

“Stamix Otokan”

NWMP Lieutenant Colonel James Macleod

by A. Commr. D.O. Forrest

in **The Nor'-West Farmer**

Vol. 45. No. 4, Fall 1980, p. 19- 28.



Lieutenant Colonel James Alexander Farquharson Macleod, C.M.G.

(Note: Sometimes written “Stamixotokan”, the name was given to James Macleod by Chief Crowfoot, powerful leader of the Blackfoot Confederacy, meaning “Bull’s Head,” possibly because of the bull’s head featured in the Clan Macleod badge worn by Macleod to adorn his glengarry). D.O. Forrest.)

I find it interesting to speculate why Lieutenant Colonel James Alexander Farquharson Macleod, C.M.G., should in 1873 apply for a commission as an officer in the newly constituted North West Mounted Police. One might expect that at 38 years of age, his legal practice in the prosperous and growing central Ontario town of Bowmanville would offer ample opportunity for future security and honour. He was, after all, well past

his first blush of youth, and to forfeit a relatively comfortable profession among old friends in favour of the rigors of frontier service was, to me, a particularly singular decision.

Macleod had been born in Scotland in 1836, the son of Captain Donald Martin Macleod of the Isle of Skye. His father had served with distinction in the 25th Regiment of Foot. In his youth, the family emigrated to the colony then known as Upper Canada and settled in Oak Ridges near Toronto. James began his education in 1845 at Upper Canada College, a private school in Toronto for the sons of gentlemen and prosperous merchants. He went on to take his B.C. at Queen's College, Kingston, studied law and was called to the bar in 1860.

Macleod entered the militia as a lieutenant in the Volunteer Field Battery at Kingston. He was called up for active service on the frontier when relations with the United States were strained at the time of the Trent affair, and volunteered again during the Fenian raids. By the age of 31 he had advanced to the rank of major and brevet lieutenant colonel.

We must now transfer the scene of our attention to the red River Settlement in what is now southeastern Manitoba. A rebellion had broken out under the leadership of Louis Riel, and a few hundred armed men of the Metis population formed a provisional government in an attempt to prevent the Hudson's Bay Company from transferring the territory to the new Canadian Confederation. Fort Garry was seized and a number of local settlers were taken as hostages. When one of these hostages was executed, the prime minister responded predictably, and a military expedition was organized to ensure the orderly transition of government to the newly created province of Manitoba. In May 1870, a force of British Regulars and Canadian Militia was formed under the command of Colonel (later Field Marshal) Viscount Garnet Joseph Wolseley. This formation, known as the Wolseley Expedition of the Red River expedition, totalled 1,213 officers, non-commissioned officers and men. Macleod was again called to the colours, and was appointed assistant brigade major of the expedition.

Previous British detachments for the Fort Garry garrison had been sent by way of Hudson's Bay and then up the Nelson River, but the situation's urgency required the selection of a shorter route.

The old Northwest Company of Montreal had blazed a 400-mile trail west from Thunder Bay by way of Fort Francis and the Rat Portage, then known as the Dawson Road. It was long considered impracticable for boats larger than canoes, because of the long and difficult portages and dangerous rapids. This route, traversing a dreary wilderness of forest, rock and water, was chosen, however, and by the middle of June 1871 the expedition had moved up the lakes by steamer and started the last and most difficult leg of the journey.

Time and space do not permit a recitation of the hardships this column of soldiers encountered during the following two months. Small boats had to be skidded on rollers over the forty-seven portages, but this was seen as child's play compared to the labour of loading and unloading the tons of provisions and supplies carried in the boats. One of the private soldiers narrated this procedure in a letter:

"The work of portaging was done with a rush, the officers and men running back after depositing their loads, all working alike. Major Macleod, a tall

graceful man, was the first of all of us to carry on his shoulder a barrel of port, a heavy load, each barrel weighing 200 lbs."



THE RED RIVER COUNTRY—CROSSING A PORTAGE.

Crossing a Portage. (Institute for Regional Studies, NDSU)

The expedition arrived at Fort Garry on August 29 to discover that Riel and his lieutenants had fled, and Wolseley assumed possession of Rupert's Land in the name of Canada.

Wolseley promulgated a farewell order and tribute to his command before returning east, which in part is quoted:

"I have throughout viewed with pleasure the manner in which officers have vied with their men in carrying heavy loads. It has rained 45 days out of 94 that have passed by since we landed at Thunder Bay, and upon many occasions every man has been wet through for days together. There has not been the slightest murmur of discontent heard from anyone. It may be confidently asserted that no force has had to

endure more continuous labour, and it may be truthfully said that no men on service have been better behaved or more cheerful under the trials arising from exposure to inclement weather, excessive fatigue and the annoyance by flies."

As the Wolseley Expedition had completed its mission, the British Regulars were ordered back to their permanent stations in eastern Canada. The battalions of Canadian Militia remained as a garrison at Fort Garry under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Peters Jarvis, commanding officer of the Ontario Rifles.

Macleod, who had performed so well as assistant brigade major under Wolseley and had been decorated with the Order of St. Michael and St. George, automatically fitted into the military aspect of affairs at Red River. He therefore did not immediately return to his law practice in Bowmanville, but continued in his post under Jarvis.

Two passages in the early reports of the Wolseley Expedition deserve mentioning, the relevancy of which will be later appreciated. The first describes the experience of Lieutenant (later Lieutenant General, Sir) William Butler, intelligence officer of the expedition, who carried messages from Wolseley to the loyal Red River settlers as the column was approaching Fort Garry. Travelling downstream from Pembina on the steamer "International," Butler slipped ashore before the boat reached the landing at Fort Garry and eluded Riel and his men who had planned to capture and question him. His

guide on this mission was one William Drever, a Winnipeg resident and a descendent of an early Red River settler. The second incident occurred a few days later when Butler's despatches to headquarters were courageously and successfully carried past Riel's scouts by William Drever's sister, Mary Drever.

Macleod was obviously impressed by William Drever. A year later, in fact, he wrote to Commissioner French:

"I propose getting young Drever to assist me. He is a most energetic, active fellows, thoroughly up in this sort of work.... I am satisfied he would prove most useful, having had so much experience travelling between Fort Garry and St. Paul with trains of carts, part of the time during the Indian troubles in Minnesota."

It is not unreasonable to believe that because Macleod knew Drever, he also met his sister shortly after Fort Garry was occupied by Wolseley's Forces. It does not strain the imagination at all to appreciate how happy the loyal faction of the Fort Garry and Winnipeg populations was with the recent turn of events, and the popularity of the officers of the Canadian and British regiments now in their midst.

We all know that the Northwest Mounted Police was created by Order-in-Council on August 30, 1873, to maintain law and order in the Northwest Territories. Three divisions, or troops, of about fifty men each were recruited in Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes, and were sent to Fort Garry later that year by way of the Dawson Trail.

That same year, Macleod was commissioned in the new Force as superintendent-and inspector (third on the NWMP's seniority roll, at a salary of \$1,400. The senior superintendent-and-inspector was then W. D. Jarvis. However, the next year on June 1, Macleod was promoted to the newly created position of assistant commissioner, and in the absence of Commissioner (later General, Sir) George French he assumed command of the three troops in training at Fort Garry, 20 miles below Winnipeg.

We are all familiar with the first test of the quality of the NWMP, which began on July 8, 1874, when the now six divisions (troops) paraded together at Dufferin to begin the long trek over more than 800 miles of uncharted prairie to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. The famous march has been described in detail by many of the early historians.

Crossing the Dirt Hills
August 6, 1874. (*Canadian
illustrated News*)

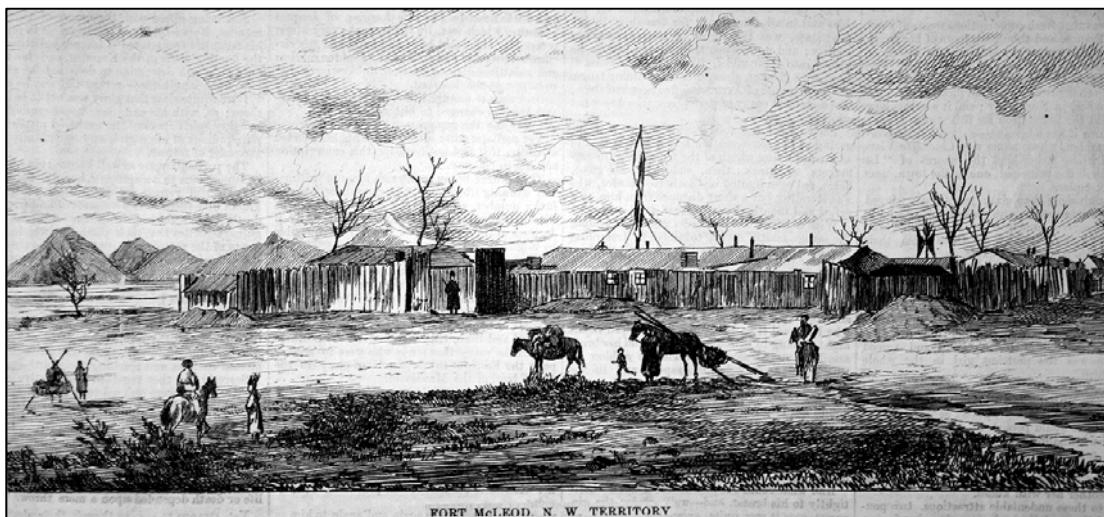


The main column plodded on day after day over terrain trampled by buffalo, and very little of the nutritious grass was left for forage. The shallow sloughs which men and animals depended upon for drinking water had been churned into a thin and evil smelling gruel. There were dysentery and lice, and conditions that might have dismayed the steadiest veteran of the Empire. By September 18, they had reached the Sweet Grass Hills, where Commissioner George a. French and Macleod separated. French led two divisions back to Fort Pelly at Swan River, which was to be the Force's headquarters. Macleod was entrusted with the responsibility of establishing a post farther west. Within a month, Macleod's divisions had reached the notorious Fort Whoop-Up.

"There was no sign of the life below, where the palisaded, bastioned Fort Whoop-Up was flying what the men thought was the Stars and Stripes. But Macleod ordered the two nine-pounder field guns and the two mortars to be placed in strategic positions. Then with rifles loaded and ready, and everyone silent and intent, Macleod's horsemen moved toward the fort. They expected soon to receive an order to dismount and deploy.

But, wrote Turner (the Force's first historian), 'Macleod rode straight ahead.... there were murmurs of amazement as the assistant commissioner dismounted and strode toward the open main gate. Entering and going to the nearest building within the enclosure, he rapped on the door. After Macleod's continued knocking, the door was opened by an uncouth, gray-haired man. Dave Akers nonchalantly invited the police to come right in and make themselves at home. All the whisky traders had left the place long ago, he said, and the northern manager of the I.G. Baker Company was using the old for as his own base. The manager was away, but they were very welcome.

It was an anticlimax. Actually, long before Macleod and his men drew near the ill-reputed fort, a party of buffalo hunters had warned the traders that a large part of horsemen wearing red coats was approaching. The style of trading had been altered accordingly, and a thorough police search of the building revealed no liquor. From Whoop-Up, Jerry Potts (the Force's scout) led Divisions "B", "C" and "F" to a place on the Oldman River which he advised would be suitable for a permanent police post. There at ten o'clock on the morning of October 13, Macleod ordered the troops to make camp."



Fort McLeod, N.W. Territory. (Canadian Illustrated News)

T. Morris Longstreth in *The Silent Force* (Century Co.,1927) describes picturesquely Macleod's situation at Fort Macleod in 1874.

"Macleod was one of the best-looking men of the time. Erect, well proportioned, slightly under six feet with no ounce of superfluous flesh, he presented a figure that his soldiers admired, a bearing that his enemies respected. His experience with Wolseley's expedition in 1870, and his training for the law, had fitted him for the dual task of subduing a vast region and then ruling it. With his merest suggestion of an army he now set about accomplishing this feat; a feat which, only a few days' ride to the south, regiment after regiment of American soldiers were failing to accomplish. That he succeeded is one of Canada's coups de maitre; because his success came with the mysterious ease of the master, it led the superficial into thinking that there was nothing to do. But there was everything to do, and at once, and with the craft of utter wisdom where one misstep might mean annihilation."

By Christmas, 1874, the mud-daubed log fort had been built, providing shelter for the horses, the men and the officers. Elk, deer and buffalo provided an abundant supply of meat, and the regimental tailors manufactured fur clothing from buffalo robes for winter weather. Long saddle horse patrols were made throughout the district with the immediate aim of discouraging the liquor traffic with Indians, but also with the object of bringing the Queen's law to this remote sector of the new territories.

Perhaps it was Macleod's innate Scottish regard for truth and justice, and perhaps it was his experience as a lawyer and soldier which led him to a policy of humane dealing with the Indian tribes. In any event, the methods were effective in the orderly establishment of Canadian rule throughout the vast territories under his command.

Major General, Sir Sam Steele, one of the NWMP "originals", in his *Forty Years in Canada* (Russell Lang, 1915), writes of Macleod's relations with the Indians in these terms:

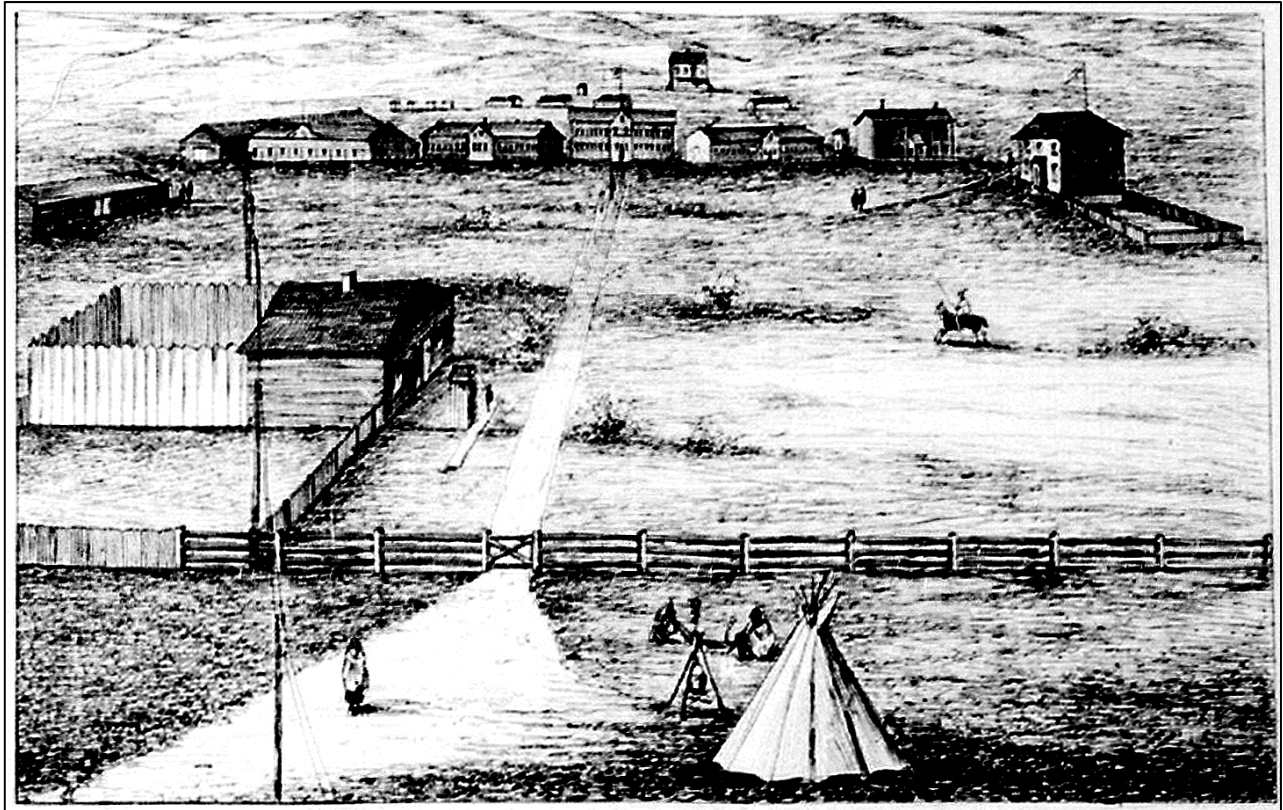
"I doubt if anyone ever had such influence with them, and, as a matter of fact, it could not be otherwise. He kept his place, never accepted a present, never gave one, and was respected by them all the more for it, his word being law from the time he appeared among them."

On New Year's Day, 1876, Macleod resigned from the Force to become the stipendiary magistrate in the Bow River Judicial District – Calgary and Macleod, Supt. A. G. Irvine took over as assistant commissioner. However, on July 20, after several months of controversial correspondence with Ottawa, Commissioner French resigned. As Turner wrote:

"He had decided to leave what was now to him an uncongenial post and return to the Imperial service. Ever since his first view of the headquarters site and buildings at Swan River in 1874, his relations with government authorities had been more or less strained. But he had the satisfaction of knowing he had accomplished a difficult task and had done it well."

By order-in-council of July 20, 1876, James Farquharson Macleod, C.M.G., was appointed in his place. Commissioner Macleod, revered and respected by whites and Indians on both sides of the international boundary, was now the

outstanding figure in the Canadian West. He had proven himself to be an efficient administrator, a natural diplomat, a sound disciplinarian and a perfect host to all. He was popularly known as "The Colonel" having been given the brevet rank of lieutenant colonel for his services under Wolseley in 1870. As well as his duties as Commissioner, he was to continue to act as stipendiary magistrate..."



Swan River Barracks, North West Territory. (*Canadian Illustrated News*)

With government approval Commissioner Macleod moved headquarters from Swan River Barracks in what is now Manitoba, to Fort Macleod. Not only was the latter site more suitable for controlling the border but an easier location from which to communicate with Ottawa. In the midst of this transfer, Commissioner Macleod managed to find time, at the age of 40, to travel to Winnipeg to marry Mary Drever. It will be remembered that she was the sister of William Drever who guided Lieutenant Butler through Riels' patrols during the same campaign.

In 1877 the stage was set for Macleod's greatest achievement and one of the important milestones in early Canadian history, the signing of Treaty No. 7. The ceaseless activity of the Mounted Police had brought peace and tranquility to a prairie empire larger than a dozen European principalities. Although the scattered Indian bands still hunted throughout the country, a few hardy settlers began to take up land for ranching and farming. It was clearly evident that the projected trans-Canada railroad would attract many thousands more. The advent of firearms to the prairies brought destruction to the vast buffalo herds which had always been the Indian's principal source of food. The economic forces of the nomadic aboriginal people and the European

immigrants were in fundamental conflict and the aspiration of each group would inevitably lead to bloodshed unless a compromise could be found.

The government of Canada advised Macleod that if the Blackfoot and other Indians of the plains would transfer their rights and titles to their historic hunting grounds east of the Rock Mountains and west of the Cypress hills, comprising some fifty thousand square miles, they would receive in exchange exclusive land reservations, domestic cattle, farm machinery, and an annual grant of money for each person.

Lieutenant Governor Laird of the Northwest territories and Macleod were selected by the government to negotiate and execute this delicate treaty. The Blackfoot, Blood, Peigan, Stoney and Sarcee tribes gathered to meet the representatives of the great White Mother at Blackfoot Crossing, an historical and legendary meeting place and an arena well chosen for this farewell to an ancient culture and way of life. A heated powwow lasted for four days, and the extravagant demands of some of the chiefs required considerable tact and diplomacy to keep negotiations open and within reasonable bounds. Finally Crowfoot, chief of the Blackfoot, the paramount personage of his race present said:

“While I speak be kind and patient. I have to speak for my people who are numerous and who rely on me to follow the course which in future will tend to their good. The plains are large and wide; we are children of the plains; it has been our homes, and the buffalo have been our food always. I hope you look upon the Blackfoot, Bloods, Peigans and Sarcees as your children now, and that you will be indulgent and charitable to them. They will expect me to speak for them, and I trust the Great Spirit will put into their breasts to be good people, into the minds of men, women and children and their future generations.

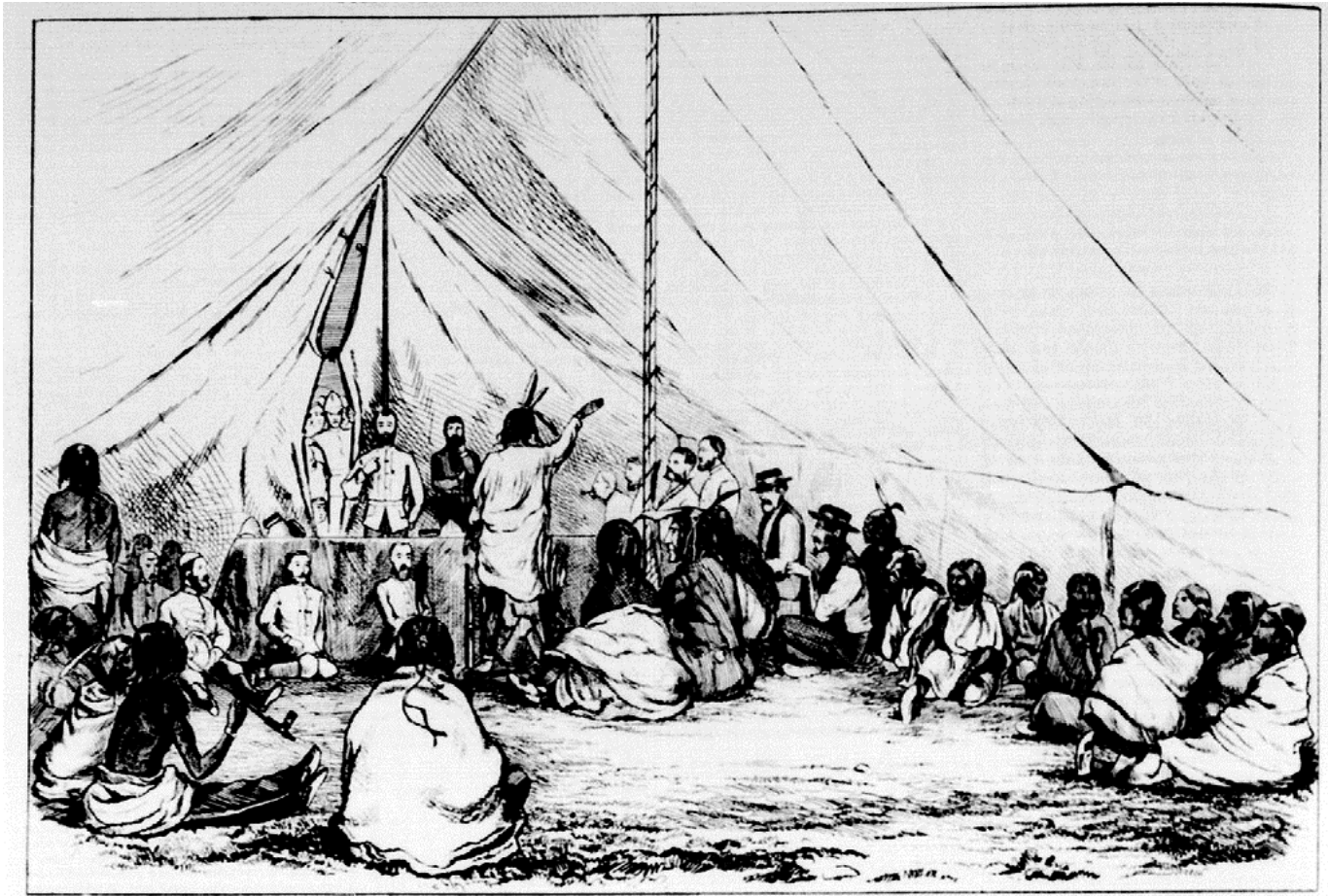
“The advice given to me and my people has been very good. If the police had not come to this country, where would we all be now? Bad men and whisky were indeed killing us so fast that very few of us would have been left today. The Mounted Police have protected us as the feathers of the bird protects it from the frosts of winter. I wish hem all good, and trust that all our hearts will increase in goodness from this time forward. I am satisfied, I will sign the treaty.”

As Crowfoot put his mark to the document he said,

“I am the first to sign, I will be the last to break.”

Red Crow, head chief of the Blood Nation, spoke and said:

“Three years ago when the Mounted Police came to this country, I met and shook hands with Stamix Otokan at belly River. Since that time he made me many promises, he kept them all, not one of them has been broken. Everything that the Mounted Police has done has been good. I entirely trust Stamix Otokan, and will leave everything to him, I will sign with Crowfoot.”



The Great PowWow with the Sioux. August 13, 1874. (*Canadian Illustrated News*, 1876 April 17.)

So was concluded the treaty which extinguished the Indians' ancient ownership of the vast territory now known as southern Alberta and Saskatchewan, immediately south of this area the indigenous tribes were engaged in a series of bloody campaigns against large military forces and the new settlers in attempts to resolve identical problems. The cost in human lives and treasure on both sides was enormous. The Canadian prairie Indians were no less warlike than their cousins south of the border, and they grieved no less the loss of hunting grounds which had been their home for time beyond memory.

There are indeed few periods in the history of any nation when as much depended upon the calibre of one man. A less fortunate selection than Macleod as assistant commissioner and later, commissioner of the fledgling Force might have led to disaster. The situation was likened by a contemporary reporter to "a few strikingly costumed mice dictating to innumerable but not quite hungry cats." This might be a humorous oversimplification, but the Honourable Frank Oliver, pioneer Edmonton newspaperman, wrote afterwards, "Ordinarily speaking, no more wildly impossible understanding was ever staged than the establishment of Canadian authority and Canadian law throughout the Western prairies to a handful of mounted police."

The long march in 1874 from Emerson to the foothills was a spectacular achievement for the new corps, but this was only the beginning. Thereafter the small Force was employed on a campaign of such firmness (and at the same time such gentleness) that reaped a rich harvest of harmony between the red and white races, leading to orderly settlement of the prairies. Much of this success was due to the faithful and loyal service of the original rank and file, but history will give the greatest credit to Macleod, whose leadership made it possible. He perceived from the beginning that the native people's allegiance, could only be attracted by an impartial code of law that would protect them from white people coming to populate their lands.



Red Crow, head of the Bloods.



Crowfoot, leader of the Blackfoot Confederacy.

By November 1880, most of the Sioux had returned to the United States and almost all the Canadian Indians had signed treaties. The prairies were changing rapidly with the swarm of new settlers and ranching companies encouraged by the government to come west. The government realized Macleod's restraining influence on the Indians was no longer required and, as more and more criminal cases were being brought before the stipendiary magistrates, he was allowed to resign from the Force to devote his entire time to his magisterial duties.

In 1886, he was promoted to become a justice of the Supreme Court of the Northwest Territories. He occupied this position until September 1895, when, after a long illness, he died. His bequest to his beloved country was peace and tranquility throughout the wide domain that was to become Saskatchewan and Alberta, and he left Indian and white walking together – equal in the eyes of the law.

Of the 275 officers, NCO's and constables serving in the Force on the eve of July 8, 1874, when the long march to the foothills was about to begin at Dufferin, it is likely that the majority had enlisted because they were young, spirited and adventurous. One can speculate that some may have joined for economic reasons, even at one dollar a day and rations. It is possible that some recruits had private reasons for wanting to escape to the wilds of a frontier which would do them no credit. Be this as it may, in my view, one of

Macleod's reasons for going west as a member of NWMP was to meet again the young lady he had known three years earlier, and whom he later married.

Macleod served with distinction as a lawyer, a soldier, a policeman and a judge. Contemporary and later historians have described in complimentary terms his appearance, his personality and his judgement. It is not surprising therefore to find that he possessed in abundance the even more rare attributes of constancy and loyalty.

by Acting Commander D.O. Forrest, 1980.



Commissioner J. F. McLeod, 1879. (*RCMP Quarterly*, 1980 Summer.)