

119 Years Ago This Month at Old York Factory, Hudson Bay

*Leaves From Diary of William Tomison,
Chief Factor, Dated October, 1801*

AN old Journal, in the archives of the Company, relating in the Chief Factor's own words the day-to-day happenings at York Factory, Hudson Bay, in the year 1801, yields some interesting sidelights upon life at an H.B.C. fur trade post in the early years of the 19th century. Extracts from the Journal are reproduced verbatim:

1801

- Oct'r 7th—Wednesday—Took up floor in the trading room and took up sand to make it higher to the beams. Brought across the Indians that went for game yesterday. One man tayloring leather trousers and jackets—2 coopering—& 2 cutting firewood. Several of the Blackfeet pitched away—37 tents of Fall Indians came in—8 chiefs to our house. Last night the guard under arms, the Blackfeet being very troublesome. Clear, calm weather.
- Oct'r 8th—Thursday—Most all the Blackfeet went away—and a few of the Fall Indians. Gave their chiefs from 15 to 20 balls and 1 to 2 ft. of Tobacco. They will not be in again this month. Finished the other side of the counter in the warehouse. 10 mixt foxes today. They are all very black yet. Put our bear meat up to dry.
- Oct'r 9th—Friday—A few Blackfeet went away. Last night at 9 o'clock all the Indians were alarmed & came within the stockade—they say the Stone Indians are nigh, to either steal horses or go to war. Mended the roof & the outside of the Victual Shed & Trading Room. 2 at the saw—2 making kegs—2 cut wood & 2 making posts. Calm, clear, hot weather.
- Oct'r 10th—Saturday—A few Fall Indians went away early this morning. Several Blackfeet came around to oppose the Stone Indians as they say they saw 16 men on the river bank yesterday, but it proved false & they returned. Put earth on our dwelling house to the chimney. Cleaned out the yard. Stowed by the cloth bundles. Put a window into the warehouse. Weighed our bladder fat. Shot and killed 1 bear.
- Oct'r 13th—Tuesday—All the Fall Indians pitched away. 3 tent of Blackfoot here, to pitch tomorrow. Put on upper floor in victual shed and put up back fat. Traded a horse from Ki-oo-cus for a 20-skin keg.
- Oct'r 14th—Wednesday—Cloudy weather. Sent a few Blackfeet across the river with 5 men & they killed 6 cows (buffalo). Mended the chimney. Mended the guard room stove. Finished repairing the North gates.
- Oct'r 18th—Sunday—Light airs at W., clear & very hot. Went to the knoll on N. Side—great numbers of Buffalo.
- Oct'r 19th—Monday—A Blackfoot came in with 30 foxes. Carried in the last logs for building. Woman cut out 30-1 skin and 20-2 skin Coats. Put the stock into boxes as the mice has already cut the cloth & done very much mischief.
- Oct'r 24th—Saturday—2 men sawing wood for a door, 1 overhauling the back fat for mouldy ones, 3 on hunt & killed 2 cows, 4 cleaned the yard & burnt the rubbish. Taylor finished my coat he began on Monday. The Fat Man (chief) came in with nothing but 2 cat and 1 beaver.
- Oct'r 27th—Tuesday—Light breeze at W. 4 Muddy River Indians & 6 Blood Indian Chiefs came to our house. Told them to take all their provisions to the New Co. as we have got a sufficiency to make abt. 80 bags at present. Mended the shed—2 making pins for the stockades & the rest at their respective duties.
- Oct'r 28th—Wednesday—Several Fall Indian young men came here to keep the Blackfeet in awe. The Big Man's son has killed 2 children 3 nights ago. Monday night a Blackfoot trader cut Mr. Will's gates a good deal with a hatchet.
- Oct'r 29th—Thursday—All hands took a part of the French Stockades and put on ours as our new stockades was too low—also took down the French Watch House and put up at the corner of our stockade.
- Oct'r 31st—Saturday—Froze pretty hard last night. The Tattooed Indian came in—3 chiefs, 4 young men, 5 women and 7 children. One chief and his wife was shot by the Blackfeet and 2 children drowned by running into the river when the Blackfeet shot their Countrymen. Got six beaver skins, big & small, they are very hard & whiteish hairs on them. Red Deer a Fall Indian came. In the evening he was very troublesome. Got our boat within the stockades. Feathers gave the Fall Indians 2 good horses 3 days ago for the Bodies of the 2 Fall Indians his son killed last February to make it up with them.