouts needs, but he is not quite sure as to the rights of the story.

...Captain Shot has many estimable sons, all of whom are rivermen and ship builders. They could hardly be expected to disgrace their name by becoming mere farmers or teamsters after the unwisdom of the white man's way. Ho! Ho! the idea of any one wishing to become a farmer."

-Janey Canuck (Emily Murphy), Seeds of Pine, 1914



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Above and below. Red River carts. Drawn by horse or oxen, Red River Carts provided one of the primary modes of transportation in Western Canada. Louison Fosseneuve drove such a cart to Lac La Biche for Henri Faraud. At right. Louison Fosseneuve is seated at the far right. The man seated at the far left is Joseph Ladouceur. The others are unidentified.



Photo courtesy of Millie Lansing



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In 1867 Bishop Faraud had to transport five Grey Nuns from Lac La Biche to Fort Providence. He hired Louison Fosseneuve to do the job. This photograph of a re-creation of that trip provides some indication of the hardships involved in early travel in Western Canada.

The Ride of a Lifetime

"It seemed as if we were rushing to certain death. In order not to see those raging waters we closed our eyes."

Sister Superior Lapointe wrote an account of the journey she and her fellow Grey Nuns made from Lac La Biche to Fort Providence with Louis Fosseneuve in 1867. It reveals quite clearly the hardships of early travel to the North and the

"At first, everything went on beautifully. It was charming to watch our boat ploughing the limpid waters of Lac la Biche, and the little rivers which flow out of it, and it was hard to understand any anxiety about the rest of the voyage. At night came the rain, an unwelcome downpour. But we had a pretty good tent for camping out. The rain did us no great harm, and we even listened with pleasure to the murmuring of a little stream of rain-water, running quite close to us, yet not harming us in the least. The morning was delightful, a good sheer terror of running the Grand Rapids. The narrative begins with the departure of the Sisters from Lac La Biche on August 3, 1867 and ends with their arrival at Fort McMurray.

breeze having driven the clouds far away. We sailed along quietly on a stream bordered with trees which looked lovely in the rays of the rising sun. At eight o'clock, we had to begin our day of sacrifices. In order to make them easier to bear, our good Bishop [Faraud] offered up the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar, and gave us Holy Communion, the food that makes the heart strong, so that it seemed to us as if we might, like Elias, walk for forty days and nights and feel no fatigue.

We had stopped near a rapid. Now, in

these northern climes, people do as in towns that are besieged. They send away the useless mouths. As the water was low, our guide told us that our absence would be welcome at this point. The Bishop set off before us, to walk through the wood. We followed as well as we were able, whilst the boatmen dragged the boat along from rock to rock. There is no unmixed pleasure in this world. It was a pleasure to follow in the Bishop's foot-steps, but the high grass was so sodden with rain that, in a little while, our habits were so heavy and clinging about us, that we could hardly move at all. And at the same time a hot sun was beating down upon our heads. Going as we could, and stopping now and then to take breath, we walked that day about six miles. We were very glad indeed when invited to take our seats in the boat once more. We had discovered that courage is not the same as strength: we were quite exhausted.

Next day we felt sure that there could be nothing before us so trying as that march in the Bishop's steps. We were chatting very cheerfully, when there was a sudden order to stop. The boat could take us no further. From the point where we were, down to the Athabaska River (about 60 miles), there was a succession of little rocky rapids, where the shallows made it impossible for a heavily-laden boat to go. What was to be done? The best thing probably would have been to make two journeys on each such occasion. But our Indian boatmen said they were too tired, and that when once they went down a rapid they would not bring the boat back. Were we then to throw away half of our stores, or to walk once more? The things that we had brought so far had cost us much trouble and expense. We resolved to save them, and to be foot-passengers again. What we had now before us was no longer mere trudging through wet prairies for a few hours. We had now to make up our minds to walk on, for two or three days, sometimes through dense forest, sometimes over steep river-banks, sinking in the mud at every step, having to cross multitudes of tributary streams, and losing ourselves in thickets which showed no way out.

The dear Bishop went before us, with hatchet in hand, clearing such pathway as could be cleared, cutting down trees, and throwing temporary bridges over the ravines. But all his efforts on our behalf did not prevent us from becoming absolutely breathless from fatigue. I was distressed to notice that some of the Sisters would not be able to hold out for long. However, we kept moving all the morning. Counting the windings in and out, we had done about fifteen miles. We were no longer in sight of the river, and so we could not tell whether our boatmen were ahead of us or were still behind. At last, through sheer exhaustion, we stopped to rest. We lighted a great fire, and in a little while we heard the cries of our men on the river bank, who, with a strong pull, all together, were dragging the boat through the water. Though not very valiant, we had got before them, after all.

At this place the boatmen halted, took a good meal and prepared to start again. I had to ask them to take Sister Ward on board. They agreed, on condition that she would pray to the "Great Spirits" for a favourable journey. Certainly, from the time of her going on board, the vessel went along very smoothly, hardly touching ground or rock anywhere. But for us, who tried to follow through the brushwood, things were less pleasant. We had not by any means recovered from the fatigues of the morning. The boatmen were far ahead of us; we screamed until they heard us. They stopped and waited. We had walked about six miles more. There was nothing for it but to go on board. But no sooner were we there than the barge grounded. The boatmen were obliged to carry the luggage on their shoulders. So it was that in two or three hours we had advanced only half a mile. Everybody feeling fatigued, we camped out for the night somewhat earlier than usual. What would the morrow bring us?

Sleep is the kind restorer, and the night sometimes drives all cares away. All that particular night the rain came down heavily; the flashes of lightning were frequent,



Running the Grand Rapids.

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and the thunder shook the earth beneath us. We arose with aching sides, and stiff and feverish limbs. We trembled to think of what might be before us. But blessings and hardships come together; the heavy rain had made the river rise, and so we were told that all might now come on board. Thereafter, our barge went on smoothly, for the most part, and was easily managed by the boatmen in certain difficult parts of the river. However, we had to walk occasionally, but not for so long, nor under such conditions as on previous days.

After our third day of anxiety and fatigue, we saw at last the Athabaska River, which promised us two or three days of smooth sailing. This river has its own dangers, but we were able at first to enjoy the innocent pleasure of feasting our eyes upon scenery truly grandiose. The fast-running Athabaska carried us along towards the north, as if by enchantment, whilst giving us time to admire the picturesque and varied spectacles which every turn of the river presented. It was a pleasure too great to last.

We thought we had gone through a great deal already, but we had only made a beginning: we had only served a little apprenticeship. One day, about two o'clock in the afternoon, we heard in the distance a booming, monotonous noise, seeming to come from the river. As far as the eye could reach there was nothing to account for the sound. I asked what it might mean, and I was advised to wait and see. In two hours we had reached Grand Rapid. At this place enormous rocks form an island in mid-stream. The waters on both sides fall into depths, on which one cannot look without growing dizzy. How our hearts beat high as we approached the island, for it was on that island that we had to land, at the very spot where the divided waters race madly to either side. One wrong turn of the oar might have sent us headlong down the rapid, but our skilful guide brought the boat safely, away from either current, into a little landing-place between two rocks. There we got out, and passing from one trunk of a tree to another we were on the island, saving a fervent Deo Gratias. The men, not without much labour, carried all the luggage to the other extremity of the island, a distance of half a mile. But the barge remained. This could not be carried. It had to be drawn. The man-power was unequal to the task. The Bishop, looking very grave, came to ask us

to bear a hand. We were harnessed two and two, and our additional help was such that the barge was successfully brought to the further end of our island. This was "portaging," indeed! As the Bishop had charged us not to pull hard, lest we might hurt ourselves, no harm was done, though we were fatigued, and the boatmen gaily complimented us on not having broken our collars. But I should have liked some of our Montreal friends to see us. Five Grey Nuns in harness! What a pretty picture!

So far, so good. Our next task was to get away from the island, and from the rapid. Whilst our boat danced up and down upon the waves, it was loaded with all the luggage, and then we ourselves got in. Moving off was really frightening. It seemed as if we were rushing to certain death. In order not to see those raging waters we closed our eyes. In a few seconds we opened them, to find that the danger spot was past. After that experience, we were less afraid, or, at least, we could face the danger without growing pale. Indeed, some of the Sisters professed to enjoy shooting the rapids. Well, for the lesser ones it may be

so. But they are of all sorts and sizes. One afternoon we climbed up a hill to gather saskatoons, of which there was a great abundance. As we were hurried, and as the fruit is small, we broke off some branches and brought them away to the boat. Just as we were eating our delicious fruit, the boat leaped into a rapid; the iron cutwater, striking a rock, was broken in pieces with a loud noise; the boat was shaken as the branches of a tree are shaken; and we in an instant were down in the whirling waters. What a fright we had! The fruits fell from our hands. Of course we screamed. Our hearts beat rapidly, and the perspiration streamed down our faces. People sometimes speak of being only frightened, and not hurt. But, half an hour after our fright, some of the Sisters were still so hurt as to be hardly able to breathe. This sudden descent put an end to all boasts about enjoying the rapids. However, it was the last of our difficulties on the Athabaska River."



In 1737, a young widow, Madame d'Youville, and four other women formed a lay group dedicated to helping the poor of Montréal. Ten years later they took over the bankrupt Hôpital Général of Montréal. They were called "les grises," or "tipsy women" because of the d'Youville's alleged profits in the brandy trade.

In 1755 the group was officially recognized as the Sisters of Charity of the Hôpital Général. They adopted a grey habit in direct response to the derisive "les grises" and so became better known as the Grey Nuns (Soeurs grises).

In addition to their hospital work, the Grey Nuns developed farms, a mill, an orchard, and even a bakery. During the mid-19th century they further expanded, particularly in Western Canada. By the mid-1960s the order was about 7000 strong but has since declined to under 4000.

When Madame d'Youville died in 1771, Montréalers mourned the passing of someone of great spirituality with miraculous healing powers. In 1959 Rome officially recognized her spirituality. She was the first Canadian-born person to be beatified - an important step on the road to sainthood.

The Grey Nuns came to Notre Dame des Victoires at Lac La Biche in 1862, where they opened a school and an orphanage. They relocated to Saddle Lake in the late 1890s and were eventually replaced by Les Filles de Jesus.



A group of Grey Nuns at Notre Dame des Victoires in 1895. Note that one of the Nuns could not keep the stern composure for what was obviously a staged photo.

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"... We arrived at Athabasca-Landing the evening of the third day. The town (future city, they say, when the railway reaches here, possibly in one or two years) is after all a small port, or building-yard of naval construction. ... I'm talking very seriously: thus when we go and ask Mr. Fosseneuve about the date of departure, he points to half a dozen flat boats under construction, around which about twenty workers at least, are busy nailing, patching, taring and preparing the oars.

Our boats have a flat bottom 16 meters by 4 and 1 deep. Our fleet is composed of seven units. The head of the flotilla is this French Canadian Métis of whom I spoke to you about already, Mr. Fosseneuve. From Edmonton to the North Pole, everybody knows by sight or by reputation, CAPTAIN SHOT, he is not described otherwise. He is an excellent person who has rendered and proposes to render yet services that our bishops have been pleased to recognize. For years already he has placed at the disposition of the missionaries his experience as Old Soft-Water Sea-Dog!

Boat no. 7 became the Admiral. Shot, who had his blanket elsewhere, sent for it and put it here, meaning that this would be his quarters. From time to time he would come at the back to smoke a pipe, and sing. He would also talk about the older missionaries: Tache, Grandin, Faraud, Grouard, Clut, Pascal.

Pelican Portage is like the station for Wabasca mission which is about 50 miles away. We were supposed to stop about only two hours, but the weather having suddenly become impossible, and the Captain informed us that the halt would have to be a full day. Pelican Portage has its own celebrity. About ten years ago, a man walking on the bank wanted to light his pipe. His match caused a terrible explosion. The smoker had a real scare and a few injuries. He then went to Edmonton and told what happened. A company was formed and workers came to the site. A well was dug to verify the presence of a lake of petroleum.

A few days later, we arrived at the Grand Rapids. The Athabasca River (which is called the La Biche River in this part of its course) can measure an average of 2 kilometers in width and flows a considerable amount of water. The banks on each side can measure from 30 to 40 meters high. Thanks to all the precautions inspired by prudence and experience, we made "the jump" without the slightest accident. I don't know if many Whites would dare try the same deed.

On the 18 or 20th we had reached Fort McMurray. The following day we gave to our worthy CAPTAIN SHOT and his crew the hand-shake of farewell, and proceeded in the following days toward Lake Athabasca."

-Notebook of a Young Missionary of the

Athabasca, 1911

Politics Lac La Biche Style

"March 5, 1891. Election for the Commons. In all 30 voted out of 43 voters. The agent and his farmer visit the school and appear very satisfied. The agent gives \$5.00 to the Sister to buy some prizes or something else for the children.

June 23, 1896. Election day has arrived. The poll is opened. The brothers go to vote during noon recreation. Everything went quietly. No alcohol this time. It is like a policeman is there. The Conservative candidate has 6 votes, the Liberal candidate has 45. Our people seem happy, but could it be they voted against their religious interests?*

November 3, 1904. Finally, election day. [Frank] Oliver (Liberal) 50 votes. [Richard] Secord (Conservative) 41 - 2 or 3 spoiled ballots. All of this week would have past for the best if the liquor had not run on the side of Oliver's supporters. Mr. Lemire and the Lamoureux left us this evening. They passed the night at [Captain] Shot's.

November 4, 1904. Departure for Edmonton of the electoral agents. Last night a dance at Shot's for Secord's voters. Louis Lavalle was refused entry for having voted in favour of Oliver."

- From the Lac La Biche Mission Codex

*The Roman Catholics were not particularly fond of Wilfrid Laurier and the Liberal Party, especially after 1896. when Catholic minority rights in Manitoba were curtailed under the so-called Laurier-Greenway agreement. This agreement took away the separate schools rights the Catholics had prior to 1890. This explains why the Oblates made the references they did regarding the federal elections.

Mad Dogs and Englishmen

In December 1889 Superintendent Griesbach, commanding "G" Division of the Northwest Mounted Police, reported that a special patrol had been sent to Lac La Biche "to enquire into certain rumors which were afloat charging that intoxicants were being manufactured, and that much gambling was going on there." The good Superintendent's patrol found that no intoxicants were being produced but reported that there was a good deal of "Indian gambling" which could not be hindered.

While on their way back to Headquarters, the patrol picked up a man named Coyle, who was apparently found wandering about looking for a certain Lord Lonsdale. The Superintendent noted that Coyle "was brought into headquarters, and is still here, a hopeless case, I fear."

Coyle may not have been as insane as Superintendent Griesbach thought. In 1888 the Earl of Lonsdale did in fact travel to the North West to hunt and he may have passed through Lac La Biche. The Earl, whose name was Hugh Cecil Lowther, had a reputation as a patron of every kind of sport. What became of poor Coyle remains a mystery.

"GRIST MILL FOR SALE At Lac la Biche. 21 inch Turbine wheel, 1 pair 4 feet stones, and Smutter. Complete. Price \$2000 Peter Pruden Lac la Biche

Address via Pakan, P.G., Alberta." -Ad in Edmonton *Bulletin*, August 18, 1888

The Decline of Notre Dame des Victoires

"Brother Moalic looked over this Mission from top to bottom and wept on its ruins."

-Oblate Codex, February 24, 1905

Ironically, the feats performed by Louison Fosseneuve which did so much to help Notre Dame des Victoires ultimately proved to be its undoing. When Fosseneuve demonstrated the possibility of running the Grand Rapids, the Athabasca river provided an economical route to the North. Recognizing that fact, in 1875 the Hudson's Bay Company established the Athabasca Landing Trail

In 1888 Bishop Faraud negotiated an agreement with the Hudson's Bay Company under which the HBC would transport goods for the northern missions by way of the Athabasca river. Once assured of the transportation issue, Faraud no longer needed Lac La Biche and decided to leave. His departure marked the end of Notre Dame des Victoires reign as the most important Oblate mission in the Northwest.

While the mission did not disappear, it certainly went through a long period during which it struggled for survival, particularly after the decision was made to relocate many of the mission's functions to St. Paul.

"[M]achines, agricultural tools, animals, cows and horses in good numbers were brought to St. Paul to the great displeasure of dear Fr. Tissier, who never forgave us for having plundered, as he said, the Lac La Biche missions to enrich that of St. Paul."

-Fr. Joseph Therien

between Edmonton and Athabasca Landing. Goods were landed at Edmonton, shipped to Athabasca Landing and then to points north. By 1886 it was the principal route to the north, displacing even the Methye Portage. But the new route - which bypassed Lac La Biche - meant that Bishop Faraud no longer needed Notre Dame des Victoires and when he left the mission went into a state of rapid decline.

"In the spring of 1891, Fr. Collignon descends with Fr. Husson at Athabaska Landing. Until last year, the missionaries leaving the country went through Lac La Biche, residence of the Bishop, then would leave for Winnipeg through the prairies, a long and difficult trip. Those coming in the country would make the same trip, but in reverse. The merchandise destined for the North followed the same route. But from now on. the railway having reached Calgary, the missionaries and their merchandise will follow this route: from Calgary they come to Edmonton, and from Edmonton, Athabaska Landing. It will be faster and cheaper."

-Constant Falher, O.M.I., 1910

"[T]he present intention of the Roman Catholic mission is to remove the boarding school at Lac La Biche to the mission site on Blue Quill's Reserve." -Department of Indian Affairs, Annual Report, 1897 "Lac La Biche Mission is presently experiencing considerable suffering. It was an important establishment. The Grey Nuns had charge of the orphanage and school: it was for a long time the residence of Bishop Faraud. But we find ourselves forced to transport this establishment to Saddle Lake. The Saddle Lake Indians have the larger number of children for the school, and given the distance, we could hardly convince them to bring their children to Lac La Biche. On the other hand, the Department of Indian Affairs wishes that the school be on a Reserve for us to receive its help. For all these reasons we are forced to transport the residential school to Saddle Lake, thereby diminishing the importance of Lac La Biche. This Mission being reduced in importance and its personnel being brought to a few members only, the sawmill and flourmill both lost their raison d'être, and we have decided to transfer them to the Metis colony of Egg Lake where they will have greater use.

Naturally the population of Lac La Biche is very annoved by these changes, and has expressed displeasure through petitions and otherwise. We have tried to make them understand that it was necessity alone that forced us to come to such a decision. But to express their anger, they have taken their children away from the school. The population of Lac La Biche is of 310 inhabitants, mostly Métis and a few Indian families. There are eight Sisters looking after 60 children, 28 of whom don't belong to the Treaty. Many of the non-Treaty children have lately been taken away. The transfer to Saddle Lake must take place as soon as the new building is ready.

-Missions des Missionnaires Oblats, 1898



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The Sisters residence at Notre Dame des Victoires. It was used by the Filles de Jésus - the Daughters of Jesus - after the Grey Nuns left in 1898 for St. Paul (though a few stayed later). The Filles de Jésus came to Lac La Biche in 1904-05 in an effort to carry on the work of the Grey Nuns. They opened a boarding school which operated until the early 1960s.





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As if to add insult to injury, in 1921 a tornado devastated parts of Notre Dame des Victoires. One unknown author wrote: "The Lac La Biche Mission, which had faced many difficulties and had been stripped of almost everything, was hardly at the end of its trials. One could say an evil genie was bent upon making it disappear." Legend has it that some of the salvaged lumber was used to build a church near Egg Lake, which was later destroyed by a tornado.



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Lac La Biche in 1914

"It's a lonely little village, practically brand new, with only a few dozen inhabitants. Life must be primitive."

-Felice Di Angelis, July 31, 1914

In late July 1914, just before the outbreak of the Great War. Felice Di Angelis, the Italian Consul at Edmonton, led a group of prospective settlers to the Lac La Biche area. They came to establish an Italian colony - the second colony of its kind in

"July 27, 1914

...For the record, my companions are: Giuseppe Billos, a well-to-do middle class type, a bit equivocal; Beniamino Maragno, who never speaks; Pio Bonifacio, a typical Roman labourer, pleasant, strong, rough and ready; Antonio Piemonte, from Venice, a very charming talker and an old fox; Teofilo Piemonte, awkward son of the other, who, perhaps to counterbalance his father, never talks.

July 31, 1914

...At half past three we reach Lac la Biche, a little hamlet on the shore of the lake bearing the same name. This, at least, is some interest.

It's a lonely little village, practically brand new, with only a few dozen inhabitants. Life must be primitive. We find an inn as soon as possible and literally invade it. The inn has been open for only a week and everything is new and clean. I make friends with someone from Montenegro; his face and expression express a vivid intelligence. He speaks a bit of Italian and has seen a good part of the world. Around five we go and see the office of the Hudson's Bay Company. This is interesting since it set up shop here about sixty years ago when this country was absolutely untamed. These people are the missionaries of trade and they've done a lot of good for this country.

From the Hudson's Bay Company settlement to Lac la Biche it's only about a mile and in an hour we are back in the village. We take a tour admiring this quiet, peaceCanada - to the southwest of Lac La Biche. Today, those communities are known as Venice and Hylo. Di Angelis kept a diary of the journey and he had some candid things to say about Lac La Biche.

ful place and the lovely lake. Everybody is friendly and everyone had advice to provide as to the quality of the neighbouring land. My friend from Montenegro sticks close to me, proud to be seen in the company of someone civilized. His company is interesting and I am glad to have it. In the evening a bit of unpleasant news: the inn will feature Native dancing for the whole night. We don't look forward to a sleepless night; but our forecasts are actually short of the mark.

The dancing begins at nine: naturally we are also invited. The dancing is far from uninteresting; the dancers of both sexes are all Indians or half-breeds. I've never seen anything quite like it. In their dress, they imitate the Europeans, but in such a strange, peculiar way that their clothes seem the work of a tailor suddenly gone mad.

The dances, the likes of which I've never seen before, are quite noisy and consist in beating the feet on the floors, which bodes ill for tonight. The novelty and interest of the situation manage to keep me in the room that serves as the would be dancing hall until eleven o'clock. Upstairs, in my room, the noise of the dances can be fully appreciated and is quite hellish. I thank God for giving me only one good ear and proceed to sink that one in the pillow. Eventually I manage to fall asleep. The dancing continues until six in the morning. Alas for the boundless reach of European insouciance! Saturday, August 1, 1914

I am awakened by the dancing which still goes on in such a noisy way, so typical of a semi-barbarous people. My companions, since they don't have just one good ear like me, have been unable to get any sleep the whole night and now swear, totally oblivious of their manners. At seven we are ready and all eaten up and we take off riding on the cart. The fresh horses merrily trot away. We coast the lake which from time to time can be seen, bright and blue among the trees. After eight miles on the road we come to the old Mission of Lac la Biche.

The place, set on the large blue lake, is enchanting. Around it the green of young forests. The simple peaceful church provides a poetic, religious note. It must be easy to feel the presence of God in this peace. We stop for about an hour. We talk with the French Catholic friars manning the mission, who do so much good or, at least, could do so much good for these poor, simple Indians."

Below: Lac La Biche just before the outbreak of

the Great War.



Photo courtesy of Gabriele Erasmi

Felice Di Angelis, the Italian Consul at Edmonton who led an expedition to the Lac La Biche area in order to establish an Italian agricultural colony. Communities were set up at Hylo and Venice. Only one other Italian agricultural colony appears to have been established before Hylo and Venice - at Leamington, Ontario.



Photo taken by Felice Di Angelis

Lac La Biche and the Great War

"The War that will end War"

-H.G. Wells

In Flanders' fields the poppies blow Between the crosses, row on row, That mark our place; and in the sky The larks, still bravely singing, fly Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow, Loved, and were loved, and now we lie In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe; To you from failing hands we throw The Torch; be yours to hold it high. If ye break faith with us who die, We shall not sleep, though poppies grow In Flanders fields

-John McCrea

John McCrae was born at Guelph. Ontario in 1872. Educated at the University of Toronto, he became a physician. He wrote a number of medical texts but also published poetry. Like thousands of Canadians, he enlisted in 1914 in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, where he served as commanding officer of the 16th

On June 28, 1914 a young Serbian nationalist named Gavrillo Princip, aided by a group of his friends from the secret society known as the "Black Hand," assassinated the Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria and his wife Sophie at Sarajevo.

Francis Ferdinand was the heir to the Austrian throne and his assassination unleashed tensions which erupted into one of the most devastating wars in human history.

On August 2-3 Germany began to invade Belgium. The German action

Battery, Canadian Field Artillery. He died of pneumonia at Boulogne. France in January 1918. His poem, "In Flanders Fields," originally published in Punch Magazine in 1915, still provokes one of the most enduring memories of the Great War - the rows upon rows of graves to mark the dead.

prompted a British ultimatum to Germany and an automatic declaration of war on August 4. The Great War, as it was known at the time and for long after, had begun.

When Britain was at war, Canada was at war. That was how it was in 1914 and no one argued differently. Canada was illprepared to fight a war. True, on paper the Canadian militia was 75,000 strong. But their training consisted of an annual two week training course during which the men engaged in field skirmishes, some physical training, and community singing. The regular army was about 3000 with no reserves. Canada had no navy and no airforce at the outbreak of the war.

Initially that did not matter much because most people thought it would be a short war. There was a great deal of talk about going off to "kill the Kaiser" and returning before Christmas. It was perhaps for this reason that Prime Minister Robert Borden promised that the war effort would be conducted on a voluntary basis. Or perhaps it was the belief in the strength and ability of the mighty British Empire, a belief which sparked a wave of patriotic duty to Great Britain.

Nowhere was that patriotism better expressed than in a speech former Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier - who had a reputation for opposing Canadian participation in war - gave to the House of Commons. "It will be seen by the world," Laurier said, "that Canada, a daughter of old England, intends to stand by her in this great conflict. When the call goes out, our answer goes at once, and it goes in the classical language of the British answer to the call to duty: Ready, Aye Ready."

The call did go out and Canada answered to a degree that surprised even the government. The goal was to raise 25,000 men for an expeditionary force, the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). They were to be trained at a special camp set up at Valcartier, Quebec. Within a month 33,000 showed up. Of these 30,000 sailed in early October for England, where they received further training before being sent off to France.

The CEF received its baptism of fire at the 2nd battle of Ypres in April 1915. The Canadians held the line against a wicked gas attack by holding to their faces a cloth soaked in urine. After three days of hard fighting the Canadians and the British drove back a much larger German force. But the cost of the battle had been staggering. Out of a front line force of 10,000 men, 1850 had been killed, 3411 wounded, and 776 taken prisoner.

That was only the beginning. The CEF went into action at the battle of St. Eloi in April 1916, at Mont Sorrel in June, and at

the great Somme offensive in the fall of 1916 - all of which cost some 33,000 casualties. Then it was on to the famous battle of Vimy Ridge in 1917, where the Canadians captured a German stronghold in just five days. Although under the command of British Lt-Gen Sir Julien Byng, it was the first time the Canadians attacked together as a unified force. They achieved a remarkable victory, for themselves as well as for the nation. Said one veteran: "We went up Vimy Ridge as Albertans and Nova Scotians. We came down as Canadians." Still, the price of victory was high, 10,602 casualties, of which 3598 were killed.

Prime Minister Robert Borden tried to meet the appalling losses by upping the size of the CEF. The original target of 25,000 grew to 50,000 by the end of 1914; to 150,000 by the summer of 1915; and then to 500,000 in early 1916. By 1917 losses were outstripping enlistments and Borden decided to impose conscription.

Most Canadian historians have judged conscription a complete failure. It created hostility in Quebec and Western Canada and added little to the forces overseas (only 124,558 were added to the CEF through conscription and only 24,000 of those ever made it to the front). Nevertheless, Canada made a significant contribution to the war. More than 600,000 men and women served in the CEF, another 10,000 in the Canadian Navy, and some 24,000 in the British air forces. And it all came from a country with a population of barely 8 million. The cost was high. The CEF lost 60,661 dead and 173,000 wounded, many of them permanently.

Although the battleground was thousands of miles away, the war nevertheless had a significant impact on Lac La Biche. Some men went off to fight and returned as heroes. John Wolstenholme, later a resident of Lac La Biche, received the Distinguished Conduct Medal for "conspicuous gallantry" at the battle of St. Eloi, when he carried messages on two occasions under dangerous circumstances while facing heavy fire. Others were not so fortunate. Many died on the field. Others, such as Charles Spencer, survived the horrors of the battlefield only to be struck down by disease.

At home the situation could sometimes be just as tense. Anxious parents waited for news of loved ones wounded at the front. Sometimes anxiety turned to grief when the CEF death certificate arrived in the mail. At home, food was subject to rationing. Attempts were made to rename places to appear patriotic. New government policies were imposed, such as income tax - which must stand as the most enduring "temporary measures" ever introduced in Canada. On occasion the war demanded sacrifices that raised suspicions, particularly when the press reported that rails for the Fort McMurray extension of the Alberta and Great Waterways Railway might be shipped to Europe for the war effort. But there were lighter moments too. A cultural exchange between Lac La Biche and France, for example, received significant press coverage.

NOTHING is to be written on this side except the date and signature of the sender. Sentences not required may be erased. If anything else is additionable post card will be destroyed.

Lac La Biche Archives

News from the front was heavily censored. Soldiers filled out field service cards.

7	CANADA REGISTRATION BOARD	
Gal et L	This certificate must always be carried upon the person of the registrant	
at 110	THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT Carrling at Lac La Dicke	
	residing at Lac Labiche Whe was duly registered for the national purposes	
satal	of Canada this 27 day of June 1918	
	Deputy Registrar	

Lac La Biche Archives

Registration card from the Great War.

Loho Report & Les Shuir progress dusc CANADIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY are then aber I Lend news I the 14/18. COCKSPUR STREET friends from Tum & Tume Gen Sociely LONDON, S.W July youlgib. also supplie Smale Comfirle me INFORMATION BUREAU. alear Su the Way of againthe heres papers, fruit i beg to inform you that the G.E. Specier Stationery de Schenever they he 49 Canadian Balla to 432, 956. her our Visities for the satisfield ader fr who is now at 1st liathere General Gosal in send you have delail Engla Hew Caster-on - Lyne his our neg(report of Music Spences a suffering from Shapene Woundson Condition Yolus Iney Reduci Caverhier both legs & he was wounded at Lie Was Usilia ley one of our authorized (ieres The carey part of the Week toho reports, he would like Edu Papers of Cigaretter which One Soen Will be that he get You will like in Ruow luc have I When Usil Our Curachan regularly al-the different nospilals. Lac La Biche Archives

The news that every parent dreaded to hear. Pt. G.E. Spencer was George Edward Spencer, son of James Spencer and Lilly Elmore. James Spencer was in charge of the Hudson's Bay Company post a Lac La Biche. Ypres - called "Wipers" by most British and Canadian soldiers - was the scene of the Canadian baptism of fire.

July 7, 1916

Dear Sir I beg to inform you that Pte G.E. Spencer No. 432,956 49th Canadian Battalion who is now at 1st Northern General Hospital Newcastle-on-Tyne England, is suffering from shrapnel wounds in both legs & he was wounded at Ypres. He was visited by one of our authorized visitors the early part of this week who reported he would like Edmonton papers & cigarettes which our society will see that he gets. You will like to know we have

who report to us their progress & we are then able to send news to their friends from time to time. Our society also supplies small comforts in the way of cigarettes, newspapers, fruit, stationary etc. whenever they may be asked for by our visitors for the patients. Hoping to send you more detail in our next report of Private Spencers condition. Yours Truly Beatrice Caverhill pp LBC

ent hospitals

visitors visit our Canadian

wounded regularly at the differ-

War Veterans From France on Visit to Lac La Biche

"Lac La Biche, Feb. 20 - From last Monday's train stepped a figure clad in a uniform strange and new to the average Canadian, but still somehow familiar to us from war illustrations - a smart, alert looking man in neat and spotlessly clean bluegrey uniform, wearing a steel helmut dented in several places, thus telling its own story, and his breast decorated with a bronze medal, showing the eagle of France. The crowd assembled at the depot for the tri-weekly diversion of seeing the train in, gaped in silent wonder on this figure, who looked like the ideal dashing soldier, a modern d'Artagnan. Your correspondent, ever on the spot for news and recognizing the uniform of France, stepped forward to give him the welcome of Lac La Biche and to get the "why and where?"

The reply came in crisp, soldierly fashion and to the point: 'Jules Brunnelle, of the Motor Cycle Corps of the 139th Regiment of the Republic Francaise, Reservist of Class 1906, on active service since the beginning of the war. In action in Flanders. Verdun, and at the Somme. Wounded three times. Decorated with the Distinguished Service Order of France. Working for the McArthur company at the outbreak of the war. Shipped from Bordeaux to America on a thirty days' furlough, at the end of which am to rejoin my regiment at the front. Am visiting friends here - the Spencers of Big Bay and Mons, and Madam Avignon. Can you direct me to them?'

This your correspondent gladly did, and the soldier slung his pack on his shoulder and marched off into the dusk to his destination.

Neat and clean as the soldier was, every bit of his accoutrement serviceable and of good material, we specially remarked his brown service boots, well made, pliable, and comfortable, and withal, neat in appearance. Thick durable soles, studded with rounded hob-nails, which would give a grip on slippery ground. We could not



Lac La Biche Archives

George Spencer on the left, with Jules Brunnelle of the Motor Cycle Corps of the 139th Regiment of the Republic Francaise. Note the footwear of the French soldier.

help thinking of the efficiency of the French army administration, which could provide such a superb footgear for their immense army in the field, in spite of the fact that at the outbreak of the war the French army was notoriously short of boots, and that their country is invaded by the enemy and a great part of industrial France destroyed. France may not be able to boast of such eminent soldiers as General Snow Shoes - pardon, Sam Hughes* - but at the same time they have not to regret such "souls of honor" as Colonel Allison, and no \$100,000 tips to typewriter ladies. Then again, they may have different ways of dealing with war grafters, to those we have in Canada."

> -Edmonton *Bulletin*, February 23, 1917

*Sir Samuel Hughes, Minister of Militia, headed a body known as the Shell Committee. As the result of many scandals, Prime Minister Borden fired Hughes in November, 1916.

CANADIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY, 14/16. OOCKSPUR STREET. LONDON, S.W. INFORMATION BUREAU. 19/7/16 Dear Si i beg to inform you that Pt. Q. E. S 956 - 49th Com 432 who is now at 1st hosthern general Aspite m. Type - Eughurd y'our auteorised visito 17th and she reports he is getting on well and glad to arrive the paral cent in . As is only to be supported. fuids his wounds' natures todioris, we hope som to be able to about. upat that he is ups and Reatrice

Lac La Biche Archives

Though of perhaps small consolation, such letters must have come as a great relief.

19/7/16

Dear Sir I beg to inform you that Pte. G.E. Spencer No. 432,956 - 49th Canadians who is now at 1st Northern General Hospital Newcastleon-Tyne-England was seen by our authorised visitor on July 17th and she reports that he is getting on well and was glad to receive the parcel sent to him. As is only to be expected, he finds his wound rather tedious, but we hope soon to be able to report that he is up and about. Yours truly

RBH.Beatrice Caverhill

During the war there was a tremendous outbreak of patriotism reflected in the renaming of cities and towns across Canada. Many of the name changes honoured various commanders of the Great War. In the Lac La Biche area, Big Bay was renamed "Jellicoe" in honour of Sir John Rushworth Jellicoe, Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet from 1914-1916 and First Sea Lord from 1916-1917. The new name of Jellicoe never captured the public imagination and soon Big Bay again became the common term used to describe the eastern end of Lac La Biche.

Wartime Suspicions in Lac La Biche

"A shiver went down the spine of the community on account of a current rumor that the rails intended for the McMurray extension might be diverted from this purpose and shipped to France. However, the work of laying steel goes steadily on, and the assurance of Mr. McArthur, which appeared in the Bulletin, that he could get all necessary rails from the States, put our minds at rest. Though it means a great deal to the people here and elsewhere to have the railroad to McMurray finished as soon as possible, still they would be willing to sacrifice every hope and expectation for the cause of the allies, if they could be sure that this was a real and honest effort to help win the war. As it is, the shady Allison transactions. the infamous horse deals and other scandals and waste have made them more than a little skeptical as to who would really reap the benefit of tearing up of the rails in the West."

- Edmonton Bulletin January 5, 1917

The Triumph



Lac La Biche Archives

Victory March, London, England, 1919. The Great War ended at 11:00 a.m. on November 11, 1918.

And the Tragedy

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Lac La Biche Archives

Above. The dreaded Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) death certificate. At right, the grave of Henry Norwest, probably the most famous Métis soldier of the Great War (and one of only 830 Canadians to be awarded the Military Medal and bar. Norwest was a friend of the Spencer family.



Lac La Biche Archives





Provincial Archives of Alberta

Known as a "Decapod", Engine No. 51 was purchased by the Government of Alberta in 1926. It is pictured here pulling into Lac La Biche. Engine No. 51 was a familiar sight at Lac La Biche until the 1950s. Note the water tower in the background.

The Magic of Steel

"While just now Lac la Biche is the newest of towns and the most modern of summer resorts, it is one of the oldest permanent settlements in what is now Alberta. But it has been tucked away in the woods, far from modern routes of travel, for so long that it has been lost sight of, and as well, the reasons that made it attractive as a place of settlement in those earlier days have been forgotten. Now that it has become a divisional point on the Waterways railway it emerges into the spotlight after years of eclipse." - Edmonton Bulletin, July 31, 1916

On Thursday, February 4, 1915, at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, amid whistle blasts and a cheering crowd, the first locomotive arrived at Lac La Biche. The iron beast belonging to the Alberta and Great Waterways Railway was greeted by a large banner advertising "A Grand Dance" to "welcome the steel."

The headline in the Edmonton Bulletin

story covering the event expressed optimism: "Vast north country is being transformed as by magic wand." And so it was. Long time resident and businessman Alexander Hamilton recalled that before the railway came, "Lac La Biche was a very poor country ... There were only cow trails between Edmonton and Lac La Biche. It would take us seven and eight days to make the trip with our groceries and supplies."

By 1916 the *Edmonton Bulletin* was writing of the "smart little town" fast becoming an important divisional point from Edmonton on the Waterways railway. More than this, Lac La Biche was "Edmonton's newest summer resort, and its only one equipped with a hotel that in situation plan, construction and appointment is as good as the best in either town or country."

The arrival of the railway catapulted Lac La Biche into the 20th Century and in many respects transformed the community. A railway station, railroad yards, long distance telephone, electric street lighting, sidewalks, and new business concerns were just some of the changes. The population also grew, from fewer than 75 people before the railway arrived to more than 500 by 1941 according to census records. And the community formally became the Village of Lac La Biche in 1919, complete with a Mayor and Village Council.

The Alberta and Great Waterways Railway, the A & GW, was one of many projects to happen during the great Canadian railway bonanza of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Originally the brainchild of James "Peace River Jim" Cornwall, who in his time had been a sailor, fur trader, riverman, and businessman, the A & GW soon attracted the attention of Alexander Rutherford, the first premier of Alberta.

Rutherford had two great visions: railways and the north. His dream was to make Edmonton the gateway to the western Arctic. So powerful was the vision that Rutherford fought the 1909 provincial election on his railway program. And so important was the railway program that, after he won the election, Rutherford established a provincial Department of Railways and appointed himself Minister.

The A & GW was the centrepiece of Rutherford's program. The line was to run from Edmonton to Fort McMurray, about 560 km to the north. The government passed legislation with loan guarantees of up to \$20,000 per mile (for 350 miles). "The bill to Incorporate this railway company is in the hands of the Premier, which as Mr. Boyle stated, is sufficient guarantee that the company means business.

... J.R. Boyle, member for Sturgeon, gave his unqualified support to the bill. He had travelled over a great part of the country to Lac la Biche and felt confident there was no finer section of farming land in the province. Lac la Biche he characterized as one of the prettiest to be found anywhere even going so far as to say that it would make the famous Lake Louise look to its laurels. The country beyond was one of immense possibilities. The railway would revolutionize trade in the north and would make it possible to travel by Pullman and sleeper from New Orleans to the Arctic Circle. A second Cobalt would be opened up, as the great area to Great Slave Lake was possessed of untold mineral wealth. He had every reason to believe the road would be a remunerative enterprise."

> -Edmonton Bulletin, February 13, 1909

Also backing the project were two brothers from Kansas City, Missouri, William and Bertram Clarke, vice-presidents of The United States Trust Company. They had associates at Winnipeg. The Clarkes claimed that the line would be completed in three years. The \$7.4 million in railway bonds were sold through J. Pierpont Morgan's people in New York. The Alberta Government's end was handled by Charles Wilson Cross, Alberta's first Attorney General and Rutherford's right-hand man.

The first sod was turned just north of Edmonton in November 1909. Crews were sent north to begin grading the line and surveying began near Lac La Biche. By mid-December grading had been completed on part of a seven mile section and twothirds of the route had been cleared.

Then things began to go wrong. Early in the new year, criticism began appearing in

the press. At first it was mild, the rail was too light, it was laid on spruce ties stuck in mud and so on. Matters began to heat up after allegations were made that the railway and construction contractor might be the same company (meaning, of course, that the contractor could cheat the company and nobody would be the wiser). Further allegations of graft and corruption led to a split in Rutherford's Liberal ranks. The Minister of Public Works, William Cushing, resigned. J.R. Boyle, member for Sturgeon and a strong supporter of the railway, began calling for an inquiry. That was followed by the resignation of Charles Cross and his deputy, Sydney Woods. More discrepancies appeared. The Canada West Construction Company, the contractor building the line, was indeed a subsidiary of the A & GW and \$740,000 had gone missing. On top of that, a plan of the route, which had also disappeared, was found on top of the Speaker of the Legislature's cupboard. The document did not have a signature of approval. The government had not officially endorsed the plans!

In an effort to divert mounting opposition and pull his party together, Premier Rutherford appointed a Royal Commission. It was to no avail. With the evidence beginning to pile up, Rutherford himself resigned on May 26, 1910. He was replaced by Arthur Lewis Sifton, a former Chief Justice of Alberta.

Although the Royal Commission found no wrongdoing on the part the government, Sifton cancelled the contract with the railway company. But what to do about the \$7.4 million in bonds which the government had guaranteed? Sifton passed legislation allowing the government to sell the bonds and stick the money in general revenue. The bondholders objected and they took their objections to the highest court in the British Empire, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. The JCPC declared the legislation ultra vires and ruled that the money had been raised to build a railway and that was all it could be used for. The money was frozen and there was no railway. All the govern"The importance of Lac la Biche as a distributing centre for large and rapidly developing farming districts is becoming more accentuated all the time. It increases the business of merchants already long established here and brings new concerns to share in the extension of trade. Messrs. A. Brube [sic, Berube] & Co. have recently opened up as general merchants, also as agents for farming implements, while last week Messrs. Hamilton & Co. opened a new store on Main street.

Lac la Biche distributes to the prosperous farming communities of Plamondonville, Bouvier, Jellicoe (formerly known as Big Bay), Owl River, Grandin, and even as far as Normandeau and the Egg Lake district." -Edmonton *Bulletin*, June 26, 1917

ment needed to do was to find some enterprising individual to take over the A & GW.

But good fortune smiled. As the matter of the A & GW bonds wound its way through the courts, a speculator, railwayman, and lumberman from Winnipeg by the name of John Duncan McArthur wrote to his friend Premier Sifton in the fall of 1913. "On behalf of myself and my associates", McArthur began, "I propose to take over the Alberta & Great Waterways Railway on terms satisfactory to representatives of the bondholders, and the Bank. ... The Government will, of course, waive any default of the Railway Company to date...."

Sifton liked what he heard and presented McArthur's plan to the Legislature. The plan was given the green light and, after a second sod turning ceremony, construction began at the end of December 1913.

Vast North Country Is Being Transformed As By Magic Wand

Fifty Families Leave on One Train For the Peace River District—Many Settlers and Much Good Land Along the Scenic Route of the Alberta and Great Waterways—360,000 Bushels of Grain Raised in Bon Accord District Last Year—Rejoicings at Lac la Biche When Steel Enters Town Limits—Prosperous Community of Two Hundred Homesteaders Near Skeleton Lake

LAC LA BICHE TURNS OUT TO WELCOME STEEL

The Alberla and Great Waterways rallway has reached Lac la Bichc.-On Thursday afternoon, at five o'clock.tc the accompaniment of joyous blasts from the engine with the track-lay. ing outfit, and the gladsome shouts of nearly the whole native population the rails were laid to the edge of the new town limits, thus placing the old Hudson's Bay trading post on the highway of civilization. The local residents still are celebrating the important event. All kinds of joyful gatherings are in progress, and on Monday night there will be what is termed "A grand dance"—according to the streamer which stretches across the village street—in order to "welcome the stecl."

"Track-laying is being continued for 25 miles beyond Luc la Biche this winter. or for a total distance of about 140 miles from the function with the E. D. and B. C.—153 miles, altogether. from Edmonton. When it is rememhered that the preliminary suryeys were not begin until just over a year ago; and that during the twelve months the reconnaisance work was completed, the right-of.way cut, the grade put in shaps, and the fittel laid, some idea will be guined of the vast amount of work that has been accumbilahed.

Edmonton Bulletin, February 6, 1915



Lac La Biche Archives

"I am in receipt of your favour of the 19th instant with regard to the Athabasca Railway, which has a Dominion charter for a road from Edmonton to Fort McMurray, on the Athabasca River, and from thence to Fort Smith, and who would desire a guarantee on their bonds. We have about a good bushelful of such applications and if we were to guarantee the bonds of all the companies who have nothing to offer us but a paper charter, the debt of the Dominion would soon run up into the billions. We have refused systematically to endorse the bonds of any company, except the Grand Trunk Pacific and the Canadian Northern, who have given us what we consider ample security of good faith and of their ability to carry on the enterprise."

-Sir Wilfrid Laurier to A.C. Rutherford, March 26, 1907





Lac La Biche Archives

A & GW Station at Lac La Biche

The Godfather of Lac La Biche

"A man of wonderful energy, enterprise and tenacity of purpose." -Montréal Gazette

But for the machinations of a Winnipeg entrepreneur, the Lac La Biche Settlement might have remained just that, a scattering of habitations along the south shore of the lake from the island which is now Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park to somewhere west of Notre Dame des Victoires.

The course of development was changed by John Duncan McArthur, a man who visited Lac La Biche only a few times and only after the town had begun to develop on the site of his choice. Although his connection with the community lasted just nine years, he was responsible for bringing Lac La Biche into the 20th Century.

J.D. McArthur was born on a farm near Bainsville, Glengarry County, Ontario, little more than a stone's throw from the Quebec border. His first language was Gaelic and he grew up in a Scots Presbyterian home governed by the strict observance of religion and the values of the community, belief in hard work, loyalty to family and clan, a deep-rooted Canadianism - plus faith in the Liberal party (which virtually owned Glengarry for generations).

McArthur was a child of Canada's first railway age. By the time he could walk he could hear trains on the main line of the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada as they went through Bainsville. As a teenager he cut fuel for the Grand Trunk's wood-burning locomotives. At the age of 24 he left the farm and country for good and travelled west to Winnipeg, and, if the recollections of others are accurate, it was with the avowed intention of becoming a railwayman. This is believable because while J.D. stood to inherit the family farm, he had no interest in farming and the land was eventually taken over by his sister and her husband.

The brown-haired, blue-eyed young man



Provincial Archives of Alberta Railway builder John Duncan McArthur.

who arrived in Winnipeg in the spring of 1879 was a well-muscled six foot three in height, mild-mannered and soft-spoken. He enjoyed a dram of scotch and the occasional cigar. Perhaps he had not yet acquired his liking for bridge (never played on Sunday) or the habit of playing solitaire by the hour while he thought. But this was essentially the man who was to play a key role in the history of Lac La Biche.

The surviving record is sketchy, but it appears that he had been working as a lumberjack since he was 16. And railway construction in western Canada during the 1880s was work made to order for a strong young man with the make-do experience of a farm upbringing and the skills of a woodsman. McArthur found work immediately.

By 1889 he had 10 years of experience, he had made some money as a subcontractor and he was ready to step out on his own. He became a full-fledged railway contractor, and over the next 30 years he built more miles of railway than any other contractor in Canadian history. Although much of this was branch-line construction he also carried out such major projects as the 250 miles of the National Transcontinental from Superior Junction, Ontario, to Winnipeg and the 300 miles of the Canadian Northern from Kamsack, Saskatchewan, to Edmonton.

But J.D. McArthur was first, last and always a lumberman. No matter that he may have wanted a railway career, wherever he saw fine timber in the course of his construction work, he went back and logged it. He did this at Atikokan, Ontario, then at Birtle and Lac du Bonnet, Manitoba. He was to do it again in Alberta.

There is little doubt that his success was owed partly to his political connections. Along the way he became a friend not only of the powerful Sifton brothers but also of no less a personage than Sir Wilfrid Laurier.

He may have met Sir Clifford Sifton before that gentleman became the minister responsible for railways in the Manitoba government, in 1889, but contact after that date was continuous, and Sifton was a frequent visitor to the McArthur home. The connection could have done McArthur no harm while Sifton was Minister of the Interior in the Laurier government, with oversight of the granting of timber berths on Crown land.

While McArthur was busy making money in lumbering and railway construction the new province of Alberta had been overtaken by railway fever and the Legislature was approving charters whenever asked to do so. Among these was that of the Alberta & Great Waterways Railway, which was conceived as a link with barge transportation on the Mackenzie River system - and also as a means of tapping the resources for the Athabasca bituminous sands in the Fort McMurray area.

This charter soon fell into the hands of an American promoter whose conduct became a scandal leading to the downfall of Alberta's first premier, A.C. Rutherford.

Rutherford's successor was not chosen by the government caucus in the Legislature but appointed by Laurier. The successor was the chief justice of Alberta, Arthur Sifton.

Sifton inherited a railway mess. The Waterways project was moribund. The settlers of the Peace River area were screaming for a railway but no developers were offering to build it. The opposition in the Legislature was pressing the government for a railway policy. And suddenly into the midst of this untoward situation stepped J.D. McArthur.

He acquired the charter of the Edmonton, Dunvegan & British Columbia Railway, which authorized a railway from Edmonton to Prince George, BC. This charter had been issued several years earlier by Ottawa but never put to use.

McArthur's only motive may have been, as some believe, to gain access to timber. But it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that he was persuaded by Arthur Sifton.

This suspicion is reinforced by the fact that after McArthur had undertaken to build a second railway in Alberta, Sifton answered the continuing demands of the opposition for a railway policy by declaring that "McArthur is our railway policy."

However that might have been, on September 13, 1913, Sifton read to the Legislature a letter from McArthur which said:

"Agriculture is but in its infancy in the district surrounding Lac La Biche. Until the Alberta and Great Waterways railway was built, only a few hardy pioneers and some half-breeds living around the missions made any attempt at crop growing."

-Department of the Interior, Canada, Bulletin No. 47, The Lac La Biche District Alberta: A Guide for Intending Settlers, 1923



Lac La Biche Archives

As a lumberman, J.D. McArthur hoped to exploit timber in the Lac La Biche region, especially the large stands of white spruce. To that end he built the "Egg Lake Spur" south of Lac La Biche. Logs were hauled by rail from the lumber camps along this line to McArthur's North West Lumber Co. sawmill at Dunvegan Yards on the outskirts of Edmonton. By the spring of 1917 McArthur had taken about eight million feet of logs. The logging came to an abrupt halt when the Great Fire of 1919 swept through the region.

"On behalf of myself and associates I propose to take on the Alberta & Great Waterways Railway on terms satisfactory to the representatives of the bond-holders and the Royal Bank, and propose to construct same between the original terminals on a route to be approved by the provincial railway department under the construction contract entered into with the railway company for this purpose."

McArthur had not taken this step only as a favor to Arthur Sifton or anyone else. Nor was he interested in building the Waterways line for the sake of whatever traffic might be generated by exploitation of the Athabasca sands. In his mind the only resource worth developing was timber, and in this instance he reversed his usual order of proceeding.

By the time McArthur's letter was made public he had incorporated North West Lumber Company Limited and built a sawmill at Edmonton.

This was done on the strength of what

his timber cruisers had found around Missawawi (Big Egg) Lake and around Lac La Biche.

The "route approved by the provincial railway department" went up the west side of the lake, more or less where Highway 63 now runs. Yet McArthur blithely ignored this and followed the approved route only as far as Skeleton Lake, where he turned the line east (this is the basis for the persistent belief by people in the Plamondon area that "Lac La Biche stole our railway").

There is a hint here of connivance, or at least acquiescence. Given his friendship with McArthur, Sifton was unlikely to have been unaware of the timber cruising. He must have known that the best timber had been found on Big Egg (Missawawi) Lake and south of the Lac La Biche Settlement. So he could hardly have been surprised to learn that this was where McArthur wanted the railway to go.

By 1914, the railway grade had reached

the timber along the south shore of Big Egg Lake, where Italian immigrants would establish the communities of Hylo and Venice. But for the charter's requirement that the line must be built to Waterways, McArthur might then have turned it southeasterly to reach the timber of the Christy Creek area and indeed it will be shown presently that he had this in mind. Meanwhile, however, he had received a very attractive offer from the Hudson's Bay Company.

If he were to put a station on that company's land he would be given not only the station site but several other parcels, including the corner which is now called McArthur Place.

Announcement of this deal led to an ingathering from the Lac La Biche Settlement to the townsite which was laid out around the station. By 1916 the shape of today's Lac La Biche was discernible.

In that year McArthur opened the Lac La Biche Inn, but this venture was a failure, partly due to the adverse publicity which resulted from a multiple drowning. The attempt to provide fast service between the hotel and Edmonton by two McKeen gasoline-powered rail cars also failed. The McKeen cars were simply not designed for the Alberta climate. These were portents.

In 1915, while the people of the Settlement were migrating to the new town, McArthur began to build a branch line southeasterly from Dewar siding, near Hylo. This was never more than a logging railway, known locally as the Egg Lake branch. Steel was laid for about 8 miles, into the timber south of Christy Creek, but the grade was completed to St. Lina and the location survey beyond that point. This was planned by McArthur as "the Saskatchewan extension" of his railway system, and indeed he had a preliminary survey run as far as Prince Albert. The extension was to be part of the Central Canada Railway.

McArthur had incorporated a Manitoba company with this name in 1905. It was authorized to build a line northwest from Winnipeg. He now had a charter covering the distance from Edmonton to Prince George. But the ambition died aborning.

The year 1916 turned out to have marked the pinnacle of McArthur's career. He owned three Alberta railways and a number of successful lumbering operations. He was engaged in railway construction at several places, including northern Manitoba, where he was building the Hudson Bay Railway.

In August of 1917, however, financial difficulties and wartime shortages of material compelled him to suspend work on the Saskatchewan extension. In May of 1919 an enormous forest fire, which all but destroyed Lac La Biche, also destroyed a large lumber camp, a train loaded with logs, and most of the standing timber which remained on McArthur's berths in the area. In 1920 he defaulted on interest payments for the bonds of his railways, which were guaranteed by the Province of Alberta, and the province took over the lines. An arrangement was made which would have allowed him to buy back the A&GW but he was never able to do so.

He began immediately a valiant attempt to recoup. After two years spent salvaging what he could in the Lac La Biche area he moved his lumbering operations first to Mitsue and Widewater, on the Edmonton, Dunvegan & BC line at the east end of Lesser Slave Lake, then to Green Court.

But he was 67 and his strength was failing. Then, on the eve of being rewarded for his political loyalty by being appointed lieutenant governor of Manitoba, he died of leukemia.

Once asked whether he regretted the railway ventures which had cost him a fortune estimated at \$26.5 million J.D. McArthur said: "The money was never mine. It always belonged to the country."



Edmonton Bulletin, April 10, 1917

A newspaper article of the day giving some indication of the impact J.D. McArthur had on the development of northeastern Alberta.

Glenbow Archives

Log-boom on Lac La Biche. The arrival of the railroad led to the development of new industries in the Lac La Biche area.

How Plamondon Lost The Railway

In 1909 the Alberta Government passed "Chapter 46, An Act to Incorporate the Alberta and Great Waterways Railway Company." The Act authorized the construction of the railway from Edmonton to Fort McMurray, via Lac La Biche. In 1915, when the construction was reaching Lac La Biche, changes were made in the Act that altered the route, and thus the future development of the area. Five quick strokes of the pen, and a cursory side note in the margin of the Act stating "am. 1915: C-2" shifted the railway to the east side of Lac La Biche, away from Plamondon. It is not known who wielded the pen, nor under whose authority, but the deal still has the faint aroma of expensive brandy, fine cigars, and overstuffed armchairs of some long forgotten old boys club.

Below is a likeness of Section 4 of the Act and the manner in which it was altered:

4. The company may lay out, construct and operate a railway of a gauge of four (4) feet eight and one half (8 1/2) inches (with all convenient branches, whether over or under six miles in length, and sidings) from Edmonton north-easterly to a point at *am. 1915:C.2* or near the west end of Lac La Biche, thence to a point at or near the west end of Lac La Biche to the eastern end thereof.

A Ride on "Muskeg Limited"

"A truly remarkable railroad was the A. & G.W., as the rotting box-cars, which had fallen from the crazy track into the ditch, so amply testified. Straight ahead it went, up hill, down dale, through the woods and into the deepest muskegs where, for hours at a time, the rails would be invisible beneath the watery slime."

-Philip Godsell

Philip Godsell, a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, spent two decades in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company. He left a rare - and very candid - account of what it was like to travel on the A & GW railway in its early years. It was first published by the Travel Book Club of London. England under the title,

"It was the middle of June when I stood upon the platform of the little station of Dunvegan Yards, five miles from the city, the terminus of the newly completed Alberta and Great Waterways Railway, en route to Fort McMurray and the North.

The place was thronged with a picturesque frontier gathering of Indians, squaws carrying papooses on their backs, grizzled trappers and traders returning North after a riotous visit to the "white lights," Mounted Policemen in scarlet uniforms and polished Sam Brown belts, black robed priests and nuns, Government officials and the representatives of the fur companies. There was also Mr. Conroy, the aged Inspector for the Department of Indian Affairs, and Jim Cornwall, "Peace River Jim" as he was frequently known, who, in years gone by, had buried his old friend "Twelve Foot Davis" on top of the nine hundred foot peak overlooking the Peace River, and had engraved upon the headstone the epitaph:

"He was everybody's friend, and never was known to lock his cabin door," a monument which may still be seen for many miles around.

It was a noisy crowd, and many of the prospective passengers, as well as those bidding them farewell, were obviously feeling the exhilarating effects of their many Arctic Trader: The Account of Twenty Years With the Hudson's Bay Company. The date of the first edition is unknown, but subsequent editions of the book appeared in 1934 and 1943. Godsell made this particular trip in 1920 during the 250 anniversary of the Hudson's Bay Company.

parting drinks.

The "Muskeg Limited," a conglomeration of dirty red box-cars, flat-cars, and one very rickety old-fashioned coach with a caboose tacked on to the rear, at length backed protestingly into the station. Every one immediately made a wild dash for the nearest car, threw on his bell-roll and grub boxes, clambered aboard and used his baggage in place of a seat.

The lucky ones got hard plush-covered berths in the coach but the majority were forced to make the best of the open flatcars. As the engine gave her last wheezy whistle the nondescript train, with much bumping and a good deal of noise and ostentation, commenced her swaying journey through prairie land and muskeg.

Twice a day there would be a brief stop for meals, then the passengers would all pile out onto the track with frying pans and tea kettles in their hands, build hurried campfires, sling on the kettles, warm up a tin of pork and beans and snatch a hasty meal.

After the first fire every one knew everybody else and the artificial barriers which civilization imposes were very soon let down. There were four white ladies aboard; a missionary's wife bound for Aklavic [sic, Aklavik] near the shore of the Polar Sea, a very practical Scotch woman



Picking blueberries along the A & GW line.

Lac La Biche Archives

who arose to every emergency; a Mounty's wife, all paint and lipstick, silk stockings and smiles, who proved a positive thrill for the mosquitoes who demonstrated their appreciation, much to the poor girl's discomfort and disgust; Mrs. Doyle, a recent bride, on her way to join her husband at Fort McPherson, as pretty as she was sensible, and Mrs. Harris who was to winter with her trader husband at Fort Good Hope, six miles from the Arctic Circle.

A truly remarkable railroad was the A. & G.W., as the rotting box-cars, which had

fallen from the crazy track into the ditch, so amply testified. Straight ahead it went, up hill, down dale, through the woods and into the deepest muskegs where, for hours at a time, the rails would be invisible beneath the watery slime. Once or twice, after frenzied efforts to reach the top of some ridge, the engine would stop with a loud despairing snort, then the conductor would apologetically ask all passengers to please jump off and walk in order to reduce the load.



Provincial Archives of Alberta

It was with good reason that the A & GW was dubbed "Arrive God Willing" - as the scene pictured above illustrates.

After backing up a couple of miles the engine would come swaying along, puffing and wheezing mightily, and finally top the hill. "All aboard" some overalled trainman would yell and we would jump on once again. Erelong the train would have to take hold of the business end of a shovel and help remove a few tons of clay and earth which had fallen in upon the track.

When on the second night we arrived at Lac La Biche we received the discouraging news that it would be a week or more ere we could proceed, some of the track ahead having been washed out by the rain. A few days later the same thing happened behind us and for two weeks we were literally marooned in this smelly oasis, sur-

"In winter the rails are thrown out of alignment by inexorable frost; in summer they sag in their spongy cradle so that the locomotive must always be struggling up hill. Ten miles an hour is considered a fair average speed. Frequent stops are necessitated to prevent breaking of couplings while the rear cars slide into the concave created by the train's weight."

-Richard Finnie, F.R.G.S., 1934

rounded by an ocean of swamp and mud on every side.

The little 'one-horse' town did boast a 'hotel'; a big packing case affair with dirty gray blankets separating the rooms in place of doors, where, for an hour before each meal, unsavory odors from the kitchen penetrated every room and proclaimed the menu in advance. After a ten days' diet of pork and beans some of the more fastidious passengers commenced to lose patience and say harsh words concerning the Company and their advertised trip to the Arctic, and as I was the only representative amongst them I was being continually sought out and asked what I intended doing about it. Meanwhile, with the help of Jim Cornwall, we had managed to get a few belated and not very industrious work gangs out on the road.

As I was anxious, for business reasons, to get to Fort McMurray I persuaded Mickey Ryan to use his auto, which was mounted on flanged wheels and could run upon the track, to take a few passengers with most pressing business in ahead of the train. But when the car pulled up at the station to take on its appointed load of five, thirty-seven angry passengers, with nearly a ton of baggage, were fighting and clamoring to get aboard, so to avoid having his car wrecked Mickey had, perforce, to call off the trip.



Fort McMurray Historical Society

"But when the car pulled up at the station to take on its appointed load of five, thirty-seven angry passengers, with nearly a ton of baggage, were fighting and clamoring to get aboard, so to avoid having his car wrecked Mickey had, perforce, to call off the trip."


Scene at Lac La Biche Station, 1920.

Late that night, like thieves in the dark, we sneaked through the woods until we reached a meeting place agreed upon about two miles out of town where we found 'Gasoline Gus' waiting with the car. As this was immediately filled I was forced to perch high up upon a bulky load of mail sacks lashed upon the 'Jim Crow' car, or trailer, while a steady rain poured down upon me. The flood-gates of heaven seemed to have opened from the moment Gus turned on the gas and for two days it poured down incessantly upon myself and my drenched companions in misery. The only stops we made were for meals, which were prepared regardless of the rain, and at night again when we crawled between our blankets on the mud floor of some leaky and deserted cabin.

Just as we reached the end of steel the sun broke through the clouds and far below we espied the glimmering surface of the beautiful Clearwater River almost obscured by the swaying leaves of the poplar and heavy cottonwood trees."



Provincial Archives of Alberta

The end of the A & GW line as it would have appeared when Philip Godsell arrived. There was a bunkhouse and cafe combination named "Bunkhouse Villa - Two Bits a Flop."

"Arriving at Lac La Biche midnight, June 15, we found accommodation inadequate. A hotel of sorts was being constructed, but the two women who took a room said they were too frightened to sleep. The room had no door."

-Catherine Hoard, 1920

Ryan's Express

"M. Ryan, contractor for the mail service between Lac la Biche and McMurray was in the city this week. Mr. Ryan has carried the McMurray mail for several years; at first between Athabasca and McMurray, down the Athabasca and over the 80 portage from House river, and more recently, from Lac la Biche to McMurray over the Waterways railway. The contract is for a fortnightly service but Mr. Ryan gives a weekly service, carrying passengers and express as well as mail. By arrangement with the railway he runs a seven passenger 60 horse Case auto fitted with flanged wheels to take the rails. The car hauls a trailer which carries baggage and express. This gas car connects at Lac la Biche with Thursday's Waterways train, leaving Lac la Biche in the forenoon, S.A. Bentley's stopping place and store at Conklin on Christina lake siding is reached for the night. The following day mile 274, the present end of run of the Waterways railway trains is reached this [sic] is at the beginning of

the railway grade down the side hill into the valley of the Clearwater. This grade has been washed out or has slidden out in places, several times since it was constructed, so that it is not now practicable for trains. At this point Mr. Ryan has a bunk house and cook shanty at which meals and beds can be secured. A small speeder takes passengers three miles further along the track to mile 277. Teams then take passengers down the hill to the boat landing a mile and a half from the railway line. A gas boat meets passengers there and takes them down the Clearwater 16 miles to McMurray, at the junction of the Clearwater and Athabasca.

The fare from Lac la Biche to the boat landing is \$15 and the charge of the gas boat to McMurray is \$3. Express from Lac la Biche to the boat landing is \$2 per 100. Baggage, the property of passengers, is carried free up to 150 pounds for each."

-Edmonton Bulletin, 1919



Provincial Archives of Alberta

"Gasoline Gus" operating Mickey Ryan's speeder.



University of Alberta Archives

"Even the monkey travels north."



Lac La Biche Archives

Constructed by J.D. McArthur in 1916, the Lac La Biche Inn operated for only two years. A tragic accident and the general downturn in tourism during World War I forced the closure of the luxury hotel. It lay empty for nearly twenty-years before it was purchased by Les Filles de Jésus and converted into a hospital. A fire destroyed the Inn in 1988.

The Lac La Biche Inn

"A thoroughly modern and artistically designed Hotel, picturesquely situated on the shore of Lac La Biche, Alberta's most beautiful lake." -1916 Advertisement for the Lac La Biche Inn

J.D. McArthur built it and they did come! Described as a "timber and railway magnate," McArthur opened the Lac La Biche Inn for business on July 1, 1916. The owner of the Alberta & Great Waterways Railway was impressed by "Alberta's most beautiful lake" and sought to duplicate Cornelius Van Horne's success in building castle-like CPR hotels along the Canadian Pacific line.

McArthur was a horse trader of the finest sort. The A & GW was to go between Edmonton and Fort McMurray along the west side of Lac La Biche, through Plamondon, and then north. In return for running the line past the Hudson's Bay Company Post and the hamlet of Lac La Biche, the HBC turned over six choice lots on the lakeshore.

This was what the visionary McArthur was after. The tudor styled building, featuring a full three storeys and a four storey turret-style tower, was soon constructed on the shores of Lac La Biche. Roland W. Lines, one of the most prominent architects of the day, designed the hotel to rival the world's finest, and many considered it to be the most luxurious in Alberta. The frame hotel, faced with stones from the lakeshore provided a breathtaking view of the lake.

In this Titanic-like era of palaces for the wealthy, the building originally cost the princely sum of \$53,112.02, and the con-

tents \$13,157.73. Manicured lawns, stretching from the Inn to the lake, and tennis courts greeted the visitors. Two fireplaces, and the finest furniture, chinaware, crystal, silverware and linen that money could buy, graced the interior. A billiard room boasted a "slate and baize" table. Artificial palm fronds impressed the tearoom visitors, one of whom, awed by the lavish surroundings, raved that to enter the hotel was "just like dropping out of the world that lay about."

An invoice from the T. Eaton Company, dated April 29, 1916, provides some insight into the enormous costs of the day: furniture at \$2505.65, electrical fixtures at \$629.50, rugs, \$936.24, draperies, \$1572.30, and silverware, \$759.42. Later inventories included 22 silver bread trays, 23 silver sugar bowls, 13 silver teapots, and 268 breakfast plates. State of the art equipment such as an electric knife sharpener, two heavy wire toasters, and granite double boilers and dish pans supplemented the huge kitchen. And what did this modern kitchen produce? The breakfast menu included such delicacies as broiled sirloin steak (\$1.25), fresh fish-fried or boiled (\$.65), and one pork chop with fried

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Lac La Biche Archives

One of the invoices for the furnishings of the Lac La Biche Inn.

apples at \$.40 or two for \$.65!

The regular train, from Edmonton to Fort McMurray, with the Lac La Biche



Photo courtesy of Mary Watson

The Lac La Biche Inn under construction.



An advertisement for the Lac La Biche Inn which appeared in the Edmonton Bulletin in 1916.

stop, had only one passenger car and was described as slow and boring, so McArthur brought in individual self-propelled gasoline-powered railcars. Passengers of the day commented that the "one-car train seemed to scoot through the pines like an echo." Known as the "skunk trains" because of the rotten-egg smell that wafted in their wake, they had the sole purpose of bringing paying guests to the Inn. On statutory holidays, as many as three daily trips were made from the capital city to Lac La Biche. McArthur's dream was indeed coming true.

And then the nightmare. On August 9, 1916, Harry Flowers, a prominent Edmonton businessman, set out on the lake in one of the Inn's wide-beamed rowboats. He was accompanied by his wife and two passengers. A squall suddenly blew in from the northwest. The boat capsized. Harry, his wife, and their guests all perished. Mrs. John Scott, a young girl working in the local drug store in 1916, recalled that "A lady came to the store to buy some film for an expensive camera. All we had was film for box cameras. She took a roll of that film and we loaned her a camera. Hers [sic] was one of the bodies that was washed ashore after the accident."

Flowers was well known in Edmonton and the tragic news spread like wildfire, damning the lake, the elements, and the Inn. While many have argued that the drowning incident was the cause of the Inn's downfall, there were other factors which contributed to the Inn's demise. In addition to the A & GW, McArthur had constructed the Edmonton, Dunvegan and British Columbia Railway from Edmonton to Grande Prairie. The ED & BC was often better known as the "Eternally Damned and Badly Constructed" by passengers and detractors alike. Faced with rising costs, minimal passengers, defective railbeds, and deteriorating rolling stock on two lines, McArthur was forced to charge exorbitant freight rates, which in turn alienated the few customers he had gained.



Photo courtesy of Mary Watson

Harry Flowers (extreme left) and friends. The prominent Edmonton businessman, his wife, and two others died in a tragic boating accident in August 1916. The focus of the province, the country, and the world had also shifted. It was the height of the Great War (World War I) and all energy was being poured into the war effort. Tourism fell dramatically during the war. The Inn managed to struggle along for a couple of years after the tragedy but it closed in 1918 - a little more than two years after its triumphant opening.

The Inn survived the Great Fire of 1919 and served as a sanctuary for many of the townspeople. It then sat empty, save for a family who used it for a residence and who maintained the building. A visitor to Lac La Biche commented, on a stopover to Fort McMurray in 1923, on the Inn's registry desk with the "never-sounding call bells of



Lac La Biche Archives

The sumptuous interior of the Lac La Biche Inn. J.D. McArthur spared no expense to create a luxury hotel. the invisible guests ... and the ghostly silentness."

The Northern Alberta Railways bought out McArthur, and consequently also took over the hotel in 1930. The NAR decided that the operating costs of \$2000 per year could not be justified and began the search for new owners. The onset of the Great Depression - at its worst during the early 1930s - no doubt played a role in the NAR's decision. A letter from the Chairman of the company's operating equipment to the General Manager of the railroad, dated November 26, 1932, stated that "the suggestion is made that perhaps the Roman Catholic Church or one of the other religious institutions, who maintain mission schools in the North may be induced to acquire it for that purpose provided we make an offer low enough and with attractive terms. Will you kindly see what can be done in this direction as there is little likelihood of sufficient business developing at Lac La Biche within the lifetime of the building to warrant the railway re-opening it as a hostelry." The letter was sent to multiple church groups and institutions, but with no success.

Five years later the Village of Lac La Biche needed a hospital. After lengthy negotiations, first with the Village Council (represented by Joseph Biollo, Charles Lebas, and Louis Richard, who made an unsuccessful offer) and then with the Community of Les Filles de Jesus, the Inn was finally sold for \$8000 cash in October 1937. The industrious Sisters took over, and began transforming the Inn to a hospital, doing much of the work themselves. The village fathers fully supported their efforts and proved it by passing a by-law in 1937 guaranteeing a payment of \$500 per year for ten years to the Order for "establishing and maintaining a First Class Hospital in the Village of Lac La Biche." The by-law also called for reduced rates for the needy. The Sisters agreed.

Dr. Charles Lefebvre was recruited from Edmonton and St. Catherine's Hospital opened its doors to the community of Lac La Biche on November 25, 1937. The hospital started with 17 beds, and was quick-



Glenbow Archives

McKeen No. 711, one of two gasoline powered railway cars J.D. McArthur purchased in 1916 for passenger service between Edmonton and Lac La Biche.

The "Skunk Train"

In 1916, J.D. McArthur purchased two gasoline powered railway cars from the McKeen Car Company in Omaha, Nebraska for passenger service between Edmonton and Lac La Biche. According to newspaper reports, McKeen No. 700 and No. 711 provided a "comfortable and speedy" journey between Edmonton and Lac La Biche in four hours. Locals nicknamed them "skunk" cars because they stank so bad.

The McKeen cars originally ran three times per week with a weekend excursion fare of \$3.45 return. McArthur wanted the potential guests for his resort hotel to travel in style.

When the Lac La Biche Inn closed its doors, the McKeen cars were put into service as a shuttle between Edmonton and Westlock. That lasted until 1921, when ongoing mechanical problems, compounded by the fact that the McKeen company had gone bankrupt, forced a temporary retirement. An attempt was made to put one of the cars back in service for a special run to Waterways in 1923, but a breakdown 25 km from Edmonton proved to be the final straw and the cars were permanently retired.

The McKeen cars remained in storage at Dunvegan Yards until 1939 and 1940, when the car bodies were stripped down. The car bodies were shipped to Rycroft, Alberta and Dawson Creek, B.C. and used as storage sheds. In 1959 the body of No. 700 was sold and moved to a farm in the Wanham district near Rycroft. No. 711 was demolished.

The McKeen car was approximately 20 meters long, 3 meters wide and 3 meters high. It could carry about 50 passengers.

ly expanded to include 24 beds for adults, six beds for children, and eight bassinets. On November 30, another Nurse/Sister arrived, doubling the nursing staff to two, and bringing the professional staff to 3. The first patient was treated in the hospital on December 23, and the first baby was born on December 29, 1937.

In 1942 Dr. William J. Cadzow arrived in Lac La Biche and took over Dr. Lefebvre's practice. Then, with the town's population growing, the "new" St. Catherine's Hospital was added in 1955, and the patients, hospital furniture, and all the equipment was moved from the Inn to the new facility. The old Inn section was then used as a nurse's residence, and supplied support services, including a pharmacy and laundry, as well as additional storage for the new hospital. Through its hospital phase, from 1937 to 1955, the Inn treated some 17,180 patients, performed more than 2000 operations, and delivered 2596 babies. In 1973 the hospital was transferred from the Sisters to the Municipal Board, and was known as the Lac La Biche General & Auxiliary Hospital and

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Lac La Biche Archives

The first page of the record of births at St. Catherine's Hospital.



Photo courtesy of Harvey Marchildon

In 1937 the Community of Les Filles de Jesus took over the Inn and converted it into a hospital, St. Catherine's Hospital.

Nursing Home District No. 78. Then, ten years later, the William J. Cadzow Hospital was officially opened, and on October 10, 1984, everything was moved from the old facility to the new.

The Lac La Biche Inn was officially designated a Provincial Historic Resource and the Town of Lac La Biche became the new owner of the building on November 21, 1985. Slowly, the painstaking work of restoration began. There was a renewed interest in the old Inn. Renovations proceeded on the ground floor and several organizations used the old foyer area for meetings. It appeared that the Inn might re-emerge as a major tourist attraction.

Then tragedy struck again. On April 21, 1988, an electrical fire broke out, perhaps the result of mice eating the insulation off the wires. In spite of the efforts of many volunteer fire departments from the town and surrounding communities, and helicopters dropping huge buckets of water, the 72 year old building went up in a spectacular blaze.

It was a sad day indeed. Tears rolled down the cheeks of old timers. Schools were closed to permit the children to see the end of an era. The posh hotel, the ghost-ridden shell, the sanctuary, the hospital, the historic landmark which had survived two world wars, the great fire of 1919, and which had stood as silent witness to so much that happened in the 20th century was gone.



Photo courtesy of Gary Elaschuk

"It was like a mother or father to me, it is like someone died in the family." -Rob Lichuk, guardian of the Lac La Biche Inn, 1988.



Just the Place For Jaded Edmontonians - Edmonton Bulletin Ad, 1916

SPANISH 'FLU All The Local Now HAS REACHED ROVINCE 1914 Influenza Epidemic Shows No Signs of Abating Her Over 100 Cases of Spanish 191 faurie man Influenza Reported by the City ands of Cases Repor HEALTH BO with Many Deat atherities. Since Friday **INSISTS POLICE ENFORCE LA** Are Mos cptible To It ANTINE LIFTED FROM SOME Id: ID TA ALBERTA. MONDAY, OCTOBER 21, 1918 MASK ORDER An Appeal For IN EFFECT How to Make Influenza Mask THURSDA Just r and Railway Pas-Must Wear Them th Board Orders NOVEMBER IL JAUS Abatem uvince Mask Order Is Legal and Can gary in Edma Be Rigidly Enforced Where it ing it will Being Opcaly Disobeyed ontino -Australia International E8 Schools, Churches and Theatres **GETTING LESS** Owing to Lexity of Ci in City to Close After Friday Of Health, Province to C. Night-Rublic Meetings Barred Enforcement of the H 18 1919 E. P of Epidemic Not Bei ty-Five Homes in Edmonton He Will Co Inemza here Patients, at the Point of WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 18 LBERTA Death on Monday, Uncared Fo Instructions; Regarding, Care Fin Relief Work at ay Dying and King Edward Scho Sick Persons For in the City Lac La Biche Archives

The outbreak of Spanish influenza in 1918 and 1919 was front page news around the world. By the time the epidemic had run its course it had claimed some 21 million lives, including more than 3000 Albertans.

The Spanish Flu of 1918-1919

"Hon. A.G. MacKay, Minister of Health, handed out the following statement to the press Wednesday evening:

'Another day passes without any report coming from any point not hitherto heard from. Sixty-seven new cases however reported Tuesday. Total number of cases reported to date 28,181.'"

So reported the Edmonton *Bulletin* on December 20, 1918. The Minister's talent for murdering the English language through a process of slow strangulation can perhaps be forgiven under the circumstances. For the Spanish Flu of 1918-19 was no laughing matter. By the time it had run its course more than 21 million lay dead worldwide - more than twice the number killed during the Great War. It was the worst epidemic - or pandemic since the Black Death of the 14th Century.

Scientists believe the flu began in the mid-western United States, most likely in Kansas, where pigs spread it to farm families. It was then introduced to Europe by American soldiers. From there it spread around the world in three particularly bad waves, the spring of 1918, the fall of 1918 and the early months of 1919. Then, in the spring of 1919, the virus disappeared.

Unlike most influenzas, the victims of the Spanish strain included not just the very young and the old but healthy young adults between the ages of 20 and 40. The illness most often began with a cough, then headache and backache, tiredness, high fever, fast heart rate, and laboured breathing. Many, like Charles Spencer of Lac La Biche, ended up dying of pneumonia.

The Spanish Flu was brought into Canada during the fall of 1918 by soldiers returning from the Great War. It spread so quickly that in November 1918 the federal government tried, without success, to postpone the Armistice celebration for fear of spreading the disease. The outbreak eventually claimed an estimated 60,000 Canadians, nearly as many as had died on the battlefield during the Great War.

In Alberta there was a certain smugness

Spanish Flu?

Where did the name "Spanish Flu" come from? In the spring of 1918 the Spanish wire service, Agencia Fabra, sent a telegram to Reuter's news service in London reporting about the outbreak of some sort of epidemic. "A strange form of disease of epidemic character has appeared in Madrid," the telegram noted. Agencia Fabra observed that the illness began with a cough, then progressed to headaches and backaches. fatigue, high fever, racing heart, loss of appetite, and laboured breathing. The symptoms usually lasted three days, the news agency said, adding that "The epidemic is of a mild nature, no deaths having been reported."

The Agencia Fabra telegram was the first public announcement of the influenza outbreak. Although other names were used to describe the flu, such as Flanders Grippe, Naples Soldier, Bombay Fever, *Blitz Katarrh*, and Wrestler's Fever to name but a few, the Spanish label stuck. Some historians have speculated that the unpopularity of Spain's neutrality during the Great War made it all the easier to saddle that country with the blame.

about the outbreaks in Eastern Canada. "There is no flu here" reported a number of newspapers in early October 1918. By the end of the month the press and public alike were approaching near hysteria. In urban centres people were required to wear masks - each mask for no more than two hours at a time and then boiled before being worn again. Failure to observe the rule resulted in a fine as high as \$50. Soon public gatherings were banned; store hours restricted, some closed for the duration; courthouses shut down; and, in one case, an entire community, Lethbridge, was quarantined for two days.

By the time the flu had run its course, some 3259 Albertans, according to the official records, had succumbed. Many medical researchers believe that number is low. At the time, collecting statistics on public health was in its infancy so published records are not entirely accurate. Even if Lac Lac Biche provides an extreme example of the devastation, the researchers are probably correct in their assessment.

The Spanish flu appears to have arrived in Lac La Biche at the end of October 1918. One of the first recorded cases of the "flu" appeared in the detachment diary of Constable Fred Moses on November 1, 1918, when Moses reported that he had just returned from Edmonton feeling sick. Within days his entire force was ill, with Corporal McPherson running a fever of up to 105 degrees and suffering pneumonia.

Within weeks the flu had spread rapidly. On November 13th, Wappus Cardinal died at Conklin. On November 30 Moses estimated about 300 cases in the Lac La Biche area. By the first week of December the Edmonton *Bulletin* was reporting "Flu in almost every house at Lac La Biche." By December 20 the headlines read: "Flu Wipes Out Indians In The North."

Dr. O.D. Weeks, who had travelled north from Calgary to help battle the flu, told newspaper reporters that "he had no idea until he arrived just how bad it was." Native people and Métis were hit particularly hard. The Bulletin wrote of "Pathetic stories of the plight of the half-breeds and Indians along the line of the A. & G.W. railway who are being wiped out by the influenza epidemic." In the Big Bay area, 20 unburied bodies were discovered. They were moved to a vacant cabin because there was no one to dig graves. In another cabin a woman was found lying on the floor in a delirious state, clutching an eight-month old baby which had been

"Frid; Nov: 1st [1918]. Fine Day. Spl Ladouceur & Const Moses from Edmonton to Lac La Biche. Const Moses sick, went to bed on arrival. Corpl McPherson sick."

"Sat; 2nd [November 1918]. ... Spl Ladouceur sick, off duty." "Sun; 3rd [November 1918]. All sick. off duty."

"Tues. 5th [November 1918]. Spl Ladouceur attending to sick families etc. & trying to arrange for help for them." "Wed 13th [November 1918]. ...'Wappus' Cardinal died at Conklin with 'Flu'." "Sat 30th [November 1918]. ... General Remarks. Dr Weeks has arrived here and is energetically fighting the 'Flu' the epidemic is taking dreadful toll here among the Indians and half-vreeds [sic, half-breeds) and help is urgently needed as they will not help themselves, large families are down with it and total number of cases must run close to the 300 mark in this entire district. Many deaths are reported and no doubt a number are not reported & are unknown, such as trappers out in the bush."

"Fri 25th [April, 1919]. ...The 'Flu' is again breaking out here taking those who previously escaped it. There is also an epidemic of Bronchitis & Flu which is spreading with alarming speed over the entire district & is particularly severe on children."

> -Detachment Diary of Constable Fred Moses

Obey the laws And wear the gauze. Protect your jaws From septic paws.

-Popular rhyme during the Spanish flu dead for two days. Dr. Weeks estimated that one-half of the Cree population in the north had been wiped out by the flu.

Although medical supplies were forthcoming, the biggest problem was the lack of nurses and healthy volunteers to help the sick. Hospitals in the district were filled to capacity. As a result, the police ended up helping to treat people with medicine sent by the Public Health

"At the Beaver Lake Reserve, in the house of the chief, Dr. Weeks found women lying on the floor, all dead except the chief himself."

-Edmonton Bulletin, December 20, 1918

Department. Fortunately, by the end of December Constable Moses and his detachment were in good health. But Moses wrote of the pressing need for a small hospital with a nurse in attendance. The Native people, he commented, had "poor housing accommodations and when one gets sick with any infectious disease they all take it."

By the end of February 1919, the flu seemed to have abated. But towards the end of April 1919, Constable Moses reported that the "Flu' is again breaking out here taking those who previously escaped it. There is also an epidemic of Bronchitis & Flu which is spreading with alarming speed over the entire district & is particularly severe on children." The spring outbreak was short lived and does not appear to have been nearly as devastating as the previous six months.

It is virtually impossible to determine how many people in the Lac La Biche area died during the flu epidemic of 1918-19. It did, however, leave an enduring mark. Years later, "old timers" recalling the one or two events seared upon their memory would often mention the Spanish flu.



Lac La Biche Archives

Lac La Biche around the time of the Spanish Flu epidemic. The wooden sidewalk on the left ran from the train station to the Lac La Biche Inn along the east side of the street.

Barboulier!



Wanted for Murder of R. J. Morrison and C. Repinski, near Lac La Biche, Alberta, during November, 1916.

The Government of the Province of Alberta will pay a reward of THREE HUNDRED DOLLARS for the apprehension of one JULIEN DESJARLAIS, alias BARBIER, who is wanted in connection with the above case, and who escaped from the Provincial Gaol at Fort Saskatchewan on July 31st, 1918.

DESCRIPTION

JULIEN DESJARLAIS, alias BARBIER: French Half-breed; about 30 years of age; height, 6 ft. 1 in.; weight, 180 lbs.; brown eyes; dark moustache and beard; black hair; narrow chin; stoops when walking; small scar on bridge of nose. Speaks French and Cree only.

Was born in vicinity of Lac la Biche and was last seen north of that district, and is now supposed to be in the vicinity of Big Bay, between Lac la Biche and Fort McMurray.

The above-described man is armed.

In case of arrest, notify any detachment of The Alberta Provincial Police at once.

(Sgd.) J. R. BOYLE, Attorney-General.

Edmonton, 9th September, 1918.

Lac La Biche Archives

Reward poster for Julien Desjarlais. Note the misspelling of his nickname, Barboulier.

In November 1916 two trappers, C. Repinski and R.J. Morrison, pitched their tent near Lac La Biche. One night they went to town where they and their possessions were observed by Julien Desjarlais, then in his late 20s. Desjarlais trailed the trappers home, shot and killed both and removed their possessions. He wrapped the bodies in blankets and buried them in the muskeg near Mile 231 on the A & GW railway line.

What happened next was a secret that did not keep well. Soon, the community, Native, Métis, and European, knew what Julien Desjarlais had done. The local police were alert to the crime. But there were no bodies, thought then to be essential to any successful murder prosecution.

Desiarlais was feared throughout the community as a man of violence. At six foot one and 180 pounds he was a very imposing man indeed, especially during an era when the height requirement for the British army had to be lowered to five feet to get recruits. He had a nickname, "Barboulier," which reflected his dark complexion and chilling appearance ("Barboulier" was adopted from the french "barbouiller," which means grimey or dirty, and possibly "barbu," meaning bearded or unshaven). "Barboulier" soon became an alias - sometimes mistakenly spelled "Barbier," as it was, for example, on the Reward poster. Many unruly children in the Lac La Biche area were quieted when their parents threatened a visit from Barboulier. It was worse than a visit from the bogeyman.

The local Alberta Provincial Police suspected him of complicity in other unsolved homicides in the Lac La Biche area, notably, that of George Alex "an Assyrian" and Hiram Johnson, but the police concentrated on successfully prosecuting Desjarlais for the Repinski-Morrison murders.

Pressure mounted for Desjarlais' arrest, but all the police initially had were two disappearances and no bodies. The investigation continued in the hands of Constable Fred Moses of the local Alberta Provincial Police (A.P.P.) detachment and Desjarlais was soon arrested for murder on the available evidence. While there were no bodies, Desjarlais was in possession of the dead men's goods, and his wife, Julia Cardinal, had given a statement to the police that Desjarlais had told her everything, including where he had put the bodies. The police finally recovered the corpses near Mile 231 on the A & GW railway line.

In the meantime, Desjarlais broke out of the Fort Saskatchewan jail in a daring escape on July 31, 1918. He hid out in the Big Bay area. A \$300 cash reward spurred the manhunt which followed. He was finally arrested by Constable Moses at Big Bay on October 28, 1918 and returned to Fort Saskatchewan to await his trial in Edmonton.

The trial of Julien Desjarlais began at Edmonton's sandstone Supreme Court House on Monday, May 26, 1919. The trial lasted three days. The case seemed airtight to Crown Prosecutor E.B. Cogswell, K.C. "Coggy," as he was known, had the evidence that Desjarlais possessed the dead man's property and the disclosures he made to Julia Cardinal about the killings. There was also the jail break, which had rendered him a fugitive from justice. As the Bible laid down, "The guilty flee where none pursueth." The courtappointed Edmonton defence counsel, J.A. McCaffery, held little optimism for his client's chances.

The six-man jury listened; the six man jury decided: "Not Guilty." The courtroom listened in stunned silence. No one cheered, including the prisoner (who, incidentally, spoke only Cree and French).

Prosecutor Cogswell had one remaining card to play. When prosecuting, if you can't get what you want, you take what you can get. He insisted that the acquitted prisoner be tried immediately for the theft and illegal possession of the dead men's personal effects, including a dog chain. McCaffery protested but Mr. Justice Hyndman forced the case on, directing it to be tried two weeks later. This time Julien Desjarlais was found guilty and sentenced to five years imprisonment, the maximum penalty by law.

The outcome of the trial was of little comfort to the families of the two deceased



Glenbow Archives

Constable Fred Moses of the Alberta Provincial Police was the officer who eventually arrested Julien Desjarlais, alias Barboulier, in October, 1918.

men. Mrs. Repinski and Morrision blistered defence counsel McCaffery on the Court House steps. Two jurymen later revealed that the verdict they rendered flowed from their dislike of capital punishment. "If life imprisonment were the penalty," said one of the jurors, "we would have found him guilty."

"The alleged slayer appeared weak and wan in the box and from the queer light in his wide open black eyes spectators could almost deduce insanity or at least constitutional mental perversion." -Edmonton Journal, May 27, 1919

"The skull of Conrad Repinski, who was murdered in the north two years ago, was taken to Lac La Biche this morning by Mary Repinski for burial. It was placed in a coffin and a funeral service will be held at the cemetery."

-Edmonton Journal, June 2, 1919

"During the year considering what class of people reside in this dist [district]: crime has not been serious, there are many criminals here and which are kept under surveillance by the Police as much as possible, which holds them in check to a certain point. We have the Desjarlais family here and that family alone necessitates a continual alertness by the Police here. Out of the five murders that has [have] taken place in this district since 1914 three has [have] been brought to light, two of which were proved to have been committed by Julien Desjarlais, who escaped the supreme penalty by the narrow views held by some of the jury, who stated in the jury room that they were opposed to capital punishment and that if a life sentence could have been given they would have found him 'Guilty.'"

-Detachment Diary of Fred Moses December 31, 1919

The Manhunt - William Leadbeater's Reports

"On our tramp we came across a number of homesteads where I made inquiries, but found that even among the white settlers the information obtained is alltogether useless because anything seen or heard in the bush is, according to their excited minds nobody else but Barboulier."

William Leadbeater was a private detective from the Thiel Agency in Montréal. He was hired by the Attorney-General of Alberta to help solve some of the outstanding murder cases in Lac La Biche. He played a key role in the largest manhunt in Lac La Biche history and he was the officer who found the bodies of Barboulier's victims. Two of his surviving reports to the Deputy Attorney-General are reprinted here because they provide an interesting

"Lac La Biche Monday Aug 19 1918 Re murder cases in Lac La Biche district. Sir:

Since my last report (Aug 10th) I regret to say, that in spite of hard and anxious work and a great deal of experience, little or nothing has been accomplished which would bring us any nearer to capture Julien Desjarlais (known as Barboulier) who made good his escape from Fort Saskatchewan on Aug. 1st. After his unexpected arrival in his home district (Big Bay) Barboulier was hiding in the bush for a number of days together with his father (Jule Desjarlais) and a young breed known as "St Paul Cardinal." By Monday Aug 12th we were evidently hot on their trail because old Jule Desjarlais and St Paul Cardinal separated from the desperado and were captured some 10 miles from the Desjarlais homestead. These two have been locked up ever since and their trial will start this afternoon. St Paul Cardinal however has given us some information which resulted in the finding of a couple of rifles and ammunition which the desperado had hid in the bush; it is known howglimpse at the behind the scenes action in the Barboulier manhunt. The reports are reprinted as they appeared - the single exception being that the originals were handwritten. In the interest of historical accuracy, spelling and punctuation have not been changed and only blatant errors have corrections appearing in brackets. It will become apparent that Mr. Leadbeater could have benefitted from the use of a good dictionary.

ever that Barboulier still has a good rifle and plenty of ammunition with him.

Barboulier meantime is roaming around the Bush between Beaver Lake and the Owl River a stretch of thick brush 35 miles long. As far as known he has not yet committed any new crimes never the less the settlers, (whites as well as breeds) are in deadly fear many of them don't dare to leave their homesteads, for fear of meeting Barboulier. Detective Matheson has 15 breeds sworn in as "Specials," and makes Jim Spencer's homestead at Big Bay his headquarters, from where he directs dis men. For three days I have been working in conjunction with Matheson & his men, but on many points I could not see eye to eye with Matheson and in order to avoid friction I have left "Big Bay" and have covered with my own two men the North Eastern part of the country in which we believe Barboulier is hiding.

On Wednesday Aug 14th I hired Peter Rhodes a well known Bush man & hunter who held the position of Sheriff in Oregon for three years. Rhodes however does not speak "Cree" I was therefore obliged to

take a second man (breed) as interpreter with me. With a weeks provisions and Camping outfit we left Lac La Biche On Aug 13th in a canoe and searched the numerous islands in the eastern part of the lake, because their [there] are many canoes & boats available with which Barboulier could easily reach one of these Islands from the main land. Later we cashed [cached] our canoe, packed light and made a systematic search, partly by day and also after dark away down to the Owl River, but we did not find any track or sign of the escaped prisoner. On our tramp we came across a number of homesteads where I made inquiries, but found that even among the white settlers the information obtained is alltogether useless

On my return to Lac La Biche on Monday Aug 19th I learnt that Peter Desjarlais and his family as well as old Mrs Desjarlais mother of Barboulier had been arrested by Matheson's men on suspicion of aiding the escaped prisoner.

I regret that Peter Desjarlais was arrested because this man is only half brother of the desparado and I had an understanding with him that he would shelter or provide Barboulier with provisions, only to give me the tip at the proper time which would result in the arrest of Barboulier. Peter Desjarlais has served 3 months in gaol [jail] for rape on Barbouliers wife, so that surely the love between the two halfbrothers is not over strong, never the less Detective Matheson deemed it advisable to

because anything seen or heard in the bush is, according to their excited minds nobody else but Barboulier. The Breeds are even worse, they all swear to be loyal to the Police, but

"Among others I had a talk to one of the most respectable settlers in the district, and old country Frenchman named Joe Row [Ruault]. I spoke to this man about the reward of \$300 being offered for the capture of Barboulier, but Row would have nothing to do with it, saying that his wife and family were worth far more than \$300 to him."

lock Peter up on the charge of aiding an escaped prisoner. Here I wish to mention that unfortunately the relations between Constable Moses & Detective Matheson are

I am satisfied that Barboulier is assisted by these people even if it is only done for fear.

Among others I had a talk to one of the most respectable settlers in the district an old country Frenchman named Joe Row [Ruault]. I spoke to this man about the reward of \$300 being offered for the capture of Barboulier, but Row would have nothing to do with it, saying that his wife and family were worth far more than \$300 to him. Row [Ruault] is not so much afraid of Barboulier himself but rather of the many friends and relations who would sooner or later get even. In offering above reward to breeds as well as white men I have fully explained to them, that in order to get the reward they do not need personally capture Barboulier, but only furnish me with reliable information which will result in the arrest of this bad man, but even at these easy terms no tangible information has been given.

anything but good. I am told that the two men had a quarrell last winter, much talk has been going on, however, it was a mistake to send Matheson out here to work together with Moses, especially because the A.P.P. officials know that the two men don't get along well.

Moses has the excuse to stay in Lac La Biche because their is allways [sic] some person locked up, consequently he (Moses) does not do anything to clear up the differint [sic] murder cases. - At the same time Moses gets certain information while in town, which I know he keeps to himself instead of telling Matheson all about it in order to help matters along. Matheson on the other hand is not in the best of health, being troubled with indigestion, therefor has the reputation of not being fit to stand the many hardships on a prolonged trip into the Bush. - However their is friction between the two men, which without a doubt hinders matters much.

As I am on good terms with both men, and hope to remain so, I trust this information will be treated accordingly.

Meantime Corporal McPherson has arrived in town and I am told is to work with Matheson. The corporals presence here will doubtless change things considerable.

Tuesday Aug 30

I delayed closing this report in order to get the results of the Court proceedings, which are as follows: Old Jule Desjarlais and his wife (father & mother of Barboulier) and St Paul Cardinal have been committed for trial, and will await their terms at Fort Saskatchewan.

<u>Peter Desjarlais</u> has been acquitted forlack of evidence. This man has been locked up for over a week, during which time he might have done good work for me, if my suggestions had been listened to.

I am leaving this afternoon with my two men on a trip North, with a view of finding the remains of the two murdurt [murdered] trappers. This, I think, should be done at once, because once snow covers the remains it will be next summer before they can possibly be located. Respectfully

Wm R. Leadbeater

Lac La Biche Aug 28th 1918

Re murder cases in Lac La Biche district. Sir:

On Aug. 27th I left Lac La Biche with a Special and a breed guide for the north. Our object was to locate the bodies of the two young men, who were murdurt here last winter by Julien Desjarlais (Barboulier), and incidently look for Barboulier, who I thought would try and do away with the remains, and therefore might be around mile 231 where we were told by Mrs. Barboulier the bodies were lying in a muskeg.

After spending some very hard days and night in the vicinity of mile post 231 we were at last successfull [successful] in finding the remains we were looking for, they were wrapped partly in a blanket and allthough the bones were scattered by wild

Barboulier Eighty Years After

Even after eighty years the name "Barboulier" still haunts some people. Joseph Ruault, son of the Joe "Row" who would have nothing to do with tracking down Julien Desjarlais for a mere \$300, was a boy during the Barboulier manhunt. In a recent letter he recalled his memory of the affair:

"I remember him [Barboulier] very well. His dad lived by the lake not far from us.

Barboulier was feared by everyone. He had met the two men in Lac La Biche and saw their equipment. He followed them to their campsite, killed them, and buried them in the muskeg. If I remember right they were both Swedes.

He [Barboulier] looked more like a Negro than a Métis and that's how he got the nickname."

beast, the skelletons were fairly well in tact, the flesh of course was completly torn off.

A guard of three Specials was left on the scene to await the arrival of the Coroner on the next train from Edmonton. The evidence against Barboulier is now complete, but the escaped prisoner is still at large, and I think will remain at large till snow covers the ground when we will have a better chance to track him.

Since my last report Barboulier had been seen and even spoken to three times. I investigated personally each of these three instances, and believe that they are correct. It is quite evident that on Saturday Aug 24 during a dark misty night, Barboulier crossed the Lake in a birch bark canoe with the intention of connecting with his sister "Maria Rose," who he knew was camping near Old Lac La Biche town. Word to this effect was sent to us by a white settler and after a hard ride we reached the place just before dark and with ten Specials covered the Woods in this vicinity but agains [sic] without results.

Again contrary to my suggestion, Dectective Matheson had Maria Rose detained in Police Barracks during the

night in question (and ever since), instead of letting the girl camp, wherever she liked, and in this may catch the outlaw in a well set trap. Barboulier is very anxious to learn the whereabouts of his wife, whom he has threatened to kill for given information to the Police in connection with the murder of the two trappers. I do believe that Barboulier wanted to use his sister Maria Rose to get in touch with his wife, it was therefor wrong in my opinion to lock Maria Rose up, because the main point at present is to catch the outlaw, Maria Rose and others can be dealt with later. The same mistake was made some three weeks ago, when Mrs. Barboulier was taken into town for protection. I pointed out than that the outlaws wife should have been left where he knew he could find her. Three or four men could have easily been in hiding in this womans teepee and she would have had the same protection as in the barracks, besides the outlaw would have been caught long ago.

However Dectective Matheson is in

charge of this work and I can only make suggestions.

Meantime Constable Moses has been in Edmonton and I understand that a change will be made soon, Inspector Fisher is expected in town any day. Respectfully submitted W^m Leadbeater"

William Leadbeater participated in the Barboulier manhunt until September 3, 1918, when he was recalled to Edmonton.



Sketch of the crime scene.

Provincial Archives of Alberta

Barboulier's Story

"When we got farther I seen four mens standing on the right hand side of the track. I look at them on their face and I recognize them. I didn't look on the ground right away only when I was right close. When I look on the ground I seen two mens lying there.... The first word the old man he gave me he told me 'did you seen them lying here? This is the soldiers. Don't you tell nobody. It you happen to see anybody don't you tell them.'" Julien Desjarlais statement to Justice James Kyle,

March 6, 1919

Accused of murdering Roye J. Morrison and Conrad Repinski, Julien Desjarlais had his own story to tell. The following excerpts are from his statement to Justice James Frederick Kyle on March 6, 1919. Desjarlais spoke only Cree and French and

"In the month of November [1916] there was old man Jerome Cardinal [and] Gabriel Cardinal. They came here in town. That time I employed the old man to bring one pound of tea for me when he came home [so] I went for it.

The old man he told me that time they [government authorities] were going to round up all the people in Lac La Biche. Old mens, young boys, younger than that again, and young girls too, and send them all to the front [the western front in France]. There was going to be five hundred soldiers come here to round up them people. We got to run away from here the whole bunch. I went home that way that time. I never seen him again. I went away that way on the railway track side to hide too. I was along with my wife. We had two dogs in the sleigh. We had only our grub and our blankets in the sleigh. I went ahead of the dogs. The dogs were behind me. My little boy was in the sleigh. My wife had my little girl Katie on her back. When we got on the railway track I seen some tracks of mens, and I seen the track of a dog sleigh too. I thought they were passing there the same day. On the other side of Black Duck Lake. There is a little creek. We had a spell [?] there out of the track on the right hand side in the bush.

When we were having meals there I hear

does not appear to have been a very literate person. His rambling statement, often disjointed and barely readable, has been edited only where absolutely necessary in an effort to maintain the flavour of the original document.

the speeder passing. I seen the mens through the bush but I couldn't recognize them. They were going farther. After we had our meal we went away from there. When we got near to where the railway turns we can hear somebody was shooting. I thought first somebody was seeing moose. When we got farther I seen four mens standing on the right hand side of the track. I look at them on their face and I recognize them. I didn't look on the ground right away only when I was right close. When I look on the ground I seen two mens lying there and two trains of dogs face each other. One train of dogs was coming from the north and one was coming from this way. I stopped there when I seen them right in the middle of the track. My wife she stopped behind. Them four men had a rifle everyone of them. The old man came to close to me around this way. Where I was standing Joseph Desjarlais was standing close but a little ways [away]. They were standing down the grade not on the grade. A little ways farther there was Minwell and Gabriel standing there. The first word the old man he gave me he told me 'did you seen them lying here? This is the soldiers. Don't you tell nobody. If you happen to see anybody don't you tell them.' 'If you don't report us I got eight hundred dollars in the

bank. If you don't tell nobody in two years from now I'll give you half of that money with one horse. If you don't tell nobody nobody he knows it. There's people everyday passing forwards anyway this winter I don't believe we'll see the spring they'll be fighting all over.' And the old man he didn't say any more. And Joseph he said 'don't you say anything at all. Perhaps during the fall we will be all killed before there will be any snow. We went over this way to see if we can find a good place to stay but there's no good place." He didn't say any more. The old man he start to talk again. The old man he says 'you had better go home from here. If you happen to see somebody don't you tell them anything. We'll say it was you you killed. Quite a few of us you can't beat us.' And we turn back from there.

... I thought at first for me to come here to tell the policeman. That's what I told my wife. And my wife she told me you had better not go they might take you and send you in [to the] front anyway if you go and tell that you'll get beat there is too many of them. After I stayed two nights at my place I went and [to] see the old man. But I didn't see him he wasn't home. I see Minwell I asked Minwell who killed them men. Is it you or your Grandfather or Gabriel or Joseph. He told me I don't know who killed them. We just start to shoot all together. Might be me or somebody else. They start to shoot us too but they didn't hit us. I asked him how many times they shoot at them he says twice. So I left him

... So I came home that way from there and all that fall I was staying at my own house. All at once Mosses [Constable Fred Moses] came there and Berland and Sasseville. He came and search in my house he was blaming me for stealing. He found two skins one moose skin one jumping deer skin he didn't find anything else.

... Two weeks after on Sunday. ... Archie Gardiner he told me we're coming for you and we just went in on his democrat [?]. He took me over to my place we went into the house. After we went into the house Berland he took a paper out of his coat. He told me the J.P. he gave me this paper to search in your house. You're blamed for stealing and they search. They took one of my violin[s] and fifty-one rats, one Big lynx. ...That's all they brought they couldn't find anything else and they brought me in here in this house. The J.P. by the name of Thiroux he asked me if I knows any people over there they were going to fight. I told him what I know and they send me away from here to jail. Now they brought me back here again. Mosses he told me here he had twelve charge[s] against me and me I didn't know what it was. Only what I know for killing a jumping deer. So they send me back again. And they brought me here again last summer and they pass my case here. They didn't give me a chance to tell what I know. They gave me three months. After I made three weeks Johnson he told me they found inside my house here a person his bones. He told me it was your brother told me. He told me you'll never get out of here for all your life. ... So I run away from there the same day. When I got here I seen pretty near all my relations to Big Bay. They told me your wife she is married to policeman Mosses. They told me they were sure they seen Mosses f#*king her. ...And my wife herself she told me 'if your husband died I'll marry you.' I told her what is the reason you never come and see me at Fort Saskatchewan. Mosses is boss of me. Even he won't allow me to send you a letter. One time he found a letter in the post office he tear it to pieces. I was going to send it on [the] sly. He told me if you seen your husband if she tells something to him you'll be just as bad shape he is. My wife she told me if you were happen to be arrested don't say anything about that. That was the first time I seen her. When I was across over there I hear my wife she was arrested. I couldn't find out right away where they been keeping her. ... At last I hear she was keeping in this house here ... I came here on the back look through the window. It was nice moonlight that night. When I looked through the window I seen my wife sleeping in the bed with Mosses and I recognized Mosses with

my wife. ... When I seen Mosses there I was afraid of him.

...The next day Decom came for me. ... When we got to Beamas we had dinner there. ... When we were talking at Beamas Mosses came in and Mac. They tie me right away. They brought me here. Mosses he search me here. Everything what I had he took and he took two letters. Next day they took me to Fort Saskatchewan.

... The four mens my wife she seen she just put all that on my back. After she

gave her statement here. She told me she had a man all summer till today that's what she said. And she told me if they should let you go I'll never go back with you.

... The very first time Mosses he ask me for them white mens I told him everything what I know. Mac he was listen and Louie too. That's all."

ACCUSED BLAMES DOUBLE MURDER ON HIS RELATIVES

Desjarlais Swears Sisters-in-Law Did Not Tell the Truth.

Desjarlais' own version of the killing at Lac la Biche was the feature of the murder trial Wednesday morning. The prisoner was in the box for more than two hours, and declared that his wife's relatives were responsible for the deaths of Morrison and Repinski.

... The prisoner appeared weak and sat down as soon as he reached the box. He was handed the Bible and given the oath. As he kissed the book his face flushed red. He stared curiously at everyone in the court room, and hesitated over his answers as though he did not quite understand the questions Mr. McCaffry put to him.

He declared that when he married his present wife the Cardinal family, of which his wife was a member, objected strenuously. He had always been on bad terms with them. He had lived all his life near Lac la Biche.

In the month of November, 1916, the prisoner said, a very peculiar thing happened. The Indians were all banded together to fight. He did not quite understand the purpose but knew there was some unusual activity. The breeds were to resist some expected attack by soldiers.

Desjarlais admitted that he saw the two white men who were killed. After they disappeared several of the half-breeds went into hiding, and he himself was advised by his sister-in-law to hide.

While he was going along the railroad tracks with his family he heard some shots, and later coming around a bend in the road saw Joe Desjarlais, Gabriel Cardinal and a number of his relatives standing with rifles in their hands.

On the ground near them were two men lying dead. Near the bodies were three dogs, harnessed to a sled and facing north. The bodies were also lying with their heads towards the pole.

Old Jerome Cardinal, his wife's grandfather, came up to the accused and pointing to the bodies said that they were soldiers. He instructed Julien Desjarlais to keep his mouth shut and to keep himself hidden.

They told him that if he said anything they would throw the blame for the killing on him.

... From this point on the accused told a long rambling story from which few important details could be gleaned. He told of several white men he had seen but denied that the two men, Morrison and Repinski, had ever been at his house. His two sisters-in-law were liars, he said.

-Excerpts from Edmonton Journal, May 28, 1919.

Frederick George Moses

Born at Monmouthshire, Wales in 1884, Fred Moses came to Canada in 1905. He joined the Royal North West Mounted Police in 1906 and served in Saskatchewan before being posted to Fort Macleod in 1908. He was discharged in 1911 when his time expired.

In 1917 he joined the newly created Alberta Provincial Police and was placed in charge of the Lac La Biche detachment. Moses held that position for six years. Then, in 1923, he was transferred to Wainwright. In 1927 he was trans-



Glenbow Archives

Fred Moses and his wife.

ferred again to Stony Plain and three years later he took over the Athabasca detachment. He was still at Athabasca when the A.P.P. was disbanded in 1932.

Moses rejoined the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (which had been renamed the R.C.M.P. in 1920). He retained his rank and position until he retired in 1934. He returned to Fort Macleod, where he took up sign painting and insurance sales. For twenty years he was Fort Macleod's correspondent to the Lethbridge Herald. He died in 1959.

The A.P.P.

As a result of a shift in wartime priorities, in 1916 the Canadian government informed the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan that their police contracts would be cancelled in 1917. Alberta immediately began to organize a provincial police system, the A.P.P. under the supervision of Major A.E.C. MacDonnell, a former Mounted Policeman. The A.P.P. began its duties on March 1, 1917 with five divisions manned by forty-eight detachments which, over the next fifteen years, would grow to one hundred. Despite early problems, the A.P.P. boasted an 80% conviction rate on crime.

The A.P.P. continued as the provincial police force until 1932, when the economic downturn of the late 1920s forced the provincial government to turn to Ottawa for help. On April 1, 1932 the A.P.P. ceased to exist. Most former A.P.P. personnel were absorbed into the R.C.M.P.

"A large number of soldiers are locating in this vicinity & which will eventually force the breeds further north & counteract the French Canadian element here & bids well for the opening up of the country."

-Fred Moses on Lac La Biche, April 23, 1919



The A.P.P. headquarters at Lac La Biche. Note how the old R.N.W.M.P. sign has been whitewashed over. Note also the rather casual atmosphere. The man standing in the doorway smoking a cigarette is likely Julien Desjarlais, alias Barboulier, accused of murdering two trappers. Fred Moses is standing to the right.

Glenbow Archives

Crime and Punishment

"Acting upon instructions received from Const. Moses I obtained a warrant to search the premises known as the Smoke House owned and controlled by George Pappas. I searched these premises at 3 P.M. of the 13 th, June 1922 while Const. Moses was in court, it being considered a good time to catch them unawares.

Upon searching these premises which is really a soft drink bar, in the presence of Pappas I found under the counter Three bottles containing a small quantity each of 'Moonshine' liquor.

I asked Pappas to smell it, when he stated 'Its all right you have got me, I'll go.'

I continued to search for more liquor and Pappas said 'you have got it all.' I searched the premises thoroughly but found no more 'Moonshine,' but I brought away three bottles of beer, one labeled and the others unlabeled upon testing these today we are of the opinion that two of them are 'good beer.'"

-A.P.P Crime Report, Lac La Biche Pappas was subsequently fined \$200. "I hereby certify that on the Thirteenth day of July [1920] I P.D. Hamel tried an information or complaint laid by F.P. Paradis against Octave Lemieux for contravention of Section 130 Prov. Board of Health Regns [Regulations] of Alberta and that such information or complaint was dismissed with costs payable by the informant or complainant to the amount of \$ Four Dollars (\$4.00) as follows:

Information.50Serving of Summon.50Hearing of Conv Record1.00Const attending court2.004.00"

Province of Alberta

Regulations

The Public Health Act 130. No person shall keep any hog within the limits of any city, town, or village, without the written permission of the local board.

"Florida Water"

"On my first trip to Lac La Biche in the fall during prohibition days, I had 4,800 pounds of Florida water on one wagon. We reached Lac La Biche about three o'clock in the afternoon. As we arrived the mail was just coming in, hauled by twenty-six dog teams, having five to seven dogs each, and a total of 155 dogs. This was a great sight. The dogs were unhitched and turned into a yard surrounded with a high board fence.

The Florida water was unloaded by the mushers and local hands in a matter of minutes - this was to be a part of their Christmas dinner."

-Lawrence M. Rye, "Reminiscences of a Parry Sound Colonist"



Photo courtesy of Gary Elaschuk

"Lac la Biche is slowly recovering from the holiday season and getting back to normal conditions and down to business. ... Lac la Biche was formerly within the prohibited district, and anyone having liquor in his possession was subject to a fine of \$50 for the first conviction, and many fines were paid. We have new province-wide prohibition, but the price can walk through with a whole lot of booze provided that it comes from outside the province. And when the occasion arises, those who want the stuff will raise the price alright. This does not mean that Lac la Biche is in any way liquor-infested; it is in fact, very free from any 'drunks,' but during the holiday season some of the halfbreeds were full of the spirit that comes in square bottles, and, thus inspired, gave an imitation of the hand-to-hand fight at the taking of the Hohenzollern Redoubt, which was most realistic." -Edmonton Bulletin, January 12, 1917

"The prohibition law, passed in Alberta, which really does not prohibit and as far as Lac la Biche is concerned, has made for the 'open door,' and is responsible for the delivery of nearly every train of many neat little wooden boxes, which are anxiously awaited by the consignees and thankfully and eagerly welcomed by them. The Mounted Police had a sometimes really uncanny faculty of smelling out 'booze,' even in the smallest quantities and in the most unexpected places, and the faintest little squeal of the 'blind pig' was heard by them. As half the fines went to the Mounted Police many hundreds of dollars were split 50-50 between them and the attorney general's office. Now, however, all that is changed. It's odd though, that 'booze' is mostly imported by people who really should have better use of their time." -Edmonton Bulletin, April 20, 1917

Before the Fall

"The bells of St. Catherine's Church and the screaming of the locomotive in the railroad yard ushered in the new year and in our leading hostelry, the Lac la Biche hotel, a jolly crowd of commercial men, the heads of the fishing companies and a full house of guests in general saw 1917 in and exchanged good wishes all round. The residents celebrated the new year by many private parties. The fishermen and trappers came in again for the general jollification.

Looking back, Lac la Biche has every reason to be proud of its rapid growth. On New Year's Day 1916 the present town was at the very beginning of its existence, while on New Year's Day 1917 we are a thriving, up-to-date town, with a fine station, big railroad yards, long distance telephone, electric street lighting, sidewalks, graded streets, a school, post office, good hotels and enterprising modern stores. We have many other business concerns and some very nice residences and, what is better still, our hotels are crowded, our businessmen are doing well and new settlers and residents are coming in steadily. The railroad also has made possible our development of the fishing industry of Lac la Biche and surrounding lakes, the value of which we calculate to about \$75,000 a year, while the lumber camps around here employ at least 150 men. The Riley Lumber company alone employs 75 men and loads at least one car of lumber a day.

-Edmonton Bulletin, January 5, 1917

"On January 11 Lac la Biche was in the throes of an election for a school trustee to replace Mr. T. Maurier, who retired. It was a veritable storm in a teacup and the campaign threatened at times to be very bitter and more zeal and partisanship were displayed than we have seen at many a hard fought Dominion election. At the root of all the excitement was the old, old bi-lingual question, and in spite of the storm and the snowdrifts, every available voter was brought out. The candidates were Mr. F. La Point [Pointe] and Mr. H. Cole.

The poll, which opened at 1 p.m. was crowded with voters, and the scrutineers, Mr. Guigere [Giguere] and Mr. H. Rhodes, challenged every vote that was not absolutely above suspicion. For a long while the candidates ran neck and neck, and then Mr. La Pointe was away ahead and great joy was in his camp. However, the arrival of Mr. Wong Sing, our genial laundryman, and Mr. Wu Bun, the chef of the Lac la Biche Hotel, here, which is a great item in this business, Cole, that snowed the rival candidate under [sic]. At the close of the polls, the voting stood as follows:

Cole, 40

La Pointe, 20

Objected votes, 14

Mr. H. Cole was declared duly elected as school trustee.

P.S. Mr. Wu Bun was challenged and his vote disallowed after all."

-Edmonton Bulletin, January 19, 1917

"Bishop Robbins and the Archdeacon of Athabasca held divine service on Sunday afternoon at the Star pool hall in the village."

-Edmonton Bulletin, August 9, 1916



Lac La Biche Archives



Edward J. McCullough and Michael Maccagno, Lac La Biche and the Early Fur Traders, p.182



Photo courtesy of Mary Watson

The Great Fire of 1919

"ENTIRE DISTRICT IS HOMELESS; CONDITION OF PEOPLE PERILOUS - FOR-EST FIRE SWEEPS OVER THE DISTRICT, TOWNSPEOPLE ONLY SAVED THEIR LIVES BY HERCULEAN EFFORTS - PEOPLE FORCED INTO LAKE - ALL HOMES, BELONGINGS AND BUILDINGS TOTALLY WIPED OUT - GOVERNMENT RUSHES RELIEF NORTH."

To this day no one is absolutely certain how or where the fire began. At the time many townspeople believed that it started around Hylo and moved toward Lac La Biche. Others believed the fire was caused by those who had cut trees for firewood and improperly piled the brush. When the brush dried it somehow caught fire. Recent evidence suggests that the blaze was likely part of an extensive fire system that covered some 7.5 million acres and extended from Boyle to Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

Whatever the source of the fire, when it arrived at Lac La Biche on Monday afternoon, May 19, 1919, the Village, save for a few buildings, burned to the ground. So quickly did the fire strike that old timers thought an eclipse of the sun had occurred. According to Father Okhuyson, it was black as midnight and the only light was from the fire itself. Constable Fred Moses of the Alberta Provincial Police wrote: "Cold, Fine, Eclipse of Sun. Thunder & Lightning. Fires al [sic, all] over. Lac La Biche burnt out. Dark in the afternoon."

It was not only dark. Gale winds of 60 miles an hour (100 km/hr.) swept the fire through the entire Lac La Biche area. People could not get within 10 km of the village because of the intense heat. Communications were broken when telegraph wires melted. People saved themselves by sitting in the lake or covering themselves with wet blankets.

The fire destroyed thirty-two main buildings and another twenty houses. The J.D. McArthur logging camp near Hylo was completely wiped out along with fourteen railway cars loaded with logs. The railway company also lost another 42 ballast cars.

Yet for all the destruction, there were some freak occurrences. When the fire struck the town it headed towards the Roman Catholic Church and, as if by a miracle, the wind suddenly shifted and the Church and the rectory were saved. Similarly, the priest had closed all the windows in his residence but the floors were covered in pine needles. At the time of the fire there were no pine trees within two miles of the place. Even more remarkable was that, despite the devastation, no lives were lost.



Photo courtesy of Mary Watson

In the aftermath of the fire people were forced to live in tents. Note the Red Cross sign on boxes.



The Roman Catholic Church and Rectory which escaped the fire.



Lac La Biche Archives

Father Okhuyson. According to news reports, he lost his shoes during the fire and was forced to wear a pair of house slippers.

The Great Fire Recalled

"My name was Lottie Desjarlais. I used to live right by where the Almac is in Lac La Biche. It was in the evening.* Then the fire was across the track. Everybody hauled water from the lake with a team of horses - you know, all that could help. We all hauled water across the track to where they were fighting fire. It was about a half mile to carry water; it was a long way. So all we did, was pack, pack, pack, water. The smoke was heavy heavy smoke. Everybody fought fire, everybody.

Anyway, where can we sleep? So my cousin, he brought us a team of horses right here by the lake and put the wagon in the water so us younger children could sleep right in there. We were right in the wagon in the water. The horses were out, but we put the wagon in there so we could all sleep there.

And then, the fire stopped. My grand-

mother lived uptown. She got some meat, but it was too heavy so she hid it in the bush - somebody stole it from my grandmother! But it was meat, and everybody was poor then! But we managed. Lots of people got help, but we didn't get any because we had everything - we never lost anything - even that bush that my mother didn't want. The station didn't burn - the church, and the Lac La Biche Inn didn't burn."

Lottie Nashim (née Desjarlais) was twelve years old when the great fire hit Lac La Biche. She recalled that day in a conversation with Professor Peter Murphy of the University of Alberta in 1989.

*The fire struck Lac La Biche in the afternoon. Obviously, the smoke was so heavy that it seemed like evening to a 12 year old.

FOREST FIRE SWEPT LAC LA BICHE AND **300 ARE HOMELESS**

Railway Station, Hotel and Church Only Buildings To Be Saved-Special Relief Train Carrying Supplies For Stricken Inhabitants Left at 4 P.M. for North.

Stricken Inhabitants Left at 4 P.M. for North.
The sends the despeter resources at Lac is Bichs today as the result of storest fire that sweep through the district yeaterday afternoon, taking the form in progress.
The only buildings to be saved, it is reported this afternoon, are the realistic communication with the form on by the fire, both the A & G.W. operating line and the government hat end the information and the government hat end the information of the train the government hat end the fire work of the wiping out of the a line take in the first work of the wiping out of the a line information in the information of the train then telephoned to the commendation with the strict in the telephoned to the commendation in the supervision. Dr. N. McIennam vice-presention of the train time telephoned to send the supervision with the supervision with the second that support with the order to tube the provincial government has openation. "At the present means the supervision with the second that the provincial government has openation." At the present means the supervision with the supervision and is one of the tomportaut the termoon. The More and the supervision the commendation had be reacted to a supervision the commendation had be reacted to a supervision the commendation had be reacted to a supervision the formation had be accessed to a supervision the commendation and the supervision the formation had be accessed to a supervision the commendation had be accessed to a supervision the supervision the supervision the commendation had be accessed to a supervision the supervis

Edmonton Journal, May 20, 1919

RESIDENTS OF LAC LA **BICHE FORCED TO TAKE** REFUGE IN THE WATER

So Swift Was Advance of the Fire and So Intense the Heat That Nothing Was Saved—Property Loss Is Estimated At \$200,000.

Huge Flakes of Flame From noon on Monday the men of the village were out trying to hold the fire to south of the relivary tracks. When the main fire was still a mile and a half from the town, huge flakes of flams were carried over the village and within a few minutes many build-ings were ablaze. Women picked up their children and ran for the lake and even when in the water they/were only saved from sufficient by the wet blankets with which the men kept them covered.

wet blankets with which the men kept them covered. Although the fire was at its height in the middle of the afternoon, states Father Okhuyson. the sky was so overcast with the drifting amoke that it gas like night. Only the leaping fames illuminated the scelle. The wind blowing a gale, trees were bent

Estimated At \$200,000. First hand information of the disart troug forest first that wiped out the troug forest first that wiped out the troug forest first that wiped out the hand come pointed with the heat. Utility place of builness were the bia's mark of the lake, and renders the city yesterday afternoon bia the city yesterday afternoon bia the city yesterday afternoon bia which first the save their of a worded the dalagation sent the city setterday afternoon bia with an intense the beat that the peo-fit was an intense the beat that the peo-fit was only bolt to save their of a wooded region, with the bush closely dry taking refurge is the water the only bolt to save their of the lake. The lown is situated the origin were alting the onrushing amoded region, with the bush closely dry taking refurge is the water the water of the cantry made it prace the water on Monday the men of the wilk remeas till a mine the arguing the town. The argument the outing the town. The argument the control of the relively tracks of fines were curried over the vilkes that from the town are the church and the the outing refurge the town are the church and the the town are the church and the busine of the lake. Women picked ut and within a few minutes many building in the wise throw and for the lake from and work the provincial boy the the town are the church and the busine the town are the church and the homes of the alke town are the church and the busine the town are the church and the busine set in med of short the province the arise and the province to a singe the town are the Church and the sole and the town are the church and the homes of the town are the church and the busine the town are the church and the homes of the town are the church and the homes of the province and ran for the lake and the town are the church and the homes of the town are the church and the homes of the town are the church and the homes of the town are the church and the homes of the town are the churc

Edmonton Journal, May 21, 1919

The Aftermath

Despite the massive damage wrought by the Great Fire of 1919 - only the Roman Catholic Church, the Lac La Biche Inn, the railway station, the Hudson's Bay Company Post, and a cottage owned by Dr. Farguharson survived - the community set about rebuilding. Optimism ran high as the newspaper article reprinted below

indicates. Part of that optimism was reflected in the fact that the small community was officially incorporated as the Village of Lac La Biche on July 24, 1919. Urgele Limoges was the first mayor with councillors O. Lemieux and John Watson. P.D. Hamel was Secretary-Treasurer.

LAC LA BICHE WILL BE REBUILT IMMEDIATELY ON PRETENTIOUS SCALE

Insurance Claims Have Been Adjusted and Figure Out to Fifty Per Cent of Total Losses-Lumber for Reconstruction Purposes Is Available.

burned out in the recent holocaust material have been shipped up from are rising anew out of what seemed at first a complete ruin. Insurance claims have been adjusted, and have Sarot Celuille in St figured out at about fifty per cent. of the losses. The merchants have secured new supplies, and are already Biche in charge of the government with the secure of the government with the secure of the government with carrying on in temporary premises.

Lac la Blehe is now well on its. Lumber for reconstruction purposes way, it is reported, to restoration, is being sawn close at hand, one of Eucliding operations are in full swing, the mills at the lake having escaped, and nearly all the business places the fire, and additional supplies of

Sergt. Colville in Charge.

supplies, is still on duty, and will remain as long as the tents and other material loaned by the government are required. The rations sent up by the provincial department of health have not yet been entirely used up, and what still remains is being distributed to needy cases under Sergt. Colville's direction. Sanitary Inspector Cottle is also on hand, and is giving special attention to the provisions for public health.

The rebuilt town, it is said, will in many ways be better than the original Lae In Biche. The fire served good purpose in clearing off nome of the hand, which was too heavily wooded, and there will now be a better chance to make a real town. Enough of the larger buildings were left, too, to form a nucleus for the town that is to be, and as things look now it will not be long before fac la Blehe will be on the map again, brighter and busies than ever.

Edmonton Journal, June 2, 1919



Lac La Biche in about 1924.



Dodge Brothers automobile alleged to be the first car in Lac La Biche. It was owned by Urgele Limoges, the first mayor of the Village of Lac La Biche. Limoges owned a general store and, later, the Lac La Biche Hotel.

Provincial Archives of Alberta

Rules

"THE COUNCIL OF THE VILLAGE OF LAC LA BICHE ENACTS AS FOLLOWS:-(1) That in order to minimize the possibilities of any accidents to pedestrians the owners of said public garages [Alexander Hamilton and Jos. Giguere] shall put a man on guard outside such garage every time a car is either taken in or taken out.

(2) That the Municipality of the Village of Lac La Biche shall not be held liable for any accidents to pedestrians or vehicles of all kinds caused by handling of such cars in or out

(3) Any one found guilty of a breach of the present By-Law will be liable to a fine or imprisonment as provided for by By-Law #1 providing for the enforcement of the By/laws [sic] of the Municipality of the Village of Lac La Biche."

-By-Law No. 54

"Whereas There is a great preponderance of French speaking residents in the District of Lac La Biche.

Whereas There is only one Justice of the Peace in the District, Mr. John Watson whose knowledge of the french language is very limited.

Whereas It is desirable in the interest of the complete administration of justice that a Justice of the Peace familiar with the french language should be appointed at this point.

Resolved That the Attorney General of Alberta be respectfully asked to direct that the name of P.D. Hamel of Lac La Biche, Notary Public, be added to the commission of the Peace for Alberta."

-Resolution of the Board of Trade June 4, 1923

P.D. Hamel was subsequently appointed as Justice of the Peace and served in that capacity until 1925.

More Rules

PROVINCE DE L'ALBERTA. Eunicipalite du Village de Las La Piche.

> ASSENDLEE SPECIALE AVIE DE CONVOCATION.

Yr.P.D.Hamel. Eceve Yr.P.Ouellette. Yr.O.Lemieux. Conseiller Conseiller

Avis vous est par la presente donne qu'une assemblee speciale du Conseil du Village de Lac La Eiche sera tenue au lieu ordinaire des reunions du Conseil Lundi le Vingt huitieme jour de Mai 1923 at Ruit heures de l'apres midi a laquelle ceront prient en consideration les affaires suivanted Savoir :-

Adoption d'un Reglement pourvoyant aux revenus pour depenses courante du Conseil.

Approbation et recommendation pour emission de licenses de Restaurant.

Paierentazi de comptes. Avis de Reglements. Ponne a Inc Ia Piche ce Vinrt deuxieme jour de Mai 1923.

> A Hand Secretaire Tresorier.

> > Lac La Biche Archives

Early village council meetings were conducted and recorded in French

"THE COUNCIL OF THE VILLAGE OF LAC LA BICHE ENACTS AS FOLLOWS (1) The expression 'Public Dance' in the present By-Law means and includes dances held anywhere within the limits of the Village of Lac La Biche whether in public halls or private dwellings for private gain....

(8) That such public dances shall not be held between the hours of twelve o'clock 'Midnight' and twelve o'clock 'Noon' on week days and shall not be held on Sundays....

(9) That public dances promoted and organized for charitable purposes or the general welfare of the community may not close before the hour of three o'clock in the morning and will not be subject to the license fee provided for by this By-Law."

-By-Law No. 22,

"...Night shall mean the time between 9 o'clock P.M. and 6 o'clock A.M. of the following day, between the 15th day of April and following 1st day of October both inclusive; and between 9 o'clock P.M. and 6 o'clock A.M. of the following day between the 2nd day of October and the 14th day of April following both inclusive.

...Any child found committing a breach of this by-law shall be warned by any constable or other peace officer to go home, and if after such warning such child again commits a breach of this bylaw, he or she may be taken by any constable or peace officer to its home, and may be further dealt with under the provisions of The Juvenile Delinquents Act, 1929....

...The council shall provide a bell which shall be rung by the Constable 15 minutes before the appointed hour to give notice to all children that they must leave for their homes."

-By Law No. 102

"Moved by Councillor W. Dumas that a By-Law be prepared and submitted at the next meeting of the Council amending By-Law No. 4 providing for sleigh dogs not to be be allowed on streets unless in charge of their owner or competent person or securely tied on private property - also changing the Licence fee from two to three dollars for dogs and from five to seven dollars for bitches." -March 3, 1930

"That the speed of all Motor vehicles shall not exceed ten miles per hour when driving within the limits of the village."

-By-Law No. 48

The Horatio Alger of Lac La Biche

"We had third class tickets and rode on the bottom of the ship and slept on hammocks. I was so sick I vowed I would never get on the water again." -Alexander Hamilton

During a period in Canadian history known as the "Laurier Wheat Boom," the Liberal Government of Sir Wilfrid Laurier actively promoted immigration to Canada. Hundreds of thousands of people answered the call between 1896 and 1911. They came hoping to find a better life. One of those "Hopeful Travellers" was Alexander Hamilton. His search for a better life reads like a Horatio Alger tale come true. Just like the heroes in Alger's famous books, Alexander Hamilton struggled through poverty and adversity to gain wealth and honour.

The story, however, began not with Alexander Hamilton, but with Ali Ahmed Abouchadi at Lala, Lebanon. One fine day in 1905 young Ali was tending a herd of cattle when he saw his uncle Hussein Abouchadi and a friend, Sam Jamha, walking on the road to Beirut. Uncle Hussein and Sam had heard tales of the great Klondike gold rush and decided to travel to Canada to get their pot of gold.

Ali walked the thirty miles to Beirut with them to say goodbye and to see, for the first time, the sea. He got more than he bargained for. By the time they arrived at Beirut Ali, too, was hooked on Canada. Uncle Hussein paid the \$24 fare for Ali's passage to Canada and word of his decision to leave Lebanon was sent to his parents through an old man. Ali was only twelve years old when he boarded the



Courtesy of Sine Hamilton

Alexander Hamilton during a lighter moment. Once asked to describe his trip to Canada, he said: "We had third class tickets and rode on the bottom of the ship and slept on hammocks. I was so sick I vowed I would never get on the water again." In any event, he did get on the water again to do battle with the Hudson's Bay Company. The building behind Mr. Hamilton is now the site of Hamar's grocery store.

ship. He did not even have a change of clothes.

The trio arrived, as so many immigrants did, at Montréal. After a short visit with George Lesahn, a Lebanese friend who owned a hotel, they left by train for Winnipeg. By the time they arrived the realization that the gold rush was over had sunk in. Young Ali began to sell - it was called "peddling," or "Syrian peddling," in those days - fans door to door. He bought the fans for five cents each and sold them for ten cents each. He managed to sell between eight and ten dozen fans a day.

While Ali was going door to door people kept telling him "Young Man, Go West." So, after a month and a half in Winnipeg, he and his companions moved to Edmonton, where Ali began peddling dry goods from a suitcase which he strapped to his back. Business was very good. Within a short period of time he was able to buy a horse and buckboard buggy. This new "transportation system" helped him to expand his activities. By the end of 1906 he and his uncle were travelling between Edmonton and Lac La Biche, peddling and trading with Native people along the way.

Business continued to grow, so much so that by 1909 Uncle Hussein had saved \$500 and decided to return to Lebanon. Left on his own, Ali, who was becoming fluent in Cree, continued operating the store he and his uncle had opened in Lac La Biche. Then, the same year, for reasons which are not entirely clear, he decided to close the store and move to Saskatchewan to start homesteading (he had to lie about his age because a person had to be 19 to obtain land on their own; he was only 17). He also made another big decision. He changed his name to Alexander Hamilton. It is highly unlikely there was anything irregular in this since he registered the change with the government. He later said it was "for business purposes."

After three years of homesteading - during which he claimed to have broken 30 acres of land a year - he sold his farm for \$1000 and returned to Lac La Biche to resume trading. His timing was perfect. Throughout most of 1912 and 1913 there



An advertisement for Alexander Hamilton's store which appeared in the St Paul Journal in the early 1930s.

was an enormous demand for live silver foxes in Prince Edward Island. Good foxes were fetching anywhere from \$2000 to \$6000 each.

Despite this windfall, Alexander, as he was now known, later recalled that Lac La Biche "was a very poor country with no railroads. There were only cow trails between Edmonton and Lac La Biche. It would take us seven and eight days to make the trip with our groceries and supplies. Most of the people in that area were trappers, so in the summer they had no jobs."

Still, Alexander Hamilton did well, very well. There was an economic downturn at the end of 1913 and it got worse with the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. The silver fox market collapsed, money was


Lac La Biche Archives

Alexander Hamilton's store circa 1930s. Note the gas pump in front of the store.

scarce and unemployment across the country was up. But Alexander Hamilton had enough to continue and even to expand his business operations. By 1915, in addition to his store, he was contracting and subcontracting for J.D. McArthur's Alberta and Great Waterways Railway and the same year he received the agency for the Ford Motor Co. Then, the great fire struck.

Like so many business people in Lac La Biche, Alexander Hamilton lost his store that dark day in May 1919. Never one to quit, he built a bigger and better one. Once again timing was on his side. In 1919 the Hudson's Bay Company pulled out of Lac La Biche and Hamilton reaped the benefits. By the late 1920s he was the largest businessman in town with a department store, the Ford agency, and a gas station. He also operated a sawmill, dabbled in cattle and built and ran the first grain elevator in town. It was later sold to John Gillespie.

Hamilton was an extremely shrewd businessman who saw opportunity and

"I also heard that you could make money by digging out little baby foxes. I took a shovel and my oldest daughter Lena, and we started out. We took some flour mixed with baking powder and salt. We wandered into the dense forest and somehow got lost. I would not admit to Lena that we were lost. We wandered in the bush, catching rabbits, fish and sparing the flour in case we needed it later. We wandered around for ten days and about three of the ten days I was lost. All we found was one fox den and we dug out a family of three. I landed up with two and only one-eighth of the third fox. All I had left in my hand was the tail of the third one. That's how I made out with fox-digging, (like a naked man in a rose brier patch)."

-Nick Tanasiuk Nick Tanasiuk settled north of Athabasca Landing. Clearly, not everyone was successful at fox farming. jumped on it. In 1925, for example, he went to Fort McMurray and started a floating store business. He later recalled that "I was following the Government boat which was paying the treaty money to the Indians all the way to the Arctic. I had to keep pretty close to it from one post to the other so as to get my share of the money before the H.B.C. [Hudson's Bay Company] got it all. I was selling my goods to the Indians at about one-half of what the H.B.C. was charging. They then got after the Government not to allow any more river boats down the river as it was cutting into their business and they didn't like the competition."

Other opportunities presented themselves during the great depression of the 1930s. Perhaps the true measure of Hamilton's business abilities can be found in the fact that while others were suffering during the "dirty 30s" he was expanding. In 1937 he and Frank Nashim started "... we stayed overnight at Mr. Huppie, but slept outside under the stars. There we met Mr. Alex Hamilton. We sold him a horse, and then bought a tent from him. To the Indians, Mr. Hamilton would give tea, sugar, powder, lead, clothes in exchange for furs.

Then we slept at Mr. Pruden's place, a Metis, and then at Lac La Biche Mission. The roads were very bad. Then we came to my brother's place, Fr. X. Bouvier, 10 miles from the Mission. It had taken us 17 days to travel 150 miles."

- Diary of Clara Ostiguy, 1911

mink ranching. In 1938 he opened an International Harvester agency and store. He continued dabbling in cattle and he also took on government contracts.

In his various business activities Hamilton practiced early forms of what are now known as "vertical" and "horizontal"



Lac La Biche Archives

During a trip to Winnipeg, Alexander Hamilton spied an Eaton's store with windows running around the store under a marquee. He was so impressed that he decided to build such a store in Lac La Biche. The result was the store he opened in 1943 on the corner of Nanton Street and Alberta Avenue. This was the store the Hudson's Bay Company bought in 1946. Hamilton later expressed disappointment over the Bay's decision to take out the windows. business integration. Thus, he sub-contracted some of his railway work in order to provide his customers with work. At the same time he started the mink ranch next to the slaughterhouse, which he owned. It was through these types of linkages that Hamilton could expand. However, not all of his businesses prospered. A store he opened in Fond du lac, Saskatchewan failed as did another business in Fort Fitzgerald. And a bid to purchase the Lac La Biche Hotel in 1941 erupted into such an uproar that the Alberta Liquor Control Board forced Hamilton to back off.

But overall he was extraordinarily successful. And business, as he later admitted, "started going really strong" during World War II. In 1943 Hamilton designed and built a new department store which carried almost everything. It even had a built-in butcher shop. He also practiced the more modern city practice of keeping his store open to cater to special traffic, notably, the customers who came by train.

By the end of World War II, two of Hamilton's business had attracted the attention of the Hudson's Bay Company. And, just as the H.B.C. had abandoned Lac La Biche in 1824 to return twentyseven years later in 1853 because independent minded business people in Lac La Biche had been successful - so the H.B.C. returned in 1946, twenty-seven years after abandoning the town for the second time in 1919 because independent businessmen had succeeded. The H.B.C. bought out Alexander Hamilton. The deal was made under the condition that he would not open a store within 50 miles of Lac La Biche for ten years. History is full of strange ironies.

The Horatio Alger of Lac La Biche moved to Edmonton, where he continued to dabble in business - now the hotel business until the late 1960s. In 1969 he moved to Kelowna, British Columbia.

Alexander Hamilton was a remarkable man. A fitting epitaph might be "Not bad for a guy who couldn't read or write" - and it was all the more remarkable that he accomplished as much as he did without the ability to read or write. But he was by

The "Syrians"

The Syrian "peddler," travelling from place to place, most often with a horse and light wagon in summer, a sleigh in winter, was something of an institution in Western Canada in the early years of the 20th century.

Who were these "Syrians," and why did they come to Canada?

Historically, the name Syria applied to an area called the Levant on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean which corresponds to modern day Syria and Lebanon, most of Israel and Jordan, and parts of Northern Arabia. It was an important geographical region because of its location on the trade and military routes between the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia and because it cradled three religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Consequently, Syria was the object of conquest by foreign powers the Amorites, the Hittites, Alexander the Great, the Seleucidae, and, eventually, the Ottoman Turks, who controlled the region from 1516 to the end of the Great War.

While the Syrians were allowed a degree of self-rule under the Turks, many Syrian Moslems left their country to escape military service in the Turkish army. Christians, by contrast, were exempt from service in the Turkish army. But Christians, particularly in Lebanon, suffered periodic massacres at the hands of the Druses, a kind of secret religious sect in Syria. So a number of Christians left Syria to escape persecution. All Syrians who came to Canada were looking for better economic conditions.

Although most famous for their role as travelling "peddlers," many Syrians settled on land and became successful farmers. Others settled into various fields of business and industry. Many Syrians anglicized their names and assimilated into the Anglo-Canadian culture. no means uneducated. He travelled around the world twice and he was an active member of the Northern Alberta Pioneers' and Old Timers' Association. When asked in the late 1970s to reflect upon his life in Canada he simply said: "I'm proud of being a Canadian."

They Met on a Northern Steamboat

In addition to being one of the most important pioneering business persons in Lac La Biche, Alexander Hamilton left another important legacy. As the first permanent Syrian resident at Lac La Biche, he paved the way for others. And when news of his success travelled back to Lala, Lebanon, many families moved to Western Canada. Some settled at Lac La Biche, some settled elsewhere, and a few returned home.

Sine Alley came to Canada from Lala, Lebanon as Hussein Ali Abougoush in 1907. He was 17 years old and eager to find adventure and economic success like his countryman, Alexander Hamilton.

That search led him to Fort Chipewyan and a partnership (with Frank Coutney and Ali Hamdon) in a firm called Alley-Hamdon General Merchants and Fur Traders. In 1921 he met a young Métis woman named Rose Albina Mercredi while crossing Lake Athabasca on a steamboat. Born and raised in the Fort Chipewyan area, Rose worked as a hostess on the boat.

The romance blossomed and the couple was married in 1923. Rose gave birth to four children in Canada.

Unlike many Syrians who came to Canada, Sine Alley did not assimilate. He chose to maintain his Lebanese culture and heritage and, to that end, moved back Historians call this "chain migration," and it was a familiar pattern in the settlement and development of Western Canada. One of those who came and then left again was Hussein Ali Abougoush, better known as Sine Alley. He was involved in a remarkable relationship which reads like a modern day David Thompson and Charlotte Small love story.

to Lebanon with his family in 1930. The couple had three more children there.

Rose adopted the language, culture, and the Islamic faith of her husband. Her personal dedication and perseverance demonstrated a remarkable strength of character.

Rose never saw Canada again. When Sine returned to Canada to work for seven years during the 1930s, she stayed behind with the children in her new home.

Rose and Sine remained in Lebanon until their deaths in the early 1980s. Their children and grandchildren returned to Canada, where the extended Abougoush, Asiff, Jarkas, and Karamujic families continue to live in Lac La Biche, Fort McMurray, Edmonton and Toronto.



Lac La Biche Archives

The wedding picture of Hussein Ali Abougoush, better known as Sine Alley, and Rose Albina Mercredi. The couple moved back to Lebanon in 1930. She adopted the Lebanese culture and Islamic religion and never returned to Canada.



Provincial Archives of Alberta

A typical steamboat on the Athbasca, probably not unlike the steamboat upon which Sine Alley met Rose Mercredi.



Lac La Biche Yesterday and Today, p.114

Frank Coutney, another early Lebanese pioneer. Born Mahmaud Bo Ali Gotmi (or Mohammed Abduli Gotmi depending on the source) in 1890 at Lala, Lebanon, he came to Canada in 1907. Unlike Alexander Hamilton and his companions, who came to get their "pot of gold," Coutney was sent to Canada by his parents to escape violence and political turmoil. After a harrowing trip via Marseilles, France, he landed at New York City - only to be sent back to France because American immigration officials decided he did not have enough money. He worked for another month and then boarded a ship for Mexico, where he stayed with friends and worked to save money. He eventually made his way to Canada and worked as a labourer for a few years before coming to Lac La Biche in 1911. Alexander Hamilton hired him for a year. after which Coutney went to Calgary. He returned in 1915 and started homesteading and fur buying just south of Lac La Biche. Three years later he sold the land and headed for Fort Chipewyan with Sine Alley and Hamdon Ali. Like Sine, Frank fell in love and in 1924 married Beatrix Bourgue, the daughter of a French store merchant and cattleman. The couple moved about a great deal over the next few years, to Cheecham along the A & GW line, then to La Loche, Saskatchewan, then to Edmonton, back to Beacon Hill, Saskatchewan, and finally, in 1927, back to Lac La Biche. Frank built a general store which he operated for many years. In contrast to Sine Alley. Frank Coutney never returned to Lebanon.

Early Business

Most of the early businesses in Lac La Biche were private corporations started by aspiring entrepreneurs who came to make their fortune. Some of the businesses had names that reflected the ambitions of the owners. Perhaps the best example of this was "The Mercantile Company Limited," a lofty sounding title which conjures up romantic visions of old time trading companies such as the East India Company. The Mercantile Company was incorporated in 1912 by O.J. Biollo (who was also known as J.O. Billos), a middle-class Italian who was one of the original founders of Venice, Alberta.

Other companies did not bear such grand titles but their aims were no less ambitious. The "Lac La Biche Hotel Company," started in 1924 by Urgele Limoges, the first mayor of the Village of Lac La Biche, had a lengthy list of corporate activities:

"To carry on the business of hotel, restaurant, cafe, tavern, beer house, refreshment room, and lodging house keepers, and artificial waters, and other drinks and carriage proprietors and livery stable keepers, farmers, dairymen, ice merchants, importers and brokers of food, live and dead stock, proprietors of club, bath, dressing rooms, grounds and places of clubs, baths, dressing rooms, grounds and places of amusement, creation, sport, entertainment and instruction of all kinds, tobacco and cigar merchants, agents for railway and shipping companies and carriers, and any other business which can be conveniently carried on in connection therewith."

Similarly, the "Memorandum of Association" which created A. Hamilton & Sons Limited in 1936 provided for an impressive range of business activity, including takeovers:

"To acquire and take over as going concerns the retail stores known as A. Hamilton, Hamar Bros. and the Cash Store now carried on by Alex. Hamilton in the Village of Lac La Biche ... To carry on business in dry goods and furnishings, clothing, wearing apparel, boots and shoes, hardware, groceries and general merchandise of any description, and any other articles which may be conveniently handled in conjunction with the business aforesaid.

To engage in the manufacture, purchase, sale, export, import and exchange of woolen and cotton and other fabrics of all kinds and in all materials used in the manufacture of clothing and wearing apparel or articles usually dealt in there



Venice Mercantile. Owned by Giuseppe Billos, who also went under the name O.J. Biollo (and others), it was one of the early businesses at Venice, Alberta. Felice Di Angelis, the Italian Consul at Edmonton, wrote of Billos: "If only I had the company of someone attractive and intelligent, my delight would be complete. Instead, I have to put up with Billos, who is neither attractive nor intelligent. Too bad!"

Lac La Biche Archives

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Lac La Biche Archives

The proverbial blank cheque. This promissary note was issued against the Banque d'Hochelaga, which appears to have been the first bank to open at Lac La Biche. Incorporated in 1873, with the head office at Montréal, the bank changed its name to Banque Canadienne Nationale in 1924. How long the bank did business at Lac La Biche remains unknown.



Lac La Biche Archives

Centre left. Emilio and Carlotta Sampietro. Best known as a dealer in guns, he ran the modern day equivalent of a sports store in Lac La Biche. At one time he managed to obtain packing cases full of new powder flasks and shot measures. One writer described him as "the type of trader who put colour to the frontier." Below left. An ad which appeared in the St. Paul Journal in the early 1930s. Below. An ad for another grand titled business, the Plamondon Mercantile Company.





Lac La Biche Archives

Up at 5:00 a.m. and work until dark. Such was life at the creamery. Operated for many years by the Cadieux family, the Lac La Biche Creamery began as a horse and ox-drawn cart family business. Because hard times often forced the men into the bush to cut railroad ties, the daily business of running the creamery was left to the women and children. Purchased by the McHardy's, and later the Badry's, it was sold to Valley Dairies and then to the Alberta Dairy Pool. Growing urban centralization of the diary and creamery business eventually forced the closure of the plant. For Lac La Biche and area, it meant the end of an era which had started with an ox-pulled cart and ended with the big city sanitized production plants common today.

To carry on all or any of the businesses of dry goods manufactures, furriers, haberdashers, hosiers, manufacturers, exporters and importers, wholesale and retail, of any and all kinds of fabrics, feathers, dresses, boot and shoe manufacturers, importers, wholesale and retail, of an in leather goods, household furniture, ironmongery, groceries, hardware, china, glassware, crockery, and other household fittings and utensils, oraments, bric-abrac, stationery, notions and fancy goods. To carry on the business of general traders in and manufacturers of goods, chattels, merchandise and supplies which can with advantage be dealt in by the Company in connection with the above businesses."

Below left: the Lac La Biche Cash Store, owned by A. Hamilton. Below right: Urgele Limoges, the first mayor of Lac La Biche and owner of the Lac La Biche Hotel Company.



Lac La Biche Archives

The Lac La Biche Commercial Fishery

"We thought in the early days that the buffalo would never disappear. We now think the immense quantities of fish in our lakes will last forever, so let us take warning by what befell the buffalo and use all care to preserve what we have left."

-Sir Cecil Denny, RNWMP, 1874

Fishing has always been an integral part of the history of Lac La Biche. While there is ample evidence that Native peoples fished the lake for perhaps thousands of years, the first recorded catch was made by David Thompson during the winter of 1798-99. Thompson was impressed with the bounty. "The Lake from our set nets gave us fish of Pike, White Fish, Pickeral and Carp for about one third of our support," he recorded in his Journal.

Indeed, so important was fishing, and particularly the fall fishery, that one fur trader declared Lac La Biche whitefish to be "the staff of life." It was no less so for the Missionary Oblates, who were fond of saying, tongue in cheek, "Give us this day our daily fish." In 1892 the lake yielded more than 6300 Whitefish for the Lac La Biche Mission.

Three years later the fishery was in trouble, a development which prompted the Department of Marine Fisheries to write in its annual report for 1895: "Lac La Biche at the present moment, is at a crucial stage, for its fish have been largely reduced in numbers, and as there are about 300 resident half-breeds who live very largely on fish, it is a serious matter to them and the country." The fishery recovered but the concern over the reduction of stocks merely underlined its importance. The upshot of this concern was the appearance of a Royal North West Mounted Police Constable in Lac La Biche to enforce fishing regulations.

The modern fishery began after the arrival of the railway in 1915. By the summer of 1916 two fish companies were operating at Lac La Biche. One was the Lac La Biche Company, owned by one Mr. Clements, former manager of the Alberta Hotel in Edmonton. Clements's fish plant was located in the "old town". A second plant opened at the east end of town near the Hudson's Bay Company post. It was owned by F. Drolet.

With the appearance of two fish companies, Lac La Biche sometimes resembled an east coast fishing port more than a fur trade center. Some 200 fishermen would leave early in the morning in boats of various sizes, including row boats and sail boats. During the course of a day the fish were weighed, gutted, and thrown into one of four compartments of the holds depending on whether they were whitefish, walleye, pike, or tullibee. Crushed ice was left with individual fishermen for the next day's catch. By two or three o'clock in the afternoon the boats unloaded the haul at the fish plants. The fish were then packed into boxes and loaded onto refrigeration cars.

The early fishery was very labour intensive but it did generate other industries,

"The Lac la Biche and northern fish have been firmly established in the Eastern and American markets, and are in great demand. As they are really excellent, they have become great favorites for the table."

-Edmonton Bulletin, 1917

such as boat building, ice storage, net mending, and transportation from the fish plants to the railway station. The local sawmill was also kept busy making slats for the many fish boxes required for the export trade. In early 1917 an *Edmonton Journal* reporter observed that one local business had five teams of horses and fifteen men hauling ice for the Lac La Biche Fish Company.

In 1916 dressed Whitefish was fetching 2 cents per pound, undressed Pickeral, 11/2 cents, and dressed Pike and Suckers 1 cent per pound. Much of the fish caught in Lac La Biche was destined for the

	DOMINION OF CANADA									
	PROVINCE OF ALBERTA									
	Department of Marine and Fisheries									
COMMERCIAL AND FISHERMAN'S FISHERY LICENSE 1914-1915										
s any right or Seturday, and	The herein named. Jes. Sponser									
and The graviting of this License neither coaveys nor implice any right or claim of secondinations by your the period stated. Yo finhing of any kind is spermitted between six o'clock p.m., Baturday, and six o'clock a.m. Monday, in such week.	resident of Les Biche									
	is hereby licensed to fish for									
	the Virter legal season from Date									
	LAC LA BICIE									
	with One Hundred and Fifty fathoms of gill nets of at least 52 inch mesh extension measure									
	THIS LICENSE IS NOT TRANSFERABLE									
	The present license requires strict conformity with the various provisions of the FISHERY LAWS and to all REGULATIONS emasating from the GOVERNOR GENERAL 1N COUNCIL, and DIRECTIONS BY FINHERY OFFICERS; in default of compliance with auch, the same will become void and forfetted forthwith, saving, moreover, tho penalties imposed by law.									
	WM.A.FOUND For Minister of Marine and Fuberice.									
	Countersigned and dated at Eliteration , this 12- day of Declinities , 1914									
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American market via Chicago and New York. Whitefish was especially important. Lac La Biche Whitefish often turned up as an entree on the menus of posh New York City restaurants.

Such fame did not go unnoticed by the Lac La Biche Board of Trade, which, in addition to realizing the real value of the commercial fishery, was quick to spot the potential for promoting increased tourism. In 1935 the Board of Trade passed a resolution proclaiming Lac La Biche to be "a veritable sportsmen's Paradise." The lake's "sloping sandy shores are unequaled anywhere for safe bathing by adults and chil-

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 Pickerel (Doré)	CLOS	E SEA	SONS.	
Gold Eyes	Pickerel (Doré)	do	40	do
 *1 Rocky Mountain do do do *2 Salmon Trout (Lake Trout) do do do *2 Salmon Trout (Lake Trout) do do do *2 Tulibes do do do do do *2 Tulibes do do do do do *2 Tulibes do do do do do *2 Tulibes	Gold Eyes Sturgeon *1 Speckled Trout	do do	15th May 1st Nov. to	to 15th June. o 30th June.
 (Lake Trout)	Whitefish	do	do	do
 (Both days inclusive in all cases.) 1. Provided that in the Red Deer river and its tributary waters the close reason for Speckled Trout, Grayling and Rocky Mountain Whitefash, shall be from 1st Sept. to 30th April, and for the same fash in the Athabasea river and the North Saskatchewan arriver and their tributary waters, the close season shall be from 1st Nov. to 31st May. a. Also provided that in waters north of the 54th Parallel hetween the close season for Whitefash, Tulibee and Salmon or Lake Trout, shall be from 1st Nov. to 31st May. a. Also provided that in waters north of the 54th Parallel hetween the close season for Whitefash, Tulibee and Salmon or Lake Trout, shall be from 1st October to 30th November in each year, both days inclusive; and that in this same district the close season for Pike, Pickerel, Perch and Goldeyes shall no apply. No person, during the close seasons above provided, shall fish for, catch will or have in possession any of the kinds of fish mentioned above. PROHIBUTIONS. 1. Fishing with nets of any kind or with other apparatus without Licens or Permit is prohibited. 3. No Cut Throat Trout, Rainbow Trout, Grayling or Rocky Mountair Whitefish less than nine inches in length shall be retained or keept out of the water, and anyone who takes or catches such fish of less than the minimum measurement namedwhich measurement shall be from the point of the nose to the centre of the tailshall return such fish to the water from which it was taken, alive and uninjured. 4. No Lake Trout less than fifteen inches in length shall be retained or the point of the nose to the aggregate amount to more than twenty-five Cit Throat Trout, Rink Paralle hetwest from which it was taken, alive and uninjured. 5. No one shall, in one day, catch and retain more than twenty-five Cit Throat Trout, Rink Paralle hetwent from which it was taken, alive and uninjured. 6. No one shall, in one day, by angling or troling	(Lake Trout) *2 Whitefish	· do	do	do
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Lac La Biche Archives

"By the time the hunters had left for their camps Fall was upon us. We had now to lay in the winter supply of whitefish for the women, children and dogs. Nine or ten thousand was considered a sufficient quantity. Most of these we speared from a bar between an island and a point on the mainland [along the present day causeway to Churchill Park]. The water was three to four feet deep. The fish were spawning and so numerous that the lake bottom was scarcely visible. It was a matter merely of sending down the spear and bringing it up with one or two, and sometimes three, fish at a time.

dren alike," the Board declared, "while over half a million of pounds of all kinds [of fish] are taken out of the lake every year for export. Angling for pickeral and pike is exceptionally good."

A major shift in the Lac La Biche commercial fishery occurred in the 1940s and 1950s with the rapid growth in mink ranching. The ranchers need large catches of tullibee and other rough fish to feed the mink. By the late 1950s the commercial The run commenced about dusk and finished round midnight, when the fish were growing scarce, we left off spearing. We used birchbark flambeaux for torches, and seldom secured less than a thousand each calm night during the whole spawning period. At other points on the lake where the fish were less plentiful nets were kept going, so that before the freezeup we had all we required. The missionaries and halfbreeds were all carrying on the same work or putting up their winter stock of fish."

> - Henry John Moberly, When Fur Was King, 1929

fishery was estimated at 2,000,000 pounds a year.

Although the heyday of mink ranching and Lac La Biche Whitefish on New York menus is gone, the commercial fishery still operates. Quality export grade Whitefish is now shipped through the Lac La Biche Fisherman's Cooperative Plant as an agent of the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation.



Top left and below right. The Lac La Biche fishery. People used to remark that Lac La Biche sometimes looked more like an east coast fishing hamlet than a village located on an inland fresh water lake in Alberta. Note the sailboat. Below left. Capturing the tourist trade.

Lac La Biche Archives





Lac La Biche Archives

Why the Hudson's Bay Company Closed Lac La Biche Post

"Contrary to specific written instructions from their respective District Managers, heavy advances were made to fisherman who were fishing the adjacent lakes."

-Hudson's Bay Company Annual Report, 1920

In 1919 the Hudson's Bay Company abandoned Lac La Biche for the second time since 1824. Ironically, the HBC did not close the post because of a downturn

"The increase in the loss by Bad Debts was principally in respect of credit extended at Green Lake Post in Saskatchewan District. and Lac La Biche Post in Athabasca District, by the local Post Managers. Contrary to specific written instructions from their respective District Managers, heavy advances were made to fisherman who were fishing the adjacent lakes. - The fish distributing companies, to whom the fisherman expected to sell their products, having accumulated, at high prices, considerable stocks, were forced to liquidate on a declining market, and refused to accept further shipments from the fishermen unless for sale on their account and at much reduced prices, - the result was that the fishermen were unable to meet their obligations and as eventual

in the fur trade. Rather, it was the commercial fishery which brought the post to its knees, as the local Commissioner noted in his annual report for 1920.

collection is extremely doubtful, the accounts were written off as 'Bad'. They amounted at Green Lake to \$15,017, and at Lac La Biche to \$4,293. Of the latter, however, about \$1,000 only was in respect of fish transactions, the Post being closed out, it was not deemed expedient to value on inventory any uncollected accounts, although no doubt some collections will be made.

The fyles [sic, files] of correspondence between the District Offices and the Posts on this subject have been examined, and the Post Managers were amply cautioned therein to restrict credit within authorized limits, - their zeal, however, was apparently greater than their good judgement. Both have since been retired from the service." -Annual Report, 1920

"There is a gathering of the clans of fishermen at Lac La Biche, in anticipation of the opening of the season on the 15th instant. ... The sound of the fish scales was heard among the brotherhood and they came from far and near to the gathering. Mr. Pope Clement, of the Lac La Biche Fish Co., came from far-off Woodstock, Ont. ... Four companies will be operating here this summer"

-Edmonton Bulletin, May 11, 1917

"The northern fishing outfits as well as the trading Coys [companies] are in bad shape for feed and supplies on account of the tie up in the railroad caused by the heavy and drifted snow and cold weather.

Dog teams are in great demand being the only mode of trak [sic] with the existing state of the weather." -Detachment Diary of Fred Moses January 31, 1920



Plamondon School Library Archives

View of the abortive Plamondon Canal.

The Canal That Wouldn't Be

"They kept at it for three summers and got within a half mile from the village when money ran out and the project died a natural death." -E. Plamondon, Memoirs

In 1921 Alexander Hamilton built the first grain elevator in Lac La Biche and the farmers in the Plamondon area had to find a way to deliver their harvests. The railroad had unfortunately passed them by and the road from Plamondon to Lac La Biche was nearly impassable much of the time. The solution? Build a canal.

The proposed Plamondon Canal was to stretch about five km (three miles) from the Plamondon Bay to Plamondon. The community placed high hopes in the project, believing it would create scores of jobs. Disappointment set in when residents learned the job would be done by a state of the art steam powered dredging machine.

Frederick and Clifton Plamondon, among others, prepared during the winter of 1921-22 by stockpiling wood along the banks of the creek. This would provide fuel for the massive machine, which was freighted to Lac La Biche on the A & GW railroad, and then placed on a 30 by 30 foot barge. The giant steam shovel was to dredge the creek to a depth of two meters (six to seven feet). Under the direction of Engineer Cunningham, assistant Arthur P. Boulanger, and with the assistance of Noe Bourassa, Jack, Valmore, and Clifton Plamondon and others, the dredging began in the summer of 1922. The grain farmers were excited, and the rest of the community overcame its earlier disappointment. "Our little hamlet is bubbling with commotion ... this was tremendous!" Mrs. D. Proulx later wrote.

The mammoth machine, and the project itself, became a local tourist attraction. Even the cattle watched with bemused wonder Politicians were enthusiastic as were members of the Lac La Biche Board of Trade. The minutes of the April 25, 1924 Board meeting proudly boasted: "Your Department of Public Works is now operating an up to date dredge at Plamondon ... the Government is actually engaged in dredging a canal at Plamondon to facilitate transportation by water from Plamondon to Lac La Biche and vice versa."

One summer passed. Then another. Finally, after three summers, and less than a kilometer (one half mile) short of completion, the money ran out and the project was abandoned.

The focus shifted to roads and another mechanical marvel: the one-ton truck. It could carry an almost unbelievable 150 bushels of grain in one load. And the Canal? It was forgotten as quickly as it was conceived.



Plamondon School Library Archives

The massive steam powered dredge at work. Note the stacks of wood for the steam engine. The dredge also had a terrible list to port side.



The dredge crew in 1922. From left to right: Arthur P. Belanger; Engineer Cunningham; and Jack, Valmore, and Clifton Plamondon.

Plamondon School Library Archives







The one ton Dodge truck. The presence of such trucks indicated growing economic diversification in the Lac La Biche region.

Lac La Biche Archives

Built by Alexander Hamilton in 1921, the Lac La Biche grain elevator was purchased by John Gillespie and upgraded in 1925. It was destroyed by fire in May 1928 following an explosion in the engine room.



Lac La Biche Archives

Settlers, Or, How Ottawa Saw It

"Farming operations, however, cannot be carried on extensively in these northern bush areas, unless a considerable amount of capital is expended before cash returns are looked for."

-Department of the Interior, Canada, Bulletin No. 47, The Lac La Biche District, Alberta: A Guide for Intending Settlers, Ottawa, 1923

"In the settlement of the extensive areas of agricultural lands in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, the open and semi-open plains in the southern parts received first attention. As the better areas of open lands were taken up, the forefront of settlement was gradually extended into the fertile wooded areas of the north. The Alberta and Great Waterways railway from Edmonton to McMurray has become one of the routes over which explorers, prospectors and home-seekers are entering undeveloped areas in the province of Alberta. This railway traverses a tract of agricultural land in the vicinity of lac la Biche [sic], Alberta, a lake approximately twenty-five miles long and six miles wide. Situated on this railway on the southeast side of the lake about 115 miles northeast of Edmonton, is the village of Lac-la-Biche Station, with a population of about four hundred. In the village are situated several stores, hotels, boarding houses, a livery, post office, bank and a subagency of the Dominions Lands Office.

The village of Lac-la-Biche Station is connected by main wagon roads with Athabaska towards the west and St. Paul des Metis and Saddle Lake towards the southeast. In general the district is undulating, becoming somewhat hilly in the forest reserves towards the east and southwest. Forest fires, from time to time, have removed a large part of the virgin timber, leaving large areas of semi-open or lightly wooded poplar country. The forest cover, where untouched by recent fires consists of poplar with some spruce, birch, willows and jack pine. In many places there are stones and boulders.

Scattered throughout the area are many spruce and tamarack muskegs, varying in

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Lac La Biche Archives

A Dominion Land Grant.

size from a few acres to several sections. The larger of these lie in township 68, range 17, and in township 68, ranges 11 and 12. A number of lakes are also found throughout the district, some of which occupy several sections.

The watershed between the Arctic Ocean and Hudson Bay drainage systems passes through the southern part of the district, the area to the north draining to lac la Biche and the Athabaska River drainage basin, that to the south draining to the Beaver river, a part of the Churchill River drainage basin. The highest elevation is about 2300 feet, in the eastern part of range 11. An elevation of over 2000 feet is reached in the northern part of Buck Lake forest reserve in township 66, range 17. Other elevations of prominent features in the district are as follows: lac la Biche [sic], 1784; Missawawi lake, 1865; Caslan, 2030; Hylo, 1884; Venice, 1873; Lac-la-Biche Station, 1836; Square lake, 1902.

An idea of what might be expected, by a man looking to this district as his future home, may be illustrated by the actual experience of a homesteader in the western part of the district. He was of Michigan-French origin and had been brought up in a hilly, wooded part of northern Michigan, where it required continual hard work to make a living. Hearing of the attractions of northern Alberta and the opportunities for acquiring land under the homestead laws, he made his way to this district, where he arrived without capital but a fair knowledge of farming. He built a small shack and made a beginning with a garden. He worked out for his neighbours whenever possible and lived off these earnings and his garden for the first summer. For the first three winters he left

his place and worked in the mines around Edmonton or in the woods, each summer returning and improving his place. At the end of five years, he had about forty acres cleared, with a very comfortable house and outbuildings, and about twelve head of stock. His place is now wholly supporting him and his family. He considers he has already reached a position he could never have hoped to attain in his old home - a good sized farm of his own, stock, buildings, and a comfortable living. This is the usual story of the hardy, hardworking man who homesteads successfully in a bush country without capital. The only way to success lies in strict attention to business. A homesteader without capital, especially if married, must 'work out' during the first few winters.

A much easier path lies before the prospective settler who has a little capital. He can clear and break enough land during the first year to make his place selfsupporting in following years, providing of course, he settled on a suitable quartersection. Farming operations, however, cannot be carried on extensively in these northern bush areas, unless a considerable amount of capital is expended before cash returns are looked for."

-Department of the Interior, Canada, Bulletin No. 47, The Lac La Biche District, Alberta: A Guide for Intending Settlers, Ottawa, 1923

Dentistry - Pioneer Style

"I wondered what else I could do to support my family. I needed money to buy wheat for seed. I came across an Indian who told me that he would show me how to trap. First of all, I had to start off by building a cabin at the end of my trap line. We set out to do so. ... In the midst of building this cabin. I came down with a severe toothache and decided to pull it myself. I took a piece of snare wire, and tied it to a beam in the cabin, then to my tooth, and stood on a block of wood. I gave the Indian a cup of water, just in case I fainted. I jumped off the block and out came my tooth. Standing there in a daze, I look[ed] around and saw the Indian laying on the floor, out cold." -Nick Tanasiuk

Early Farming



Lac La Biche Archives

An early threshing machine, used to separate the grain from the straw or husk.



Lac La Biche Archives

An early binder, used to cut the grain and bind it into sheaves.



Lac La Biche Archives

Carlo Meardi "broadcasting" wheat.



Early methods of farming in the Lac La Biche area were rather crude and involved a great deal of hard work.

Lac La Biche Archives

Homestead Regulations

"Any quarter section vacant and available of Dominion land in Alberta excepting 8 and 26, may be homesteaded by any person the sole head of a family or any male over eighteen years of age and who is a British subject or declares intention of becoming a British subject, on payment of an entry fee of Ten (\$10) dollars.

A widow, having minor children of her own dependent on her for support, is permitted to make homestead entry as the sole head of a family.

Entry must be made in person either at the land office for the district or the office of a sub-agent authorized to transact business in the district, except in the case of a person who may make entry for a father, mother, son, daughter, brother or sister, when duly authorized by the prescribed form which may be had from your nearest Government agent.

A homesteader may perform resident duties by living in habitable house on homestead for six months in each of three years. A homesteader may perform the required six months residence duties by living on farming land owned solely by him not less than (80) acres in extent in the vicinity of his homestead. Joint ownership in land will not meet this requirement. If the father, or mother if the father is deceased, or son, daughter, brother or sister of a homesteader has permanent residence on farming land owned by them not less than 80 acres in extent, in the vicinity of the homestead, or upon a homestead entered for them in the vicinity, such homesteader may perform his own residence duties by living with the father or mother.

The term 'vicinity' in the two preceding paragraphs is defined as meaning not more than nine miles in direct line, exclusive of the width of road allowances crossed in the measurement.

A homesteader performing residence duties while living with parents or on farming land owned by himself must so notify agent for district, and keep him informed as to his post office address, otherwise his entry is liable to be cancelled. Six month's time is allowed after entry before beginning residence.

A homesteader residing on homestead is required to break thirty acres of the homestead, of which twenty must be cropped, before applying for patent A reasonable proportion of cultivation duties must be done during each year.

When the duties are performed under regulations permitting residence in vicinity fifty acres must be broken, of which thirty must be cropped. Application for patents may on completion of duties be made by homesteader before an agent or Homestead Inspector, or before a subagent for district."

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Lac La Biche Archives

"Fiat" is a latin word which means "let it be done." It is used in this case to issue a land grant under the Great Seal of Canada



Photo courtesy of Norman Green

In front of the Anglican Church.

The Problem With Cows

Despite the new economic development promoted by the arrival of the railway, the establishment of a creamery, and ongoing settlement, many people in Lac La Biche relied on the family cow. or cows, to provide daily dairy needs. It would appear that a number of family cows roamed the village at will, clanging bells and all. Complaints mounted, and in early December 1938, Village Council passed By-Law No. 104, restricting the movement of domestic animals. The new By-Law caused such outrage that the Council was forced to back down and allow a bit more leeway. The following documents speak for themselves.

"No person being the owner or harbourer of any domestic animal shall permit or allow the same to graze on unfenced land within the Village or to run at large on any of the streets, lanes, or public places within the Village, and any person doing shall be deemed to be guilty of a violation of this by-law and on summary conviction shall be liable to a fine of not less than \$1.00 nor more than \$10.00 in respect to any one animal; or to imprisonment for a term of not more than thirty days."

-By-Law No. 104, passed December 7, 1938

Jac La Bicho alta Sec. 19 19.38 Tipayor & Counilmen Tac Ta / Sich llage d We the citizens, Bichy do here by an Loe By Low passed. The Finent E Co the Summer Months as there re Marge people with avod . they health by ask that the coun above b and let the cours gi Alan ml Eur Ture Lac La Biche Archives

The first page of a petition protesting By-Law No. 104.

"Moved by Councillor Hamar that the Council hereby grant permission for the running at large of 2 milk cows per family [on] the property of residents of the Village Pusuant [pursuant] to By-Law #104 and that the privilege shall cover the period between the hours of 7.00 o'clock A.M. to 8.00 o'clock P.M. From 8.00 O'clock P.M. to 7.00 O'clock A.M. all cattle found running at large shall be impounded. That all bells must be removed from cattle between the hours of 8.00 O'Clock P.M. and 7.00 O'clock A.M. This previlege to be granted from May 15 to October 1st 1940."

-Resolution of Village Council, May 1, 1940

Boosterism and Its Enemies



Edmonton Bulletin, September 28, 1916

PROVINCE OF ALBERTA

P.C. 1334

AT THE GOVERNMENT HOUSE AT OTTAWA

Tuesday, the 15th day of June, 1920 PRESENT:

HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR GENERAL IN COUNCIL WHEREAS the Minister of the Interior reports as follows:-After careful investigation it appears desirable to set aside certain areas in Alberta as Bird Sanctuaries, and for the purpose of furthering bird protection in Canada in accordance with the Migratory Birds Convention Act.

...Lac La Biche Bird Sanctuary: Comprising: the lands covered by Lac la Biche in Township 67, Range 12; Townships 67 and 68, Range 13; Townships 67 and 68, Range 14; Townships 67 and 68, Range 15; and Township 68, Range 16, West of the Fourth Meridian and the islands in said lake.

RESOLUTION

On the 15th. day of june 1920 by P.C. 1334, HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR GENERAL IN COUNCIL on the recommendation of the Minister of the Interior, and pursuant to the Migratory Birds Convention Act, being Chapter 18, 7-8 George V. as amended by Chapter 29, 9-10 George V. Set aside the lands covered by the waters of Lac La Biche as a Bird Sanctuary.

...Lac La Biche is not and never was a breeding ground for waterfowl and that the breeding of the water-fowl of this region is effected in and around the smaller lakes South and North of Lac La Biche.

Several communications have already been received from Railway General Agents contemplating bringing hunting parties to Lac La Biche from the United States in the fall.

Lac La Biche is the only sporting ground, close to Railway communications, for duck shooting as practically all wild ducks leave the smaller lakes and concentrate on the big lake Viz: Lac La Biche early in September.

Any encouragement given these hunting parties would advertise the District for settlement.

That we, the Lac La Biche Board of Trade, humbly petition the Honourable Minister of the Interior to select another lake besides Lac La Biche for a Bird Sanctuary.

-Resolution of the Lac La Biche Board of Trade, December 2, 1929

THE ALBERTA NATURAL RESOURCES ACT 1930, CHAPTER 21, ALBERTA

19. The Province will not dispose of any historic site which is notified to it by Canada as such and which Canada undertakes to maintain as an historic site. The Province will further continue and preserve as such the bird sanctuaries and public shooting grounds as may hereafter be established by agreement between the Minister of the Interior and the Provincial Secretary or such other Minister of the Province as may be specified under the laws thereof.

-: AN INVITATION :-

The Mayor, the Council and the Citizens invite YOU to come to LAC LA BICHE for BIG GAME. The word "hunt" is a misnomer in this part of Alberta. You do not hunt, you just get whatever game you want,-mcose, deer, elk and anything.

Nature bas endowed, sprinkled the Lac la Biche country with incomparable lakes. Make your dreams come true; come off the besten paths.

See Lac la Biche. Beaver Lake and Touchwood Lake in their primitive solitude and silent grandeur. You will say "incredible, marvellous, bewildering, astounding."

Lac La Biche Journal, September 14, 1932

The Athabasca Electoral Riding Scandal of 1925

The scene: Hamilton Hall, Lac La Biche, August, 1926. Justice A.H. Clarke is questioning a witness about the federal election of 1925. The court has just learned that one ballot box contained 40 votes for Liberal C.W. Cross and 2 votes for United Farmers of Alberta D.F. Kellner.

Justice Clarke: "Why didn't you mark all the ballots in his favour?" Witness: "Well, it would have looked bad."

When Sir Wilfrid Laurier, leader of the Liberal Party, died in 1919, he was succeeded by forty-four year old William Lyon Mackenzie King. The Liberals had lost the so-called "Conscription Election" of 1917, but Mackenzie King led them back to power in the federal election of 1921.

As Prime Minister, Mackenzie King worked hard to win the confidence of the Canadian people, particularly in the West. He reduced tariff and freight rates and he tried to get more autonomy for Canada in international affairs.

By 1925 those policies did not appear to be winning enough confidence and Mackenzie King was growing increasingly apprehensive about having to call an election. He told his Cabinet that he was sure the Liberals could come back "as strong as we are at present, or within two or three" seats. Privately, however, he was deeply concerned. "I felt that Cabinet was very weak," he recorded in his diary, "lamentably weak in fact - really nothing to grip to. Many like barnacles rather than fighters."

The West was especially important so far as Mackenzie King was concerned. "We can only hope to win as we carry the West," he wrote, "and we can only carry the west as we are a Liberal party in name and in fact." In an effort to boost support for the Liberals in Western Canada, Mackenzie King turned to Charles Dunning, the Premier of Saskatchewan. He used a carrot and stick approach. In return for Dunning's help in fighting the election, Mackenzie King promised him a position in the federal cabinet. Although Dunning turned down the offer, he pledged his full support in the federal election. True to his word, the Premier of Saskatchewan campaigned tirelessly on behalf of the Liberals in Western Canada. He delivered speeches, helped with advertising, and made good use of publicity.

But would it be enough? A number of Liberal supporters in Alberta, especially in the electoral riding of Athabasca, where Liberal C.W. Cross was pitted against United Farmers of Alberta D.F. Kellner, apparently thought not. Instead of helping to win the election on the campaign trail, they decided to do their bit on election day. And sure enough, when the votes were counted on the evening of October 29, 1925, a jubilant C.W. Cross found that he had defeated D.F. Kellner by 1400 votes.

Then things began to go wrong. Someone discovered that people who came nowhere near a ballot box had voted. One revelation led to another. The Governor General of Canada, at that time the most powerful political authority in the country, ordered an investigation under "The Corrupt Practices Inquiries Act." The act had been passed shortly after confederation. Justice A.H. Clarke was appointed Commissioner and ordered to conduct an investigation. He was joined by H.C. MacDonald, K.C., counsel for C.W. Cross, and R.D. Tighe, counsel for D.F. Kellner.

According to the newspapers of the day it was the first completed inquiry under the act. By the time Justice Clarke submitted his report more than 80 people were implicated in the scandal. Three people, including one official from Lac La Biche, committed suicide, several fled to the United States and at least one person ended up in Mexico.

There were two polls at Lac La Biche that October day in 1925, one in the village and a second at what was commonly known as "Old Town." What Justice Clarke wanted to find out when he arrived at Lac La Biche on August 30, 1926 was how some 48 names of voters at the two polls appeared on both polling lists and how seven people had managed to vote at both polls.

He got more than he bargained for. Not only were there discrepancies in the voting, Clarke discovered. The assistant District Returning Officer (DRO) was illiterate, the poll books had disappeared into thin air, and election pay cheques had been made out to fictitious people (including a Thomas J. Cardinal, who never existed). Then, while examining Frank Fisher, a local storekeeper who acted as poll clerk, Justice Clarke learned that P.D. Hamel, the Mayor, Postmaster and Justice of the Peace, had marked ballots.

When news of Fisher's

testimony hit the streets. the village was, according to the Edmonton Journal, "humming with excitement." Hamel hotly denied the allegations, but eventually the truth came out after J.A. Simoneau, who served as District Returning Officer at Lac La Biche - and who had previously denied any wrong doing - broke down during cross examination by H.C. MacDonald at Fort Saskatchewan in early September. In a dramatic scene which smacked more of a Hollywood movie than real life. Simoneau cried out: "I



Mr. Justice A.H. Clarke.

Legal Archives Society of Alberta

ADMITS HE PERJURED SELF TO SAVE FRIEND; TRUTH OF LAC LA BICHE POLL TOLD

J. A. Simoneau Now Declares Postmaster There Helped Stuff Ballot Box; Two Athabaska Probe Witnesses, Brought from Prince Albert Penitentiary, Are Heard

(By Journal Staf Reporter) FORT SASKATCHEWAN, Sept. 8.—T lied to save my friend. Mr. Harnel, postmaster at Lac is Biche." This was the confession of J. A. Simonanu, and was D. R. O, at Lac ja Biche rural poll at the federal election held in October, 1925, on his second appearance before Mr. Justice Clarke, as a witness at the investigation this morning at Fort Sarkatchewan under the Corrupt Practices act, which is now drawing to a chose.

Edmonton Journal, September 8, 1926

lied to save my friend, Mr. Hamel, postmaster at Lac la Biche."

MacDonald: "Was your evidence true?"

Simoneau: "It was not true" MacDonald: "Then why did you make untrue statements?"

Simoneau: "Because I wanted to defend by friend, Mr. Hamel at Lac La Biche."

MacDonald: "Then you want to retract your first evidence? This was a lie you told to defend Mr. Hamel?"

Simoneau: "Yes, that is so." MacDonald: "Fisher's evidence was true, then?"

Simoneau: "Yes, it was true to the best of my knowledge."

Hamel was promptly carted off to Fort Saskatchewan to appear before Justice Clarke and cross examination by R.D. Tighe, counsel for D.F. Kellner.

Tighe: "If you only put in four or five ballots, how do you explain the fact that there were thirteen ballots more in the box, than people who voted?"

Hamel: "Oh, I can explain that, I think. After I had marked some ballots, I took the voters list, and the D.R.O. marked some more ballots."

Tighe: "How did you mark your ballots?" Hamel: "For Mr. Cross."

Tighe: "What did you mean when you asked Simoneau and Fisher if they hadn't voted?"

Hamel: "I meant, why didn't they vote some people who weren't there."

Hamel went on to explain that Issac Gagnon and W.A. Deyl had asked him to do all he could to help Cross win the election. While Hamel admitted to "stuffing" the ballot box, he denied taking any money for so doing.

MAYOR AND POSTMASTER OF LAC LA BICHE CONFESSES HE 'PLUGGED' BALLOT BOX

P. D. Hamel Declares He Marked Ballots for Cross and Placed Them in Box-Did So on Suggestion of Late Isaao Gagnon and W. A. Deyl.

Note: Isaao in the title should be Isaac.

Edmonton Journal, September 9, 1926



Lac La Biche Archives

P.D. Hamel. A veteran of the Great War, he despised anything German. He was elected Mayor of Lac La Biche in 1923.

"Mr. Tighe produced some election pay checks he had received from Ottawa, explaining that these were checks made out in favour of fictitious officials. Some of the checks had been cashed and others had been returned.

One of the fictitious officials, Thomas J. Cardinal ... had written a neatly typed letter to Ottawa, against the non-arrival of his check.

... However the fictitious Mr. Cardinal had been forestalled - the check had been issued and cashed by somebody or other."

- Edmonton Journal, September 9, 1926

GOVERNMENT OF THE PROVINCE OF ALBERTA

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

10th Systemier, 1926.

2604 - J.P.

Sir:

I have been instructed to advise you that your appointment as a Justice of the Peace has been cancelled by Order in Council, and your name removed from the list of Justices of the Peace in this Province. I enclose you forms of return, and shall be glad if you will complete these up to the date of your ceasing to act and return them to me. Will'you kindly also return to this Department your commission, books, and forms sent you in connection with the appointment?

Your obedient servant, R. U. Swift Mr.P. D. Hamel. Lao La Biche.Alta

Provincial Archives of Alberta

While he does not appear to have served time for his part in the election scandal, P.D. Hamel's career as Justice of the Peace came to a abrupt end.

"Jos. O. Billos, D.R.O. at the Venice poll on the A. & G.W. railway, south of Lac La Biche, who is also serving a term at Prince Albert penitentiary followed Jenner [in testifying to the Clarke enquiry]. This poll had 104 names on the voters' list and 95 people were shown as having 'voted.' The poll gave 94 for Cross and there was one rejected ballot. Billos said he was appointed D.R.O. by W.A. Deyl, who was an agent for Mr. Cross in the election. Deyl told him if they could elect Cross, they would get the lake near Venice drained.

'Deyl said we were to play the game. We were to elect Cross somehow. We were to get the votes for Cross,' proceded [sic] Billos.

Deyl later asked Billos to get a man as enumerator and he mentioned W.J. Jex, who was appointed, and who went to see Deyl at Lac la Biche. Deyl was Cross' agent and also assistant to Isaac Gagnon, the returning officer said Billos. The two positions were almost the same thing he thought.

Jex, following his visit to Deyl, got the old voters list from Billos and used it to make up the new list, adding some names to it. Billos said he knew that some of the names were not properly on the list, and when he protested, Jex said he had instructions to put them on the list. Billos said he had been in business 12 years at Venice, but he didn't know the names Jex had added.

Later, Deyl telephoned to ask how many names were on the list and when told there were 94, wanted to make this up to 150 or so Proceeded Billos. On election morning ... Deyl said 'go to it, you are practically safe.'"

-Edmonton Journal, September 8, 1926

3 TOOK BALLOT BOXES INTO BUSH; SAT THERE **AND MARKED UP VOTES**

Four Fugitive D. R. O.'s Return and Tell Justice Clarke How They Held "Mystery Polls"; Were Acting Under Instructions from Bowtell Still in States

Local legend has is that one group of election officials proceeded to a small lake south of Lac La Biche with a handful of unmarked ballots and a bottle of liquor, where they set about the task of ensuring a victory for C.W. Cross. And so that lake became Election Lake.

Joe Giguere, a returning officer, committed suicide over the Athabasca affair. O.J. Billos of Venice went to prison. Though P.D. Hamel does not appear to have served time for his part, his career as Justice of the Peace and Postmaster came to an end.

Election

The Aftermath of the Scandal

The 1925 federal election and the 1926 election which followed it were confusing affairs that changed the course of Canadian history. The October 29, 1925 federal election returned 101 Liberals. 116 Conservatives, and 28 Progressives, Labour, and Independents. Mackenzie King managed to hang on and form a government with the support of the Progressives. But a nasty scandal involving the Customs Department was revealed and several Progressives began to have second thoughts about supporting the Liberals. Fearing that he might lose a vote of confidence in the House of Commons, in late June 1926 Mackenzie King asked the Governor General of Canada, Viscount Byng, for a dissolution of Parliament so that a new election could be called. Much to Mackenzie King's surprise, Byng refused to grant the dissolution. Mackenzie King resigned and the Governor General called on Arthur Meighen and the Conservatives to form the government.

Byng, who was the hero of the battle of Vimy Ridge in 1917, had always believed that Meighen had really won the 1925 election and should have had the chance to form the government. Mackenzie King had other ideas.

At that time any member who was appointed Minister - including the Prime Minister - had to resign their seat and then seek re-election in a by-election in order to sit in the House of Commons as a Minister collecting a Minister's salary (a practice which is no longer followed). Meighen knew that this would take his best debaters out of the House so he tried to get around the rule by appointing Ministers without Portfolio who would not collect a Minister's salary. Mackenzie King jumped on this and argued that Meighen was forming an illegal government. Over a period of three days the Liberals presented five want of confidence motions. The Conservatives won the first four but lost the fifth. Meighen then asked for a dissolution of Parliament and the Governor General granted it. The election was called for September 14, 1926.

Mackenzie King had a field day during the campaign. He hammered away at the constitutional issue. Why did the Governor General refuse him a dissolution of Parliament and turn around and grant one to the Conservatives? What right did the Governor General have to refuse the advice of the Prime Minister of Canada? It was British interference in the Canadian political process, pure and simple. The fact that Byng was probably right to do what he did was lost on deaf ears. Mackenzie King struck a chord among the voters and they responded. The Liberals won 116 seats and the Conservatives 91. The Progressives were reduced to 12 while the United Farmers of Alberta elected 11 new members. It was a clear victory for Mackenzie King and a major defeat for Arthur Meighen. He would never be on the floor of the House of Commons again. As for the Governor General, never again would a representative of the British Crown refuse to grant a Canadian Prime Minister a dissolution of Parliament.

Arthur Meighen, leader of the Conservative Party, attempted to use the scandal against Mackenzie King and the Liberal Party in the September 1926 federal election. In what the Edmonton newspapers described as "One of the most astounding statements ever heard from a public platform in this city," Meighen was quoted saying that Mackenzie King was trying to gain control of the federal election machinery in order to "place a Baldy Robb in every constituency in Canada."

In the event, D.F. Kellner defeated C.W. Cross in the 1926 election by a vote of 4870 to 2770. Cross never again ran in the Athabasca [or Athabaska, as it appeared at the time] electoral riding.

Of Airplanes, Airmen, and the Lost Goldmine



Photo courtesy of Mary Watson

"Most of the women whom I had encountered at Lac La Biche had been pert young misses with rolled stockings and rouged lips" -Louise Rourke, Land of the Frozen Tide, 1928

Yvette (left) and Annette (right) Lemieux standing in front of the Vickers Viking airplane that took off from Lac La Biche in June 1926. It was the first mineral exploration by air in the Northwest Territories.

One day a grizzled prospector showed up in Calgary and began calling on a number of the city's leading businessmen. He claimed to have found a fabulous gold mine in the Northwest Territories and he produced some rich samples of gold to prove it. Of course, he would only reveal the place for a price, adding that it would be easy to find using an airplane because he had marked the site with a giant cross cut in the bush beside a large lake. He also said that he had left his Indian wife behind to guard the area. The businessmen were convinced the prospector was telling the truth and they formed a company, Northern Syndicate Limited, to mount an expedition to find the gold.

The enterprise got off to a shaky start when the prospector became drunk in a Calgary bar, was hit on the head with a beer bottle during a fight, and suffered a fractured skull. Although he recovered, his memory was affected and he could not be taken along as a guide.

Still, plans went ahead. The syndicate

bought a Vickers Viking Mark IV amphibious airplane - called a "flying boat" in those days - bearing the registration letters, C-CAEB. Better known as EB, the English-built Vickers was powered by a 450 h.p. Napier Lion engine. Originally purchased in 1922 by Laurentide Air Services Limited, EB was apparently the first amphibious airplane to be used in Canada. The plane had seen extensive service in northern Ontario and Quebec before it was shipped out to northern British Columbia for use in mineral exploration. From there it was dismantled and sent to Sault Ste Marie for an overhaul.

Northern Syndicate Limited bought the Vickers in early 1926 and hired pilot C.S. "Jack" Caldwell and engineer Irenée Vachon to fly it. Caldwell had been co-pilot of EB on some of the first northern aerial exploration flights in Canada. Vachon was a mechanic who had worked for the Napier Company in England.

The airplane arrived dismantled at Edmonton in May 1926. Caldwell and Vachon spent a month overhauling the motor. The plane was then sent by rail to Lac La Biche, arriving on June 16, 1926. Caldwell and Vachon began to assemble the plane in the open beside the lake. Vachon built a derrick using part of a tree to lift the engine in place. They finished the job in six days and made the first test flight on June 22.

The following day Caldwell and Vachon took off for Fort Fitzgerald, where they met the prospecting party, which had travelled up on the Hudson's Bay Company's river steamer, *Fort McMurray*. The expedition then moved north to search an area southeast of Great Slave Lake. A base was established at a large lake, named Caldwell lake in honour of the pilot, and the flights began.

The search for the gold mine continued throughout July, but no trace of the gold was found. By early August the weather was turning cold and the expedition was abandoned. Caldwell and Vachon flew the Vickers to the R.C.A.F. station at High River in early September, where they performed the first "ground-landing" of an



Photo courtesy of Mary Watson

Above. Assembled in six days, the Vickers Viking took off from Lac La Biche on June 23, 1926. The girl standing in front of the plane is unidentified. Below. Engineer Irenée Vachon and the derrick he built using a tree. Note the cows roaming in the background,



amphibian aircraft in Canada.

The Vickers Viking was placed in storage and eventually ended up in Vancouver, B.C. The plane was given a complete overhaul in readiness for service in the Yukon. But during a flight in September 1932 a gas line broke and EB went down in a ball of flames. Although the pilot managed to crash land the plane on the Fraser River with no loss of life, the Vickers was a write-off. The Napier engine was later recovered, given a complete overhaul, and donated to the National Research Council. It later sat on display in the National Museum at Ottawa.





Lac La Biche Archives

Probably the first aerial photograph of Lac La Biche. It was taken before the construction of the "Big Dock" in 1928. It is certainly possible that the crew of the Vickers Viking took the photograph as part of a training run.

Pilot C.S. "Jack" Caldwell. He later performed the first landing made by an amphibious aircraft in Canada at High River, Alberta on September 4, 1926.



Provincial Archives of Alberta

In 1932 Commander Wolfgang Von Gronau and his crew undertook a world trip in the Gronland-Wal "flying boat." They landed at Lac La Biche in mid-August. From Lac La Biche, Von Gronau flew to Prince Rupert, B.C., on to Alaska, Japan, India and back to the Mediterranean. It was the first world flight made in a "flying boat." Von Gronau completed the trip in four months.



Ad in the Lac La Biche Journal, September 14, 1932

By the time Von Gronau came to Lac La Biche, the village and the country were in the depths of the Great Depression. The mayor was quick to use the occasion of Von Gronau's visit to promote Lac La Biche, as the advertisement above indicates. It was simply a case of boosterism. Note, for instance, that the mayor did not even make the effort to get the correct spelling of Von Gronau's name. Others crowed about the fact that Lac La Biche had beat out the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce in wooing Von Gronau.



Lac La Biche Archives

Another depression related "booster" project, the Government or "Little" Dock. Built in 1932 at a cost of \$8000, it provided more fuel for promoting Lac La Biche. The Lac La Biche Journal wrote: "It is at this quay that all planes effect a landing and refuel. Lac La Biche is 1000 feet lower than Cooking Lake [near Edmonton] where the air is too rare and light for craft to rise with any kind of a load." Rarefied air? The elevation of Cooking Lake is about 2200 feet. Lac La Biche is at about 1800 feet.

A Depression Tale

During the Great Depression people did what they had to do to survive. Sometimes that meant bending the law. And sometimes even the law bent the law. Dr.

"This was in the time of severe depression. It was tacitly understood that people living in marginal, new homesteading areas, where conditions were desperate, would not be prosecuted for taking game (usually moose) out of season when urgently needed for family sustenance.

Wandering River, thirty miles north of Plamondon through the bush by primitive trail, was such an area. Homesteading had just seriously begun.

A man named Puhach, who was secretary-treasurer of one of the districts was appointed a Justice of the Peace. You will be familiar with the nature and powers of such an officer, who dispensed justice with respect to minor offences beyond the reasonable travelling distances from a magistrate.

Puhach, a farmer, homesteader, was no better off than his neighbors. He shot a moose out of season. He had enemies who reported him to the A.P.P. [Alberta Provincial Police]. This left the peace officer no option but to pursue the matter. Puhach admitted his guilt. However, he being the only J.P. in the area there was William Swift, a former Deputy Minister of Education, was fond of telling his favourite depression tale.

no one to try his case. The constable asked him to accompany him to Lac La Biche where Magistrate Watson would hold court. (Incidentally Watson was the local station agent, much respected, who served as cases arose).

On the way a detour was made to Grassland where one of the McKenzie boys was also under suspicion of having shot a moose out of season. He was invited to join the constable and Puhach to Lac La Biche for trial.

Then the constable had a happy thought. To McKenzie he said, "I have a J.P. in the car with me. Would you be satisfied to have him take the case here, plead guilty, and dispose of the matter." McKenzie was willing. Court was called into session in the McKenzie living room. Puhach levied the usual fine and costs, thereby earning his honorarium, and the two left for Lac La Biche.

There must be few, if any, cases in the history of jurisprudence where a judge while under charge for an offence has presided over a court in which another has been tried for the identical offence."



Von Gronau taking off from Lac La Biche.

Lac La Biche - 1928

"Our train stopped at Lac La Biche for some three-quarters of an hour, so, after seeing that our animals were watered, we wandered through the village street. Soon we came to the beautiful lake-side, and by this time the daylight was fast fading, so that the crimson from a sunset sky was reflected from the quiet waters, and turned the pine trees and the sandy shoreline into fairy coloured joys of the imagination. There was no wind, and the lake stretched out before us, deep and limpid like the waters of a lagoon, suggestive of rest and tranquillity. I am left with an ineffaceable memory of the quiet and beauty of that scene, but I remember how my feelings were tinged with that sadness and indescribable longing which sometimes comes to one when gazing upon a scene of exquisite loveliness. It is as though some hidden part of one's being yearned toward the fulfillment of an unknown soul-desire, bringing a sorrow beyond the understanding. Beauty without must surely awaken the Divine within, for in rare moments of exaltation such as I experienced on the shore of Lac La Biche the hidden spiritual impulse is called into response."

- Louise Rourke, The Land of the Frozen Tide, 1928



"Old Town" Lac La Biche, probably during the 1930s.

Lac La Biche Archives

July 1, 1938 parade.



Lac La Biche Archives

The Great Brew Ha Ha of 1941

"At a meeting of the Village Council held in the Village Office the following resolution was passed.

Moved by Councillor Hamar that the following resolution be adopted and a copy of it be sent in to the Liquor Board and the Hon. Lucien Maynard.

WHEREAS Alexander Hamilton of Lac La Biche has applied for a Beer Licence for the Lac La Biche Hotel; and

WHEREAS it is not in the best interest of the Village that Mr. Hamilton be granted a Beer Licence for the same Hotel;

NOW THEREFORE be it resolved that we ask the Liquor Board not to grant a Beer Licence for the same Hotel to Mr. Hamilton."

> -Secretary-treasurer of Lac La Biche to the Alberta Liquor Control Board, June 10, 1941

In 1936 James McCarthy, the owner of the Lac La Biche Hotel, died. His wife, Mary, tried to run the hotel, but she ran into difficulties with managers and rumours soon spread that she was interested in selling the establishment. Among those interested in buying the hotel was a Mrs. M. D. Kennedy of Andrew, Alberta. In early June 1936 she wrote directly to the Alberta Liquor Control Board (ALCB) to inquire about the sale. The Chairman of the board, R. J. Dinning, replied that "It is difficult for us to state at this time just what Mrs. McCarthy had in view, and we suggest that you might get in touch with her direct, and ascertain if she is disposed to sell or lease the holdings." The Chairman also added that "Lac La Biche is in a district settled chiefly by Frenchspeaking people and Halfbreeds. It has always been the centre of a good deal of controversy as to who should have the License, as our records show that there are two other Hotels at that point, and from time to time we receive suggestions that the License should be changed to another building." There is no indication that Mrs. Kennedy pursued the matter. But the Chairman's observation about controversy over who should have the license was prophetic in the extreme.

By the end of July 1936, Mrs. McCarthy had decided to sell the hotel. An ALCB memorandum dated July 24, 1936 indicated that "Mr. Dimos" (William Dumas, the Mayor of Lac La Biche) was interested in buying the hotel. Mrs. McCarthy was asking \$12,000 and Dumas thought the price too high. The memorandum also noted that Alexander Hamilton was interested in buying the hotel.

Negotiations between Mrs. McCarthy and Dumas and Hamilton broke down and, in the spring of 1937, she sold the hotel to William A. Kelly, the fifty-five year old manager of the Waverly Rooming House in Edmonton. There is no record of exactly how much he paid for the hotel except that he had a mortgage of \$5500.

In those days a potential buyer or manager of a hotel had to undergo a thorough security check. Kelly passed with flying colours. An RCMP report dated May 15, 1937 stated that "discreet enquiries made locally would indicate that William A. Kelly and his wife are fit and proper persons to conduct a licensed hotel."

So far as the ALCB was concerned, Kelly did an outstanding job of operating and upgrading the hotel. Of course, there were the usual headaches. On one occasion, for example, an ALCB inspector expressed concern over the improper sterilizing of glasses because the RCMP were worried about the numerous cases of venereal diseases in the Lac La Biche area (though how venereal disease was passed through a beer glass was never quite explained).


Lac La Biche Archives

Lac La Biche and the Lac La Biche Hotel around the time of the Great Brew Ha Ha. The existence of only one beer licence, which gave the owner a virtual monopoly, created a volatile situation. Note: It would appear that licence or license were both acceptable forms of licence.

Kelly rectified the problem to everyone's satisfaction in short order. Then, for reasons which are still not clear, in the spring of 1941 he decided to put the hotel up for sale.

The key parties interested in buying the hotel were John Semko, a Polish immigrant who had worked on the Northern Alberta Railways and operated a grocery store in Edmonton, and Alexander Hamilton. On May 21, 1941 Hamilton made a preliminary application* for a liquor license for the Lac La Biche Hotel. In the application, Hamilton stated that he was interested only in owning the hotel. His intention was to "appoint a competent manager," a man named Jack Garritty, then working at the Grand Hotel in Edmonton. A public notice then appeared in the Edmonton *Journal* announcing Hamilton's intention to buy the hotel and make a formal application for a liquor license. That was when the fireworks started.

The public notice had no sooner appeared when Kelly was approached by a number of villagers who were opposed to Alexander Hamilton owning the Lac La Biche Hotel. Kelly did his best to explain that the public notice was merely a statement of intent and the actual sale was subject to approval by the ALCB, but it was to no avail. The objections were so strong that Kelly felt compelled to write a letter to A. J. Mason, Secretary of the ALCB on May 26:

"It would appear that considerable illfeeling would be caused if this man [Alexander Hamilton] should succeed in obtaining a license. I do not expect that they will do all that they threatened such as applying for a Vendor, calling for a Plebiscite or taking up the matter with Mr. Maynard** but nevertheless, I take their actions as an indication of what is in their minds. In view of the expressed feeling of a number of the residents, I have been

^{*}At that time a person or persons would make a preliminary application for a liquor licence and then a formal application. The applicant was subjected to a thorough character and security check.

^{**}The Hon. Lucien Maynard was a St. Paul lawyer who sat as a Cabinet Minister in the Social Credit government.

prompted to write this letter. I also feel that, should this man get control of the Hotel, my balance of payments amounting to \$7,000.00 would certainly be jeopardized if any infraction of the Licensing Regulations close the Hotel or cause a cancellation of the License. If this should happen, it would reduce my equity from its' [its] present standing to that of a common lodging house. Naturally, I do not wish to get entangled with this man if it can be avoided. If I had known what I have since learned. I would have done otherwise as I know of several men who are well known to the Board as hotelmen of experience. In view of these circumstances and also the request that he made in our presence, (about which I made no remark at the time), when he asked if it were possible to inject into the existing regulations another one whereby he could operate under my License until such time as his was available. Such operation, presumably, to be for the benefit of Mr. Hamilton. In my opinion, it was a sign of greed and selfishness that such a request should be made by a man with no former experience. I, therefore, appeal to the Board to disallow this application from the aforesaid man."

In what must have been lightning speed for the day, the letter was passed to J. A. King, who had replaced R.J. Dinning as Chairman of the ALCB. The new Chairman replied to Kelly on May 28:

"Your letter addressed to Mr. Mason has naturally been handed to me for consideration. I was not aware that the negotiations between you and Mr. Hamilton had progressed to the degree suggested in your letter. While you have not explicitly so stated, I gather that the deal has been completed. If so, I am sorry that this is the case.

... At the moment I am not at all sure that the Board would give favorable consideration to the granting of a license to Mr. Hamilton, and while that in itself is no reflection on Mr. Hamilton's character, there are other circumstances that must be taken into consideration, and one of the most important perhaps is Mr. Hamilton's standing with his community. You, as an experienced Hotelman, must realize that a licensee and licensed premises can only be an asset to a community when the said licensee maintains a reasonable degree of popularity, and the Hotel is run in such an efficient manner that it renders a very real service to that community.

Mr. Hamilton is without experience in the Hotel business, although I realize that he has had reasonable success in connection with the mercantile game, but I am not at all sure that he would fit into the licensee picture in that particular locality.

Frankly, Mr. Kelly, we have already had some protests against the granting of a license to Mr. Hamilton, and while I would be very sorry to interfere in the sale of your premises, because it may in some measure cause you inconvenience or even loss, yet I do think that you might be well advised for the moment to carry on, in the hope of finding some other more satisfactory purchaser. It would appear quite evident to me that the feeling that is going to be created in that particular area might be so intense as to endanger the license privileges."

The Chairman of the ALCB had indeed received some protests against the granting of a license to Alexander Hamilton, notably, from Mayor William Dumas, the same Dumas who had inquired about the sale of the hotel in 1936, and the same Dumas once referred to as the "Smiling Mayor" in a Northern Alberta Railways Company memorandum. The day after Kelly wrote his letter to A. J. Mason, Dumas penned a note to the ALCB stating his "objection of having the beer licence in the village of Lac La Biche transferred to Alex Hamilton. This man is not responsible for himself and does cause much grief among the businesses of this town, and does not observe any laws."

Those were strong words. The Chairman of the ALCB tried to mollify Mayor Dumas by downplaying any criticism against Hamilton. He did add, however, that "if the Mayor of Lac La Biche feels so keenly with respect to this particular matter, it is altogether probable that we will receive further protests from other citizens who may be equally concerned."

That seemed to be a cue for Mayor

Dumas because on June 9 a "special meeting" of the Village Council passed a resolution calling on the Liquor Control Board and the Hon. Lucien Maynard "not to grant a Beer Licence to the said Mr. Hamilton for the Lac La Biche Hotel." The only dissenter appears to have been Councillor Louis Richard, who moved an amendment that Hamilton should be recommended for the licence. Richard was defeated and the Resolution was sent to the Liquor Control Board - where it showed up with no indication of Richard's counter motion. The Mayor followed this up with a personal letter to the ALCB in which he suggested that people who supported Hamilton's application did so under duress.

By this time J. A. King was beginning to suspect something else was afoot. In a strongly worded letter to Mayor Dumas, he pointed out that the Mayor's letter, the resolution of the Village Council (which gave no reason for wanting the ALCB to refuse Hamilton's application for a liquor licence), and an unsigned letter were the only protests the Board had received. Most of the evidence seemed to indicate that the majority of the people of Lac La Biche favoured Hamilton's application.

Hamilton's position, in fact, looked very favourable. A number of prominent businessman from Edmonton had written glowing letters of support. "We have found him a man of his word and believe that he is a man of considerable principal," wrote the president of one company. He "is absolutely straightforward and honest in all his dealings," wrote another. Local businesses appeared to support his application and a petition signed by 38 people, most of them farmers, seemed to indicate strong public support.

But then things began to go wrong. A rumour began circulating to the effect that the person Hamilton had chosen to run the hotel, Jack Garritty, was a crook. Hamilton dismissed the rumour and an R.C.M.P. investigation initially found nothing to incriminate Garritty. The manager of the Strathcona Hotel in Edmonton, however, revealed that Garritty had stolen money and was fired for his crime. Shortly after, a



Lac La Biche Archives

Alexander Hamilton around the time of the controversy over the Lac La Biche Hotel.

petition against Hamilton signed by 108 people showed up on the desk of the Chairman of the ALCB. Moreover, opposition forces were threatening to force a "Local Option Vote" - meaning a plebiscite on prohibition - if Hamilton got control of the hotel.

By the end of June 1941, J.A. King was getting even more suspicious, especially after two persons wrote to ask that their names be removed from the petition against Hamilton. So, he decided to send an inspector to Lac La Biche to look into the matter. The ALCB inspector made a number of inquiries about Alexander Hamilton on July 1 and 2 and presented a lengthy report which held a wide range of opinion:

"W. Dumas - Butcher and hog buyer -Village Mayor - Hamilton does not live up to any laws, injures many people and is hated by many people. He conducts his business in an unfair manner. One man should not be allowed to own so many businesses in one town if the town is to progress....

M. Hamar - General merchant and village council member - Hamilton is shady and not straight. He has ruined many small people and does not respect the laws. ... One man should not own so much in one town. Hamilton is hated by a great many people....

J. Watson - Ex-station agent here and present J.P. - Hamilton is definitely disliked by many people in village and district but over a period of the twenty-odd years resident here I know of no good reason for this. Hamilton has helped many a man and his family out with food and clothing help over that time. Feels that Hamilton would operate a good and law abiding hotel business and extend good service and accommodation simply because he is a hard headed business man....

Anglican Church Minister. A comparative stranger here but from what he has been told of this controversy by various of his parishioners and the local United Church minister, ... he has formed the opinion that Hamilton is a hard headed and successfull business man who carries on his business along as ethical a lines [sic] as possible under prevailing circumstances. States that a great deal of jealousy on part of many local people exists towards Hamilton which results in an unwarrented bitter attitude on their part toward him....

Hyman King - Fur Rancher and dealer -Not on speaking terms with Hamilton but has known the latter for thirty years and feels that he would give splendid hotel accommodation. All present opposition would 'die off' immediately the license granted to Hamilton. Stated that Hamilton, as the proprietor of the village's main store would be in a position to prevent to a large extent the present and past practice on part of many to fill up with beer at the expense of unpaid grocery and clothing bills.

Const. Hannah - R.C.M.P. Stated that he believed Hamilton a straight dealing individual and quite desirable as a licensee here or elsewhere. Intimated that the chief figures opposing Hamilton were of poor color [colour] and not to be taken seriously...."

It was a mixed bag of reviews, but from the point of view of the Chairman of the ALCB the evidence weighed against Hamilton, as J.A. King informed W.A. Kelly on July 5, 1941. "The importance of this controversy," he wrote, "may be somewhat exaggerated in the minds of the people of the Lac La Biche district, but it does seem to me that sufficient trouble has been created to make it inadvisable for Mr. Hamilton to further pursue the application." The same day Hamilton was asked to withdraw his application for a license. King tried to be polite about the affair. "I would much prefer to have you withdraw the application," he wrote, "in preference to me having to refuse to grant same." Five days later Hamilton received the official word by telegram.

Thus ended Alexander Hamilton's bid for the Lac La Biche Hotel and the granting of a beer license. But it was by no means the end of the story. Stung by the ALCB refusal to grant him a license, Hamilton decided that if he was not going to get it then nobody would. His basic strategy was to turn his critics own threat to force a Local Option Plebiscite under Section Fiftynine of the Liquor Act against themselves.

Although the details are somewhat sketchy, by the end of September 1941 Hamilton had apparently mustered enough support to prompt Kelly to make detailed inquiries about the fine points of Section Fifty-nine. Kelly, who was then negotiating the sale of his hotel with Fred Olynik and Nick Mandryk, was terrified. If a Local Option Plebiscite came down in favour of prohibition his hotel would lose considerable value, not to mention that it would torpedo negotiations with his two potential buyers. In what must be one of the most inflammatory letters ever written by one resident of Lac La Biche against another, Kelly appealed to the Executive Council of the Government of Alberta to intervene. In part of that letter Kelly (or someone else) wrote:

"The local option petition had been signed in many instances by individuals manifestlu [manifestly] under economic

Lac La Biche, Alberta. 6th October, 1941.

pressure wielded by Mr. Hamilton. ... This movement has been instigated by the frustrated egoism of a small town autocrat seeking to build a backyard principality on the shattered debris of ruined buisness [business] competitors. Having failed to secure the license he is now in the mood to destroy an enterprise which will not submit to his dictation.

His present tactical movement is devoted to the task of preventing the establishment, therein, of two creditable [credible] gentlemen and fellow Canadians of Ukrainian origin.* To this end, a vicious racial prejudice is circulated in an effort to destroy my natural right to dispose of my buisness [business] interests, free from dictation or injustice at the hands of Mr. Hamilton. In essence, if he cannot secure my license, he is fully prepared to destroy my buisness [business] and goodwill to satisfy a diabolical desire for revenge.

... The blighting influence and intolerable caprice of a small clique, able to exploit the passivity of the unheard majority, can be heard in high places. The mercenary plotters private ends mean all. I am confident that the cosmopolitan character of our population will decisively repudiate the vile methods by which these elements seek to conduct their local option campaign.

When the activities of unsocial influences subject me to unfair and provocative attack, I submit, that laying these facts before you I act in the spirit of defence of my legitimate rights. Trusting you will give this matter your serious consideration and trusting in the sense of observation and judgment [judgement] which animates your deliberations."

The Executive Council did indeed give the matter some attention, particularly after it received a letter from the President of the Alberta Hotel Association charging that the Local Option vote was "an organized effort on the part of one person to

The Executive Council Government of the Province of Alberta. Edmonton, Alberta.

Honorable Sira:

In view of the situation existent, at Lac La Eiche, with respect to the proposed local option vote, I desire to place myself on record and draw to the attention of the Executive Council and its Honorable Ministers, certain facts pertaining to the conditions recently developed.

In certain quarters Resentment has been expressed against thr continuance of the licensed sale of Beer. A demand has been raised for a local option wote. It is well hnown that such a request has no justification hased on in-fringement of the law or activities prejudicial to the public interest on my part. A minority decopirely purporting to be the Alberts Temperance Forces have maliciously intervened to deprive me of the pecuniary advantage which should legitimately resolve to my interest, free of coercion or intervention, by my lawful right of purchase and sale.

A digest of documents in the hands of the afministration reveal the salient features of this visions campaignal respectfully convey to your notice the following. Under date of the List day of May, 1941, an application to the Alberta Liquor Control Board embodies the request of Kr.A. Hamilton of Loc LB Bichs to carry on the buisness of Licensed Sale of Beer on the pramises covered by my License this was denied by the Board Kr.Hamilton having failed to fulfill the necessary requirements the conveyance of my interest was can-celled.Contrary to usual conmercial practice his deposit was refunded although I was fully entitled to remneration for legal and personal expenses.Kr.Hamilton expressed deep satis-faction for the generous treatment accorded him. Megotistions were then commenced with new purchasers who fully met every requirement demanded on my part.The transfer of buisness and goodwilk neared completion.I was then informed a local option wote had been demanded.Mr.Kmilton Ad instigated this unovement. despite his previous arsurance of goodwill. despite his previous assurance of goodwill.

The local option petition had been signed in many instances by individuals manifestlu under econamic pressure vielded by Kr.Hamilton.A chronic antipathy in the form of en organized conformist Temperance bloc has never existed in the district.The actual mucher deroted by ethical principle to Temperamece has always been negligible.This was fully borne out by the results of the local option vote of 1932.The local temperance voters at that time were not moti-wated by an historical hostility to intemperance but by other extraneous factors winh arcse out of the particular con-ditions which prevailed at that time.

This novement has been instigated by the frustrated egoism of a smcll torm sutcorst seeking to bill a back yard principality on the shattered dibris of runed buisness competitors. Having failed to secure the license he is now in the mod to destroy an enterprise which will not submit to his dicttion.

His present taction movement is devoted to the task of preventing the establiatment, therein, of two creditable gentlemen and fellow Canadines of Ukrainian origin. To this end, s vicious readal prejudice is circulated in an effort to destroy my naturel right to dispose of my buisness interests, free from distation or injustice at the hends of 1r. Humiltons, in essence, if he cannot secure my license, he is 'ully prepared to destroymy buisness and goodvill to satisfy a disbolical destre for revenges. Koigious sent-iment and political feeling have played no part in this struggle.

When individual interests stand in each others way, the wise balancing of one olaim against another is not easy. An equit-able solution demonds there should be no compromises. I submit that in contradistinction to these demands no expression of popular opinion from the trapper, farmer, fisherman or Maggar has been heard. They comprise by for the nost numerous body affected. The blighting influence and into brake capride of a small olique, able to exploit the passivity of the unloard anjority, can be heard in high places. To moreomy plotters phase to end ream all. I ar confidentiat that organize the factor of our population will decisively ropulate the places.

when the activities of unsocial influences subject me to unfair and provocative attacks auxis, that laying these facts before you I act in the spirit of defence of my legitimate rights. Trusting you will give this matter your serious consideration and trusting in the sense of observation and judgment which animates your deliberations, Iam,

Respectfully.

James Brady Papers

Kelly's letter to the Government of Alberta. It is entirely possible that parts of this letter were drafted by Jim Brady, one of the leaders of the Métis in Western Canada. There is certainly nothing in Kelly's previous correspondence to indicate such use of the English language and what are obviously sophisticated techniques of argument. Moreover, one of the few copies of the letter is to be found in Brady's own papers.

^{*}In fact, Alexander Hamilton promoted Ukrainian immigration to Lac La Biche and passed a motion to that effect through the Lac La Biche Board of Trade.

work an injury upon the present licensee." The government decided that the evidence weighed in Kelly's favour and disallowed the Local Option Vote. Kelly sold the Lac La Biche Hotel to Fred Olynik and Nick Mandryk, who were subsequently granted a license.

So ended the great brew ha ha of 1941. What did it all mean? By 1941 Alexander Hamilton was one of the most powerful businessman in Lac La Biche and it would appear that many people both envied and resented his success. There were also those who clearly feared the kind of economic power Hamilton could exert. Those who opposed his bid for the Lac La Biche Hotel did so largely on the grounds that one man should not own so much in one town. The controversy was further fuelled by personal grievances and petty jealousies which could have extended back for years. Perhaps J.D. Durocher, who owned General Motors Garage and who had known Alexander Hamilton for more than thirty years summed it up best when he said: "while he (Hamilton) operates within the law his business activities are very often decidedly unethical and for this reason he is disliked by many people. That Hamilton is capable and in a position to operate a good hotel and in all probability will be wise enough to operate within the law there can be no doubt"

James Patrick Brady

Born at Lac St. Vincent, Alberta in 1908, James Brady was the grandson of of one of Louis Riel's soldiers. His father was a prosperous Irishman who settled in the St. Paul area and married Philomena Garneau, a Métis woman who came from a well to do family.

From an early age Jim, as he was known, showed unusual intellectual promise. By age four he was reading and at age seven he undertook his own study of the Riel Rebellion. An early encounter with racial discrimination left him shaken - "The unending ordeal of daily combat," as he put it - and he turned to radical politics and a lifelong political quest to better the lot of the Métis people.

He was one of the founders of the Association des Métis d'Alberta et des Territoires du Nord-Ouest and an influential political teacher. Yet, he remained an enigmatic figure. Born into wealth, he became a communist; he played on the national stage but chose to live at Lac La Biche for a period during the 1930s. He abandoned the Métis political struggle in 1943 and boarded a troop ship bound for England.

After the war Brady tried unsuccessfully to persuade the CCF government in Saskatchewan to adopt better policies toward native people. He disappeared on a prospecting trip in 1967.



Lac La Biche Archives

J.D. Durocher.



Lac La Biche Archives

From left to right: Barney Arnfinson, Donald Stewart, Archie Huppie, Howard Lett, George Spencer, Stewart Deschambeau, Rick Donofrio.

Lac La Biche and World War II

many Imas & a main on & The Tam Days & arymond beau M15790-Ple Lewis R. no 1. Conadiain Labacco C-A.D .- C.M.F.

Lac La Biche Archives

9/12/44 "Italy"

To Members of Red Cross Comittee [sic] In receipt of lovely Xmas parcel which arrived today. I want to thank you for it. You folks have been so good at all times in remembering us boys overseas & for the past five years I have always had the honor [sic] of being remembered by you "Ladies" of That Wonderful organization. I am hoping like the rest that it will be our last Xmas overseas. May I extend to one & all through you Mrs. Lett. A Very Merry Xmas & a Happy New Year I remain one of The Town Boys Raymond Lewis M15790-Pte. Lewis R.P. No 1 Canadian Tobacco Depot C.A.O.-C.M.F.

Dear members of the Red Can Committee

Lac La Biche Archives

"The people in England and Scotland are very kind and generous. I've spent some very enjoyable evenings with some folks who invited a chum and myself to tea.

Despite all this, give me Canada any day. Things are too settled here. Always the same. Nothing ever changes. I like Canada because it is still raw and new. There are no age old customs to observe. It is nice to travel, but a fellow has the feeling that he's just away temporarily and hopes to be back in his own country.

Now that the second front has started, the time when myself and many others will be on combat, is not far away. Somehow I'm roaring to get in there and fight."

> -Pte. Charlie Laboucane, No date, probably 1944

M56427 Pte R.E. Whitford 36, 1st Cdn. Army Tsp. Comp. Coy. R.C.A.S.C. C.A.O. B.L.A. Jan. 17, 1945

Dear Members of the Red Cross Parcel Committee

I wish to thank you all very much for the nice parcel which I received recently from your committee the boys and I really enjoyed the cake as well as the other things, we all share different things out of our parcels and it is really a treat for us to get something good to eat from home once in awhile.

I wish you all a very Happy New Year Yours Sincerely, Pte. R.E. Whitford



Lac La Biche Archives

Private Herb Erickson. A skilled archer, he called himself "Herbie of the Wilds." After the war Canadian Army wanted him to join a travelling circus as an archer. He refused because he wanted to go home.

Battle

"Aug. 25 [1944, the Normandy

Beachhead]: Still resting at Bellou. Went to Livarot with Sgt. Moreau, Lemieux, and Huot and had a bath. Seen enemy wreckage everywhere. Stupendous destruction. German prisoners were awaiting transport to the rear in Livarot. The riversides were literally black with them. Thousands covering acres of ground ... We seen the trial of 15 S.S. men held in the town square by the F.F.I. military tribunal. There were charged with crimes against humanity. Seven were acquitted ... the remaining eight were convicted of looting, murder, rape and sentenced to be executed by firing squad. They were immediately taken to a French cemetary [sic] and shot. ... A French officer made an anti-Fascist speech. One of the most gripping impressions was to hear hundreds of French voices raised in that most stirring and loftiest of all national anthems, 'La Marsellais.'

Sept. 18: Still in action at Belle Houefort. Enemy is putting up a terrific resistance but half our objectives have been taken. Had a letter from [Malcolm] Norris advising that his son Pte. R.J.F. Norris, North Nova Scotia Highlanders, had been killed in action July 25.

Sept. 21: At Belle Houlefort. Still in action. German resistance growing feeble. ... The local population do not seem friendly. ... A French woman cursed us in the *estaminet* ... she had a son in the Luftwaffe.

Oct. 12: At Maladegm. Raining. Unit in action. Stiff fighting along the Leopold Canal.

Nov. 28: Moved to Brakkenstein, a suburb of Nijmegen. The anti-American and Canadian propaganda spread by the English has had some effect among the Dutch. Enroute in convoy a wild eyed Dutchman came out of the crowd, ran along Lieut. Matte's gun carrier and vily insulted him at every turn and in very good English ... He finished his tirade with the fervant hope that the Nazis would kill every one of us. I jumped off my vehicle and seized his throat, held him off the ground and asked him what he thought would happen if I were an S.S. man. He paled and struggled feebly. Feb. 8 [1945]: At Kappel. The advance into the Reichswald begins. A heavy barrage begins at 5:00 a.m. ... Our unit kept up a steady and sustained fire for 13 1/2 hours ... The thunderous vibration rolls for hours. Eighty-five miles away in distant Brussels, windows rattle ... civilians pause in the street, listen and say 'The Canadians are attacking the Siegfried line.' Feb. 24: ... Was in the middle of a field when we were fired upon by multiple mortars. No cover. Laid down in tank track. After a lull we got up and started to run. Another salvo landed almost immediately. Nearly a direct hit. The blast nearly blew the battle blouse off my back. Suffered

shock and difficult breathing. Laid down in the deep tank tracks and never moved 'til dark.

Apr. 12: ...Off to England tomorrow. First leave in 17 months.

May 8: At last the wondrous day. Victory in Europe. Our crew however are silent and thoughful. Anti-climax. There is no feeling of exultation nothing but a quiet satisfaction that the job had been done and we can see Canada again.

May 9: ... The Colonel begins to read the 36 names of our fallen. Tears are in his eyes. He falters and hands the paper to the Adjutant who calmly folds the paper and puts it in his pocket and quietly says: 'It is not necessary. They were comrades. We remember.'"

-Gnr. J.P. Brady, 50th Battery, 4th Medium Regiment (French Canadian), Royal Canadian Artillery,

Jottings from a Record of Service in the North West Europe Campaign Halland. 1 st January 1945

Mrs. T. B. Lett. Convense, Red Cerro Committee Las La Buche, alberta.

man Nro. Lett.

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Lac La Biche Archives

Holland 1st January 1945

Mrs. T.B. Lett Convenor Red Cross Committee Lac La Biche, Alberta Dear Mrs. Lett

I beg to acknowledge receipt of Christmas parcel, which arrived yesterday through the kind offices of the Lac La Biche Red Cross Committee.

It is pleasant to know that we are not forgotten by those on the home front. I appreciate sincerely the thoughtfulness of our community in remembering us this holiday season.

With many others on the overseas fronts I join in the hope that by our efforts we may continue to enjoy the confidence and regard which prompted this delightful parcel.

Kindly accept my thanks for the efforts of yourself and the committee.

Yours very sincerely, J.P. Brady



Photo courtesy of Norman Green

Lac La Biche in 1942. One visitor wrote: "How pitifully some of the people exist out here, and there is the sordid side, too. Yesterday [July 1 celebration] I certainly found out what I am up against."

A Trip to Wartime Lac La Biche

"I arrived at Athabasca about 10:15 p.m. and went to Archdeacon Little's home where I find a fine welcome. The Rectory is only a small house, so the Archdeacon arranged for me to stay at the Hotel. ... Then we went to see about my flivver [car] - that was the first snag! It had not been touched since last fall, and it looked to be in awful shape...

Bright and early Sunday morning (8 a.m.) I started off.

I figured on doing the 90-odd miles [to Lac La Biche] in five hours at the very most - It turned out I was away off 'cause I got here at 5:30 p.m. - average of less than 10 miles an hour.

All went well until I turned off the main 'highway' and headed this way. As I kept stopping at farmhouses to enquire if I was still on the right track (and I mean 'track') they all told me the 'road' was worse ahead, until finally I was convinced it was impassable. So I turned back on a detour. I was directed to a more travelled road round by way of a little hamlet called 'Boyle' - they 'thought' I might get through that way.

By this time the old bus was boiling all over the place and had stalled twice. Finally I did reach Boyle and then headed for Lac again - I had gone forty miles by now and it was after 11 o'clock!

Steadily both the 'car' and the 'road' got worse - it is quite true that Western gumbo must be experienced to be realised [sic]. I got properly stuck finally, but after half an hour's hard work and a bit of road building with logs and bush, I managed to pull out and clank on my way. Then a flat! And not a tool in the bus to fix it. In half an hour I found a farmhouse and fortunately the man had all the tools necessary and did most of the work of changing the wheel - I repaired the tube while I was there, as a safeguard against the future, because the spare we had on looked pretty weak to me. I won't describe the rest of the trip, because it really was bad - every mile

I considered was one less to walk because I felt sure I would never arrive with the car.

- Ruts a couple of feet deep, mud by the ton, water by the hundreds of gallons, bush, muskeg, and pasture - what a ride!

To make it short - I had one more flat. had to fill the radiator twice with ditch water as it boiled away, the brake rod snapped and left me with no foot brake (used the handbrake for the last thirty five miles). Finally, I got stuck good and proper about twelve miles from here. Very fortunately, I was only a few yards from a house and the man had a car to pull me out - that was my last experience before I arrived right here. The car itself was half the trouble though, and I shall not use it more than I have to because it is worse than running a tractor. On my right hand I developed a beautiful blister from tugging at the wheel all day.

However, I made it, and I think I did them a good turn, too, because I know I graded a good few miles of their road with the front axle!

Really the trip was worth it ... Past my front door runs a by-road from the centre of the town, and then beyond that is the beautiful lake stretching away off to nowhere, and dotted with lovely little islands."

Norman Green, Diary, June, 1942 to September, 1942



Photo courtesy of Norman Green

Norman Green came to Lac La Biche as part of his training for the Anglican Ministry.

Small Miracles

On the afternoon of October 29, 1943, three year old Rita Keir wandered off her grandparents property and into the bush near the La Biche River in search of her long lost dog, Kazan. Later examination revealed the existence of coyote and timber wolf tracks where she had vanished. She was wearing only a short sleeve dress, longjohns, and moccasins.

For the next twenty-seven hours the community forgot about the War as it banded together to find the missing child. As the frantic search began, young Rita amused herself by watching the wonders of nature - the northern lights, a spider weaving its web, the pattern of bark on trees. Although cold and hungry, she never lost hope.

In the meantime, an incredibly gifted tracker who went by the name of Lactab Cardinal had gone to Lac La Biche for supplies. He heard about the missing girl and immediately travelled across the lake to see if he could help.

Once at the scene, Cardinal found a tiny piece of thread from Rita Keir's dress and, from that single clue, found her less than two hours later. Rita later recalled: "When Lac Tab [sic] discovered me, I remember his gentle way. He approached me slowly, speaking softly. ... He told me he had come to take me back to my Mommy and Daddy; then he fed tiny pieces of white bread to me."

For years after, Rita Keir was known as "The Miracle Child of the North," and with good reason. Three days after she was found, the lake froze.

> At right. Octave "Lactab" Cardinal, the remarkably gifted tracker who found young Rita Keir.

Rita Keir Found Alive: Was Missing 27 Hours

Little 3-year-old Rita Keir was found well and strong about two miles from her home on Cherry Island on Friday evening, Oct. 29, after being missing since 2.30 the previous day. Search parties were organized when she was found about 80 persons were engaged in the search. A number of searchers went by boat from Lac La Biche. The night that Rita spent outdoors was not very cold, but she had wandered in the bush over muskeg that would not support a full grown person, and this made the search difficult. Then there was the danger that the coyoles or wolves, which ware heard howing during the might, might get her, hence as

many as possible kept up the search all night. She was finally found by Lactab Cardinal, half-breed, who certainly, showed great skill in his work of tracking, as she was found only three hours after he came on the scene. The parents were overjoyed to see their child found alive and express their thanks to all who helped in the search for her. Mrs. Keir is the anyther of Mr. N. Manuel.

The Northern Herald, November 10, 1943



Photo courtesy of Rita Keir-Bos

Rita Keir (later Bos), the Miracle Child of the North.



Photo courtesy of Roderick Cardinal



Holten Canadian War Cemetery.



Bergen-op-Zoom Canadian War Cemetery.

"Laid in a tulip field and rested for an hour under the stars. What beautiful peace and serenity. Towards dawn I slept for a few hours in a barn at Rijnsberg. A buxom Dutch girl brought me a glass of milk and wished God Speed as the sun rose glistening on the dew above the waving tulip fields..."

-J. P, Brady, August 27, 1945



Photo courtesy Tom Maccagno