

The Swiss colonists for Red River setting off in York boats from York Factory in 1821. From the water colour by Peter Rindisbacher. Public Archives of Canada

Port of the Pioneers

ON September 26, 1811, William Hemmings Cook, Chief at York Factory, noted in his journal that he had "sent Mr. Geddes to encourage the Indians in Nelson River to kill deer and bring supplies to the factory for the support of our numerous and unexpected visitors." And on September 28 "Mr. Geddes' Boat returned with a very seasonable supply of 13 Deer."

York Factory was preparing to receive the "New Settlers"—colonists for the Earl of Selkirk's settlement at Red River. The decisions reached in London which had given power to Lord Selkirk in the councils of the Company, were now reaching out to the posts.

York Factory had been accustomed to dealing with those who were with and of the fur trade. Now, for the first time they were to become accustomed to settlers—to people who were interested in the soil for what would grow out of it, rather than the animals raised upon it. They had to adjust to people whose objectives were virtually in contrast to their own, who were inexperienced on the frontier, and who had not learned self-reliance.

The first party to arrive came in the last week of September, 1811—a party of servants under Capt. Miles Macdonnell, the newly-appointed Governor of the Red River Settlement, going ahead to prepare for the influx of

settlers. The second group—servants and settlers—came in 1812. A third group—all settlers—arrived in Hudson Bay in 1813 but, failing to reach York Factory, wintered at Fort Churchill, arriving on the Nelson River in the spring of 1814. A small party arrived directly from Britain in 1814. The final large detachment—a group of Swiss settlers destined for the Red River—passed through in 1821.

Of all the many strangers—explorers, missionaries, geologists and others—to whom York Factory was destined to be temporary landlord, there was none towards whom hospitality became so reluctant as the group of 1811.

The *Edward and Ann*, with Macdonnell and the servants destined for the Red River, arrived on September 24, 1811. The *Eddystone*, with Hudson's Bay Company servants, arrived on September 26. This second ship was to have proceeded to Fort Churchill, but the lateness of the season made this impossible. The full brunt of the invasion of Red River settlers and newly indentured Company servants had to be borne by York Factory.

There was not room at the fort itself to accommodate the new arrivals. Further, the prospects of killing "deer" (caribou) were considered to be better north of the Nelson River. A camp had to be created. "Nelson Encampment" was 23 miles from York Factory across the peninsula formed by the Hayes and Nelson Rivers, on the north

During the course of the winter both health and spirits suffered. A total of 59 men were stationed at Nelson Encampment, and Captain Macdonnell, all on his own, decided that 38 should be under his command and destined for the Red River Settlement, leaving 21 under Hillier for the service of the Company. Hillier felt that he had been left "Old Men and Boys" and that the division should have followed discussions between himself and Macdonnell.

Before the winter was over Macdonnell's relations with Cook at York Factory and with William Auld, Superintendent of the Northern Factories—Macdonnell's chief contact within the Company during this period—had deteriorated.

This was, at least in part, a product of totally different backgrounds. In a letter to Cook on November 2nd, Macdonnell felt too little meat was being supplied: "There are scarcely provisions on hand for one month at the rate of 2 lb. of meat to a man per day . . .", he wrote.

York Factory itself was short of food at the time this letter was written. In the regular northern ration two pounds of meat lasted a *week* and, indeed, bacon and oatmeal (but no fresh meat) were being eaten at York at the time.

The request, however, inspired literary creation rather than impatience on the part of Auld: he wrote from Churchill to Cook, ". . . He [Macdonnell] expresses his fears that his situation will be most helpless as he has not more than will serve 1 month at 2 lb. per day each man. . . . It is not the first time that a man's belly has brought his head into jeopardy." And he counselled patience, ". . . tho' I know it is unnecessary you will utterly dismiss from your mind all dissatisfaction at the subject of venison and continue to render the whole party every assistance in your power in every variety of way so that whatever may be the issue of the events we may possess the exquisite satisfaction that always results from conscious rectitude."

But any impatience between the Hudson's Bay Company people and Macdonnell was trivial compared to the trouble that developed among the Red River servants at Nelson Encampment. Macdonnell had hoped that, after his arrival at York Factory, he would gain additional recruits for the Red River from among the servants of the Company. He did get one—William Finlay, a cast-off servant of the Company—whom he hired against the advice of Cook. This man now became difficult. Macdonnell took him before Hillier, who was a magistrate, and he was imprisoned as a refractory servant. But Finlay was released by 13 of his supporters, and they burnt the hut in which he was being held. Macdonnell's authority was virtually gone from this date. Certainly he did not restore it for the months that he remained at York Factory. In

BY RALPH HEDLIN

Mr. Hedlin, formerly with the Winnipeg Free Press, is now free lancing.

bank of the Nelson opposite Seal Island. Miles Macdonnell was in command of the Red River group and William Hillier was in command of the group of newly-employed servants, who had arrived aboard the *Eddystone*.

The men prepared to feed themselves, as far as possible. A deer fence was built. As it turned out, it was not responsible for the capture of any deer, although 27 deer were caught with snares in the spring. A party of hunters "with every possible exertion" brought in three brace of partridge in as many weeks.

"We are all in good Health and Spirits . . ." Miles Macdonnell wrote to Cook, at York Factory, on October 10.

the first week in July, after nearly nine months there, he and the 22 men that still remained with him, departed the fort and moved inland on the second lap of their journey to Red River. York Factory, with a sigh of relief, bid them good-bye.

But the fort was not long without Red River transients. On August 26 a schooner put out from York Factory to carry provisions to the *Robert Taylor*, just arriving from Britain, with 71 men, women and children for Red River.

In almost every way the experience of 1812 was happier than the parallel experience of 1811. The crossing from Britain had been equally long—61 days—but the start in the second year was a full month earlier than it had been in 1811, and the ship dropped anchor at York Factory on August 26.

Things were also well in hand at York Factory. Kenneth McRae was there, on behalf of the Red River settlement, to receive the people. The *King George* brought boats from Churchill Factory so that the servants and settlers could all go down to the Forks (Red River) together. And although Owen Keveny, who commanded the party, was "a harsh disciplinarian" he was also a man of "steadiness, activity and integrity" and he controlled servants and settlers.

Indeed, he brought a form of discipline (described by Gunn and Tuttle in their 1880 *History of Manitoba*) that was a new experience to York Factory. He made some of his wayward servants run the gauntlet—run between two rows of men, all armed with cudgels, who struck them as they passed—"somewhat terrifying and amusing to the beholders, who for the first time saw this very ancient but long neglected mode of punishment put into operation."

In less than two weeks all was prepared for the departure for Red River. To avoid confusion at the portages not all left at once. Divided among eleven boats and three canoes, the party moved out on September 7th, 8th and 9th. They arrived at the Forks on October 27.

Lord Selkirk had hoped to send out a very large party, which he would lead personally, in 1813. The reorganization of sheep farms in Sutherlandshire, in northern Scotland, resulted in the eviction of agricultural tenants. Applications to go to the Red River Settlement came in from 700 persons.

Word had come from York Factory, however, that boats were not available, nails had to be made at Hudson Bay, and the boatbuilders could not hope to have ten boats ready for the river before winter. Less than a hundred settlers, wrote William Auld, could be accommodated.

On June 28, 1813, the *Prince of Wales*, with colonists, and the *Eddystone*, with Company servants, left Britain. Before she reached Hudson Bay typhoid fever had broken

out on the *Prince of Wales*—the first time the disease was known in the Hudson's Bay Company trade. Ten colonists died aboard ship and two after disembarking.

For some reason that is still not clear the commander of the ship, Captain Turner, ignored his orders to go to York Factory and instead steered for Fort Churchill and put the colonists and their supplies ashore. Auld hastened up from York Factory, ordered the colonists and their equipment on board and told the recalcitrant Captain Turner to sail to York Factory. The effort was frustrated. The ship ran aground and by the time everything was righted it was too late to go on to York.

Miles Macdonnell and Owen Keveny were, at the time, at York Factory. Keveny completed a difficult trip to Fort Churchill but found the settlers worn out and ill and decided that any attempt to move them overland to York Factory would be impracticable.

On April 6th, 1814, Archibald McDonald, who was in charge of the settlers, set out on snowshoes for York Factory with the whole party, consisting of 21 men and 20 women. They were accompanied by hunters and by guides from York Factory.

In a letter to Selkirk dated May 22, McDonald recorded that when—after a very difficult 140-mile trip—the party arrived at Hayes River ". . . there were two men from York Factory and some Indians pitching tents for our reception. . . ." McDonald went on to York Factory for provisions and was received "very kindly" by Cook and the rest of the officers. Auld had left instructions as to rations—for ten men per week, 70 pounds of oatmeal, 5 pounds of rice, 7 pounds of molasses and three pieces of pork. This was later supplemented with 5 pounds of rice, 10 pounds of oatmeal and 10 partridges.

McDonald had to accommodate himself to what was available. On May 22 he moved his settlers right to York Factory to "get every thing ready for starting tomorrow." Augmented by ten men, the party now consisting of 31 men, 3 women and 17 girls, pushed off for the Red River on May 23.

In 1821 the first large group of non-British people and the largest single contingent for the Red River to appear at York Factory arrived aboard the *Lord Wellington*. This consisted of 165 people from Switzerland, the final recruitment by Lord Selkirk's agents for the Red River Settlement.

They were distinctive for another reason—the shortness of their stay at York Factory. "These people passed the brief time they remained at the Bay very much to their satisfaction," records Donald Gunn. Within "about a week" they were enroute to the Red River. Unfortunately the greater part of their baggage—as was the case with

their predecessors in 1814—had to be left at York Factory, because of a lack of transport. This intensified the bitter hardships of their first winter at the settlement.

The *Prince of Wales*, which carried many of the Selkirk Settlers, had also brought Capt. John Franklin to York Factory. He and his party arrived on August 30, 1819, two years before the Swiss settlers, and left York Factory for England, again on the *Prince of Wales*, a year after the Swiss came through.

Franklin and his party—which included Dr. John Richardson, Midshipmen George Back and Robert Hood—had travelled to Hudson Bay on the first lap of their journey to determine “the latitudes and longitudes of the Northern Coast of North America, and the tending of that Coast from the Mouth of the Copper-Mine River to the eastern extremity of that Continent. . . .” And in the few days they spent at York Factory—August 30 to Septem-

ber 9—Franklin busied himself in collecting information on travel in the Arctic.

He did not content himself with verbal reports. He drew up a series of questions and presented them to the three masters of districts at York Factory—Messrs. Charles, Swaine and Snodie—and two days later “they had the kindness to return very specific and satisfactory answers.” Franklin then asked the Resident Governor of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Territories, William Williams, to give his opinion in writing, which he did.

Several partners of the North West Company were under detention at York Factory and Franklin sought, not only the goodwill, but also the opinions of these people. He records in his narrative that they gave him most useful information regarding travel in the interior.

It was while he was at York Factory, indeed, that Franklin issued his memorandum to the officers of his expedition expressly forbidding “any interference in the existing quarrels, or any that might arise, between the two Companies.” The competition between the Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company had at this time, of course, reached almost a peak of intensity.

Franklin in 1819, like Miles Macdonnell in 1811, first met the North at York Factory. The respective approaches were in sharp contrast: Macdonnell generated misunderstandings through a too opinionated approach; Franklin sought opinions (in writing!) from all whom he regarded as his superiors in the matter of northern travel.

Though the arrival of the colonists in 1811 was a new experience for York Factory, the movement inland of men and freight and the expediting of outgoing people finally became routine. But in August of 1846 a large body of soldiers—the first at York Factory—arrived to be transported south.

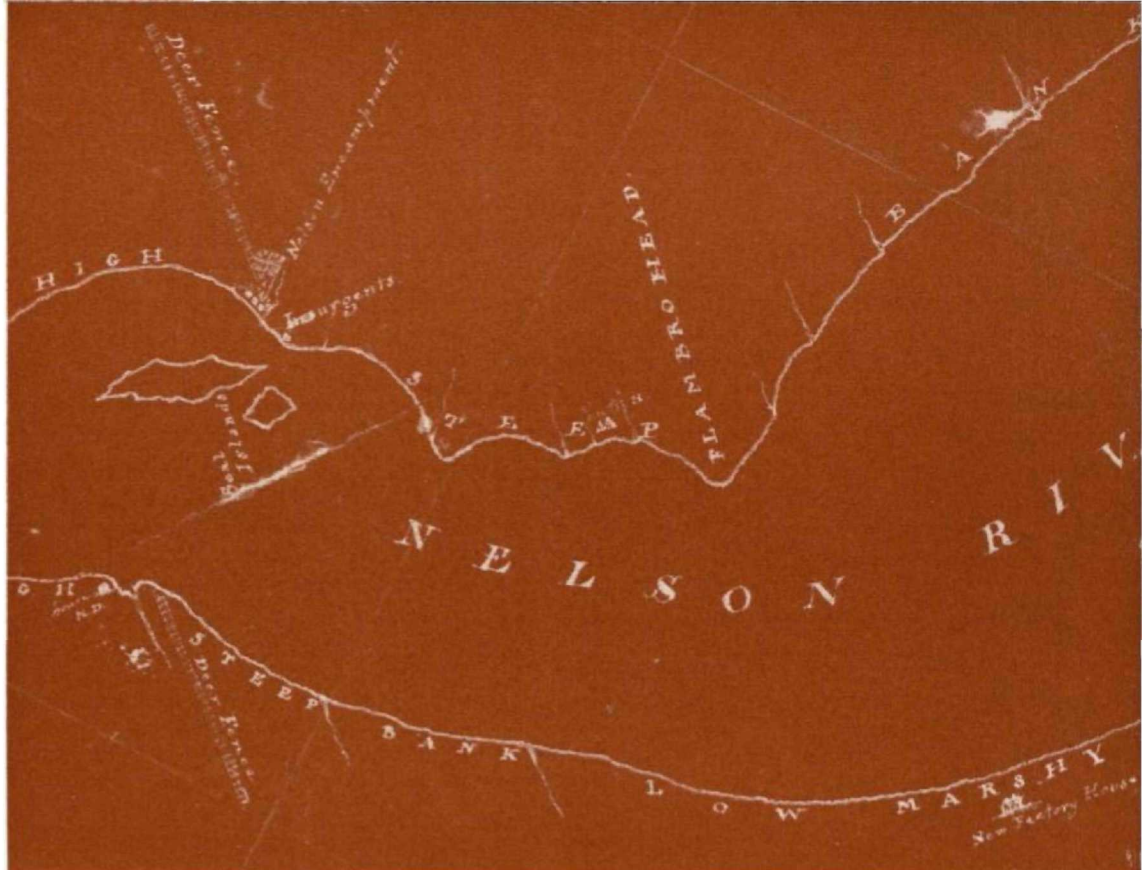
They arrived in response to a letter from Sir George Simpson, directed to the Governor of the Hudson’s Bay Company, Sir John Pelly. The Oregon boundary question was creating trouble and Sir George was concerned over the possibility of a military combination between the restless half-breeds at Red River and raiders from the United States. Sir John got in touch with the War Office and finally, after much correspondence, was advised that Her Majesty’s Government “. . . will be prepared to forward a detachment to Fort Garry during the present Season.”

Five months later—well after the Oregon Treaty had been signed—the detachment arrived at York Factory. The party included three companies of the Sixth Foot, consisting of 16 officers, 15 sergeants and 276 other ranks. The Royal Artillery was represented by 28 officers and men, complete with six 6-pounders, six 3-pounders, eight

Non-commissioned and commissioned officers of the Sixth or Royal First Warwickshire Regt. of Foot, three companies of which passed through York Factory in 1846 and 1848.



The encampment of the first body of Selkirk Settlers during the winter of 1811-12 is shown on this contemporary map in the HBC archives.



howitzers and eight mortars. In addition there was a small body of Royal Sappers and Miners. Seventeen women and 19 children rounded out the party. (*Beaver*—December, 1945.)

Apparently the thought of carrying this immense fire power 700 miles—and over 34 portages—to the Red River cooled the military's enthusiasm. Only four of the cannon went on to the Colony. The trip was still not an easy one. Chief Factor Donald Ross, who took charge of the movement later, wrote to Sir George Simpson: "... the voyage up was therefore sufficiently tedious, but not more so than might well be expected with such extraordinary cargoes as Her Majesty's stores proved to be—piles of awkward cases of great weight, of every possible shape and size; massive pine tables, benches, wheel-barrows, immense washing tubs." He also reported that one of his boatmen was fatally injured in moving this cargo.

The comments of the people at York Factory, who always travelled light, can only be guessed at; certainly as this material was transferred from ship to boat it would again be clear that they were dealing with the totally inexperienced. However, Sir George Simpson himself arrived at York Factory just prior to the coming of the troops, presumably to greet the people whose arrival was a product of his own importuning. The presence of the great man might well have silenced sarcasms to a whisper.

Chief Factor James Hargrave subsequently reported the departure of the troops to Archibald Barclay, HBC secretary, without any asides: "The whole were embarked

in four Brigades of six Boats each, and the last division was got under weigh on the 23rd, each Brigade being under the conduct of an Officer of the Honble. Company's Service. Governor Simpson in Company with Major Crofton left the Factory for Red River Settlement in a Light Canoe on the 24th. A fifth Brigade, also of 6 Boats, laden with Commissariat and Barrack Stores will be sent off on the 28th making in all 30 Boats and Crews employed in the service of the Government. . . ."

The soldiers were a great success at the Red River Settlement. Their high spirits and healthy appetites contributed respectively to the social and economic life of the Colony. And when they again appeared at York Factory in August of 1848, upon their repatriation to England, it was in the shadow of the deep regret of the people of Red River.

It was also a particularly busy time for the fur traders at York Factory. The ships that were taking the troops home had brought in the Chelsea Out-Pensioners who, with their families and supplies and equipment, had to be forwarded to Red River.

The ship carrying the Pensioners and Major Caldwell, their commander, arrived on August 13, 1848, bringing 56 men, 42 women and 57 children. A few days later the troops arrived in strength from Red River. The York Factory Journal records almost feverish transporting of men and supplies between the Factory and the ships, and between ships and Factory. By the end of August the Pensioners had been passed inland. On August 30 the

General Palmer left for England with half the troops and on September 12th "... the *Lady Fitzherbert* got underweigh with the morning tide and crossed the bar in safety. . . ."

It was nine years before troops returned to York Factory in any numbers. Some additional pensioners arrived in 1850, and there was some outflow in 1855, when the term of enrolment of the Pensioners expired and the group was disbanded. Some remained in the Settlement, some travelled to Canada, but a group which included the commander, Lt.-Col. Caldwell, travelled back to Britain via York, Factory. In 1857 the Royal Canadian Rifles—100 men,

12 women and a number of children—arrived from Canada (*Beaver*—Autumn, 1957).

The troops appeared at York Factory at the end of August and proceeded south on September 14. They travelled in 12 large York boats that had come up from Fort Garry especially to fetch them. On October 13 troops were once again stationed at Fort Garry.

As with the Sixth Regiment of Foot, York Factory processed the men both coming and going. In 1861 the troops returned to Canada by the way they had come. This exodus of the Royal Canadian Rifles represented the last mass movement of men through York Factory. ♦

The "Blenheim" was one of the ships which brought out the Sixth Foot from Cork to York. Five Fathom Hole was the anchorage.

Account of Supplies to the *Blenheim* Transport Ship at York Factory furnished at order of Captain Moleson.

To 58 tons Stone Ballast delivered outside			
the bar at sunitt times	£ 11/	24	10
65 " D th debit at 5 fm hole			
do	£ 7/6	24	40
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C.C.
York Factory, 26th Aug. 1846