

## Duel at Ile-à-la-Crosse

by Elizabeth Arthur

THE violent clash of fur trading companies in the second decade of the 19th century — provocation given, swords flashing, and blood flowing — possesses a dramatic quality that few historians of the west have been able to resist. The late A. S. Morton gave this account of one such incident:<sup>1</sup>

A Mr. Hector McNeil, an Irishman, was sent out from it [the blockhouse] to pick a quarrel with Clarke's officers, his associates watching its course from their blockhouse. Soon McNeil the Northwester provoked James McVicar to a duel with swords. There was an element of chivalry in it all, for when McVicar was disarmed the fight ended. McNeil, however, was severely wounded.

This particular encounter, it seems to be agreed, took place in October, 1816, at Fort Chipewyan. E. E. Rich's description of the affair, however, does differ from Morton's on some points.<sup>2</sup>

An Irish bully, Hector McNeil, soon appeared from the North West house to goad Clarke and his men and to provoke John McVicar, an Irish employe of the Company, to a duel. The Hudson's Bay man was disarmed, the Northwester wounded, both were covered with blood and the Northwester (who gave every appearance of being drunk) was trying to murder the unarmed McVicar when the latter's Indian wife intervened, screaming and scratching. Clarke fetched his gun to prevent murder, Simon McGillivray set on him to take the gun from him, and a general scuffle developed. When the two parties had separated, with no serious damage done, A. N. McLeod appeared, as a Justice of the Peace, and summoned all the English to a court.

Any problem concerning the given name of the Hudson's Bay man involved in the duel was compounded by the fact that Morton's James McVicar and Rich's John McVicar were each indexed in the respective historical works under the heading: McVicar, Robert. In the text, Professor Rich correctly identified the duellist as John McVicar, but, at least at the time that he edited George Simpson's Athabaska journal, he believed that the much-better known Robert McVicar had also fought a duel with a clerk named McNeal [sic] but at Ile-à-la-Crosse, and the time, it might be inferred, was 1815 or 1816.<sup>3</sup> Using this as his source, a local historian of northwestern Ontario, sketching in the eventful past of one of the early Lakehead settlers, made the simple statement that Robert McVicar had fought Hector McNeil at Ile-à-la-Crosse in 1816.<sup>4</sup> Three related questions emerge regarding the incident and the interpretation of primary sources by historians of the northwest. What were the facts surrounding the encounter at Chipewyan? What part did Robert McVicar play? Did he, in fact, fight any duel at Ile-à-la-Crosse?

The Fort Chipewyan journals for 1816-1817, like those kept in most Athabaska posts during such violent years, were defective. Errors and careless writing were frequent; several different accounts of the same exciting events were sometimes being kept by Hudson's Bay Company officers and servants, and a number of these have been preserved for the year in question, although it was the journal

kept by Roderick McKenzie that was finally approved by the Company.<sup>5</sup> The "bloody affray", as he called it, had its origin<sup>6</sup> when a Nor'wester, identified at this point in the narrative merely as a "stranger", encountered Mrs. McVicar while she was spreading clothes to dry on the ground behind the Hudson's Bay Company fort, and asked her whether she had ever been to Glasgow. She refused to answer "such a forward and unbecoming question". A marginal note opposite this passage, signed F. M., 1896, states that Mrs. McVicar was a Scottish woman, but certainly Rich's claim that she was Indian lends more credibility to the offence she took at the question addressed to her, unless, indeed, she came from Edinburgh.

Subsequently, as all the accounts agree, the stranger challenged John Clarke, the gentleman in charge of the Hudson's Bay Company post, but he contemptuously refused to fight with a social inferior. It was at this point that John McVicar took up the challenge. Simon McGillivray, métis son of William, "Lord of the Northwest", gave his sword to the stranger who then drew his own and presented it to McVicar. The combat lasted about six minutes, and by that time McVicar had been disarmed and his assailant was making every effort to despatch him when Mrs. McVicar ran screaming between the combatants. Her husband, far from being run through, had only been slightly wounded in the forehead. The journal entry ends with the identification of the other duellist as McNeil, an Irishman, but makes no reference to his having received any wounds at all.

Further detail concerning the duel is to be found in the depositions to which both combatants swore, a year or more after the event. John McVicar made no reference at all to his wife's role, but claimed that the duel had its origins in an altercation between McGillivray and his guest, McNeil, on the one hand, and John Clarke on the other. Again, according to this document, swords appear as the unlikely weapons used, but this time it is McNeil who is wounded in the forehead. McVicar swore that he dropped his sword when it became lodged in a wooden door frame. The deposition makes no mention of what force intervened to stop the duel at that point, but does indicate that both combatants were ordered to appear before the Justice of the Peace, A. N. McLeod of the North West Company. It also quotes McNeil as saying that, had McLeod not intervened, he would have killed his disarmed opponent.<sup>7</sup> McNeil's deposition repeats no such statement, but does bear out McVicar's account to a surprising extent in most other details. He swore, of course, that he was walking peaceably around the fort when he was assaulted by the fiery Clarke; then, after some dispute, a battle took place between him and "John McVicar (a clerk of the said Hudson's Bay company, acting under the orders of the said Clarke) which was fought with swords, and ended with his disarming the said Viccar [sic]"<sup>8</sup>. So much is clear. Whatever the initial causes of dispute, Clarke was involved very early in the exchange; a duel did take place and, whatever the murderous intent of either participant, one was prevented by his own lack of swordsmanship and the other by the intervention of onlookers from doing any serious damage.

But underlying the study of this rather unimportant incident is far more than a tendency to romanticize, to which even historians sometimes fall prey.

The contradictions in the sources themselves reveal some of the particular problems with which students of history must deal, both in respect to fragmentary and misleading records and in respect to the application of general knowledge to a specific situation. The post journals were often carelessly written with many interlineations; deciphering them after the passage of a century and a half is often difficult; the constant repetition of names like Clarke and McGillivray in repeated violent confrontations at various posts presents a real hazard to the modern reader — all these conditions can explain some errors, especially in detail of peripheral significance. In the events of October, 1816, the problem was compounded by the fact that the Hudson's Bay Company had two employees named McVicar at Fort Chipewyan at the same time. The journals and the later depositions make it clear that it was John McVicar who fought McNeil. Those recording the events of that stormy year on Lake Athabaska made every effort to distinguish between the two men in their accounts of duties performed, periodic imprisonment in the North West Company fort, disputes with Nor'westers, and so on.<sup>9</sup> In most cases, a remarkable clarity does emerge, once the reader's attention has been focused on such a small point as differentiating between the activities of the two men. Robert arrived at Chipewyan on September 18, 1816, from Bustard Lake, departed almost immediately on another mission, and was again at the fort by September 29. Meanwhile, John had remained at Chipewyan, and his activities were carefully listed. Both men were thus on the scene of battle when McNeil arrived. In later months, the pattern set in September continued. Robert was much more frequently absent; both men were at Chipewyan during March and early April, 1817. Then their paths permanently diverged. Robert was at various outposts during the summer and returned to Chipewyan in the fall. John remained reluctantly at the post during the summer of 1817, awaiting permission to leave for Cumberland House.<sup>10</sup> This permission was finally forthcoming in August, and it was at Cumberland in December of 1817 that he made his deposition concerning the events in which he had participated. No further record of his role in the Hudson's Bay Company has been discovered, and even the journals of Fort Chipewyan, and his own account imply a lesser position in the Company hierarchy than that enjoyed by Robert McVicar.

Certainly it was Robert, a younger man, and a Scot by birth (where John was described as Irish) who rose in the Company service and became a Chief Trader in 1821. He too figured in a number of incidents in which tempers were aroused and threats of duels hung in the air. His reputation among the Nor-westers when he first arrived in the Athabaska country was already a violent one. They claimed he had been imported from York Factory as a hatchet man, "on high salary for the express purpose of killing some of their men".<sup>11</sup> In the tense atmosphere of the next few years in the west, there is little doubt that his employers gave him licence to break what would have been recognized as the law in other societies. He and Simon McGillivray clashed on at least two occasions, once in a wrestling match at Fort Chipewyan,<sup>12</sup> and again the following year on the Athabaska.<sup>13</sup> According to his own account, he disarmed an intruder at Frog Portage on September 1, 1819, and so prevented a duel from taking place.<sup>14</sup> His own threats of violence were illustrated during his command at Fort Resolu-

tion. "We told the Indians that should any of them attempt to return to the N.W. we would enter their Fort and lead them out by the nose and kick everyone that offered to oppose us."<sup>15</sup> Had the Athabaska Indians been acquainted with the niceties of European etiquette, one might have expected some challenges to arise from that directive. In dealing with Edward Smith of the North West Company in 1820, as the days of "Athabaska justice" were drawing to an end, McVicar again defended his practices in securing furs from the Indians, while Smith retorted: "You appear to take things very hienously [sic] when the game goes against you; you have sanctioned and supported your men in acts of violence and aggression."<sup>16</sup>

What then of the possibility that young Robert McVicar did fight a duel at Ile-à-la-Crosse with McNeil or with some other Nor'wester? In 1815-1816, the year preceding the incident at Fort Chipewyan, McVicar was stationed at Ile-à-la-Crosse, but, for a number of reasons, it seems impossible that he could have fought McNeil and improbable that he was involved in any duel there. In the first place, the coincidence of two McVicar-McNeil duels within less than a year of each other at two different posts in the same area, involving two Hudson's Bay Company men of the same surname (and perhaps two Nor'westers of the same surname) could hardly have passed without comment in the various accounts of what happened at Fort Chipewyan. Secondly, those same accounts do make the point repeatedly that McNeil was a stranger to all the Hudson's Bay Company men at Chipewyan, and Robert McVicar was at the fort when the newcomer appeared. Had a duel taken place earlier, it seems reasonable to assume that the dangerous newcomer would be identified at once. Thirdly, there is the negative evidence of the Ile-à-la-Crosse journals during the year that McVicar spent there.<sup>17</sup> The entries of the conscientious clerk, Robert Logan, began on September 13, 1815, and continued until the following June. They make no reference to any duel, but do give in great detail items of local news that heightened tension. Logan found time and space to recount the fulminations of representatives of the two rival companies, threats, charges and counter-charges. Whenever Hudson's Bay men were absent from the fort in small groups, trying to intercept the Indians before the furs went to the rival company, or sometimes to take back prisoners captured by Nor'westers in an earlier foray, Logan's concern leaps from every entry in his journal.

The character of the Ile-à-la-Crosse journal of 1815-1816 and of the man who kept it must stand as important evidence in any investigation into Robert McVicar's activities during that year. On one occasion, McVicar was despatched to Paint River "to get our men from the N. W. Co. either by fair means or foul ones."<sup>18</sup> He set off the very day after rejoicing and dancing were heard from the North West Company fort as the men there celebrated news of fresh victories in the Athabaska country. Shortly after his departure came the disquieting news that Samuel Black had also left for Paint River. Black was the man the Hudson's Bay Company employees most hated and feared; he was consistently described as an outlaw and a felon, "callous to every honorable and manly feeling."<sup>19</sup> There was no doubt in the minds of the Hudson's Bay Company men at Ile-à-la-Crosse that, given the mood of triumph among Nor'westers at the

time, Black would impose no restraints upon his own conduct or that of his men. Black re-appeared at Ile-à-la-Crosse on April 3, but McVicar did not return to report on the failure of his mission until May 3.<sup>20</sup> During this month, concern for McVicar's safety was mentioned repeatedly, and it seems incredible that any specific cause the North West Company might have had for desiring vengeance upon him would have been omitted.

But certain circumstances in the history of the Ile-à-la-Crosse post made it such a reasonable locale for violence that the more a historian knew about the post, the more disposed he might be to accept rather uncritically the likelihood of McVicar's being embroiled in a duel there. The traders from Montreal had been established there for more than a generation. It was to Ile-à-la-Crosse that the young William McGillivray was sent when he first arrived from Scotland in the 1780's; it was at Ile-à-la-Crosse that he married, *au façon du nord*, the Indian girl called Susan; it was at Ile-à-la-Crosse that their children, including the belligerent Simon, was born.<sup>21</sup> As a wintering partner in the early 1790's, William McGillivray had coordinated the food and transport services for the entire English River District at Ile-à-la-Crosse. To the natural advantages of the place — the abundance of fish, the presence of an Indian settlement, the closeness of the beaver country, the water route to Athabaska<sup>22</sup> — were now added the organized links with Green Lake and the Saskatchewan River area, as well as the concentration of pemmican supplies brought from the forts on the upper Saskatchewan by dog-sled each winter.<sup>23</sup> By the time McGillivray left for wider areas of management in 1793, he was already noting that the wood supply around the fort was depleted because of the long occupancy by the Montreal traders.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps for that reason, the North West Company built a new post at Ile-à-la-Crosse in the late 1790's.<sup>25</sup> There seems little doubt that they had selected the most effective location for a post, and the Hudson's Bay Company, which built its first post on the lake in 1799, was not usually in a position to offer very effective opposition. After 1821, it was not surprising that it should have been the former North West Company post that continued to be used, while the rival Fort Superior was abandoned.<sup>26</sup>

In the two decades preceding the amalgamation of 1821, Ile-à-la-Crosse acquired a reputation for violence, but the nature of that violence needs to be examined rather carefully. The continuous presence and strenuous activities of Samuel Black and, after 1811, Peter Skene Ogden, contributed greatly to the reputation of the place. Both became chief villains in the eyes of the Hudson's Bay Company men, so much so that they were denied positions under the Deed Poll of 1821. Only later did their undoubted talents secure them important positions with the "new" Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>27</sup> Black was frequently referred to as a gadfly in Ile-à-la-Crosse incidents; Ogden had all the self-assurance of a very young man whose family was accustomed to deference. Both undoubtedly broke the law as repeatedly as and often more successfully than their opponents. In many of the incidents in which they were involved, the numerical superiority of the North West Company at Ile-à-la-Crosse made possible a kind of harassment which the Hudson's Bay men resented and denounced repeatedly. When Robert Sutherland was forced to abandon the post by what he called insolent "marauding"

by the Nor'westers, a very clear picture of the rivalry of 1811 appears. "Marauding" is defined by Professor Rich as "a series of injuries, outrages, and premeditated insults in which he was prevented from access to Indians, his fishing nets were cut to pieces, his stockades were hacked down and his goods taken and carried away."<sup>28</sup> Up until 1815, the preponderance of power was so greatly in favour of the Nor-westers that incidents were legion. The number of the incidents and the frequent appearances of Black and later Ogden in the midst of them, creates a peril for the historian. It creates a disposition to believe any account of violence alleged to have taken place at Ile-à-la-Crosse.

The overriding question, with which historians like Professor Rich are necessarily concerned, is that of the Hudson's Bay Company priorities in the west. As early as 1802, William Auld, in command at Churchill, was urging a full-scale challenge to the North West Company in Athabaska.<sup>29</sup> If his arguments were accepted, Ile-à-la-Crosse would assume an important role in the operations of both fur companies and real violence was likely to erupt there, although not necessarily every season or involving every employee. It was not until 1814, however, about the time that Auld left Churchill, that the Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company had at last resolved upon a more aggressive policy in Athabaska, and harassment of the weak by the strong was likely to give place to combat between more equal forces.

It was Colin Robertson, the former Nor'wester then working for the Hudson's Bay Company, who sought to carry into effect the plan that both he and Auld had been advocating for some years. In 1814, he first undertook to recruit Canadian workmen in Montreal. In the the same year, Joseph Howse and a group of Hudson's Bay Company employees, many of them Irish with some experience at Red River, were sent to Ile-à-la-Crosse to win the support of the Chipewyan Indians by a show of strength there.<sup>30</sup> The results were predictable. In February, 1815, James Johnston, who served as accountant for Howse, went in search of a steel trap which he suspected had been stolen by Nor'westers; he was shot by a métis, brother-in-law to Samuel Black, and, in the answering fire, a Canadian labourer in the employ of the North West Company was also killed.<sup>31</sup> The nature of violence at Ile-à-la-Crosse had sharply altered, and a legendary quality came to surround the incident which had claimed two lives. Although it seems clear that Samuel Black had tried to prevent violence on this occasion, his very presence on the scene, his relationship to the man who killed Johnston, and his reputation for provoking confrontations, all made it easy to conclude that he was an accessory both before and after the fact.<sup>32</sup>

An interesting sidelight upon the Johnston death, the creation of myth around it, and the actual routine of life at Ile-à-la-Crosse in the succeeding years is provided by the reminiscences of Jean Baptiste Charbonneau, one of the men recruited by Colin Robertson for Hudson's Bay Company service. Charbonneau signed on for three years' service in the Athabaska country, left Lachine in May, 1815, and reached Ile-à-la-Crosse in the late summer.<sup>33</sup> As soon as he arrived, the story of Johnston's death during the previous winter was impressed upon him.<sup>34</sup> He was caught up in the excitement of an armed camp, in which

“les simples serviteurs embrassaient la cause de la compagnie à laquelle ils appartenaient avec autant d’ardeur que les chefs eux-mêmes.”<sup>35</sup> He noted that the North West Company already had a number of “athlètes” in residence; to counter these, the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1815 engaged some equally tall and robust “montagnards écossais”.<sup>36</sup> Among these might be classified Robert McVicar. Two significant aspects of the history of Ile-à-la-Crosse emerge from Charbonneau’s account — his own unwillingness to become involved in the brawling if he could avoid it, and the subjects of most of the quarrels: traps, stolen fish (during the winter months), and the location of gardens in the spring. Small and wiry, and practically indestructible provided he stayed clear of the strong-armed warriors, Charbonneau acted as a courier and exulted in being away from post so much. He was absent at Green Lake when the Hudson’s Bay men briefly dropped their guard and were captured by their rivals in March 1817.<sup>37</sup> When he returned, he also became a prisoner of Samuel Black, and, with fourteen others was taken to Lac la Ronge, eventually freed there, sent to Fort Dauphin, and then back to Ile-à-la-Crosse. His headquarters remained there for another decade, and his continuous experience enabled him to observe, from a very limited and local point of view, the drama of fur trade rivalries in one particular post, and some isolated incidents striking enough to warrant the attention of later historians. That Charbonneau mentions no duels proves nothing. But one point that his narrative does make clear, which historians have consistently noted without realizing fully its significance with respect to the history of duels, is that the year 1815-1816 at Ile-à-la-Crosse was a comparatively peaceful one.

Between the bloodshed of 1815 and the capture of the fort in 1817 lay an interlude of tension. At first, two virtually equal forces were confronting each other, with the possibility always present that superiority in numbers, perhaps in one of the outposts linked to Ile-à-la-Crosse, might precipitate an incident and full-scale war ensue. At Green Lake, in March, 1816, for example, the ubiquitous Samuel Black took a number of Hudson’s Bay Company men prisoner.<sup>38</sup> Any misjudgement of the degree of force at one’s command might well lead to bloodshed on such occasions. The tension at Ile-à-la-Crosse heightened as news of Hudson’s Bay Company disasters in the Athabaska reached jubilant Nor’westers, and during 1817 and 1818, a comparative calm arose from the dominance of one company throughout the whole area, with Ile-à-la-Crosse on the periphery of excitement. It is ironic that one of the printed contemporary accounts that support this view was preserved more to perpetuate legend than to expose it. The Abbé Dugas, who collected and published the reminiscences of Charbonneau many years after the events, was primarily interested in the French Canadian presence in the west, and more particularly, the Riel family. It was at Ile-à-la-Crosse in 1815 that the North West Company servant, Jean Baptiste Riel, married the Franco-Chipewyan métisse, Marguerite Boucher; it was at Ile-à-la-Crosse in 1817 that their son Louis was born. The family left the area in 1822 and, in September of that year, young Louis was baptized at Berthier, Lower Canada, but as an adult he was to journey west again, briefly as a Hudson’s Bay Company employee at Rainy River, then, permanently as a resident of

Red River where his more famous son was born in 1844.<sup>39</sup> Whatever aspect of western history catches the attention of the historian, it seems that the name of Ile-à-la-Crosse leaps from the page; the threads of which legends are woven lie there constantly ready for the loom.

As the years of rivalry between the fur trading companies drew to a close, Ile-à-la-Crosse again became a centre of potential violence, because the revived Hudson's Bay presence in the whole Athabaska region and the reestablishment of posts formerly lost to the rival company recreated the situation of 1814-1815. The man sent to command the Ile-à-la-Crosse post in 1819 was the John Clarke who was already noted for his rash behaviour in several ill-fated Athabaska campaigns, and it appears that he surrounded himself with an able and truculent staff.<sup>40</sup> New clashes were to be expected under his energetic leadership. Clarke challenged his opposite number, Angus Bethune, to meet him "as a gentleman", threatening at the same time to give that Nor'wester a public horsewhipping, but Bethune refused to answer the challenge.<sup>41</sup> Clarke's journal has several references to potentially dangerous incidents. Paul Fraser, a North West Company employee, on one occasion threatened to fight and was told that only blackguards fought with their fists,<sup>42</sup> and

that if he had any inclination to show his bravery he [McLeod of the Hudson's Bay Company] was ready at a call and would walk forward before him into the bushes for that purpose, Mr. McMurray [of the North West Company] in the interval going for a brace of pistols. The North West gentlemen requested me (particularly Mr. McMurray who said: "Beware of bloodshed") to arrest such proceedings. From Fraser's manoeuvres, who was going crying and weeping through the camp, and seeing Messrs. McMurray and Bethune detaining him from following our gentleman, I knew there would be nothing serious which induced me to allow Mr. McLeod to persist. After waiting on the ground for about twenty minutes, Mr. McKenzie, who was Mr. McLeod's second, came to the camp and told Fraser, "We are waiting for you some time back," and returned immediately to Mr. McLeod, and after waiting fifteen minutes more and finding Fraser did not go, they both came back through the North West camp.

A later journal entry reported further activity by the same Paul Fraser, when he and Angus Bethune arrived at a place where several Hudson's Bay Company men were working.<sup>43</sup>

Fraser laid hold of Proux from behind and Bethune immediately came to his assistance and both of them were dragging Proux along, when they were perceived by Patrick Cunningham, who ran to Proux's assistance and took him from Bethune and Fraser. Proux finding support wished to fight with the North West gentry, but Cunningham prevented him.

This incident, minor in itself although representative of those that enlivened the fur trade at Ile-à-la-Crosse over a number of years, is interesting in that it involved Patrick Cunningham, an Irishman who had been an associate of Howse and Johnston in 1814, and had survived all the intervening events. He had one later claim to fame. Early in 1821 three duels were reported in the northwest within the period of a month — "one at Ile-à-la-Crosse between young Douglas and Pat Cunningham (no blood)".<sup>44</sup> A far more arresting figure in Canadian history than Robert McVicar thus steps on the stage in an actual duel at Ile-à-la-Crosse,



for Cunningham's antagonist was the James Douglas<sup>45</sup> who was to create legends of his own west of the Rockies. If historians or writers of fiction had chosen to supplement scanty journal entries and deliberately selected one incident to illustrate the tensions at Ile-à-la-Crosse, surely the Douglas-Cunningham encounter would have recommended itself for consideration. The McVicar myth has grown by accident, not design.

It is all too easy to ascribe blame for the creation of such myths. Interpretive historians of the west, like A. S. Morton and E. E. Rich, have contributed to the growth of the myth, not out of any desire for dramatic effect, but out of minor errors in detail made possible, to a great extent, by their knowledge of the large picture into which the details fit so neatly and so deceptively. The local historian may discover the errors, but, in his triumph at confounding the experts, he may fail to scan the broad picture, and lack the perspective that made the error possible. Uncovering as much of the story of the McVicar-McNeil duel as it is now possible to piece together, fascinating as the exercise may be, reveals little of the grand drama of the confrontation of fur trading companies in the west. In his desire to focus on individual locations and personalities, the local historian can often be misled, and it is significant that it was a local historian of northwestern Ontario who provided the complete and unequivocal statement of a McVicar duel at Ile-à-la-Crosse. Fort William and Ile-à-la-Crosse were part of a whole, and knowledge of one of the parts can be most deceptive. The references to Selkirk's capture of Fort William as justification for retaliation in Athabaska,<sup>46</sup> for example, or the transfer of personnel from one area to another — Robert McVicar, Angus Bethune and Thomas McMurray were all involved in the later history of the Lake Superior district. But these are the kind of details, fortuitous but arresting, from which the local historian may erect a precarious structure, relying for his information not upon the original records but upon the useful appendices that the interpretive historian often provides. It is precisely in these appendices that mistakes will be most frequent, for the necessity of creating a generalization and a theory makes almost inevitable some errors in detail. The historian of the west, as a whole, caught up in the study of the grand design, is quick to recognize such errors as trivial; the local historian may well ask when an error ceases to be trivial.

The creation of myth, insofar as it is accomplished by individual writers at all, may be credited to those seeking to magnify the importance of a local person or event. But, in a very real sense, the myth cannot be created. It takes hold of the minds of people, historians or not, as the essential rightness of a story, the essential drama of a situation forces itself upon the mind. "Myth already reveals the striving and the power, not simply to glide along in the stream of feeling and affective agitation, but to fetter this movement and bring it into a kind of spiritual focus, into the unity of an 'image'".<sup>47</sup> It was this imaginative leap that caused Morton to see chivalry in a petty and even ludicrous quarrel. Such a leap is never far away from the student of old records who cries to himself: "Let these dry bones articulate."

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> A. S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, (London, 1939), p. 608.
- <sup>2</sup> E. E. Rich, *Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870*, (London, 1959), II, pp. 341-2.
- <sup>3</sup> George Simpson, *Journal of Occurrences in Athabaska Department, 1820 and 1821, and Report*, edited by E. E. Rich, (London, 1938), Appendix B, p. 457.
- <sup>4</sup> J. P. Bertrand, *Highway of Destiny*, (New York, 1959), p. 179.
- <sup>5</sup> Rich, II, p. 345. In this reference, Robert McKenzie is stated as the writer of the journal, but an apparent error is corrected in Simpson, Appendix B, p. 454, where Rich gives a biographical account of Roderick McKenzie (Junior).
- <sup>6</sup> Public Archives of Canada (P.A.C.), Microfilm of Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) records, B-39-a, Fort Chipewyan Post Journals, 1816-17, Entry of October 5, 1816. Reference to this and other material in the HBC records is made with the kind permission of the Company.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, B-39-z, Miscellaneous Papers, Fort Chipewyan, Deposition of John McVicar, sworn before James Bird at Cumberland House, December 11, 1817.
- <sup>8</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Colonies*, (reprinted Shannon, 1971), V, p. 239, Deposition of Hector McNeil.
- <sup>9</sup> P.A.C., HBC records, B-30-a, Fort Chipewyan Post Journals, 1816-17.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, B-39-z, Miscellaneous Papers, Fort Chipewyan, Deposition of John McVicar.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, B-89-a, Ile-à-la-Crosse Post Journals, Feb. 1, 1816.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, B-39-a, Fort Chipewyan Post Journals, April 15, 1817.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, B-39-z, Miscellaneous Papers, Fort Chipewyan, Deposition of Robert McVicar, Fort Wedderburn, August 28, 1818.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, B-181-a, Fort Resolution Post Journals, 1819-20, Letter of McVicar to William Williams, Dec. 1, 1819.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Entry of Oct. 17, 1819.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, includes exchange of notes between Smith and McVicar, Apr. 15, 1820.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, B-89-a, Ile-à-la-Crosse Journals, 1815-16.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Entry of March 11, 1816.
- <sup>19</sup> Simpson, *Journal of Occurrences*, p. 102.
- <sup>20</sup> P.A.C., HBC records, B-89-a, Ile-à-la-Crosse Journals, April-May, 1816.
- <sup>21</sup> Marjorie Wilkins Campbell, *McGillivray, Lord of the Northwest*, (Toronto, 1962), p. 58.
- <sup>22</sup> Donald Gunn, *A History of Manitoba from the Earliest Times*, (Winnipeg, 1880), p. 125; Abbé Dugas, *Un Voyageur des Pays D'en Haut*, (Montreal, 1924), p. 85.
- <sup>23</sup> Campbell, pp. 60-1. <sup>24</sup> Morton, p. 450. <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 452. <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 630.
- <sup>27</sup> Simpson, *Journal of Occurrences*, Appendix B, pp. 429-30; Colin Robertson, *Colin Robertson's Correspondence Book, September 1817 to September 1822*, ed. by E. E. Rich, (London, 1939), Appendix A, p. 238.
- <sup>28</sup> Rich, II, p. 304. <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.
- <sup>30</sup> *Robertson's Letters*, pp. 31-2, Robertson to Irving, December, 1817; Appendix A, pp. 221-3.
- <sup>31</sup> Gunn, pp. 122-4.
- <sup>32</sup> Simpson, *Journal of Occurrences*, p. 222, quotes report that the murder of Johnston was planned by Durocher and Black; *Robertson's Letters*, 68n, reference to J. B. Durocher as the confessed killer of Johnston who was then protected by Black.
- <sup>33</sup> Dugas, p. 29; p. 84. <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89. <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86. <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89. <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 93-7.
- <sup>38</sup> Simpson, *Journal of Occurrences*, Appendix B, p. 430.
- <sup>39</sup> G. F. G. Stanley, *Louis Riel*, (Toronto, 1963), pp. 3n; 375.
- <sup>40</sup> Simpson, *Journal of Occurrences*, pp. 7; 324; 344.
- <sup>41</sup> J. J. Hargrave, *Red River*, (Montreal, 1871), Appendix B, Journal kept by Clarke at Ile-à-la-Crosse, 1819-20, p. 495, May 20, 1820.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 491, Oct. 6, 1819.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 492, Oct. 17, 1819.
- <sup>44</sup> Gordon G. Davidson, *The North West Company*, (New York, 1918), Appendix O, p. 302, J. G. McTavish to the Wintering Partners, Fort William, April 22, 1821.
- <sup>45</sup> Margaret Ormsby, "James Douglas" in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, (Toronto, 1972), IX, p. 239.
- <sup>46</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Colonies*, V, p. 236; Deposition of Hector McNeil.
- <sup>47</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Form*, (New Haven and London, 1957), III, p. 108.