Canadian Historic Sites
Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History

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by Edward F. Bush
5 The First Contingent: The North-West Mounted Police, 1873–74
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Cover: Views of the premises of the Dawson Daily News in 1973. Last used in 1954, the press (front cover) and the type drawers (back cover, right column) now stand in forlorn dereliction. (Photos by E. Wylie.)
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Abstract
The North-West Mounted Police force was created in 1873 to provide a buffer between the native population of the plains and the incoming settlers from Ontario and elsewhere. Its earliest efforts were to be directed against American-based whisky traders, whose operations in Canada’s remote unsettled lands were threatening the welfare of the natives and mocking the Dominion’s sovereignty over lands it could not police. The first administrative headquarters of the North-West Mounted Police was Lower Fort Garry, a Hudson’s Bay Company post of declining commercial importance in Manitoba. There the first contingent of 150 men received basic training and the weaknesses caused by hasty recruitment of inexperienced men were ironed out over the winter of 1873–74. At Lower Fort Garry plans were made to outfit the force for its long march to the foothills of the Rockies. In June 1874 the first contingent moved south to join at Fort Dufferin, Manitoba, the second contingent, which had been trained in Toronto.

Submitted for publication 1972, by Philip Goldring, National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Ottawa.

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Introduction

In the autumn of 1873, 150 men gathered at Lower Fort Garry to train as the first contingent of Canada’s new police force for the Northwest Territories.

They were mostly young, healthy and enthusiastic. Some were veterans of the Red River Expeditionary Force of 1870; a few were professional soldiers; but many more were fresh from the farms and commercial establishments of central and eastern Canada. Many were unprepared for the rigorous training and harsh climate they encountered at the Stone Fort and equally unprepared for the hardships of police life on the western plains.

The recruits were supposed to be good horsemen, but only a few could ride. All were supposed to be fit, but 19 were given medical discharges after two months’ training. They were supposed to represent all the provinces, apart from the one in which they were initially stationed, but most of the Quebec recruits deserted or were discharged in the first six months; the recruiters had been hasty and careless. Recruits were supposed to serve for at least three years, but by the autumn of 1876, more than half had gone—quit, discharged or died.

They had come in answer to a hasty call from the Dominion government, which was anxious to defend and promote Canada’s peaceful occupation of an immense and remote territory, recently acquired by purchase but still not connected to Canada by sentiment or by trade. The men who arrived at Lower Fort Garry in the last, freezing weeks of 1873 became the nucleus of the early North-West Mounted Police, a tough, disciplined body of policemen who vitally assisted the westward expansion of Canada.

The creation of the North-West Mounted Police in 1873 was a logical sequel to the establishment of a Canadian form of government in Manitoba. Canada’s possession of the soil had been guaranteed by purchase from the Hudson’s Bay Company negotiated in 1869 and by treaties with the Indians in 1871. Administrators in Winnipeg and Ottawa could now turn their attentions beyond the river lots and new settlement grants of the tiny province toward the spacious Northwest Territories.

This was a troubled realm. Traditional warfare persisted among the Indian tribes, particularly the Cree and Blackfoot. The encroachment of settlement, so graphically forecast at Lower Fort Garry by the Dominion’s first western Indian treaty, left Métis and Indians apprehensive about their future and hastened the movement of Métis from their farms in Manitoba to the still-unsurveyed upper reaches of the Saskatchewan River. Finally, the deteriorating prospects of the natives were being further undermined by American-based whisky traders who generated unrest and dissipated the tribes of the southwestern part of the territories, nick-

named the “Whoop-Up Country.” Politicians in far-off Ottawa found it difficult to envisage the fragility of the situation, but Lieutenant Governor Morris, the head of government both in Manitoba and the Territories, was under no illusions. “The most important matter of the future is the preservation of order in the North West,” he wrote in the first days of 1873. “The Dominion will have to maintain both a military & police force for years to come.” Then the prosaic Morris drove his point home in a rare flash of imagery: “Little as Canada may like it she has to stable her elephant.”

Stable it she did. The major achievement of Sir John A. Macdonald’s government during its last months, while it struggled under the shadow of the Pacific Scandal, was to create the North-West Mounted Police. This force, hastily recruited from all the provinces, provided stablehands for Canada’s first efforts to care for her elephant. Their story is part of the record of Lower Fort Garry, for 150 of these police were sworn in and trained at the Lower Fort before they joined an equal number of their comrades at Dufferin to begin the epic trek westward into the Whoop-Up country.
The Origins of the Mounted Police Force

I

"Come what may, there must be a military body, or, at all events, a body with military discipline, at Fort Garry; . . . the best force would be Mounted Riflemen, trained to act as cavalry but also instructed in the rifle exercise." So, in 1869, Sir John A. Macdonald expressed the idea which was the genesis of the Mounted Police.¹

It is likely that the Canadian government realized the necessity for a Dominion police in the Northwest from the moment it negotiated for possession of that territory, but the first reference to police in Macdonald’s correspondence comes in mid-December 1869, very shortly after a body of Métis stopped Lieutenant Governor William McDougall at the American frontier and forbade him to pass. Immediately the prime minister wrote to the hapless governor, "Have you taken any steps yet to organize a Mounted Police? . . . You can . . . be organizing a plan for a semi-military body." The type of police which Macdonald outlined was a cross between the Royal Irish Constabulary and the native regiments of the British Army in India. The force was to have a mixed racial character: "pure whites & British & French Half-Breeds" were to be carefully mixed in the different troops of the force so that no one element would predominate. Macdonald clearly underestimated the depth of the chasm between the Métis and the Dominion, for he confidently anticipated that there would be no need to send a military force to the newly acquired territory. "The cost of sending a Military force will be so enormous, that . . . it would be a pecuniary gain to spend a considerable amount of money in averting the necessity by buying off the insurgents."²

The Métis proved impossible to buy. Loyalty to their people and to their past ran too deep for them to throw in their lot with a strange new government. The intransigence of their resistance under Louis Riel and the resultant creation of Manitoba as a province induced the Dominion government to shelve plans for a locally recruited police. Tentative efforts to recruit a mounted police force in Ontario early in 1870 likewise came to naught, and the government put together a purely military expeditionary force. One imperial infantry battalion and two specially recruited militia battalions – the Ontario and Quebec Rifles – were dispatched to Red River in the summer of 1870. Their principal purpose was to restore and then to preserve order in the settled area of what became Manitoba, and it proved convenient to leave them there for some years as a buffer between rowdy elements of the old and the new populations of the province.³ Yet it remained clear to Macdonald that a different sort of force must be raised as soon as circumstances north and west of Manitoba demanded an effective agency for enforcing the law. For the first several years, therefore, the militia served as a stopgap in Manitoba while the rest of the Northwest was without effective law enforcement.

Macdonald never abandoned his idea for a mounted police force although he continued to defer it until it appeared more urgently necessary. Manitoba, as a province, was responsible for its own law enforcement and Macdonald envisaged the proposed mounted force primarily as a buffer between migratory Indians and settlers who had yet to arrive. Late in 1871, he wrote to Gilbert McMicken at Fort Garry,

There must be a Mounted Police Force, say of 50 men, well selected and fully organized. Such a force could be sent at a moment’s notice at any time on the Plains, when wanted. I look forward with some anxiety to a conflict between the Indians and the new settlers who will scatter over the Saskatchewan Valley next year. An infantry force will be of little value in preventing such encounters.⁴

Political violence in Manitoba showed the continued need for a substantial militia force there and the anticipated rush of settlers proved an illusion; Macdonald continued to procrastinate in withdrawing the militia and organizing the police.⁵ It was April 1873 before he took any positive steps toward creating the police force which he had first envisaged more than three years earlier.

II

Meanwhile, pressure mounted in the West in favour of the immediate organization of a police force. Lieutenant Governor Archibald sent out Captain William F. Butler to investigate conditions west of Manitoba.⁶ Butler’s colourful report emphasized the need for a mounted force though he suggested a military body, not police. His judgement was corroborated the following year by a report from Colonel P. Robertson-Ross, the adjutant general of Canada’s militia and permanent force. Butler, Robertson-Ross and other observers were really only repeating a series of commonplace notions about the administration of the Northwest. These early recommendations differed from Macdonald’s publicly expressed views in only two respects, first in assuming the use of military garrisons rather than police detachments, and second in believing that these detachments should be deployed instantly. Macdonald was skeptical of the military and felt that the militia at Fort Garry would be quite sufficient for the time being. When white settlers were actually living close to Indians in the territory, then friction might develop beyond the effective range of the Manitoba garrison.
Macdonald’s views were soon subjected to strong criticism from Alexander Morris, who had replaced Archibald as lieutenant governor at the end of 1872. Morris was often regarded as an alarmist, inclined to exaggerate all the problems of his realm and indifferent to the Dominion’s need to balance strict economy against the supposed requirements of the territories. It is true that he viewed the future of Canada with unbounded optimism, yet he was inclined to paint each practical administrative problem in the gloomiest possible colours. By 1873, however, he was not far from the truth in believing that the future of the territories depended on swift and effective enforcement of the law. “The presence of a force,” he wrote in January, “will prevent the possibility of such a frightful disaster as befell Minnesota & which without it, might be provoked at any moment.”

At length, Macdonald was convinced that it would be well to prepare for a force beyond the borders of Manitoba and he began to draft legislation to cover the complex problems of administering the laws of the Northwest Territories. (These laws, framed by the territorial council at Fort Garry, were enacted by order in council in Ottawa.) Early in May Macdonald introduced in the House of Commons the Bill commonly referred to as the “Mounted Police Act.” Although the bulk of this Bill concerned the Mounted Police, its full contents were enumerated in its title: “An Act Respecting the Administration of Justice, and for the Establishment of a Police Force in the North-West Territories.” The two main sections of the Bill were closely related, since the senior officers of the police force were also to be stipendiary magistrates and as such would not only preserve order, but would also administer justice in accordance with the judicial provisions of the Act. The second part of the legislation outlined the structure, powers and duties of the force, and established basic qualifications for policemen. They were to be “of a sound constitution, able to ride, active and able-bodied, of good character, and between the ages of eighteen and forty years.” Recruits were to be literate in either French or English. The act authorized a force of up to 300 men, plus officers, but specified that the full strength need not be raised until the governor-in-council saw fit. Macdonald, introducing this legislation to the frugal Parliament, noted that he did not intend to appoint anywhere near the authorized number “at first or for a long time yet,” and in reply to a question from the opposition, confirmed that after the creation of the police, the militia force at Fort Garry would be reduced “by degrees.” The Act received royal assent on 23 May.

The passage of the Mounted Police Act wrought a sudden change in one part of the Department of Justice in Ottawa. Hitherto the Dominion Police Office had been a small, quiet branch of the department where the files were encumbered by nothing more than the regular reports of the commissioner and his two constables. Then a remarkable transformation took place. Early in April, when word leaked out among the government’s friends that the force for the Northwest was soon to be organized, letters of application began to trickle in from across Ontario. When Macdonald introduced his Bill in the Commons, the trickle became a steady stream, and the deputy minister, Colonel Bernard, was assigned to handle the flow of applications. Retired soldiers, restless young militia officers and sons or acquaintances of Conservative stalwarts pressed their claims upon the prime minister. Most supplied letters of reference praising their moral, military or political virtues. (One Captain Crozier of Belleville applied offering good Conservative credentials; after the change of government in November 1873, he applied again, recommended by Liberals. He was appointed in time to join the training camp at Lower Fort Garry.) A disproportionate number of applicants sought staff or desk jobs, and a few considered themselves well-qualified to command the force. Among these was Captain Butler. “I am now about to proceed to England with the intention of joining the Expedition at present being organised against the Kingdom of Ashanta [sic],” he wrote, “but as that Expedition is expected to finish its labours before the close of Winter I will, if still fit for service, be ready to move on the Saskatchewan early in the Spring.” Other, less colourful, applications for command came from a retired British captain living near Toronto and from an Ottawa resident who claimed to have commanded mounted police in India.

All these applications, together with others from tradesmen who sought contracts to equip the force, apparently received some consideration though most, no doubt, were acknowledged in the succinct form noted on the cover of one file: “Answer – making no promise JAMD.” There were exceptions; as early as 28 May 1873 Colonel Bernard noted on one file, “Sir J. promised an app[ointment].” This was the application of Major Walsh of Prescott, who subsequently had a distinguished career in the force. But for the most part, Macdonald was in no hurry to make promises, whether the applicant asked for command, for a commission, or simply for enlistment in the lower ranks.

In fact, the Macdonald government had other, more pressing matters on its mind during the summer months of 1873. The planned Pacific Railroad and the fate of the ministry itself hung in the balance while inquiries proceeded into the government’s alleged corruption in seeking funds for the 1872 election. Macdonald worried a great deal about some of the disclosures and, worrying, he drank. Even if he had been sober and able to give his full attention to the police, he had not yet found a commander for the
Sir George A. French (1841–94) was granted leave from the Royal Artillery to become the first full-time commissioner of the North-West Mounted Police in December 1873. He commanded the force on its famous march in 1874 from Manitoba to the whisky-trading posts near the Rocky Mountains. In 1876 he resigned from the force to return to the army. (Public Archives Canada.)
force. He had earlier favoured Captain Cameron, a young imperial officer and a son-in-law of Charles Tupper: "As one can do a good natured thing for a friend without injuring the public service, we may as well embrace the opportunity." But by 1873 Cameron was employed with the boundary commission and other candidates had presented themselves. Macdonald was anxious to enlist the services of Colonel J.C. McNeill, an imperial officer who had been in Canada in the early 1870s, but McNeill, like Butler, had joined the expedition to West Africa and was not available. The people of Red River had their own opinions about the command of the force and a faction pressed for the appointment of a French officer. This group was represented, rather improbably, by two Scottish traders, A.G.B. Bannantyne and the aging Andrew McDermott. Their first choice was Louis de Plainval, a colourful and erratic young Frenchman who had come to the West with the expeditionary force of 1870 and had remained to command the small and ineffectual provincial police force. When he left the scene midway through 1873, Bannantyne and McDermott turned their endorsement to Major L.M. Voyer, formerly of the Quebec Rifles. Their wishes were frustrated, however, by Macdonald's continuing determination to appoint, if possible, an imperial officer.

This determination to have a British officer in command was part of a fairly comprehensive idea of the force which Macdonald had formulated. Macdonald never spelled his idea out at any one time, but the outlines of it may be gleaned from a number of sources, notably the prime minister's remarks to Parliament when he introduced the Mounted Police Act, and his correspondence with the governor general and the lieutenant governor of the territories up to the end of September 1873. Macdonald's plan was to have a mounted force of 150 to 200 men (under the direction of the justice department, not the militia) in the Northwest by the summer of 1874. The men would be recruited in the four eastern provinces and would train in Ontario during the winter of 1873–74, and then would go west as soon as the Dawson Road was open. At the same time, part of the militia was to be withdrawn from Fort Garry. Eventually the police force would be raised to its full strength of 300 men and, when the need for a special force at Winnipeg had passed, the militia would be further reduced.

If such a program was to succeed, creation of the police force had to begin in the summer of 1873. Despite various setbacks, the timetable was met; organization was under way by the end of August. The obstacles were considerable as the government struggled under the burden of disclosures and accusations concerning the Pacific Scandal (or Pacific Slander, as stout defend-
the introduction of the order in council and declaring that the force was “to be organized immediately.”

III
Morris could take credit for the fact that his dispatches on the state of affairs in the territories had prompted the government to take immediate action. A delay of a few weeks longer might have seen the force lost in the flurry of activity surrounding the ministry’s collapse on 3 November. There was little public reaction to the announcement of the formation of the force, beyond a brief rumour that the command would be offered to Captain Butler. The government’s decision passed with little public notice beyond a few terse lines in the Citizen, which found further justification for the government’s policy in reporting a hideous incident which might have been prevented had the force been established a year earlier. This news concerned the Cypress Hills massacre, the killing of 20 or more Assiniboines on Canadian soil in a drunken clash between the Indians and a party of white traders and wolf-hunters from the United States.

If the Republic cannot teach its subjects to respect law it is time that the Dominion should . . . . Vigorous action on the part of our government in this direction may save us future trouble not only from the lawless citizens of the neighbouring country, but also from the North West Indians who will not be slow to defend themselves if the Dominion Government should appear to them incapable or unwilling to afford them protection. The organizing of the Mounted Police Force, as which we announced yesterday, will be commenced at once, may prevent a repetition of the disgraceful scene to which our despatch from Fort Garry refers: Reports of the killings reached Ottawa too late to play any role in the decision to organize the force, but did have some bearing on the manner in which the police were recruited and trained.

The shape of the embryonic force was determined by the order in council of 30 August. The men would be divided into six troops or divisions designated by the letters “A” to “F.” Each division was to be commanded by a superintendent and inspector, assisted by two officers with the rather confusing titles of superintendent and sub-inspector. A commissioner would command the entire force. The noncommissioned officers were to be one “chief constable to rank as Sergeant-Major” in each division and one constable for every ten ordinary sub-constables. The administrative structure of the force in the field was to be kept as simple as possible; one man was to serve as paymaster and quartermaster of the entire force, with only one constable in each division to assist him. No administrative structure in Ottawa was created at this time; the organization of the police was undertaken initially by Macdonald himself with the assistance of the militia staff and the two senior men in his department, Hewitt Bernard and Hugh Richardson. Afterwards, a full-time comptroller was appointed.

Salaries for officers were reasonably generous, ranging from $1,000 a year for sub-inspectors to $2,000 for the commissioner. Constables would receive one dollar a day; sub-constables’ pay was fixed at 75 cents. The latter salaries were not as meagre as they might sound, for the lower ranks were also to receive rations, barrack or other lodging accommodation and Medical attendance free; and such clothing as may from time to time be fixed by Order in Council.” The act authorized the appointment of a surgeon for the force, but Macdonald decided that since the police were to be “scattered in small parties over the North-West, one Surgeon at Head Quarters would be of comparatively little use to the Force as a whole.” Instead, local medical men would be engaged as needed.

In a circuitous way, the Cypress Hills incident affected one important part of Macdonald’s plan – the training of the force in Ontario. At first Macdonald had taken the massacre in stride, appointing a special commissioner to inquire into the matter and extradite the offenders from the United States; then he reverted to the important work of organizing the mounted police. The massacre stirred up even less public interest than the formation of the police, but it did offer Macdonald a chance to appeal in stronger terms for the services of an imperial officer. “This Indian massacre at Fort Benton [sic] shows the necessity of our losing no time in organizing the Mounted Police,” he wrote to the governor general. Then he made his pitch: “May I ask you if you thought of writing to the Horse Guards to get the service of the Commissioner of Police recognized as Military Service? If this were accorded to us, our range of choice would be considerably enlarged.” But Macdonald was still obviously not as alarmed about the massacre as Morris, for he wrote in answer to the latter’s plea that the police should be sent immediately, “Our present idea is to drill them all winter here, and send them up, with their horses as soon as the Dawson route is open in the Spring. Do not you think, on consideration, that that is by far the best plan?” Morris most definitely did not think so and stepped up his attacks on the prime minister’s more optimistic view of the situation.

In every rumour, in every hindrance to his administration, Morris saw a threat of Indian warfare or of renewed Métis resistance; his gloomy reports became shrill and impassioned pleas for help, from either police or militia reinforcements. Finally, amid vague reports that the Métis were conspiring to prevent the signing of further treaties between the Canadian government and the Indi-
ans, Morris wired Macdonald, “What have you done as to Police force their absence may lead to grave disaster.” The prime minister capitulated. He ordered the police recruiters (already travelling across eastern and central Canada in search of men) to redouble their efforts and to report to Collingwood as soon as possible for transportation to the Northwest. At the same time, he explained this sudden departure from previous policy to the governor general:

*Morris is getting very uneasy about matters in the North West. The massacre of the Indians by the Americans has greatly excited the red men there. . . . He is so pressing about the necessity of having the Mounted Police there, that although we intended to concentrate them at Toronto and Kingston for the winter and give them a thorough drilling before going west, we found it necessary that the force should be sent up before the close of navigation. It would not be well for us to take the responsibility of slighting Morris’ repeated and urgent entreaties. If anything went wrong the blame would lie at our door.*

This decision was to have major repercussions for the recruitment of the force.

IV

The formation of the mounted police force took little more than two months after the passage of the order in council. It owed its rapid creation partly to the exertions of Bernard and Richardson in Macdonald’s department, but mainly to the acting adjutant general, Colonel Powell, and the commanders of the military districts of eastern Canada and Manitoba. This is ironic, for Macdonald had been determined from the first to keep the police separate from the militia and within his own purview at the justice department, yet he would have failed to meet his own deadlines had he not been able to lean heavily on the men, expertise and parliamentary grants of money at Powell’s disposal. Even the backbone of the force – the bulk of its officers and some of the NCOs – came from the Canadian militia or the permanent force.

After the decision to organize the force was announced publicly, the government was temporarily diverted by the need for rapid measures to pursue the perpetrators of the Cypress Hills massacre. This emergency was speedily dealt with by issuing special instructions to Gilbert McMicken, a former Fenian-hunter and commissioner of Dominion police, who had recently accepted a number of government appointments in Winnipeg. Once this matter was dealt with, Macdonald plunged back into the organization of the force. He contacted Powell on 8 September and informed him that the justice department would need considerable assistance from the militia in recruiting the new police force. On the following day, he approached Lord Dufferin with his request for assistance in getting a British officer as commissioner.

The justice department required a broad range of assistance from the militia. In effect, the individual deputy adjutants general were to put their resources at the disposal of the police recruiting officers, providing whatever information, funds or facilities were needed to enlist the men and transport them to Ontario. The decision taken by Macdonald on 24 September to send the force as soon as possible to Manitoba put further strain on the recruiters and tightened their dependence on the militia. As Macdonald wrote to Lord Dufferin, “No time is to be lost. The Dawson route is not open after the middle of October.”

The men in Macdonald’s office knew little about the Dawson route, but the militia had been sending men to Manitoba that way since 1870. Powell therefore made the necessary arrangements with the manager of the Northern Railway, which operated trains from Toronto to Collingwood and steamers from there to Thunder Bay. He also gave instructions to Simon J. Dawson of the Department of Public Works, in charge of the route to Fort Garry from Prince Arthur’s Landing on Thunder Bay. Powell ordered boots and caps for the mounted police. He told Richardson what supplies the police must procure for themselves and what they could expect to find along the route, and he selected a capable staff officer, Major D.A. McDonald, to proceed to Collingwood and there coordinate the arrival, equipment and dispatch of the contingents of police as they arrived.

The force’s debt to the militia did not end there, for the government took the essential step of choosing a temporary commissioner at Fort Garry to prepare for the force’s hasty and almost unexpected arrival. The obvious choice for this duty was Lieutenant Colonel W. Osborne Smith, the officer in charge of military district No. 10, Manitoba. Smith immediately set to work procuring horses, renting and fitting up barracks and contracting for supplies for the force. By year’s end, Smith had turned over command of the force in Manitoba to its new full-time commissioner, Colonel G.A. French, but in the brief flurry of organization, the militia had proved indispensable in the creation of the mounted police.

V

Preliminary recruiting orders had been given as early as 9 September to Captain Charles Young, a retired imperial infantry officer who was to raise the Nova Scotia contingent, but active recruiting did not begin until ten days later. The records of recruitment are sketchy for Ontario, where James Morrow Walsh, James Farquharson Macleod and John Breden recruited about 80 men. (These three recruiters, together with the four in Quebec
and the Maritimes, became the first officers of the force.) In the eastern townships the recruiter was William Winder, a militia captain from Compton, while Ephrem A. Brisebois raised a contingent in the St. Lawrence valley, including Montreal. The recruiter for New Brunswick was Jacob Carvell of Saint John, a former officer in the Confederate army. Charles Young enlisted 20 men in Halifax.

There is little official record of how the original policemen were chosen. No recruitment posters have survived nor is it likely, in the haste in which the force was raised, that any were printed. Two officers asked for permission to advertise in the newspapers, but apparently did not do so. Winder located part of his contingent through local members of Parliament, notably J.H. Pope, but MPs do not seem to have been used extensively for recruiting. It seems likely that most of the new policemen were found through the militia. A few vacancies had recently been filled in the force at Fort Garry; the local district commanders must have had lists of late or superfluous applicants for the limited number of positions at Fort Garry. Now a second chance arose for young men to go west for three years’ service and a promise of a land grant at the end of it, and it was doubtless through the militia that the police recruiters found many of their men.

The recruiting in Quebec started about 24 September. Ephrem Brisebois set up offices in the Hôtel du Canada and in the Casino de Montréal, the latter being the former headquarters of the Papal Zouaves. His efforts received some notice in the press although the remarks of a Protestant newspaper, the Daily Witness, reveal a total lack of planned advertising. The Witness first learned of the recruiting from the columns of its French-language contemporaries and acidly suggested that “there is no official attempt made to invite other nationalities but the French to enlist in this force.”

After Brisebois had secured a number of men in Montreal, he moved to Quebec, where the Daily Mercury remarked on 1 October that “Sub-Inspector Brisebois has been in town recruiting for the force, and several young men of this city, Kamouraska, Sagueneay and elsewhere have already enlisted.” As soon as he reached his quota of 20 men, Brisebois proceeded to Collingwood. There he joined with Winder (who had managed to find a dozen men in the eastern townships) and with several Ontario recruits, enough to make up a party of two officers and 62 men. Under Winder’s command, the party sailed for Thunder Bay on 8 October aboard the Northern Railway Company’s steamer Chicora.

Jacob Carvell managed to raise his quota and reach Collingwood well before the departure of the last steamer though his efforts were undermined by faulty instructions. He received his orders for the most part by word of mouth from Captain Young, who had also had only sketchy instructions and vague written orders from Richardson. Nonetheless, Carvell proceeded apace with the recruiting, starting at Saint John and working his way to Shediac by 30 September, and back to Saint John the following day. He must have had some presentiment of the difficulties which would later arise for he wired Ottawa for permission to exceed his quota: “I want permission to engage eight more men to prevent complications arising from making extraordinary effort to do this work quickly.”

His foresight proved justified when, five weeks later, four of his men refused to take their oaths and had to be sent home from Manitoba. It is uncertain whether he received permission to over-enlist, but he did have 24 men with him when he left Saint John on 2 October for the long trip through Maine and Quebec to Collingwood. He reached that port on the seventh, well ahead of the other Maritime contingent under Charles Young.

Young left Ottawa for the Maritimes on 18 September, carrying his own and Carvell’s instructions. He interviewed Carvell on 24 September and reached Halifax about the twenty-seventh. There his methodical and orderly progress became a scramble when he received Richardson’s telegram informing him of the government’s change of plans. “Utmost dispatch requisite. First detachment goes Manitoba early next week.” The public works department was already advertising that it would not accept passengers or freight for the Dawson route after 10 October, but Young still acted as though there were no need for haste. Finding himself short of money, he asked on 2 October for permission to take his men by steamer from Pictou to Montreal, arriving at Collingwood on the twelfth. Again Richardson prodded him, “You have not a moment to lose. Move at once by quickest route.”

The rail connections between Nova Scotia and central Canada were little better than the steamboat schedules and it was 6 October before Young could start out. He had filled his quota on 1 October and had evidently had plenty of men to choose from for on one day he interviewed 50 men and rejected all but ten. The local opposition press was indignant to see young men, “some of the best mechanics in the city . . . who can earn from $9 to $12 per week here” setting out for the “uncertainty” of the Northwest. Nonetheless 20 men were found and on 1 October all gathered at the drill shed to take their enlistment oath from a local magistrate. On the sixth, a crowd of relatives and friends collected at the Intercolonial Railway depot to see them off. Young accompanied his men, pausing at points along the way to report his progress and to plead with Richardson for more money. On the ninth he wired from Toronto, “Orders required as to route & only ten dollars left telegraph at once.” Fortunately Inspector Macleod
reached Collingwood with his detachment and ample funds only hours after Young arrived there, and on the tenth they sailed. A relieved Major McDonald capped off a chaotic week of activity with this cheerful telegram to Hugh Richardson:

*The remainder of the Bobbies consisting of three officers and fifty-three men under command of Inspector Young sailed from here by the Frances Smith at ten o’clock last night immediately upon the arrival of the late train.*

The *Cumberland*, the *Chicora* and the *Frances Smith* carried the mounted police from Collingwood to Prince Arthur’s Landing on Thunder Bay. From Thunder Bay their route, the Dawson Road, climbed over rugged terrain, linking wagon roads to short stretches of navigable water, until it reached the Savanne Portage – the height of land between Lake Winnipeg and the Great Lakes – almost 900 feet above Lake Superior. From the Savanne, the route followed the course of Rainy Lake and Rainy River, across the Lake of the Woods and into Manitoba by a 100-mile road from Lake of the Woods to St. Boniface, opposite the tiny but boisterous provincial capital of Winnipeg. The Dawson Road was a variation on the old canoe route of the Nor’Westers who, until 50 years before, had brought to Canada the trade of the prairie regions and beyond. A similar route had also been used briefly by the abortive North-West Transportation and Navigation Company, which had tried for a few years after 1857 to reclaim Red River for the Canadian commercial empire. The Dawson Road was by no means superior to the system of American railways and navigable rivers which the Hudson’s Bay Company had employed for much of its transport since 1859. (This latter route was taken by the second contingent of police in 1874.) The only advantage of the Dawson route was that it lay wholly in Canadian territory, linking Collingwood to Fort Garry as directly as possible without trespassing on the territory of the neighbouring republic. As such, it remained an important transport route for over a decade until abruptly superseded by the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

The police left Collingwood in high spirits, relieved that they had left behind the worst of the confusion, if not the worst of the travelling. Recruits aboard the *Chicora* enjoyed the diversion provided by the constant singing and dancing of their French-Canadian comrades; mild pranks (including depredations on the officers’ special rations) amused some of the men. They were not yet acquainted with military discipline. The Grand Trunk Railway had lost part of Brisebois’s baggage and seasickness swept through Young’s detachment. On the whole, however, the head of Lake Superior was reached without serious incident.

The first detachment reached Thunder Bay on 8 October and set off immediately for Fort Garry. Progress was hindered by high winds and a few early snowfalls; it was also interrupted at one point by hostility between the police and some of the government officials along the route. This lack of cooperation was apparently sparked by the domineering conduct and articulate profanity of Major Walsh. Despite adverse weather and frayed tempers, the police reached Fort Garry on the twenty-first. The third detachment was less fortunate; it encountered harsher weather and the steamboat schedule was quite inadequate beyond the height of land dividing the Hudson Bay and Great Lakes watersheds. Equipment became soaked and soon froze, and men whose boots had frozen were forced to wrap their feet in rags and march through mud which, in the words of one recruit, James Fullerton, “was frozen enough to let you through and the ice cut your legs.” Eventually their ordeal was over, as they were met by dog sleds a few miles west of Lake of the Woods, and they reached Fort Garry on 31 October. The first detachment had gone to the Lower Fort by steamer, but a few days of sub-zero temperature had frozen the river solid, so the last police went down by sleigh. They arrived at their new barracks exhausted and footsore but exhilarated by the novelty of their voyage. The last of them were barracked by the first of November and they settled down for the winter in Canada’s tiny outpost, the province of Manitoba. The first of their trials was over.

VI

Happily for the recruits, a hardworking and competent officer had been preparing for their arrival. As soon as Macdonald decided to send half the force west in the autumn instead of waiting till spring, he appointed W. Osborne Smith commissioner. Smith, a veteran of the Crimean War and the Fenian Raids, commanded the troops at Fort Garry. He would later have a serious quarrel with the Mounted Police over a trivial but distasteful incident, but from his appointment at the end of September until George French arrived to take up his command in mid-December, the exertions of Osborne Smith were vital to the early formation of the Mounted Police force.

Smith’s first concern was to purchase suitable mounts for the police. “No time should be lost in getting these so as to have them in thorough training for any movement in the spring. Canadian horses do not do well till after a year’s acclimatization. Horses can be bought much lower now than in the spring.” He succeeded in purchasing 33 horses before the three divisions arrived and while this was far short of the number eventually re-
2 Lower Fort Garry, headquarters of the North-West Mounted Police, 1873-74. 1, provision store; 2, Hudson’s Bay Company sales shop; 3, barracks, “B” Division; 4, meat store; 5, oil store; 6, Hudson’s Bay Company men’s house; 7, officers’ quarters in the Hudson’s Bay Company Big House; 8, hospital and canteen; 9, bakeshop; 10, carpenters’ shop; 11, provincial penitentiary; 12, powder magazine; 13, barracks, “A” and “C” Divisions; 14, guardroom; 15, cookhouse; 16, latrine; 17, front or “river” gate; 18, back gate, and 19, parade ground.

(Ottawa Public Library.)
quired, it provided enough mounts for training. The description of the first horses of the North-West Mounted Police is worth noting: *One hundred and Twenty Five dollars to be the price, the Horses to be over Four and under Seven years . . . . To be Fourteen hands three inches high at least . . . . A proportion of mares will not be objected to. When stallions are brought for inspection and approved they will be accepted as they stand, or if required by me altered at your risk.*\(^53\)

Shortly after Smith was appointed, he received assistance in the form of the new quartermaster and paymaster of the force, the first of the Mounted Police to reach Manitoba. The justice department, after sifting through the applications of several retired army quartermasters, had selected Edmund Dalrymple Clark, a young nephew of Sir John A. Macdonald. Clark proved to be a precocious and immature officer, much preoccupied with politics, personal advancement and the uncertain state of his romantic affairs in Ottawa.\(^54\) His double job was too much for him and after 13 November Jacob Carvell took over as acting quartermaster, leaving Clark the functions of paymaster only.\(^55\)

Far more important than any other task facing Clark and Smith was the problem of finding suitable barracks for 150 men. The acting commissioner briefly considered the idea of scattering them among the immigrant sheds and Assiniboine Barracks in Winnipeg, and the militia buildings of Lower Fort Garry.\(^56\) He quickly abandoned this idea and negotiated with the Hudson’s Bay Company to quarter the whole force at the Stone Fort. The warden of the provincial penitentiary at the same place promised convict labour, if needed, to move supplies, and a small army of carpenters swarmed over the fort repairing and remodelling buildings.\(^57\) Militia stores were sorted out to see what equipment could be spared for the police and arrangements were hastily concluded through the lieutenant governor to have stables erected near the fort to accommodate 50 horses, with harness rooms and storage for hay and oats. By the time the last detachment had arrived, Osborne Smith was able to report that “the barrack accommodation is nearly complete.”\(^58\)

The acquisition of substantial parts of Lower Fort Garry had not been entirely effortless. The government owned several buildings there, but expensive alterations were required and the Hudson’s Bay Company (which had already surrendered a major warehouse for the penitentiary) was most reluctant to rent out more than one of its remaining buildings. The Company also had to provide extra labour to cope with the force’s demands for fuel and rations. On the whole, however, the Company did not suffer by the occupation, for in addition to $3,000 rent for three buildings, it must have made a profit on the large contract for supplies and on the canteen which it operated for the police (many of whom were reprimanded during the training period for too-generous patronage of the Company facility).\(^59\)

As much as possible, the Company hoped, the police activities would be carried out in buildings already owned by the government. These consisted of a small structure between the men’s house and the bakery, and a large guardhouse beside the river gate. The small building was extensively modified by the addition of a kitchen and washroom, and served as an infirmary. The militia guardhouse could have barracked a considerable number of men, but it was preserved as a guardhouse. So all living space had to be rented from the Company. There was little dispute over the old wooden storehouse – the Northern Department warehouse of busier days – near the northeast bastion; likewise, there seems to have been no argument over officers’ quarters. Smith found suitable rooms in the attic of the Big House though the more fastidious Lieutenant Colonel French was later to complain that “officers quarters are about as bad as they well could be . . . divided from each other by wooden partitions which do not reach the ceilings.” Smith, having secured these buildings, cast covetous eyes on a new, two-storey wooden shop which had just been completed for the Company’s retail trade operations. This, he suggested, would make ideal barracks. Chief Factor John H. Mactavish replied testily that the store was essential to the Company’s operations, but Smith took it anyway and told Mactavish to make the best deal he could with the government in Ottawa. The Company later tried to claim $3,000 rent for this one building, but eventually settled for $1,000, the same sum the police paid for each of the other buildings. The new store subsequently provided most comfortable accommodations for the recruits of “B” Division, while the remaining two divisions were barracked in the three-storey warehouse across the courtyard.\(^60\)

The Company’s men at both forts were kept busy throughout the winter of 1873–74 supplying the Mounted Police. There were small matters to be taken care of, such as detailing two men every Tuesday to carry cordwood.\(^61\) but the major part of the contract covered foodstuffs, all the necessities of life for man and beast: fresh beef and mutton, flour and bread, salt, pepper and potatoes for the men; hay, straw, oats and bran for the horses. The contract also included coal oil, “of the best quality pure, and clear, and warranted to burn without causing an offensive smell.”\(^62\) Although the original requisitions have not survived, Dalrymple Clark’s monthly records show that the force spent just over $3,000 per month for food, light, fuel and forage. This was in addition to rent and private purchases made by individual members of the force.
During the space of three months, the justice and militia departments had collaborated to create the raw materials for the long-awaited force to patrol the Northwest. The driving forces behind this activity had been Macdonald, whose ideas formed the basis for the organization, and Morris, whose insistence during the long summer of 1873 had ensured that Macdonald would not default on his own previous plans. The force was conceived as a protection for white settlers on the plains; it was created to protect the Indian from the whisky trader and the government from both; it was sent west, eight vital months ahead of schedule, to pacify the lieutenant governor's fears for the security of Canadian government and settlement in the Northwest. But the Mounted Police force of 1873 was far from the Scarlet Force of legend: it lacked the training, the discipline, even the uniform which became famous. It was a group of young men, far from home, appointed to an enormous task which they were not yet prepared to execute.

The Force Takes Shape

November followed the last of the recruits into barracks and winter settled down over Lower Fort Garry. On 3 November Colonel Smith arrived from Winnipeg and summoned his force to take part in a simple and businesslike ceremony which marked the real beginning of the Mounted Police force. The three troops stepped forward, each man to receive his warrant of enlistment and to inscribe, at the end of the articles of engagement, his place in history as one of the "old originals," the first of a celebrated line of wardens of the northwestern frontier. From this day on, Canada would observe the warning of Lieutenant Governor Morris. She would "stable her elephant" with strength, dignity and colour.

The pledge signed on this occasion is often called the "enlistment oath," a misleading term since the enlistment oath was taken by each man as soon as he was accepted by the recruiters. The ceremony at Lower Fort Garry involved signing the articles of engagement stipulated by section 16 of the Mounted Police Act. The initial enlistment oath, taken with an oath of allegiance, committed the recruit to "faithfully, diligently and impartially execute and perform the duties and office" of a Mounted Policeman, and to "well and truly obey and perform all lawful orders or instructions . . . without fear, favor, or affection." For the engagement ceremony in Manitoba, Osborne Smith presented a cumbersome text, incorporating much of the wording of the original oath but adding a wealth of prosaic detail which lent no elegance to the historic proceedings. The text limped to a conclusion which was probably inspired by the recruits' incursions, on the Dawson Road, into the officers' special rations of beefsteak and whisky: "We will take care of and protect all articles of public property . . . and make good all deficiencies and damages occurring to such property while in our possession or care, except through fair wear and tear, or unavoidable accident." Previously, the recruits had sworn a simple and dignified pledge to serve the queen faithfully and to adhere to the principles of justice which must underlie the reputation and success of any police force. The oath of office in November had little to say of such lofty principles. It was time to get down to brass tacks.

One of the provisions of the engagement, not explicit in the enlistment oath, produced the first of a series of problems which would plague the force because of the haste with which the men had been recruited. Acceptance of a mandatory three-year term of service should have been carefully spelled out, but some recruits had reached Manitoba under the impression that they could resign simply by giving six months' notice. (Six months' notice
was actually required after expiry of the minimum term.) Several men refused to be attested for this reason. Four of these were French Canadians and a dozen were New Brunswickers who had been enlisted by Jacob Carvell. The story was eventually unravelled by Carvell, Young and the justice department. Young, it seems, had hastily scribbled down Richardson’s verbal instructions before his hurried departure for the Maritimes. There, Carvell found that the government’s instructions appeared to be garbled and decided that he must design his own enlistment form. At the same time, he assured the men that three years was the normal term, but that they could resign earlier, if they wished, simply by giving six months’ notice. At first the government proposed to pay the unattested recruits up to the date when the rest of the force was sworn in and to discharge them. This was manifestly unfair, as two brothers from Saint John complained in a simple but eloquent plea to the minister of justice:

This is a part of the country where there is no work to be had in the winter seasons. With no work . . . what are we to do, without money or friends. Were we not brought here under false pretences? As we are British Subjects we ask for redress. Can we have it?

They could. The justice department concluded that Carvell had acted in good faith and that no one was really to blame. The men were promised free passage back East. They received their pay up to 26 November and drew subsistence from then until they were able to depart in the spring.\(^4\)

Far more worrisome than the government’s inability to swear in a few of its recruits was the fact that stores which should have accompanied the Mounted Police were all frozen in on the Dawson Road and did not ultimately reach Manitoba until months after they were needed. There was little that Obsorne Smith could do, for his own militia supplies, shipped in August, had similarly been stalled en route. Still, he promised to “do the best I can to try to stop ‘growling’ among the officers and men,” and he found bedding and a mismatched assortment of old militia uniforms for them. The officers complained of being “practically speaking without any uniforms” and the men “had to undergo great hardship for the want of proper clothing” during their winter at Lower Fort Garry. Nonetheless, the major necessity — food — was well taken care of by the Hudson’s Bay Company, and Major McDonald had ensured that every man had a greatcoat before he left Collingwood.\(^5\) The deficiency of supplies was a nuisance, but it did little to hinder the training of the force, which proceeded apace through the ensuing winter.

II

Much of the force’s first six months was characterized by drudgery interspersed with sheer misery. Only a few of the men were accustomed to the prairie climate. The force had yet to find its eventual balance between the constabulary and military sides of its character and the initial season was organized strictly along military routine. As training progressed and a combination of climate and control weighed heavily upon the men, the officers soon learned who was fit and who was not for the rigours which might be faced in the future. The policeman’s day began before dawn and ended hours after dark; it was marked by foot drill, riding instruction, regular shifts of sentry duty at stables and in the fort, but above all by the cold.

During the season spent in Manitoba, officers were given special assignments at the Lower Fort to accommodate the peculiar needs of training and initial organization. Thus Superintendent Jarvis did not command a division, but was put in charge of the force on the frequent occasions when the commissioner was in Winnipeg or elsewhere. Another superintendent, Jacob Carvell, acted as quartermaster and took most of the workload from the inexperienced Dalrymple Clark. The three divisions were still commanded by the superintendents who had taken charge of them on the trip to Manitoba. Young had “A” Division; Macleod and Winder commanded “B” and “C” respectively. The sub-inspectors were scattered unevenly through the divisions and one of them, James Morrow Walsh, acted as adjutant and later as riding instructor and veterinarian. The complement was made up by an ever-fluctuating number of constables and sub-constables, about 146 in the first instance. No provision had yet been made for “a Farrier Sergeant, Hospital Sergeant, Saddler, Shoewing smith” or other specialized duties.\(^6\) To overcome this problem, Smith had rearranged the divisions to distribute among them as evenly as possible the men with various trades and crafts, just as he had carefully dispersed men according to language, religion and provincial origin.\(^7\)

From the first, the commanding officers tried to impose military routine and discipline upon the force (without, however, military powers of punishment),\(^8\) but these efforts were often eroded by the weather. This was most evident in the disposition of sentries and pickets about the fort. A “main guard,” six men under an NCO, was to patrol two posts, No. 1, the main or river gate, and No. 2, the rear or landward gate of the fort. In addition there was to be a stable guard of one NCO and three men, and an inlying picket of two NCOs and ten men. The latter were to be ready at all times, from the sounding of retreat until they were dismissed by the orderly officer of the day, to give the alarm in case of fire, to
search for absent men, and generally to carry out the orderly officer’s instructions. This comprehensive scheme, particularly for night duty, soon withered under assault by a constant and unwonted cold.

The first deviation from these strict rules came early in December, when an order was published permitting sentries, “first and last relief excepted,” to stand guard without rifles — both hands, apparently, could be buried deep in pockets for warmth. Another concession followed on 5 January, when the sentry at No. 2 post was withdrawn entirely from last post until reveille. The first sentry was then to “extend his beat and act as a flying sentry for the general protection of the Barracks between 10 PM and 6 am.” On the eighth the stable guard was moved from outside to inside the stables. How this privilege was received may be gathered from the recollections of Acting Constable Fullerton, in charge of a stable party at this time.

We took our blankets, gathered all the saddle blankets into a pile of hay and unless some tenderfoot had left a halter half tied, we could sleep all night after the officer came around, and they were usually in a big hurry to rush back to their stoves. We hustled things back to their places before stable sounded at 6 a.m. Fullerton’s reminiscences are full of small irreverences as well as large untruths, but it is easy to believe that the discipline of officers as well as men suffered somewhat from the temptations of warmth and comfort. Nonetheless, this custom of sleeping on duty cannot have continued for long, for the daily orders of 12 January noted that “Acting Constable Fullerton of ‘B’ Division is admonished,” and warned the force against abusing special privileges granted because of the climate. At the same time, however, permission was given the sentries at No. 1 post to shelter from midnight to 8 a.m. in the guardroom, only emerging at ten-minute intervals to perform a quick check of all the buildings. The very next day the guard was further reduced. In this gradual fashion, plans for a full and formal guard withered under an onslaught of Manitoba weather. What remained was a skeleton force, huddled around its stoves for all but a few minutes of every night. It must have been with genuine relief that Walsh could order, early in April, that the guard would henceforth mount in summer clothing by day and only at retreat should it “put on Great Coats, Belts and Fur Caps.”

Guard duty represented the static side of the force’s first winter; riding instruction was probably the most active. Although the Mounted Police Act stipulated that recruits should know how to ride, only a few were accomplished horsemen; moreover, Osborne Smith had bought a number of horses which had never been saddled. Therefore a considerable amount of time was spent that winter teaching man and beast to work together. Before the bulk of the force had even arrived, Smith ordered Walsh to lay out an exercise ground, about 40 by 50 yards, in the vicinity of the Stone Fort. According to James Fullerton, who assisted in training the neophytes, this “hippodrome” was lined with brush to help prevent broken bones as horses shed their inexperienced riders.

Commissioner French instituted a riding schedule as soon as he took personal command of the force in mid-December. Constables were to ride daily from 9 a.m. to 10; officers rode from 10 a.m. till 11. The sub-constables of the three divisions were to ride for one hour a day, each division having two afternoons a week, after parade and the foot drill which followed it. These instructions were probably thwarted by the weather, for it is not until early February that mention is again made of riding. On the fourth of that month, Walsh was placed in charge of riding instruction with Sam Steele, the stablemaster, immediately under him. In addition to riding instruction, “Horse Exercise” was instituted on 9 March, when very basic manoeuvres were undertaken to familiarize the men with their mounts. Thereafter riding drill was reorganized according to classes, officers and NCOs forming one class, and sub-constables being divided according to proficiency. In addition, regular riding drill was continued, each troop practicing as a unit for two afternoons a week. Men who were not riding or on duty were generally occupied at foot drill.

The heavy emphasis on riding drill is wholly understandable and was fundamental to the force’s purpose. The regular and frequent foot drills, however, were symptoms of an anomaly in the makeup of the force. Although French correctly reminded his men that they were not militia but police, the training program failed to reflect this distinction. There is no evidence anywhere that the ordinary sub-constables of the force at this stage were given even a basic grounding in the law, or that the officers, aside from a trained lawyer like Macleod, were particularly suited to their statutory functions as justices of the peace. From the first, French treated his force as a small regiment of cavalry. The North-West Mounted Police (as the force came to be known) was trained not as a police force but as the “mounted rifles” which Macdonald had written of four years earlier. The Act had assigned to each rank an equivalent military title and these titles were often used in preference to the unimaginative, cumbersome labels which Macdonald had affixed to the ranks. In this way Paymaster and Quartermaster Clark became Captain Clark; on the other hand, Major Walsh retained his militia rank, which was higher than he was entitled to within the Mounted Police order of precedence. There was also a certain amount of military swag-
ger among the rank and file of the force and a corresponding sense of formality among the officers; on 9 December constables and sub-constables were instructed not to wear spurs unless they were accompanied with “Cavalry trowsers and Jack Boots.” Great care was taken to train trumpeters and all men went through a period of rifle training. In general, the force acquired a military demeanour in all save its disciplinary powers. This must have been imposed by French deliberately, either in conformity with his own preferences or perhaps as a means of coping with the latent desire of the new prime minister, Alexander Mackenzie, for a military rather than a constabulary expedition into the Northwest.

Miscreants among the original Mounted Policemen were tried and disciplined with little paper wasted. Only the sentences for misdemeanours are recorded and these do little to indicate the nature of the offence. Sub-constable F. Payette, we learn from the order book, “grossly misconducted himself” and was fined ten dollars, dismissed from the force and barred from Mounted Police barracks forever; but one can only guess at his offence. Long lists of fines were regularly published with the daily orders, for fines and dismissal were the only punishments the force could impose, yet the offences were not revealed. In fact, the discipline of offenders was relatively slight, for after 19 January not even sub-constables were confined to the guardhouse except in instances of drunkenness or disorderly conduct. They were simply “placed in Arrest,” an honour system equivalent to being released on bail. At the same time, fines were levied ruthlessly and a substantial number of men, not all of them deserters, were stricken from the rolls of the force in punishment for offences.

The police cannot have found many opportunities for recreation in their winter barracks. Leave was severely restricted, for only the orderly officer could authorize leave for more than two men per division on any one day and requests made to him required eight hours’ notice. The commissioner alone could grant leave of more than 48 hours. It is not surprising, then, that some of the men tried to smuggle liquor back to their barracks to while away the long nights. This was ordered to stop in mid-December. The Hudson’s Bay Company canteen remained open, however, and since only about one man in ten was on duty between retreat and first post, the canteen must have done a roaring business. It was also a disruptive business from the viewpoint of the officers of the force, as is revealed by a sharp order in January 1874, fixing the fines for drunkenness. A first offender would be punished by a three-dollar fine, equivalent to four days of a sub-constable’s pay. For each succeeding offence the fine was doubled. Penalties were also to be doubled against men who showed up drunk for duty and trebled if a man proved unfit for guard duty or stable picket.

A further form of entertainment was detected and curtailed two weeks later, when a strict ban was published against gambling in barracks. An order of the same day brought an end to some elements of fraternization between sub-constables and NCOs:

> Constables who are in the habit of drinking or Card Playing with Sub Constables or having money transactions with them, or who by their general conduct do not endeavour to inspire the Sub Constables with proper respect for the position of Constable, will be unfit for the rank they hold.

The exact state of discipline in the force at this time is hard to ascertain. When Osborne Smith turned over command to French in mid-December 1873, the former remarked enthusiastically that “a continuance of conduct such as has already been shown, will . . . undoubtedly make this Force not only of the greatest Service, but a credit to the Dominion.” His successor, nevertheless, found cause to remark sadly just a month later that he hoped the sub-constables would remember that they were police, not militia, and that “a proper notion of self respect will prevent their committing offences, which it should be their province to apprehend others for.” The record, unhappily, is silent on the cause of this outburst, but the entertainments of the force were doubtless more soberly conducted for some time thereafter.

Two firsthand accounts of the force’s recreational and social activities have survived. One is from a man who showed brief promise but quit the force after six months’ service. The other is from one of the original NCOs, later one of Canada’s most celebrated soldiers. James Fullerton, the first of the writers in question, remembered his winter at Lower Fort Garry for the skating parties on the Red River. The local girls, he was convinced, always made the weather much warmer than it ever felt when he was on guard duty. The more serious-minded Samuel Benfield Steele enjoyed the parties – particularly the legendary wedding parties – of the Red River settlers, but he also spent many evenings in their homes learning the history and customs of the plains. Steele also mentioned rifle matches though “with the thermometer in the thirties below zero there was little pleasure in shooting.” There was also a cricket match held on the queen’s birthday and a “Quadrille Club” at which the NCOs and men were undoubtedly introduced to all the eligible young ladies of the district. It must have been rather a lonely winter nonetheless; all the police were birds of passage, forbidden to marry, and it is unlikely that many lasting friendships were made in the community.
For the officers there were two additional diversions. The first was politics; the government which appointed them had fallen. The new Liberal government of Alexander Mackenzie flirted briefly with the idea of sending a military force to the plains instead of the police, but this deviation from Macdonald’s plan was soon dismissed and was not, in any case, allowed to affect the training schedule. Nonetheless, some of the more obvious political appointees in the force (Charles Young and John Breden, for instance, to say nothing of Dalrymple Clark) felt it necessary to be, in Clark’s words, “most careful.” Clark noted in a letter to the deposed prime minister, his uncle, that “of course our fellows are all your appointments, and consequently they can talk more freely than if it were otherwise.” Another preoccupation of some of the police, which they shared with many Canadians in Manitoba from the lieutenant governor down, was speculation in land. “The members of the Mounted Police Force are making considerable investments in real estate,” The Manitoban reported in April 1874; “We hear of sales of 39 lots of the Magnus Brown Property, and a number of lots on the Portage road to them during the past week.” This is hardly surprising. Promises of free land grants were made to ordinary recruits of the force and it is entirely to be expected that the officers would have shared in the land hunger which was, after all, one of the roots of the whole Canadian adventure in the Northwest.

III

By January the force had begun to diminish. Serious breaches of discipline were punished with dismissal and a medical board discharged 19 unsuitable men who had slipped through the loose scrutiny of the recruiters. A number of recruits, mostly French Canadians, found the life of a soldier-policeman uncongenial and deserted. The drawbacks of hasty recruiting and the pressures of early training were most apparent among the Quebec recruits, who at the end of October numbered about three dozen. Four refused to be attested and another 12 were eliminated by the medical board; six deserted or were drummed out of the force and another two quit after finding substitutes, bringing the attrition rate to 22 – a higher proportion in six months than the entire first contingent was to experience in three years. The high rate of departures can be accounted for in a number of ways. Faulty recruiting was the most obvious cause for a third of the whole Quebec detachment later proved medically unfit; it is therefore not unlikely that Brisebois and Winder had been as lax in seeking character certificates as in ordering medical examinations. The attrition among their recruits must also be accounted for partly by the fact that a majority were French-speaking and were dispersed by Osborne Smith throughout a force which had only one French-Canadian officer. This obvious attempt at assimilation must have offended some of the Quebec recruits and made life more difficult for all of them, and several drifted into drunkenness and insubordination as well as desertion. Whether through the faults of the recruiters or of the trainers, the proportion of the force which came from Quebec was, by the summer of 1874, far below what it should have been.

Aside from the problems with the Quebec recruits, the health of a number of Mounted Policemen gave cause for concern and resulted in a substantial reduction of the force. Recruiters had been ordered to have all recruits examined by a surgeon at government expense, but many disabled men slipped through. Commissioner French first suspected this when he noticed a sub-constable who quite obviously had only one eye and others with a variety of limps and aches. Early in January Dr. David Young, a local medical practitioner, was summoned to conduct a special examination of the entire force. Checking up to 50 men a day, the medical board weeded out not only the blind, the halt and the lame, but the scrofulous and syphilitic as well. One case of tuberculosis was discovered, along with one of heart disease and – a grim malady for a horseman – a case of haemorrhoids disqualified another trooper. Unhealed broken bones were discovered and one man, five feet and a quarter inch tall, was dismissed for being too short. In all, 19 men were discharged for medical reasons antedating their enlistment. These 19 continued in barracks at the Lower Fort until 30 April; they were paid in full, were ordered “to retain the Under Clothing served out by the government” and were sent home at government expense. The medical examination, together with the improvements effected by discipline and training, left the force at the end of May a leaner and healthier body than that which had gathered at the close of 1873.

IV

The three detachments had hardly settled into their winter quarters when the Council of the Northwest Territories called for their assistance. On 11 December Colonel Smith was asked to provide a small force to investigate reports of whisky trading beyond the boundaries of Manitoba on Lake Winnipeg, where possession of liquor without a permit was unlawful and trade in spirits with the Indians was strictly forbidden. Smith protested that he was authorized only to organize the force, not to deploy it, and the council’s request was pigeonholed until Commissioner French took up his command on 17 December. On Christmas Eve the secretary of the council renewed the appeal for police assistance: “It would be well if a small party of the Dominion Police were sent
James F. Macleod (1836–94), one of the first inspectors of the North-West Mounted Police, became the force’s first assistant commissioner in 1874 and succeeded G.A. French as commissioner in 1877. At Lower Fort Garry he commanded “B” Division. He also commanded the force’s first, unsuccessful, patrol in December 1873. (Public Archives Canada.)
to Big Black island on Lake Winnipeg.” There, according to a “reliable person,” some purported lumbermen were “really driving a thriving liquor trade with the Indians of the surrounding coasts.”

On 29 December the Hudson’s Bay Company officer in charge of Lower Fort Garry recorded the departure from his gates of the first patrol of the Mounted Police. Nine men (three from each troop) under Major Macleod set out and were away for nine days. Various romantic accounts have been published of this patrol, including one by James Fullerton, who claimed untruthfully to have been a part of it, but the true outcome may be gleaned from the journal of Chief Trader Flett: “The party of Mounted Police who went out in search of liquor and liquor sellers returned without finding either the one or the other.”

Shortly after this patrol, an unpleasant incident proved that the officers and men of the force were beginning to be drawn together by a sense of identity and morale. This stemmed from a fire in the militia barracks at Fort Garry, where two off-duty constables, dressed in their castoff militia uniforms, helped to subdue the flames. Colonel Smith emerged out of the smoke and confusion and, mistaking Constable John McIlree for a militiaman, ordered him to rejoin his company. McIlree replied that he had no company and Smith sent him to the lockup under close guard. Percy Neale then stepped up to Smith and informed him of his mistake; Neale was succinctly told to “go to hell.” When McIlree had been released, the two constables reported Smith’s conduct to the commissioner. French might very easily have sided with his friend and fellow officer, but he chose instead to support his men. He ordered an inquiry under Macleod and subpoenaed Smith to appear before the inquiry: Smith refused. When Macleod concluded that Smith’s conduct was unwarranted and that he had lied in his subsequent allegations (that McIlree was drunk and Neale a liar), French did his utmost to discredit Smith before the force in Manitoba and the government in Ottawa. A trivial but unpleasant incident had pointed to the development of an esprit de corps which might help sustain the force through years of difficulties.

That incident also illustrated the sorry shape of the police uniform, which at the time consisted entirely of castoff and surplus militia equipment. In addition to old-fashioned wooden militia saddles and Snider carbines, Smith (in his dual role of commissioner and deputy adjutant general for Manitoba) had issued to the police an assortment of serge tunics which had to suffice until better uniforms arrived from England. These castoff tunics, though nowhere described, were probably of the old blue militia pattern or the green of rifle companies, which until very recently had been in general use by the Canadian force in Manitoba. When French was informed that a number of red tunics were en route to him, he decided to make do with the mismatched equipment already at hand. The force was clad in scarlet for its march west, but does not seem to have had proper uniforms until the summer of 1874.

As S.W. Horrall points out, the force did not receive final orders for its westward expedition until mid-March 1874. The new prime minister even entertained ideas of a joint Canadian-United States movement and did not decide finally until early January to send a Canadian force of some description to the Whoop-Up country. Nonetheless, Commissioner French, in the absence of specific instructions to the contrary, continued to plan as though the force’s westward expedition was already determined. Early in January he instructed each of the three inspectors to submit an estimate of the supplies and transport necessary to sustain a division over a long march and a year’s absence from contact with civilization. French must have been staggered by the quantities the superintendents requested. Macleod, for instance, requisitioned transport for over a hundred thousand pounds of baggage and supplies for “B” Division alone. French not only accepted these estimates (which were later drastically reduced), but forwarded them to his doubting superiors in Ottawa with the remark that “to take a considerable force into an almost unknown country, and with but little chance of obtaining supplies, is emphatically a big business.” Some of the more exaggerated requests were trimmed down, but it was an impressive army of wagons and oxcarts which assembled at Fort Dufferin in June.

After less than two months at Lower Fort Garry, French hurried to recruit and train a second contingent of police, Divisions “D,” “E,” and “F,” to bring the force up to the number authorized by Macdonald’s order in council. French departed on 5 February, leaving W.D. Jarvis (once again in acting command) to complete the schedule of training. The commissioner did not rejoin the force until the summer, when it reassembled at Dufferin.

There were, notwithstanding the preparations and the weeding out which a winter’s training had effected, grave doubts as to whether the force would be fit to proceed at all. Lieutenant Governor Morris wrote in concern to the new minister of the interior early in March, “I find there is a good deal of suspicion in certain circles here as to whether the Police Force is sufficiently organized . . . & disciplined.” He emphasized the rigours of the trip the police must undertake and added that he thought it very unlikely that the officers could successfully discipline their troops unless their powers of punishment were enlarged. There seemed ample justification for Morris’s concern. The force had been depleted throughout the winter by a steady trickle of desertions and
dismissals; it was only natural to wonder how many more men would break under the strain of actual police work. In fact, of the 144 men attested on 3 November 1873, less than half were still in the force when their minimum term expired three years later.49 Two politically appointed officers, Breden and Young, resigned before the force left Manitoba50 and there were sporadic desertions right up to the moment when the force began its westward march. French later expressed no regrets at losing 31 deserters from the whole force at Dufferin, just a few days before the gruelling trip which would surely have broken anyone not fully prepared for whatever lay ahead.51

The government had tentatively selected Fort Ellice as the headquarters of the force and in April preparations were begun to shift a part of the force from Lower Fort Garry to the new seat of command. The following order reached Morris from Ottawa:

Despatch [Shurtleff] and ten men to Fort Ellice or where ever Governor Morris will direct this party will remain there for [suppression] of liquor traffic. They can take ten horses and carts and more if necessary. they will have to take provisions also some agricultural implements and seed grain.52 Trained as soldier-policemen, they were to begin their careers as farmers! The full purpose of the expedition was not publicly revealed, for the local press made no mention of the liquor trade, commenting only that the men had been “assigned for farming purposes.” They left the Lower Fort about the fifth of May to become the first detachment of the mounted police on regular active duty.53

This minor deployment was only part of the large-scale undertaking mounted by the government in sending the force westward. Tiny detachments would remain in Manitoba, but the bulk of the force was destined to travel into what is now the province of Alberta. Throughout the month of May the Mounted Police arranged to purchase 100 carts and 150 oxen to make up the supply train and a harried Dalrymple Clark was kept busy making arrangements which he described to Macdonald in a letter from Winnipeg:

I have been more busy the last three weeks than I ever was. We are purchasing oxen carts &c for the march to the West and by the regulations I am so tied down that I must almost see every ox cart and set of harness before paying for them. The authorities that be, appear to know very little about the difficulties that exist here during the spring weather, and consequently I have been kept on the trot between here and the Lower Fort for the last month. Being 20 miles from the bank and all places of business and having no telegraph office at the Lower Fort is most inconvenient, but all will be over soon.54

His remarks about “the authorities” might suggest that little had changed in Ottawa since the Macdonald government fell. In fact there had been improvements in the appreciation of western difficulties; the new ministry moved expeditiously to amend the Mounted Police Act, providing for the appointment of an assistant commissioner – Macleod was immediately promoted – and for pay raises to all constables performing specialized tasks.55 These changes had little impact on the force at Lower Fort Garry for the Act was passed on 26 May and the police were gone within a fortnight. Indeed, a dozen men under Carvell had already left on 24 May to prepare a camp at Fort Dufferin for the union of the two contingents of the force the following month.56

V

The Mounted Police did not evacuate the Lower Fort entirely in June; Dalrymple Clark remained behind, in charge of supplies, cattle and a handful of men including convalescents in the tiny hospital. The latter were eventually discharged and sent back to eastern Canada. When they left in September, Clark was ordered to prepare “to start with balance of Men and Horses for Pelly.”57 The first member of the force to reach Manitoba in October 1873, Clark thus became the last to leave the Lower Fort a year later. Police matters in Winnipeg were thereafter left in the hands of Warden Bedson of the penitentiary and a civilian agent named Thomas Nixon.58 The Mounted Police were gone completely from Lower Fort Garry, leaving a few cattle, rooms full of discarded furniture and equipment, and their unpaid bills. It had been a rather short period, less than a year, but the experiences of seven-score men in one winter at the Lower Fort would help to shape a wider history than they could then imagine.
A Transition

The connection between Lower Fort Garry and the North-West Mounted Police lasted for less than a year, but that short term, the winter of 1873 and spring of 1874, is a watershed in the history of the Canadian West. The fort, graceful, immovable and explicitly commercial, represented the previous half-century of history at Red River. It was first built to serve George Simpson, lord of a vast trading empire, at a time when the fur trade fixed the pattern of nearly every human life in the Northwest. That day was gone; by 1873 the Lower Fort had become mainly a retail centre for a sedentary agricultural community and a workshop for a mechanized age. Its usefulness had shrunk until the grounds and buildings best served their owners when they were rented to the keepers of the new order.

The Mounted Police were, preeminently, the vanguard of that new order. As Lower Fort Garry stood for the old trade, the police stepped forward on behalf of a new empire of settlement, tangible in terms of farms and railways, wheat and minerals, but insubstantial, coloured and brought to life by dreams of Canadian greatness, of personal greatness. There was little work for the new Mounted Police in the shadow of the old fort; their business was elsewhere, to push forward, to make the queen’s writ run far to the west. Her subjects soon could settle there in peace, some to make their homes with their hands, some to make their fortunes by their ingenuity and their capital, and all to build, sometimes unconsciously, a new nation.

So the fort and the police parted company. The yellowed limestone walls, witness to a brief and important period in the force’s history, would not see the parade of the whole force at Dufferin, rows of red coats and white hats marshalled on horseback over the plain and then dispersed across a thousand miles of trackless territory. The force was born at Lower Fort Garry; its infancy ended there on the seventh of June as the jingling of harness and the last hoofbeats faded down the road which led to Winnipeg, to Dufferin and to an indelible place in the romantic traditions of a nation.
Appendix A. “An Account Submitted to the Dominion Government by A. McArthur and Company of Winnipeg, 7th January 1874.”

For Buildings and alterations & repairs at Lower Fort Garry for Mounted Police Force [numbers in parentheses refer to the plan of Lower Fort Garry, “Head Quarters of Mounted Police,” see Fig. 2].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kitchen Wash-room &amp; latrine in rear of old Barracks [15, 16]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kitchen 12 x 20</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3500 ft. of lumber $105.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3500 shingles 21.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 windows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 door</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 chimney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Bench 12 feet &amp; shelving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Washroom 18 x 20</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3000 ft. lumber $90.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3000 shingles 18.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wash-stand &amp; foot-boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 door</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 window</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Latrine 20 x 9</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500 ft. lumber $45.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 shingles 12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pit-frame 18 x 5 700 ft. lumber $21.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 door</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 window</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nails for three buildings 3 kegs $30.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor on 3 buildings – 103 days of 1 man $360.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locks Hinges and other hardware $15.00</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Barracks [3]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Filling up front door &amp; Lumber $15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covering well 600 ft. Lumber $18.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enclosing Stairway – Lumber $7.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 doors, lumber &amp; Labor $12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filling an opening 5 x 10 Lumber $6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making and putting up Pegs &amp; shelving in two stories $130.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 new doors $35.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lumber for sundry places &amp; shelving 1500 ft. $45.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor 1 Man 30 days $105.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nails $5 Hardware $17 $22.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Barracks [13]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 partitions across building $100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lumber for shelving &amp;c 3000 ft. $90.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stairway &amp; porch lumber 700 ft. $21.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor for stairway &amp; porch 16 days $48.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening for a door; trestlework under chimneys, making 3 doors &amp;c $18.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor on shelving, Pegs $c 80 days $240.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nails $10 Hardware $12.50 $22.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time fitting up partitions 8 days $26.00</td>
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</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guard Room at Gate [14]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lumber 1500 ft. $45.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altering partitions, cutting openings for Doors &amp; furnishing 3 doors $47.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laying over Floor &amp; Lumber $11.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitting up Table &amp; lumber $7.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass and Glazing $12.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hospital [8]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>500 feet dress lumber $200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building paper 560 lbs $56.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 chimneys $30.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nails 2 kegs $24.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sundry lumber 300 ft. for interior and for various purposes – kitchen, washroom &amp;c $90.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor 1 man 90 days at $3 $270.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen-washroom-water-closet &amp; covered passage including lumber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Hardware &amp;c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Lumber for washroom 2000 feet $60.00                        |
| Shingles for do. 2000 $12.00                                |
| Doors & windows for both $21.00                             |
| 1 chimney for kitchen $15.00                                |
| 1 Bench & shelving for do. $10.00                           |
| Wash-stand and foot-boards for kitchen $10.00               |
| Lumber for sundry work $15.00                               |
| Latrine lumber 1000 ft. $30.00                             |
| Shingles 1500 $9.00                                        |
| Pit frame 500 ft. $15.00                                   |
| Nails for 3 building 2 kegs $20.00                          |
| Hardware for 3 buildings $22.50                             |
| Labor on 3 buildings – 1 man 80 days $250.00                 |
Appendix B. Daily Routines.

During the training of the Mounted Police force at Lower Fort Garry, several different routines were developed for officers, men and horses. Although these routines changed almost weekly in one detail or another, there were only three substantial revisions, imposed by the following three entries in the order book.¹

12 November 1873

- Reveille: 6:00 a.m.
- Stables: 6:30 to 7:45 a.m.
- Breakfast: 8:00 a.m.
- Guard mounting: 9:45 a.m.
- Parade: 10:00 a.m.
- Office: 11:00 a.m.
- Stables: 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
- Dinner: 1:00 p.m.
- Parade: 2:00 p.m.
- Tea: 4:50 p.m.
- Stables: 5:00 to 6:00 p.m.
- Retreat
- Picket mounting: 7:00 p.m.
- Night guard: 9:00 p.m.
- First post: 9:30 p.m.
- Last post: 9:45 p.m.
- Lights out: 10:00 p.m.

5 January 1874

- Reveille: 6:30 a.m.
- Stables: 7:00 to 8:00 a.m.
- Breakfast: 8:15 a.m.
- Office: 10:00 a.m.
- Parade: 10:30 a.m.
- Stables: 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
- Dinner: 1:00 p.m.
- Guard mounting: 1:45 p.m.
- Parade: 2:00 p.m.
- Tea: 4:30 p.m.
- Stables: 4:45 to 5:30 p.m.
- Retreat: 4:45 p.m.
- Picket mounting: 5:30 p.m.
- Night guard: 5:30 p.m.
- First post: 9:30 p.m.
- Last post: 10:00 p.m.
- Lights out: 10:15 p.m.
Appendix C. Notes on the Cypress Hills Massacre and the Formation of the North-West Mounted Police.

A perennial tradition surrounding the origin of the North-West Mounted Police is that the force's creation was deferred indefinitely by Sir John A. Macdonald until the Cypress Hills massacre of 1 June 1873 became known in Ottawa, whereupon public opinion forced the government to act. I have published elsewhere some facts which undermine this theory and will examine here two particular facets of the case. One is a modern, conflicting interpretation and the other is a source from which the dubious legends may have sprung. The subject can best be explained after a brief chronological summary of the important documents and dates from the spring to the autumn of 1873. After a scrutiny of these dates, one may more easily assess the importance of the two most challenging efforts to link the massacre to the formation of the Mounted Police.

3 May
Macdonald told the House of Commons that he would move on the sixth the resolutions for the mounted police in the Northwest. He stated, "It was not probable that it would comprise 300 men at first or for a long time yet" (300 was the number stipulated in the Bill). Macdonald reassured the parsimonious opposition leader, Alexander Mackenzie, that the government intended "to reduce the military force in Manitoba by degrees."

23 May
Royal assent was given to "An Act respecting the Administration of Justice, and for the establishment of a Police Force in the North-West Territories." The Act attracted little attention in the press, but a stream of letters came in from men applying for positions in the force. A commission was promised as early as 28 May to James Morrow Walsh.

1 June
Twenty or more Assiniboine Indians were killed in the Cypress Hills in a fight with white men from the United States.

2 June
Lieutenant Governor Morris of the Northwest Territories wrote to Macdonald urging him to raise the force to its full complement of 300 men. Macdonald did not refuse, but spent a dilatory summer anticipating the disgrace of the Pacific Scandal.
11 June
Word of the Cypress Hills massacre was first published in Montana.6

27 June
A report of the massacre reached the American Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington.7

12 July
Morris sent a lengthy dispatch to the Department of the Interior, outlining the state of lawlessness in the southwestern part of the territories and indicating that in addition to the proposed police force, the government would probably have to maintain 500 soldiers in the Northwest.8

9 August
Alexander Campbell, minister of the interior, misunderstood Morris’s dispatch and proposed to the cabinet that a military force should be sent immediately to the vicinity of Fort Whoop-Up at the junction of the St. Mary and Oldman rivers. The cabinet discussed this plan, but turned it down. There is no evidence that this meeting discussed the mounted police or the problem of law enforcement generally, but the order in council constituting the force was fully prepared less than three weeks later.9

20 August
Word of the Cypress Hills massacre reached Winnipeg in the form of a clipping from the Helena Daily Herald, 11 June 1873, which Morris immediately forwarded in a dispatch to Campbell.10

24 August
Edward MacKay arrived in Winnipeg and confirmed, independently of the newspaper account, the report of the massacre. Morris interviewed him and forwarded his account to Ottawa on 26 August.11

The dispatches of 20 and 26 August were not acknowledged until 8 September although they may have reached Ottawa as early as the fourth. Campbell’s letters to Morris of 28 August and 3 September, however, made no mention of the massacre or of Morris’s dispatches about it.12

27 August
Macdonald presented to the cabinet a recommendation for organizing the North-West Mounted Police.

28 August
Macdonald’s submission to council was succinctly remarked upon by the government’s organ in the capital, the Ottawa Daily Citizen: “The Mounted Police Force for Manitoba is to be organized immediately.”

29 August
The Citizen printed news of the massacre which it had received from Winnipeg and commented that “the organizing of the Mounted Police Force, which, as we announced yesterday, will be commenced at once, may prevent a repetition of the disgraceful scene to which our despatch from Fort Garry refers.”

30 August
The order in council passed in the form in which it was introduced. The force would be constituted basically as outlined in the Act though with minor variations. Only enough horses would be bought “at once” to mount the officers and half the men, and no surgeon was to be appointed “for the present.”13

4 September
Gilbert McMicken wrote to Macdonald asking permission to start purchasing horses for the force. “I hear thru’ Morris that you have taken up the work of organizing the Mounted Police Force. I wish you would give me the order to purchase the Horses for the Force.”14

6 September
The cabinet discussed the culprits in the Cypress Hills case and referred the matter to the justice department to “take such steps as would enable us to ask for their arrest and extradition.”15

8 September
Macdonald reverted to the problem of organizing the police force; he informed the acting adjutant general that he would shortly be called upon to collaborate with Captain Charles F. Young to recruit men for the force. Ultimate responsibility would fall on the justice department, but the militia would be expected to lend funds and whatever other facilities the recruiters might want.16

9 September
Macdonald sought to persuade the imperial government to lend him a British officer for the command of the new force; “This Indian massacre at Fort Benton,” he wrote to the governor general, “shows the necessity of our losing no time in organizing the Mounted Police for the North West. May I ask you if you thought
of writing to the Horse Guards to get the service of the Commissioner of Police recognized as military service.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{18 September}
Acting Adjutant General Powell gave Captain Young $450 to facilitate recruiting efforts in the Maritimes.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{19 September}
Young received instructions for Jacob Carvell in Saint John and set out himself for the Maritimes.\textsuperscript{19}

\textbf{20 September}
Morris, embroiled in political crises and rumours of Indian troubles, wired Macdonald a desperate plea to send the mounted police to Manitoba for training before the winter. The previous plan had been to train them in Ontario and to send them up in the spring.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{24 September}
The justice department capitulated to pressure from Morris and informed recruiters that they had not a moment to lose.\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{25 September}
Macdonald turned again to the Cypress Hills massacre, appointing McMicken to take the investigation in hand from Winnipeg.

In June 1972, when research for this paper was well advanced, an article appeared which admirably demonstrated that the cabinet’s plans for the force were not as hasty nor as impromptu as previous writers suggested. This article, S.W. Horrall’s “Sir John A. Macdonald and the Mounted Police Force for the Northwest Territories,”\textsuperscript{22} also stated that the cabinet learned of the massacre only after the order in council creating the force had been introduced in cabinet. But Horrall continued to find a connection between the massacre and the police force, for he believed that Macdonald had introduced the order in council tentatively, without any immediate plans for carrying it into effect.

Macdonald, he maintained, “was still in no hurry to proceed with its actual organization.” The government was too deeply preoccupied with surviving the Pacific Scandal to deal with any but the most essential measures; since the ministry did actually fall early in November 1873, Horrall believed that news of the Cypress Hills massacre saved the force from dying on the drawing board.

This interpretation fails to convince. In the first place, the two material events happened at least a week earlier than Horrall claimed: the massacre was reported to Ottawa at least as early as 29 August and not early in September as he stated, and the government was definitely committed to organizing the force long before 9 September. The order in council itself, prepared on 27 August, contains phrases like “at once” and “for the present,” and in other respects seems attuned to immediate rather than long-range purposes. The \textit{Ottawa Daily Citizen} stated unequivocally on 28 August that “The Mounted Police Force . . . is to be organized immediately” and other papers reported that Captain W.F. Butler would soon be appointed commander of the new force. A further hint is found in McMicken’s letter from Winnipeg, dated 4 September, indicating that Morris knew the force was about to be organized. Seemingly, Macdonald was committed to the speedy organization of the force before 6 September, the date on which Morris’s dispatches about the massacre were referred to the cabinet.\textsuperscript{23}

Another part of Horrall’s analysis is also open to debate. He was undoubtedly right to argue that the government was distracted by inquiries into corruption in the election of 1872, but the conclusions he has drawn from this fact seem improbable. Surely in these conditions Macdonald would spend valuable hours only on the administrative measure he fully intended to use in the immediate future; he was hardly likely to enact and then pigeonhole orders which he was in no hurry to proceed with. It is also worth noting that creation of the force put 300 jobs at Macdonald’s disposal, a very useful asset to a prime minister whose faithful following showed signs of crumbling. So the existence of the Pacific Scandal gives a great deal more weight, not less, to the introduction of the order in council on 27 August.

Very little is proved by the often-quoted remark in Macdonald’s letter to Lord Dufferin on 9 September: “The Indian massacre . . . shows the necessity of our losing no time in organizing the Mounted Police.” Macdonald nowhere actually said that he would have proceeded differently without news of the massacre and as the letter in question went on to ask a favour of the British government,\textsuperscript{24} it was natural to put his case in the strongest terms possible, even if they had been developed as an afterthought, not as grounds for the original decision.

Of course, Horrall is right to point to Mackenzie’s scepticism about the value of the police force and to the possibility that he might have been more strongly tempted to dissolve it if it had been less nearly organized, or barracked in Toronto, when the Conservative government fell in November 1873. To this extent the massacre, which prompted Macdonald to send the force west ahead of schedule, no doubt contributed to the fact that the Liberals did not smother the North-West Mounted Police at birth. But beyond this, analysis is “counterfactual” and therefore conjectur-
al, and Horrall’s approach demands that certain pieces of unequivo-
cal evidence should be dismissed as unreliable. Notwithstand-
ing his doubts, there seems adequate reason to suppose that all
the steps taken up to 24 September would have been taken re-
gardless of the news of the massacre. Macdonald’s interest in the
question in the spring of 1873, the mounting pressure from Morris
and Campbell to quell the whisky trade, the fruitful source of en-
tirely new patronage which the Mounted Police gave a faltering
ministry, and the reasonably good evidence of the government’s
intentions promulgated on 27 August, all suggest that the massa-
cre was perhaps a contributing factor but by no means the indis-
ispensable factor underlying the efforts which were made by Mac-
donald, his staff, and the Militia and Defence department in
September 1873.

It is hazardous to trace the precise origins of an erroneous tra-
dition. There is evidence, however, that confusion of dates and
causes existed from the earliest times. A memorandum was
drawn up by the Department of Justice to chronicle the pursuit of
the Cypress Hills murderers up to May 1875; this paper contains
one statement which might be regarded as the ancestor of all ef-
forts to link the massacre to the origins of the police. The memo-
randum referred to information on the massacre supplied to Ot-
tawa early in September 1873 by the British embassy in
Washington and added:

On the 25th August 1873 Lieutenant Governor Morris enclosed
Copy of the same extract from the Montana Herald, and this letter
having been referred to the Minister of the Interior, he reported re-
commending the establishment of a Mounted Police Force with-
out loss of time. This remark, though it came from a civil servant in the Department
of Justice, cannot be wholly true. It carried the decision to or-
ganize the force well into the first week of September when the gov-
ernment had already been publicly committed on the question a
week earlier. Moreover, the recommendation did not come from
the minister of the interior, Campbell, but from the more appropri-
ate minister, Macdonald himself. The submission to council of 27
August was signed by Macdonald; Campbell was apparently not
even present. If any firm recommendation did come from Camp-
bell, it came informally on 9 August after cabinet had rejected his
proposal to send troops to Fort Whoop-Up. But if this is the rec-
ommendation alluded to by the memorandum of 1875, then nei-
ther the massacre nor the despatch of 25 August could have
played any part in it.

The question may not seem to deserve all the attention given to
it here and elsewhere in print, but it does raise some interesting
questions about proceedings in cabinet in the last days of the first
Macdonald ministry. And when a tradition like this has gained
general circulation, one’s reasons for dissenting from it should be
as clear as possible.
Endnotes

Introduction
2 This work does not pretend to give an exhaustive account of all the stages leading up to mobilization of the force in 1874. It tries instead to offer new material or new interpretations while picking a path through events thoroughly detailed in works published at different times by official historians of the Mounted Police. The first of these is John Peter Turner's The North-West Mounted Police, 1873–1893 . . . . (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1950), Vol. 1. More recently, the record of administrative decisions leading to the deployment of the force has been explored in depth in the very useful article by S.W. Horrall, "Sir John A. Macdonald and the Mounted Police Force for the Northwest Territories," Canadian Historical Review, Vol. 53, No. 2 (June 1972), pp. 179–200. Horrall's article tempers some of the romantic mythology and misconceptions which have surrounded the formation of the force and traces the successive decisions of the Macdonald and Mackenzie cabinets from 1869 to May 1874.

The Origins of the Mounted Police Force
2 Ibid., pp. 712–6, Macdonald to William McDougall at Pembina, 12 Dec. 1869.
3 See S.W. Horrall, op. cit., pp. 184, 186; see also PAC, MG26, A1, Macdonald Papers, Vol. 252A, pp. 114192–200, Morris to Macdonald, 20 Sept. 1873: "Here . . . we are between two fires. We [sic] have a turbulent population of English, many of them fanatical Orangemen, & on the other hand, an excitable half-Indian French population."
5 The two following excerpts from Macdonald’s correspondence graphically illustrate his change of pace. On 16 June 1871 he wrote to Sir George E. Cartier: “There must be organized a force long for the North West a Mounted Police. I quite agree with the views of Cyril Graham & the Hudson’s Bay authorities on that matter. With emigrants of all nations flowing into that Country we are in constant danger of an Indian war & that once commenced God knows where it would end” (PAC, MG26, A1, Macdonald Papers, Vol. 518, pp. 929–31). The failure of settlers to flow into the territories produced a change of tune 15 months later, when Macdonald wrote to inform a young office-seeker that the “government have not come to any conclusion about a Mounted Police Force at Manitoba” (ibid., Vol. 521, p. 445, Macdonald to the Hon. J. Patton, 17 Sept. 1872).
6 An unattached, itinerant Irish officer who eventually became a knight, a lieutenant general and an imperial privy councillor. For Butler’s report, see the appendix to his book, The Great Lone Land: A Narrative of Travel and Adventure in the North-West of America (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Low and Searle, 1872), pp. 355–86. This report is often cited by critics of Macdonald’s policy, but unjustly, for the central idea of both is the same: increased contact between red men and white on the plains would threaten the balance of forces which had hitherto preserved a relative calm. Butler’s report assumed that gold seekers, white settlers and American traders would all converge on the plains and their presence, coupled with the depletion of buffalo and the evil effects of free trading, might ignite the latent hostility of the Indians, particularly the Cree. Butler, assuming that white incursions were imminent, urged the immediate creation of a magistracy and a mounted preventive force in the territories. In fact, neither the settlers nor the gold diggers materialized in any numbers and Macdonald postponed acting on Butler’s recommendation until the third element, the American traders, began to pose a more serious problem. Butler had a great deal to say about the lawlessness of the plains, but the burden of his report was that “the wrong-doer does not appear to violate any law, because there is no law to violate” in the territories. “I do not mean to assert that crime and outrage are of habitual occurrence among the people of this territory . . . but crimes of the most serious nature have been committed . . . by persons of mixed and native blood, without any vindication of the law being possible.” Fortunately, he continued, the small population had not yet seen any of “those conflicting interests which, in more populous and civilized communities, tend to anarchy and disorder.” These passages of Butler’s report must be read to temper the more lurid passages which are usually quoted. See William Francis Butler, op. cit., pp. 382, 357–8.
8 W.L. Morton, Manitoba: The Birth of a Province (Winnipeg: Manitoba Record Society, 1965), p. 177. No official Hansard was published that year, but Morton’s account of the debate is drawn from a reliable newspaper account. The Act is 36 Vict. cap. 35, “An Act Respecting the Administration of Justice, and for the Establishment of a Police Force in the North-West Territories.” As Horrall correctly points out, the full title does not justify the popular contraction to “The Mounted Police Act,” but the statute itself does not provide a short title and the one used is a convenient, if imperfect, summary.
9 The very interesting Dominion Police Files for 1873 are temporarily collected at the Public Archives of Canada with the unsorted papers of the deputy minister of justice (PAC, RG13, Acc. No. 68/263, 1873). Although much of this collection consists of letters from the public, it also includes some of the earliest correspondence of the force. The Mounted Police files were not separated from those of the Dominion Police Office until 1874. For Crozier’s correspondence, see PAC, RG13, Acc. No. 68/263, Dominion Police Files, 1873, file 27; for Butler, see ibid., file 93; see also ibid., file 17, J.C. Mansfield, and file 22, J.H.C. Cox, for other matters referred to above in the text.
12 S.W. Horrall, op. cit., pp. 189, 192.
13 PAC, RG13, Acc. No. 68/263, Dominion Police Files, 1873, file 71, McDermot and Bannantyne to H.-L. Langevin, 18 June 1873. Their reasoning is worth noting: “La Grande partie de la population du Nord-Ouest étant d’origine Francaise et ne parlant que le langue francaise; un Chef de Police de meme origine aurait l’effet de faire comprendre a cette population que cette force ne vient pas contre eux, mais bien plutot pour les proteger, tandis qu’un chef d’origine anglaise leur fera croire que c’est pour les priver de leurs droits que le Gouvernement a monte cette police.”

15 See PAC, MG26, A1, Macdonald Papers, Vol. 252, pp. 114133–7, Morris to Macdonald, 2 June 1873; Manitoba Provincial Archives (hereafter cited as PAM), Morris Papers, Morris to Alexander Campbell, minister of the interior, 12 June 1873.

16 There is useful personal correspondence between Morris and Campbell on this matter; see PAC, MG27, I, C8, Morris Papers, Campbell to Morris, 14 Aug. 1873, discussing the cabinet’s consideration of Campbell’s proposal; ibid., Morris to Campbell, 27 Aug. 1873, confirms that Campbell had misunderstood Morris’s request contained in the official dispatch of 12 July: “The tenor of my dispatch was misapprehended. I was not urging the sending of a force . . . at once. I was dealing with the whole north west, and indicating the measures, I believe, the Govt. will be compelled eventually to take, and before very long.”

17 PAC, RG2, 1, Vol. 6, order in council No. 1134, 30 Aug. 1873.


These three newspapers reprint identical telegraphic reports from Ottawa.


21 Traditions persist to the effect that the news of the Cypress Hills massacre reached Ottawa in time to influence the government’s determination to create the Mounted Police. For a refutation of these traditions, see Appendix C.


24 Ibid., pp. 621–4, Macdonald to Morris, 10 Sept. 1873.

25 Ibid., Vol. 252A, p. 114204, telegram, Morris to Macdonald, 20 Sept. 1832. The telegram appears to have been sent in panic, as the rambling dispatch of the same date shows that the Ontario faction in Manitoba had disturbed the fragile racial balance of the province by arresting François Lepine; at the same time, reports were reaching Morris that his forthcoming treaty negotiations at the Northwest Angle were doomed. He explained these rumours to Macdonald: “the Riel party had sent couriers to the North West to engage the half breeds & Indians there in a movement; & also to prevent a treaty at the angle & that the H.B. Coy’s posts & the various Missionary stations would be plundered.”

26 See for example PAC, RG13, Acc. No. 63/263, Dominion Police Files, 1873, file 67, Smith to Macdonald, 29 Sept. 1873. Smith’s activities before the arrival of the force may be pieced together from his telegrams to the justice department (see PAC, RG13, Acc. No. 63/263, Dominion Police Files, 1873, file 67) and his letterbook (PAC, RG18, RCMP Papers, B3, Commissioner’s Records, Vol. 1).


29 PAC, MG26, A1, Macdonald Papers, Vol. 523, pp. 605–6, Macdonald to Dufferin, 9 Sept. 1873.

30 See PAC, RG9, II, Militia and Defence Papers, B1, Adjutant-General’s Office, Vol. 521, p. 755, Col. Powell (acting adjutant general) to Macdonald, 9 Sept. 1873, acknowledging Macdonald’s request by letter of the previous day; see also ibid., pp. 15–6, Powell to Col. Laurie, deputy adjutant general, Military District No. 9 (Halifax), 18 Sept. 1873. This letter outlines the amount of assistance the police would need. Powell concluded by saying, “As the Police Force is to be a separate organization from the Militia, the assistance of the Militia Staff is only required to facilitate the organization and . . . all Expenses will hereafter be made a charge against the Force to be raised.”


32 Much of the adjutant general’s correspondence for September concerns the organization of the Mounted Police. The following five letters provide an outline of the most important activities of Powell in this matter. All are in the Militia and Defence Papers, Adjutant-General’s Office (PAC, RG9, II, B1), Vol. 521. First, pp. 15–6, Powell to Laurie, 18 Sept. 1873; second, pp. 59–60, circular memorandum, Powell to the eight deputy adjutants general east of the lakehead, 23 Sept. 1873; third, pp. 73, Powell to F.W. Cumberland, manager of the Northern Railway, 25 Sept. 1873, asking for Cumberland’s price for transporting the men from Toronto to Prince Arthur’s Landing (Cumberland was asked only to quote prices; no competitive bids were sought). Cumberland was told that the men would “go by whichever boat may sail from Collingwood on the day any party may be ready.” Fourth, p. 77, Powell to S.J. Dawson, 25 Sept. 1873, instructing him to move the police and their supplies from Thunder Bay to Fort Garry. “The value of the transport and subsistence of the men, also transport of stores, is to be claimed from the Department of Militia and Defence, but in rendering the accounts you will note that the service was performed on account of the Police Force.” Finally, see pp. 87–90 for Powell’s lengthy letter to Major D.A. McDonald, staff officer, Ottawa, 24 Sept. 1873.

33 Ibid., p. 86, Powell to W.O. Smith, telegram, 26 Sept. 1873; PAC, RG13, Acc. No. 63/263, Dominion Police Files, 1873, file 67, Smith to Macdonald, 29 Sept. 1873. Smith’s activities before the arrival of the force may be pieced together from his telegrams to the justice department (see PAC, RG13, Acc. No. 63/263, Dominion Police Files, 1873, file 67) and his letterbook (PAC, RG18, RCMP Papers, B3, Commissioner’s Records, Vol. 1).


36 PAC, RG13, Acc. No. 68/263, Dominion Police Files, 1873, file 50 (Capt. C. Young), file 53 (William Winder), file 63 (Ephrem A. Brisebois), and file 62 (Jacob Carvell).

37 The two were Brisebois and Young; see ibid., file 62, and file 50, Young to Richardson, 29 Sept. 1873 (from Halifax). There is no answer on record to either of these telegrams.

38 Ibid., file 52, Richardson to Winder at Compton, 2 Oct. 1873, and Winder to Richardson, 3 Oct. 1873.


41 PAC, RG13, Acc. No. 68/263, Dominion Police Files, 1873, file 63, D.A. McDonald to Powell, 8 Oct. 1873.

42 Ibid., file 62, Carvell to Richardson, 1 Oct. 1873. For Carvell’s later troubles, see ibid., file 67.
43 Ibid., four telegrams to Richardson, dated 2 Oct. 1872 (from Saint John), 3 Oct. 1873 (from Danville Junction, Maine), 4 Oct. 1873 (from Montreal) and 6 Oct. 1873 (from Toronto); also ibid., Major McDonald to Richardson, 7 Oct. 1873 (from Collingwood).

44 Ibid., file 50.

45 Ibid., Richardson to Young, telegrams, 24 Sept. 1873 and 2 Oct. 1873.


47 PAC, RG13, Acc. No. 68/263, Dominion Police Files, 1873, file 50, Young to Richardson, 9 Oct. 1873.

48 Ibid., Richardson to Young, telegrams, 24 Sept. 1873 and 2 Oct. 1873.

49 Ibid., file 63, Brisebois to Richardson, Oct. 1873; "my men have been making music, singing and dancing the whole trip up." See also J.T. Fullerton, "Toronto to Fort Garry," Scarlet and Gold, 17th ed., Vol. 3 (July 1935), pp. 17-8. Fullerton enlisted in Ontario but exchanged out of the force early in 1874. This article is colourful but unreliable.


51 J.T. Fullerton, op. cit., pp. 17-8; PAC, RG13, Acc. No. 68/263, Dominion Police Files, 1873, file 67, W.O. Smith to Macdonald, telegram, 1 Nov. 1873. "Police detachments all arrived all well am getting on rapidly with organization."

52 John Peter Turner, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 95.


54 PAC, RG13, Acc. No. 68/263, Dominion Police Files, 1873, no file number, W.T. Urquhart to Richardson, telegram from Fort Garry, 17 Nov. 1873: "Dalrymple Clark Arrived." For Clark’s personality and activities at Lower Fort Garry, see PAC, MG26, A1, Macdonald Papers, Vol. 346, pp. 158595-602, Clark to "My dear uncle" (Macdonald), 14 March 1873, and ibid., pp. 158646-52, Clark to Macdonald, 15 May 1873.


57 Ibid., 9 Oct. 1873; PAC, RG18, RCMP Papers, B3, Commissioner’s Records, Vol. 1, memorandum by Smith, 20 Oct. 1873. (For a detailed statement of repairs and new construction at Lower Fort Garry, see Appendix A.)

58 Ibid., Smith to Macdonald and Smith to Richardson, 19 Nov. 1873.

59 For rent for buildings, see PAC, RG2, 2, Vol. 45, Privy Council Records, Order No. 373; for policemen’s overindulgence at the canteen, see Daily Order Book, passim.

60 An itemized statement of buildings rented by the government from the Hudson’s Bay Company is available in an unsigned memorandum to the justice minister, Edward Blake, in PAC, RG18, RCMP Papers, A1, Comptroller’s Office, Vol. 9, file 34. See also ibid., D.A. Smith to minister of justice, 23 April 1874. French’s comment on living quarters is found in his report to Macdonald, ibid., Vol. 1, file 7. A good contemporary sketch of Lower Fort Garry as the police headquarters is on deposit in the Ottawa Public Library; it is useful in spite of a few minor inaccuracies (see Fig. 2).

61 Manitoba. Provincial Archives. Hudson’s Bay Company Archives (hereafter cited as HBCA), B303/a/1, Lower Fort Garry Journal, fol. 168, for example.


The Force Takes Shape

1 The ceremony, and life at Lower Fort Garry in general, are described in the memoirs of one of the force’s best-known recruits of 1873; see Samuel Benfield Steele, Forty Years in Canada; Reminiscences of the Great North-West, with Some Account of his Service in South Africa ..., ed. Mollie Glenn Niblett (London: H. Jenkins, 1915), Chap. 3, passim.

2 The actual enlistment oath is set out in the act which authorized the creation of the police (Canada. Laws, Statutes, etc., 36 Vict. cap. 35, sect. 14). The articles of engagement are reprinted in John Peter Turner, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 97-8, where he makes the misleading claim that they were "the enlistment oath."

3 This incident is referred to by J.T. Fullerton, op. cit., pp. 17-8.

4 Detailed correspondence on this matter may be found in PAC, RG13, Acc. No. 68/263, Dominion Police Files, 1873. See file 62 (Jacob Carrell) and file 67 (W.O. Smith); the latter includes the letter quoted (William and Alexander Bruce to the minister of justice, 10 Dec. 1873). The original statement of the problem is in ibid., file 67, Smith to Macdonald, 6 Nov. 1873; a note on its resolution is contained in a memorandum by Smith in his letterbook; see PAC, RG18, RCMP Papers, B3, Commissioner’s Office, Vol. 1.

5 Ibid., W.O. Smith to Hugh Richardson, 27 Oct. 1873; ibid., Smith to Macdonald, 1 Nov. 1873; ibid., A1, Comptroller’s Office, Vol. 1, file 7-74, French to minister of justice, 7 Jan. 1874; PAC, RG9, II, Militia and Defence Papers, B1, Adjutant-General’s Office, Vol. 52, Assistant Adjutant General Powell to D.A. McDonald, 24 Sept. 1873.

6 PAC, RG18, RCMP Papers, B3, Commissioner’s Office, Vol. 1, Smith’s letterbook, Smith to Hugh Richardson, 19 Nov. 1873; Daily Order Book, entry for 4 Feb. 1874. Specific references will be made to the daily order book only when the date is not mentioned in the text.

7 PAC, RG18, RCMP Papers, A1, Comptroller’s Office, Vol. 1, file 7-74, French to minister of justice, 7 Jan. 1874; also ibid., B3, Commissioner’s Office, Vol. 1, Smith’s letterbook, Smith to Richardson, 19 Nov. 1873.

8 See Canada. Laws, Statutes, etc., 36 Vict. cap. 35, sect. 20, which stipulates that "rules and regulations" may be made for the force by the governor-in-council, but permitting imposition only of ‘penalties, not exceeding in any case more than thirty days’ pay of the offenders.’

9 Daily Order Book, 17 Nov. 1873.

10 Ibid., 9 Nov. 1873.


12 Daily Order Book, 9 April 1874.


16 Ibid., 11 March 1874.
17 James F. Macleod (1836–94) was born on the Isle of Skye, received his BA from the University of Toronto in 1854, and was called to the bar of Upper Canada in 1860.

18 The honorary ranks are set out in the order in council. Curiously, there is no rank equivalent to major. The commissioner was entitled to rank as lieutenant colonel, the paymaster (together with those holding the ranks of superintendent and inspector) ranked as captains, while the veterinary surgeon, superintendents and sub-inspectors ranked as lieutenants.

19 James Morrow Walsh (1840–1905) did not resign his major’s commission in the Prescott troop of cavalry until 1875.

20 Daily Order Book, 15 Jan., 17 Jan. and 5 April 1874. The second of these orders contains the note “SubConstable Fitzpatrick of ‘A’ Division being unable to blow the Bugle returns to his duty.”

21 This trend in the Liberal government’s thinking is discussed in S.W. Horrall, op. cit., pp. 196–9.


23 These fines were published not on a regular basis but whenever they were levied. Fines of a week’s pay were the average. See ibid., passim.

24 Ibid., 22 and 25 Nov. 1873.

25 Ibid., 13 Dec. 1873: “No Constable or SubConstable is allowed to purchase Liquor in the Hudson Bay Store.”

26 Ibid., 8 Jan. 1874.

27 Ibid., 19 Jan. 1874.


29 Fullerton, whose work has been quoted above, was appointed an acting constable by an order dated 21 Nov. 1873. He was “permitted to resign his acting rank” and demoted to duty as hospital orderly on 4 February, and was struck from the force on 24 April when he provided a substitute. These events are not mentioned in his lively recollections except, of course, for his promotion in November.

30 Samuel Benfield Steele, op. cit., Chap. 3, passim.

31 S.W. Horrall, op. cit., p. 199.


33 Manitoban (Winnipeg), 18 April 1874.

34 Two years later, Commissioner French reported that only 69 of the “old originals” remained in the force. PAC, RG18, B3c, Vol. 46, p. 115, French to deputy minister of justice, 17 Dec. 1875.

35 For further notes on Dr. Young’s career in Manitoba, see Philip Goldberg, The Manitoba Penitentiary and Asylum, 1871–1886, Manuscript Report Series No. 28, Parks Canada, 1970, pp. 41–5, 48–62.

36 PAC, RG18, RCMP Papers, A1, Comptroller’s Office, Vol. 1, file 27–74, Walsh to Dr. Young, 31 Dec. 1873, and Young to French, 5 Feb. 1874. The report of the medical board, including the 19 detailed certificates of discharge, is in ibid., file 8–74.

37 Daily Order Book, 29 April 1874.


39 HBCA, B303/a/1, Lower Fort Garry Post Journal, fols. 168–70, entries for 28 Dec. 1843 and 7 Jan. 1874. The list of nine men is in Daily Order Book, 5 Jan. 1874. Yet another account is provided by James McKernan, “Expeditions Made in 1873,” Scarlet and Gold, 2nd annual (1920), pp. 84–5. McKernan says that Macleod caught the traders but, being unable to take them back to Manitoba, “held court right there and let them off with a small fine.” This flatly contradicts Flett’s account and although McKernan was on the patrol, his motive for exaggerating its result 50 years later would be the same as Fullerton’s reason for lying about it. The absence of any contemporary record (except for Flett’s journal) is not conclusive though financial records are reasonably complete and show no evidence that a fine had been received. If the patrol had succeeded, one might expect to find some sort of congratulation, either in the daily orders or in Morris’s correspondence. Nonetheless the reader may choose between McKernan’s agreeable account in 1920 and Flett’s deflating report in 1873. But if Macleod succeeded, even partially, why was his host at Lower Fort Garry led to believe he had failed?

40 Extensive correspondence, affidavits and the report of the inquiry are to be found in PAC, RG18, RCMP Papers, A1, Comptroller’s Office, Vol. 1, file 30–74. See ibid., French to W.O. Smith, 4 Feb. 1874: “I fear that the treatment these Constables have received may weaken their Authority and lessen their Self Respect. It is incumbent on me in any case to use every endeavour to obtain redress for their grievances.”

41 For the early outfitting of the force, see ibid., B3, Commissioner’s Office, Vol. 1, Smith’s letterbook, Smith to Jarvis, 4 Nov. 1873. Forage caps and Serge trousers and jackets were obtained, some from militia stores and others by purchase.


43 PAC, RG18, RCMP Papers, A1, Comptroller’s Office, Vol. 1, file 7–74, French to minister of justice, 7 Jan. 1874. The absence of any positive evidence that French’s men were clothed in scarlet strongly indicates that they were still clad in the mismatched garments issued by Smith.

44 See S.W. Horrall, op. cit., pp. 198–9.

45 PAC, RG18, RCMP Papers, A1, Comptroller’s Office, Vol. 1, file 4–74, Macleod to French, 15 Jan. 1874. Similar memoranda of about the same date were submitted by Young and Carvell for “A” and “C” Divisions.


48 PAM, Morris Papers, Morris letterbook, Morris to David Laird, minister of the interior, 5 Feb. 1874.

49 See note 34, this chapter.

50 Breden was the first to go; see PAC, RG18, RCMP Papers, A1, Comptroller’s Office, Vol. 1, file 93–74.

51 The events at the camp at Dufferin are among the best-known aspects of the force’s early history; see, for example, Samuel Benfield Steele, op. cit., Chap. 5, passim, and John Peter Turner, op. cit., Vol. 1, Chap. 4, passim.
Appendix A. “An Account Submitted to the Dominion Government by A. McArthur and Company of Winnipeg, 7th January 1874.”


Appendix B. Daily Routines.

1 Daily Order Book, 12 Nov. 1873, 5 Jan. 1874, 15 April 1874.

Appendix C. Notes on the Cypress Hills Massacre and the Formation of the North-West Mounted Police.


2 No official Hansard was published that year; this excerpt is from the Scrapbook Debates collated by the National Library of Canada from newspaper accounts of Parliamentary proceedings.

3 Canada. Laws, Statutes, etc., 36 Victoria, cap. 35, 1873.


6 Daily Herald (Helena), 11 June 1873.

7 PAC, RG7, G6, Vol. 24, Clurn to secretary of the interior, 8 Aug. 1873, in Thornton to Dufferin, No. 27, 21 Aug. 1873.

8 PAM, Morris Papers, items 33, 35.

9 PAC, MG27, I, C8, Morris Papers, Campbell to Morris, 14 Aug. 1873; ibid., Morris to Campbell, 27 Aug. 1873.

10 PAC, Morris Papers, letterbooks, Morris to Campbell, 20 Aug. 1873.

11 Ibid., 26 Aug. 1873.

12 Ibid., 28 Aug., 3 Sept. and 8 Sept. 1873.

13 PAC, RG2, 1, Vol. 6, order in council No. 1134, 30 Aug. 1873.


15 PAC, MG27, I, C8, Morris Papers, Campbell to Morris, 8 Sept. 1873.

16 PAC, RG9, II, B1, Adjutant-General’s Office, Vol. 520, Powell to Macdonald, 8 Sept. 1873.


18 PAC, RG9, II, B1, Adjutant-General’s Office, Vol. 521, Powell to Young, 18 Sept. 1873.


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Morton, W.L.

Ottawa Daily Citizen
1873.

Quebec Daily Mercury
1873.

Sharp, Paul F.

Steele, Samuel Benfield
Turner, John Peter
Whisky, Horses and Death:  
The Cypress Hills Massacre and its Sequel  
by Philip Goldring  

Canadian Historic Sites  
No. 21  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>43</th>
<th>Abstract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Preface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Prologue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>The Characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>The Scene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>The Tragedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Anti-Climax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Epilogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Appendix A. Abel Farwell and the Cypress Hills Massacre Story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Appendix B. Descriptions of the Massacre Site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Appendix C. The Date of the Massacre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Endnotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract
For about three years before the establishment of Fort Walsh in 1875, the Cypress Hills had been a haven for whisky traders. Their activities are chiefly remembered for the slaughter inflicted in 1873 on a band of Assiniboine by some of the traders and a passing band of white men from Montana. The immediate cause of the massacre was the supposed theft of a trader's horse, but the case gave rise to wide controversy about the value and application of the law to native peoples on the frontier of white trade and settlement.

Submitted for publication 1973, by Philip Goldring, National Historic Parks and Site Branch, Ottawa.

Preface
In 1968 the National Historic Parks and Sites Branch of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs acquired the Cypress Hills massacre site from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. In 1972 it became necessary to determine the accuracy of the traditionally ascribed sites of Fort Farwell, Fort Soloman and the Indian camp around which the massacre took place. The material uncovered was unsatisfactory to some extent; it was wholly consistent with the traditional image of the site, but offered no positive or striking confirmation that the traditions were correct. It was therefore decided to try archaeological investigations, which began in August 1971. The archaeologist, Jack Elliott, made discoveries which thoroughly justified the time and effort expended and it now seems pointless to dispute the traditional arrangement of sites about the massacre grounds: Fort Farwell stood on the west bank of Battle Creek, Fort Soloman about 600 feet away on the east bank, and the Indian camp on the south side of the coulee, east of the creek. The two trading posts stood on land now surveyed within Section 9 of Township 7, Range 29 west of the third meridian. The Indian camp, though only a few hundred feet southeast of Fort Soloman, appears to have lain wholly, or almost wholly, in Section 10.

Although tradition faithfully recorded the arrangement of buildings about the site, it was less careful of the massacre story itself. The historical record is littered with inaccuracies, careless descriptions and unwarranted assumptions. It soon became apparent that I had amassed a more extensive collection of firsthand accounts of the massacre than has been available to any previous writer, enough to justify going beyond immediate operational needs and writing a new story of the massacre based entirely on primary sources.

In general I have followed the spellings and translations of names current in the 1870s and where inconsistencies arise, I have followed the spelling given in official documents rather than that of newspapers or other accounts. A single exception is the use of "Soloman"; according to Jack Elliott, this is the correct spelling of a common Métis name. In quotations from contemporary sources, spellings have been left as they were, but obvious typographical errors in newspaper accounts have been corrected.

The collection of information on the massacre was not a single-handed effort. Modern transcripts of 19th-century Department of Justice papers were sent by the RCMP to National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, probably before 1960. Many of these documents are of great interest and not all of them can still be found in the justice department's records, which were severely

43
pruned about a decade ago. Original copies of some of these documents can still be found elsewhere; in such cases I have cited the surviving original. Where a comparison is possible, however, the transcripts are such faithful copies that I have relied on the RCMP typescript in cases where no other copy exists. Another substantial part of my notes consists of excerpts from Montana newspapers, made available by F. Verspoor, formerly attached to Western Region Office, National and Historic Parks Branch. I also profitted from consulting the research notes of my colleague Robert Allen after he examined the T.C. Power Brothers Company records in Helena, Montana.

I am indebted to many other people for contributions of various sorts. George Shepherd, curator of the Western Development Museum in Saskatoon and a long-time student of the Cypress Hills and their history, gave useful advice and encouragement. Jack Elliott, director of the Galt Museum in Lethbridge, Alberta, and an authority on Métis winterers in the Cypress Hills, read an early draft of the manuscript and made several valuable suggestions. Members of the staff of the National Historic Parks and Sites Branch’s Western Region, H.A. Tatro and A. Buziak, took me over the massacre site. I am grateful also for the patience of J. O’Brien of the Public Records Division, Public Archives of Canada, and the assistance of John Bovey, provincial archivist of Manitoba, and his assistant archivists, B. Hyman and E. Blight.

Prologue
Late in the spring of 1873 the tranquility of the Cypress Hills was broken by one of the most extraordinary events in the early history of Canada’s Northwest Territories. This was the Cypress Hills massacre, the killing of many Assiniboine by a small party of frontiersmen from Montana when a drunken fight followed the disappearance of a white man’s horse. The Indian encampment, 40 lodges or more, was totally destroyed and the survivors scattered over the hills, leaving perhaps a score of dead in the fields and bushes. The whites paused long enough only to bury their sole casualty, a hapless victim of his own bravado; then they, too, left the valley.

The massacre story is properly part of the history of the United States frontier because the Cypress Hills in 1873 were on the fringe of American trade and settlement. There was no significant contact with Canada except through some Métis winterers, a thousand or more nomadic hide-hunters and part-time traders. Yet the sequel to the massacre story is an integral part of Canadian history. The massacre was a direct result of contact between the Plains Indians and the commercial venturers who pressed from the United States into the Northwest Territories, newly purchased and not yet occupied by Canada. The affair was unique: American incursions into Canada’s Northwest were a relatively novel development, and the Dominion government was already taking steps to curtail and control them. But for a short span of years a century ago, laws made far away were unenforceable. The plains were a scene of anarchy, and violence was perpetrated by men who had no stake in preserving the general balance which had hitherto prevailed. The pursuit of these men by Dominion officials showed the Indians that they could expect protection at least from individual crimes by whites, even if a broader question, the full cultural impact of white settlement, remained to be resolved.
The Characters

The Indians of the northwestern plains of the North American interior, long before recorded time, were drawn towards the Cypress Hills. To the traveller, the hills present a sudden and pleasant vista of deep green, a curlicue relic of a pre-glacial age, standing alone since the dusty plains around were scoured flat by the great moving pack of ice. Vegetation flourishes and the hills are even now a natural sanctuary for all sorts of animals which are otherwise not to be seen for miles around. The hills mark part of the divide between the plains which stretch away towards the Mississippi and the Gulf of Mexico to the south, and the vast territory which drains northeastward into Hudson Bay. The region is remote, wildly beautiful and sparsely peopled: but for centuries it had much to offer the Plains Indians.

In a mechanical age the hills are scantily populated in comparison with the prairies which surround them. In earlier times, before the horse was seen on the plains, the hills had many attractions to a native population. Ample wood and water, shelter and plentiful game brought the people whose innumerable tipi rings and flint artifacts still litter the Cypress Hills. This peaceful occupation became impossible in the increasing clash of tribal organizations which followed the arrival of the horse. No tribe completely mastered the region; it lay on the fringes of territory controlled by the Cree, Assiniboine, Gros Ventre and Blackfoot. The hills remained the same, but they no longer offered secure refuge and if a few bands hunted the prolific game, they did so at constant risk of being surprised by a hostile party of some other tribe. This sporadic and inconclusive skirmishing persisted until gradually, after 1850, the Métis hivernants, or winterers, controlled the area by their fighting superiority.¹

A new cause of instability appeared in the early 1870s with the arrival of whisky traders from Fort Benton. Throughout the winter of 1872–73, a succession of Indian bands came to the valley of what we now call Battle Creek, near the gap which divides the central from the eastern plateau of the hills. Their large camp consisted of several bands, the principal chief being an Assiniboine named Manga. Snowbound, the chiefs were not able to prevent demoralization of their people due to the trade of two whisky posts, Fort Farwell and Fort Solomon, located a few hundred yards from the camp. The chiefs fretted impatiently, waiting for spring and a chance to move on, while the camp was impoverished by the ruinous trade and split by feuds originating in drink. A warm spell in early spring liberated these bands and they moved on toward their customary summer hunting-grounds.

Their campsite, however, did not long remain empty; it became the temporary home of a number of different Indian parties. In the middle of April a war party of some 17 Stonies spent two days at the whisky posts and vanished before dawn of the third day, taking three horses with them from Fort Farwell. Another Indian party was the remnant of a band under Manitupotis (Little Soldier), which had set out from an intended winter camp on Battle River and was driven by starvation across 200 miles of frozen prairie to seek the shelter and food the Indians knew could be found in abundance in the Cypress Hills. Thirty members of this band failed to reach the hills, but two dozen lodges encamped to recuperate in the old campsite near the whisky posts. There they were joined by other small bands of Assiniboine, one led by Minashenayen and about a dozen lodges under Inihan Kinyen.² They were a sorry lot. The survivors of the winter trek had retained little but their lives; Minashenayen’s band had lost all its horses; the Indians were scantily armed with bows and arrows and obsolete firearms. Yet they were numerous enough; in that one spot were camped more than 40 lodges, about 250 people.

The Cypress Hills cover more than 200 square miles and there was obviously a special reason for the concentration of Indians on one site at this particular time. The attraction was a variety of American merchandise at the two trading posts – blankets, tobacco, simple implements and trinkets, and the ever-present whisky. These goods were purveyed by a number of traders who used Fort Benton in Montana as a supply base and drew their supplies from the burgeoning T.C. Power Brothers Company at Benton. The fraternity of frontier traders encompassed a wide variety of men, but they all had one thing in common: they were engaged in illegal trade which by its nature was destroying morale and social organization among their native customers. The whisky traders were driven by many influences. Failure elsewhere, adventure-some spirits or plain lack of scruples prompted them to move beyond the law and hasten the disruption of native life which was bound, in any case, to change soon because of the spread of white settlement.

Unhappily for the Northwest Indians, the whisky traders were beyond the law in more than one sense. Their penetration of the lands which now make up southern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan was propelled not only by the normal motives of commercial expansion, but also by the growing pressure of law enforcement in Montana, where it was illegal to trade spirits to Indians. No such prohibitions inhibited the trader in the adjacent Canadian territory, where the law was the same, but was not enforced. The Hudson’s Bay Company was the only European authority which had hitherto reached far beyond the bounds of settlement in northwestern British North America, but even the Company had not managed to plant firm roots in the Cypress Hills.
The Cypress Hills were part of a territory nominally under British sovereignty, but never effectively controlled by either the Hudson's Bay Company or the Canadian government until the North-West Mounted Police established Fort MacLeod in 1874. The whisky post, Fort Whoop-Up, was destroyed the same year. The region continued to receive most of its imports through the United States territory of Montana until the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway. (Map by S. Epps.)
Fort Benton on the Missouri has of late become a place of very considerable importance. For the first time in the history of the Saskatchewan, carts passed safely from Edmonton to Benton during the course of last summer. Already the merchants of Benton are bidding high for the possession of the trade of the Upper Saskatchewan. As the Benton merchants grasped for the trade of the Saskatchewan (threatening to assume there the role already taken by St. Paul in Manitoba), the isolated region between the Hudson’s Bay Company posts of the Upper Saskatchewan and the mining towns of Montana began to attract traders. The most costly and most celebrated of these posts was Fort Whoop-Up, erected in 1869 at the junction of the St. Mary and Oldman rivers; but the years that followed brought a string of less famous whisky forts. By 1872 the trade had penetrated the Cypress Hills.

There were 13 whisky traders within three miles of Little Soldier’s camp in the spring of 1873, in the valley of what was then known vaguely as the north fork of the Milk River. Half a dozen or more of these traders were within two minutes’ walk of the Indian camp, trading at Forts Soloman and Farwell. On the same side of the creek as the camp, Moses Soloman and George Bell had a considerable stock of whisky even after most of their competitors had run out; on the opposite side, a cluster of traders lived in loose association with their host Abel Farwell. Of these, James Marshall, Petersen and perhaps George Hammond all traded whisky to the successive inhabitants of the camp across the creek. In the neighbourhood, too, were Paul Rivers and William Rowe. Rivers was killed by Indians in the spring of 1873; Rowe moved out shortly afterward, turning over his stock of whisky to Farwell. Farwell swore after the event that he had never traded whisky to the Indians and had only bought out Rowe’s stock to keep him out of the trade. Yet it hardly seems likely that Farwell travelled 170 miles from Fort Benton to winter in bitter cold among the Indians without taking along ample supplies of the most profitable trading commodity known on the frontier.

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Fewer than half, probably, of the white men on Battle Creek that winter are known, but details about some of them have survived. Abel Farwell, 35 that year and married to a Crow Indian named Mary, came originally from Fort Peck, but had traded out of Benton for a number of years. His interpreter was Alexis Lebom bard, an aging Métis who had worked for Moses Soloman the previous year before coming to Farwell in the autumn. Lebom bard also kept his wife at Fort Farwell, as did George Hammond, a French Canadian (despite his name) whose function at the fort is unclear. Attached to the rear of Farwell’s fort was a log house where Marshall and Petersen lived and dealt in whisky. Apart from these people there was an indeterminate number of helpers and hangers-on, including one man called Kerr and another name Garry Bourke.

Fort Soloman was built in the fall of 1872 by Moses Soloman, a trader from Fort Benton and, like Farwell, a customer of the T.C. Power Company. A part share in Soloman’s business was owned by George M. Bell, an ex-soldier who as recently as 1869 had fought against Indians while he was enlisted in the United States 13th Infantry. John C. Duval, a Métis from Fort Benton, had accompanied Soloman to the hills in some indeterminate role; so had Antonio Amei, a native of New Mexico. Also present was Philander Vogle, who had come north with Farwell, helped him build his fort, then moved over to work for Soloman. Vogle’s feet had been badly frozen during the winter of 1872–73, but by spring he could walk reasonably well. Another occupant of Soloman’s fort at the time of the massacre was John MacFarlane, a hunter who had wintered in the hills. Altogether, the occupants of the two forts were not an exceptional lot among frontiersmen; they were engaged in a dirty trade, but there is nothing to suggest that they were any better or worse than the general run of men on the American frontier at the time.

During the fight between the Assiniboine and the white men which took place on 1 June, another group was present but took no part in the affray. They were Métis winterers, another strand in the fabric of human life in the hills that year. They came from a temporary settlement of more than 500 people, a cluster of 50 tents about a day’s ride (25 miles) from the trading posts. Métis, many of them natives of Red River, had been frequenting the hills, hunting buffalo, since the middle of the century. Their role, appropriately, combined those of Indians and whites. They were hunters, killing animals for food and skins. A few, like Moses Soloman, were in trade in a small way; others served the Benton traders as interpreters or freighters. It was in the latter role that a number had been summoned to Fort Farwell in the last days of May. Farwell had ridden off to their camp and hired enough men and carts to pack up his season’s returns of furs and his unused stock of goods and carry it all back to Fort Benton. The Métis came to Farwell’s even though there had been rumours of trouble in that neighbourhood. An Assiniboine had come to the winterers’ camp the night before the men set out for Farwell’s and told them that the band had planned an attack on Fort Soloman and that he had
Vital Turcotte. Like the other characters in the Cypress Hills drama, none of them would now be remembered if it were not for the events of 1 June.

The villains of the piece, arriving under cover of darkness on the last night in May, were a party from Fort Benton, a dozen or so men under the leadership of John Evans and Thomas Hardwick. They were not traders, but a gang of men to whom the traditional pejoratives "outlaws," "desperadoes," or "frontier ruffians" might very well apply. At least two of them were well-known as horse thieves and the remainder were reliably reported to be "a set of scamps who have no permanent home or abiding place" and "persons of the worst class in the country."7 Were it not for their character, they might have deserved some sympathy for the situation which led them to the Cypress Hills that spring. They were wolfers, part of that unpopular fraternity which hunted wolves, not with traps or guns but with strychnine. After a busy season of this activity they made their way back toward Fort Benton where men of their type habitually congregated toward the end of May to sell their furs, drink away part of the proceeds and plan their activities for the coming season. So the Hardwick gang was making its way toward Benton with the season's catch and a large number of horses. They made their last camp a day's journey from their destination; here a passing band of Crees, venturing far out of their own territory, caught the wolfers unaware and turned the tables on them by riding off with 40 head of horses. Hardwick and his friends immediately took their furs into Fort Benton, stashed them there and made an unsuccessful plea for military assistance to recover their stolen property. The local garrison was already depleted by the dispatch of a detachment on a special mission and Hardwick's request was turned down. Frustrated, the wolfers reassembled to follow the trail, still fresh, of the Cree raiders.8

The horses were stolen on 17 May: two weeks later, Hardwick and his little band of followers had to admit they had lost the trail. They were by this time well into the Cypress Hills where they camped for the night on the thirty-first. They knew, however, that traders were established in the area and Hardwick and Evans agreed to find the forts and scout the camps of whatever Indians were located nearby. If the horses were there, "then the whole party would slip in and try to recover our horses in Indian fashion," as Evans wrote afterward.9 They were most unhappy, then, to find how utterly destitute the encampment was of horses and they stopped at Fort Farwell to inquire further about possible news of their missing animals.

Farwell received them coolly, knowing their reputations and not wishing to have much to do with them. He told them, "No, the camp has only five or six horses, and they have not got yours."10 He was, nevertheless, sufficiently hospitable to listen to their story and to tell them to bring their party in for breakfast. Hardwick stayed all night, while Evans returned to the remainder of the party. By eight in the morning the dozen men were sitting around a fire in a temporary encampment about 80 yards from Fort Farwell.11

During the years which followed, a fair amount came to be known about some of the members of this party although a full and authentic list of all the men was never compiled. Sketchy biographical details are available for five of them. Thomas W. Hardwick of Carrollton, Missouri, was about 29 at the time of the massacre. John H. Evans, 26, was a native of Fort Dodge, Iowa. Trevanion Hale, 32, was also from Iowa and 24-year-old S. A. Harper was from Ohio. The only recorded Easterner was somewhat older: Elijah Jefferson Devereaux was born in Maine and was probably a French Canadian.12 Less is known of the other members of the frontier band. S. Vincent and Charles Smith were in the party; Charles Ladd was a witness to the massacre and probably belonged to the Benton group. Edward Legrace, the lone white killed in the massacre, was one of the Benton group as was James Hughes, the only member of the party subsequently tried in Canada for murder. There were two Métis in the Hardwick group, Joseph Lange and Xavier Faillon.13 There may have been a thirteenth man, a young Scot named Donald Graham, but his version of the massacre is unconvincing and his claim to have participated with Hardwick's gang is substantiated only by his own statement 50 years later.14 Even if we knew nothing of the composition of the party, its actions betrayed its character. Hardwick and his men were impetuous, unscrupulous and more than ready to settle disputes with the Winchester and Henry repeating rifles which all of them carried.
The Scene
In the centre of the Cypress Hills, a few miles east of the present boundary between Saskatchewan and Alberta and 40 miles north of the international boundary, the valley of what we now call Battle Creek cuts a trench through uneven terrain. At one point, a mile and one-half below the junction of Spring Creek with Battle Creek (where the Mounted Police set Fort Walsh to quell the whisky trade in 1875), the hills rise gently away from the water well back from the creek banks, the river turns sharply to the east and the valley widens slightly to take the shape of a bowl. This has two openings toward the north. The river is one and the other is a short, deep box canyon from which a coulee twists across gently sloping ground to join Battle Creek. A spring wells up in the hillside and empties into the creek 400 feet upstream from the mouth of the coulee. It is an impressive place, remarkably attractive even in the striking scenery of the Cypress Hills. This, a century ago, was the scene of the Cypress Hills massacre.

In the fall of 1872 Abel Farwell arrived from Fort Benton and built his fort, a collection of palisaded huts, about 100 feet from the nearest point on the stream and 600 feet in a straight line from the point where the coulee joins the creek. Facing Farwell’s fort in friendly rivalry was one built by Moses Soloman at about the same time. Fort Soloman was square with bastions. The main building was L-shaped, with two walls of log palisade to fill out the complex into a square or rectangular shape. The lone gate could be locked against intruders by what the watchman later called “a log chain.”

The fort was 150 feet roughly northwest of the nearest point on the coulee and 600 feet from Fort Farwell. The third feature of human habitation in the area was the Indian camp, a cluster of 40 or more lodges on rising ground south of the coulee. At no point was it closer than 42 feet from the coulee and it was probably at no point closer to the creek than about 50 feet. It was therefore more than 600 feet from Fort Farwell, on the opposite side of the stream.

For years the exact configuration of the massacre ground was in doubt and the reputed locations of the two forts and the Indian camp rested on the slim evidence of an old Métis who had herded cattle on the site seven or eight years after the massacre. Over 50 years later, he pointed out to interested individuals the site where he had once found human bones and that, it was decided, must be the campsite. This recollection of Jules Quesnelle was a useful indication, but by no means decisive. The issue was left further in doubt when amateur archaeological efforts in the mid-1940s failed to turn up evidence of the body of Ed Legrace, who was known to have been buried under Fort Soloman. In 1972 the National Historic Parks and Sites Branch began historical and archaeological research to find the exact locations of the two posts and the Indian camp. Documentary research failed to turn up a contemporary map of the massacre site (though one was drawn in 1875), but did confirm that the traditionally ascribed location satisfied the measurements taken on the site by the Mounted Police in 1875. Part of the traditional story was given dramatic confirmation by the archaeological efforts by Jack Elliott on the supposed site of Fort Soloman. He discovered there a skeleton which appears to be that of an adult male, buried by whites. The grave provided no objective means of determining that the remains were definitely those of Legrace, but the burial coincides with the supposed location of Legrace’s grave. The region has a sparse history of white settlement and it is unlikely that another, unrecorded burial would have taken place at that spot. Elliott also found evidence of log structures dating from after 1850 under the site of Fort Farwell. Assuming, then, that the two trading posts have been correctly located, the documentary evidence makes it clear that the Indian camp stood on the south side of the coulee, east of the creek and far enough up the slope to be visible from both forts.

Such was the scene of the Cypress Hills massacre. On the west side of the creek stood Fort Farwell; opposite were Soloman’s post and the Indian camp. A fragile balance had been preserved between the whites and the successive bands of Indians who had occupied that encampment. Then, on the eve of Farwell’s departure from the hills, the Benton party arrived. Their presence, their gross intemperance, would destroy everything. Before they left, death swept down the valley; all human habitation became smoking ruins. The passage of seasons and the flooding of Battle Creek soon erased all but a shadow of the forts and the campsite, but nothing has washed away the notoriety which the massacre of 1873 gave to the Cypress Hills.
The site of the Cypress Hills massacre. The precise location of the Indian camp is unknown, but it must have been east of Battle Creek and south of the coulee. The ground to the north of Fort Soloman rises abruptly; more gradual slopes dominate the valley west of Fort Farwell and east of the site of the Indian camp. (Map by S. Epps.)
The Tragedy

Morning broke on the little cluster of tents and forts on Battle Creek, the beginning of a clear Sunday, 1 June. With daylight came the 12 companions of Hardwick who settled down to cook a rough breakfast on campfires a stone's throw from Fort Farwell. The men at Soloman's noted the unusual activity and sent George Bell over to invite the new arrivals to the fort for a visit. Van Hale and a few others waded across the creek with Bell and met the rest of Soloman's party, who told "horrible tales of how the Indians had abused them, had shot through their windows, and were repeatedly threatening to kill them all." Relations between Soloman and the Indians were very bad just then for the latter believed the traders had cheated them. An intoxicated Indian had fired at the fort a few days previously and Soloman had forbidden the natives to enter his post. He seemed determined, however, to stay at his fort until his supplies were exhausted before winding up his business. His visitors did not stay long on Sunday morning; after Hughes and Harper bought some liquor, the newcomers went back to their camp beside Farwell's and settled down to enjoy their purchase.

During the morning, different activities occupied the men around Farwell's. The members of the Benton party, having no business that day, were undoubtedly drinking. Lebombard was counting robes and passing them on to the Métis who packed them into carts. The measured pace of this activity was ruptured about noon when George Hammond came roaring out of the fort, complaining that his horse had been stolen. This horse had already had a chequered career: it was one of three stolen by the Stonies in April and had been returned to Hammond only the day before. Hammond had rewarded the Indian who brought it in with two gallons of whisky, a blanket and some tobacco. Now it appeared to Hammond that the Indian had so liked the exchange he wanted to repeat it. In truth, the horse had merely strolled through an open gate and was grazing peacefully with some others in brush a few hundred yards from the fort.

Hammond may well have been drunk; it was most unlikely that Indians had slipped unnoticed into a fort surrounded by armed men and then escaped, stealing three horses. Nonetheless, he stormed around, cursing vociferously in French and English and inciting the Benton men, "They have stolen my horse again; let us go over and take theirs in return." The others crowded around, particularly sensitive just then about the subject of stolen horses, and most of them agreed that the Indians should be taught a lesson. Farwell heard the men threatening to seize the Indians' horses or even to "clean out" the camp. He thought this talk was just bravado, but he hastened to smooth Hammond's ruffled feathers. "These Indians brought the horse back and gave it to you," he pointed out, "and if they had wanted it they would have kept it." Hammond remained unconvinced and returned to the fort for his gun. Then, with all but three of the Benton men striding along behind him, he moved off toward the Indian camp. Just as this party gained the east bank of the creek, Lebombard saw Hammond's horse being led back into the fort. He called out to Hammond in French, but the latter just looked back quickly and then ignored his call and pressed on toward the camp. By this time Farwell was already among the Assiniboines, where he had rushed in advance of the hostile party, determined to act as peacemaker.

The Indian camp was in even greater turmoil than Farwell's post. Inihan Kinyen had visited one of the traders in the morning and had been warned that his people could expect trouble from the new arrivals from Benton. He instructed his band to break camp, but a rash man named Wincanahe mocked the chief, belittled his fears and convinced the band to stay where they were. As if to drive away fear, the Indians then turned to the whisky jugs and as one of them (a boy of 12 at the time) recalled years afterward, "Whiskey flowed like water in the camps and by mid-day the tribesmen were all hopelessly drunk." The whites on both sides of the creek could see the Indians dancing about the camp, giving out excited shouts and cries. Then disorder turned to panic when two Métis witnessed the belligerent preparations at the camp of the Benton party and rushed to the Indians to give the alarm. They warned the Indians they might not live till sundown and urged them to lie close to the ground. Immediately the camp was full of frenzied activity as women picked up their children and fled to the surrounding bushes and men, taking only their weapons, followed close behind. Even the dogs sensed the panic and fled in all directions.

It was into this chaos that Hammond strode, took two horses from behind the camp and attempted to lead them back toward the creek. He was stopped by an Indian named Bighead, who seized the horses. Hammond then turned and joined the main party of whites, now standing impatiently in the coulee between the camp and Fort Soloman. The whites were watching with irritation as Farwell, surrounded by Indians, was trying to make himself understood. He was apparently trying to work out a deal with one of the lesser chiefs to hold two of the Indians' horses as a token of their good intentions until Hammond's horse should be found. The group in the coulee, which included most of the Benton party and some of Farwell's friends, grew impatient with such methods and looked apprehensively at the threatening gestures made by some of the natives. One Assiniboine aimed a gun at Farwell, but
a woman knocked it away and hurried the man into a lodge. Farwell, meanwhile, returned to the party in the coulee, told them he had worked out an agreement with the chief and countered their scepticism by offering to get Lebombard to confirm his report. Hammond, Hardwick and the other men in the coulee were hardly inclined to wait. The Indians were still milling about in apprehension and confusion, and some of the bolder or drunker men among them were challenging the whites to a fight. The flight of the women and children was quickly interpreted by the whites as a sign that the Indians anticipated a battle. Farwell claimed that Hammond fired first; other witnesses were equally sure that both parties fired preliminary challenge shots into the air. In any event, the Benton party and the handful of men from Fort Farwell took advantage of the shelter of the coulee to fire repeated murderous volleys through the camp.

The foregoing is a reasonable reconstruction of the start of the massacre, based on statements of witnesses for both sides in the hearings and trials which followed the slaughter. In these legal proceedings the prosecution always alleged premeditation on the part of the whites, but never proved it. Even Farwell, the major witness for the prosecution, always maintained that he felt firing would have been avoided if the Indians had possessed Hammond’s horse and had willingly given it up. It is also fully possible that the defendants told the truth when they alleged they were afraid for their lives when they opened fire. Nonetheless, responsibility for the affair must rest with the white party, as an American jurist, Commissioner W.E. Cullen, pointed out after he discharged five of the Benton party at an extradition hearing two years later:

The preponderance of testimony is also to the effect that the Indians commenced the firing, though they were doubtless provoked to this by the apparently hostile attitude of the whites. Some of the Indians were intoxicated, and with all their savage fierceness intensified by drink, it would require but little provocation to induce them to commence hostilities. An armed party menacing their camp, no matter for what purpose, was by no means a slight provocation.

After this amateur dissertation on Indian psychology, the commissioner turned to examine the white men’s motives and actions:

It would seem from the testimony that the most that was contemplated by the defendants... in this aggressive movement was to intimidate the Indians... It was sheer folly and wantonness on their part, but if they went for no other purpose than that of intimidation, it amounted to no more than an aggravated trespass, and the killing at most was but manslaughter.

The Indians, for their part, were relatively blameless victims of the whisky trade and of the trigger-happy whites’ misinterpretation of the confusion in the camp. Up to the outbreak of shooting many of the Indians tried to ignore the menace of the party in the coulee and to make peace through Farwell; others fled. Parley and flight were clearly their only hopes for salvation for their superiority in numbers over the whites was no match for the advantages the latter enjoyed. The Indian leaders (and most fighting men) were incapacitated by drink; they and their homes were fully exposed to fire from the shelter of the coulee. Muzzle-loading muskets were a hopeless mismatch against the Henry and Winchester repeaters of the whites, and the members of Benton party were assisted by the guns of some of Soloman’s party, firing into the camp from the roof or from in front of Fort Soloman. It is hardly surprising that the whites were able, without a single casualty, to drive the Indians out of their encampment and to wreck it completely. It was a fight only in the sense that the Indians may have unintentionally provoked the firing and later tried to avenge it by shooting from concealment. The traditional description of the affair is apt: it was a massacre.

After the Indians had scattered, Hardwick took a small mounted party across the creek to shoot down upon the Indians who were hidden in the bushes around the mouth of the coulee and on the opposite bank. Farwell came out of his fort and stopped them, confronting Hardwick with the fact that the missing horse had not been stolen and was now in the fort: it was therefore pointless to continue the fight. Hardwick reportedly snapped back, “We’ve started in, and we’ll clean them all out if we can.” He misjudged his harried opponents for there were Indians hidden on the hill above the fort; these drove the whites back toward the creek. A small party of whites then left off sacking the camp and dashed back to Hardwick’s relief. They tried to cross the creek right where a number of Indians were hiding; one of these managed to put a bullet through the heart of Ed Legrace. The Indian was promptly shot, but this action had cooled the whites’ enthusiasm for fighting and the massacre was over.

After the Indians had scattered, a few of the whites swept through the camp tearing up lodges and murdering the few remaining inhabitants. An exception was made for four women (one of them with a small child) who were captured and held overnight at Fort Soloman before being turned over to Mary Farwell in the morning. Little Soldier was one of the last Indians found in the camp. He was awakened from his stupor by his wife, who tried to lead him to the supposed safety of one of the forts. He said, “I will die here,” and turning, saw the body of his father. He called out to the nearest Americans, “White men, you will know what you
have done today, you never knew a 'woody mountain Assiniboine' Indian to harm a white man." Vincent shot him. After his wife and her mother were led away, an old Indian named Wan-
kantu was clubbed to death with a hatchet and his severed head was raised on a lodge-pole, a hideous trophy for the assassins of the band.16

Quiet returned to the valley as the evening sun slid behind the western wall of the valley. From Fort Soloman men took a blanket down to the creek bank where the body of Legrace was wrapped and carried on Vincent’s back to the kitchen of Soloman’s post. A sad little procession moved through the small room and some-
boby took a few boards and put together a rough wooden coffin. Later that night or early the next day a shallow grave was dug be-
neath the floor of Soloman’s cellar and the crude coffin was buried.17 This was the only burial. All over the valley were the bodies of dead and dying Assiniboine and their bones lay there for years.

Harper, Hardwick and Lange joined the debauchery at Fort So-
lo- man that night with the captive Indian women. Little Soldier’s wife recalled that a white man had led her into the fort, grabbed me by the arm and ravished me, he remained with me all night and had connection with me many times, every time he did, he told me I would not live till morning . . . . The three (3) old women were in different rooms and myself and another young woman were in separate rooms, the other woman can tell more than me as she had many men with her, there being only one with me.18

Aside from the three Benton men who stayed at Soloman’s, the rest of the party recrossed the creek to spend the night at their temporary camp by Farwell’s. The trader asked them to stay one more day: he had not yet finished packing and did not know how many Indians might still be in the vicinity, waiting to take revenge on any white man imprudent enough to leave himself unprotected.19 (He need not have worried – the broken remnants of the Assiniboine camp scattered until they were taken in by sympathetic Métis.20) Then the two trading parties hastily packed up their remaining goods and returned to Fort Benton. As the leading wagons disappeared over the hills, an unknown hand set fire to the forts, a custom in the hills since the Indians often burned deserted posts anyway. While the Benton party stayed at Farwell’s behest, they amused themselves by stripping the Indian camp of its few remaining poor possessions, piled all the lodges in a heap and set fire to them. Then they split up. Two members of the party returned to Fort Benton. The rest were still determined to pursue their stolen horses and so continued on their search, the venture which had already brought death to the Cypress Hills and a name to Battle Creek.21

The story of the massacre, like an ugly stain, spread slowly across North America. The two wolfers who returned immediately to Fort Benton related their exploits around the saloons of the frontier town. These reports were picked up by the Helena Daily Herald, the major newspaper in the territorial capital. The story, judging by all later accounts, was severely distorted – it claimed that the Indians had met the Benton party arrogantly on the night of their arrival, had told them their horses had been stolen by Crees and said that since the Crees were their allies, the white men could have a fight if they wanted it. Then (the story con-tinued) the whites sheltered for the night in one of the trading posts and at the break of day attacked the encampment "on the Indian plan"; that is, without warning. The death of Edward Legrace was noted and the extent of Indian casualties was grossly, even boastfully, exaggerated: "The 16 or 17 whites attacked and effectually wiped out the forty lodges, very few escaping."22 It is unclear how far this account sprang from the imagination of the Herald’s correspondent, but it was not repudiated by the Benton party until various legal authorities began to talk of the affair as murder and not as a salutary lesson courageously taught to nefarious savages.

The slaughter caused a stir of interest and concern beyond the saloons of Fort Benton. At the end of June a worried citizen, J.J. Wheeler, sent information of the massacre to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington.23 A few days later Garry Bourke accompanied Abel Farwell to the latter’s hometown of Fort Peck, where they gave their version of the story to the Indian agent there, Major A.J. Simmons. This was the agency to which the murdered Assiniboine nominally were attached and Simmons sent an anxious report to his superiors: Hardwick and others, he wrote, "attacked a camp of 40 lodges of peaceful Assiniboines who were almost entirely defenceless, and killed 16 of their number, men, women, and children, and mutilated their bodies in a most outrageous and disgusting manner." Simmons sent Farwell and Bourke to the Board of Indian Commissioners in Bozeman, where a formal deposition was taken. The board’s secretary was particularly incensed at the apparent nonchalance with which the participants publicly treated the massacre: "The parties engaged in the Massacre do not attempt to palliate it, thinking the fact of those mur-dered being Indians, a justification for the outrage."

By the middle of August this file of correspondence had fol-
lo-wed J.J. Wheeler’s letter to the desk of the American secretary of the interior.24 His department referred the matter to the attorney general for possible legal action. The latter reported that he was
unable to touch the matter since the alleged murders had taken place in British territory. The whole dossier was therefore forwarded to Hamilton Fish, the secretary of state, who immediately dispatched it out of the capital to the vacationing British minister, Sir Edward Thornton. Thornton read through the papers and sent them on 21 August to the Canadian governor general in Quebec City, inviting the Canadian government, in the restrained official terminology of the day, to “cause such steps to be taken in the matter, as may appear to you proper and expedient.”

This information reached Ottawa late in August or early in September, by which time it was already stale news. A copy of the Helena Daily Herald story had reached Fort Garry about 20 August and Lieutenant Governor Morris immediately forwarded a copy to the minister of the interior. The Winnipeg newspapers picked up the story and it was telegraphed to the Ottawa Daily Citizen later the same week; it was the Citizen which first published the story in the East, with a succinct report datelined Fort Garry. “A number of Americans attacked a band of Indians on British Territory, murdering twenty-two men and women and children six hundred miles west of here.”

A longer and more detailed statement was written out for the information of the North-West Council by Edward MacKay, a respected Métis hunter and trader who had passed through the Cypress Hills shortly after the massacre. MacKay was summoned before the lieutenant governor to give further particulars and these, too, were set down in an official dispatch to Ottawa. The whole matter was taken up in cabinet on 6 September, a little over three months after the massacre.

The entire situation, as Morris warned the government on more than one occasion in the ensuing month, could prove a watershed in the history of Canadian expansion into the Northwest. Hitherto the government had had to deal only with the relatively settled tribes of the Red River and Lake Manitoba regions. Treaties would soon have to be made with the less placid tribes of the Qu’Appelle and Saskatchewan valleys, tribes which were, as Captain Butler had pointed out two years before, restive and suspicious of outsiders. It was essential, the lieutenant governor thought, to show these Indians that the Dominion would not imitate the disastrous native policy, or lack of effective policy, which had pushed forward the American frontier at the cost of some bloodshed and total lack of communication between the Indian occupants of the land and the white usurpers. The problem in Canada had hitherto been an abstract one: the Indians were alarmed by occasional rumours, but had no vivid cause for grievance. The massacre wrought a stark change in this situation. If the Indians were to be dealt with in peace and mutual confidence,
Anti-Climax

During the late summer of 1873 the Canadian government was forced to pay considerable attention to northwestern affairs. Strong pressure from Morris and authentic reports of the evils of the whisky trade had induced the cabinet, at the end of August, to commit itself to immediate organization of the mounted police force which had been authorized by an Act of Parliament of the previous session.¹ This question had hardly been decided when the Departments of Justice and the Interior began to receive official correspondence respecting the Cypress Hills massacre. The cabinet decided to attempt extradition proceedings and turned the whole matter over to Sir John A. Macdonald, then minister of justice. The latter was beset by all manner of problems at this time, not least among them being his own political survival, and he seems to have been incapable of dealing with more than one matter at once. The mounted police had priority; not until 25 September were the most important decisions respecting the police in process of being implemented by the militia department and the newly appointed police officers. It was late in September, then, when Macdonald turned his attention again to the problem of apprehending the Cypress Hills murderers. Macdonald then decided on the aggressive course of trying to arrest and extradite the wanted men before they returned to Canada for their winter hunt. This choice underlined the impossibility of administering Canada’s laws in the remote parts of the new territory. Since haste was essential, Macdonald chose for the task a man already near the scene, Gilbert McMicken in Winnipeg. McMicken was an old political ally and trusted colleague of Macdonald’s and an intimate adviser of Morris, but in Winnipeg he was widely despised as an archetypal carpetbagger. In addition to his offices as a Dominion land commissioner and deputy receiver general for the Dominion in Winnipeg, he carried from his pre-Manitoba career as a Fenian-hunter the almost nominal office of Dominion police commissioner. This aspect of McMicken’s official personality was dusted off and he was entrusted with warrants for the arrest of Hardwick, Hale, Devereaux, Harper, Vincent and others, an assurance that American federal officials in Montana had been instructed to assist him in every way and orders to move as quickly as possible. The trip proved impossible at so late a season and the affair languished in McMicken’s hands until May 1874 when he was ordered to turn all his instructions and warrants over to George French, the commissioner of the newly formed North-West Mounted Police.²

In the hands of the Mounted Police, the investigation virtually vanished from the government’s view for the better part of a year. In the spring of 1875, however, Commissioner French indicated that the case could be reopened. Justice Minister Fournier therefore presented a minute to the cabinet recommending that Assistant Commissioner Macleod should be appointed a special agent to proceed to Fort Benton in the early part of the summer, when hunters and traders gathered there. In co-operation with the American authorities, Macleod was to arrest five of the Benton party – Hardwick, Hale, Evans, Harper and Devereaux – and an equal number of the traders or their guests: Hammond, MacFarlane, Vogle, Duval and Bell.³ In addition to appointing Macleod to this duty, the government accepted the resignation of A.G. Irvine, commandant of the militia garrison at Fort Garry, gave him an inspector’s commission in the Mounted Police and ordered him to meet Macleod in Montana and assist his efforts there. En route to this assignment Irvine reaped an unexpected windfall – he encountered Alexis Lebombard and, with a touch of melodrama, hired him as guide and interpreter without advising him that he had really passed into the pay of the crown and would before long be called upon to testify on behalf of the Canadian government at the extradition hearings.⁴

For two years since the Cypress Hills massacre the major participants had gone unmolested and unthreatened. It is therefore not surprising that Macleod and Irvine, aided by two United States marshalls and some soldiers, were able to locate and arrest seven astounded frontiersmen in the streets and saloons of Fort Benton on 21 June 1875. (Two soon escaped.) United States attorney Page had earlier warned the Canadians to have the extradition hearing held in Helena – “I think it would be difficult to detain them at Fort Benton” – and Macleod noted the advice.⁵ Accordingly the five prisoners – Hale, Hardwick, Harper, Evans and Devereaux – were sent almost immediately from Benton to Helena where the extradition hearing began on 7 July before United States Commissioner W.E. Cullen.⁶

From the first it was a no-holds-barred confrontation between deeply antagonistic groups. On one side was the Canadian government, desirous of punishing the murderers of Indians and represented by Republican attorneys working under instructions from a federal government recently embarked on a course of attempting to mend fences with Britain and with the western Indians. On the opposite side were the Cypress Hills killers, wedded to a philosophy of retaliation and subjugation of the Indians and represented in court by a phalanx of lawyers, who, in the complicated territorial politics of Montana, were intertwined with the Democratic party and anti-British Fenianism.⁷ The court was therefore a stage for playing out the passions of the anti-British frontier element against the saner policies of the Grant administration. A formal transcript of the hearing has not survived, but
brief summaries were presented in the local newspapers. Considering the depth of public excitement which swirled around the court, an unpopular case was conducted vigorously by the American prosecutor on behalf of Canada and the verdict was a model of judicial impartiality.

When the inquiry opened on 7 July, the prosecution’s first witness was Abel Farwell, the man on whose story the Canadian government was to pin its hopes for a year. The flaws in the Canadian case appeared when Farwell declined to make positive identification that any of the prisoners had actually killed an Indian and indicated further that he thought it improbable there would have been any firing if the Indians had really stolen Hammond’s horse and had returned it when the Benton party went to the camp. Lebombard’s testimony did little good for the prosecution. Then the defence had its innings. It appeared to accept the basic structure of Farwell’s story — that the defendants had followed someone from Farwell’s post to the Indian camp to assist in recovering a stolen horse — but the first witness, Antonio Amei, testified that he had not seen Devereaux among the men in the coulee. A lengthy succession of witnesses was called to prove that Farwell’s testimony was worthless. Some of them claimed to know him personally, others spoke only of knowledge “they had gleaned from the conversation of business men and other residents of Benton.” Farwell’s reputation was thoroughly dragged through the mud in the effort to destroy the fabric of his testimony. One witness gave the game away when he said that he “never heard a man speak well of Farwell for the last two years.” In other words, Farwell acquired his bad name after he reported the massacre to the government! Other witnesses swore that Farwell had, as recently as the current year, said the killers had nothing to fear since it could be proved in court that the Indians had fired first. This the prosecution witness hotly denied, saying that he remembered the conversation in question and it had concerned an entirely different fight. Nonetheless, the defence testimony on 15 and 16 July tended to isolate Farwell’s evidence and to cast a bad light on many details of his story which failed to correspond to the evidence of other witnesses.

On 17 July the prisoners themselves began to give evidence. What they said was given scant coverage in the local papers, but it is clear that they stuck to their story that they had gone to the Indian camp with peaceful intentions and were obliged to take shelter in the coulee and fire on the Indians to save their own lives; that they eventually turned from the defensive to the attack and scattered the Indians, inflicting considerable casualties and suffering one themselves. The prisoners were examined during the week ending 24 July and were released early the next week.

Commissioner Cullen found himself caught between the wording of the extradition treaty and the spirit in which it was interpreted by American courts. The treaty itself obliged him to commit the prisoners for trial if, according to the laws of Canada, there was enough evidence to justify commitment. American judicial precedent, on the other hand, bound him to discharge the prisoners unless he heard sufficient unequivocal evidence to convict as if he were “sitting upon the final trial and hearing of the case.”

The evidence on both sides of the case, he said, was heavily laden with inconsistencies, but the prosecution had not made a clear-cut case for convicting the accused of the two crimes with which they stood accused, murder and assault with intent to commit murder. He accordingly discharged all five from custody.

Cullen criticized the prisoners’ rashness in the harshest terms, but popular opinion ignored the legal nuances and Cullen’s view that the prisoners were guilty, if not of murder, then of various lesser crimes. The town of Helena broke into celebration at the announcement of the verdict; the erstwhile prisoners were treated as conquering heroes when they returned to Fort Benton. The frontier hailed these men, the products of its own harsh conditions. But beneath the anti-British rhetoric and the intricate judicial questions of fact and interpretation there lay a deeper and more important misunderstanding between the prisoners and the Canadian authorities. This misunderstanding was the whole attitude toward Indians and the enforcement of law in frontier regions where groups of fundamentally different origin and divergent interests existed in discord along a fluid line of settlement. To the Mounted Police, the Hardwick gang was a band of outlaws who had, in a dubious cause, settled a quarrel by force and killed many innocent people. To a vocal sector of the Montana populace, the Cypress Hills killers had courageously shown themselves to be the “true advance guards of civilization” who protected their compatriots more efficiently even than “the military forces of the general government.” The Fort Benton Record expressed views which were fundamentally at variance with the traditions of justice and of native policy, which had been transplanted from England to British North America. The Assiniboine, argued the Record, had kept the peace ever since they were taught their salutary lesson on 1 June 1873. Even while the affair was sub judice, the Record argued that conviction of the prisoners would be an invitation to Indians to swoop down on settlements of Montana, hitherto indebted to the Hardwick gang for the peaceful continuance of life. A view even more radically opposed to the British tradition of justice was expressed in a resolution passed by a meeting at Benton which was presided over, appropriately enough, by two Fenians. It was necessary, said a
resolution, for citizens to "protect their own lives and property" and the arrested prisoners were congratulated for doing just that. The meeting then endorsed a dangerous principle, always tempting to those who are impatient with judicial safeguards during times of difficulty — guilt by association, the treatment of a complex group of individuals as if it were a single responsible entity. The hostile attitude of Indians, declared the public meeting, prompted retaliation by the whites and the whole situation was "due entirely to the failure of the government to hold the Indians responsible, individually and collectively, and to punish them for their crimes." The people of the Gallatin valley were less sophisticated: a meeting at Bozeman simply declared that the white population was safe only if it pursued and punished Indians "according to their own method of warfare." 

One fact must be admitted in partial extenuation of the white attitude at the time. All the editorials and resolutions quoted above based their strong opinions, in part, on the government's inability to control and punish individual wrongdoers — hence the impatient conclusion that whole bands of Indians ought to be punished for individual crimes. Such an attitude, of course, encouraged the friction between races and thus perpetuated the disorder of the frontier. It was just such a vicious circle that the Canadian authorities sought to avoid in the Northwest Territories. And it was clear to the Mounted Police, as it was to Morris, that the Indians and whites alike must benefit from (and when guilty, suffer by) the law if the two races were to live in any sort of amity. They also realized that white attacks on Indians tended to be reprisals for native depredations and it was therefore crucially important to win the early confidence of the Indians. The extradition of five members of the Benton gang would have provided a superb demonstration that an Indian life was worth no less than a white one in the eyes of the law in Canada.

In a childish gesture of revenge, Jeff Devereaux swore out a warrant against Macleod, charging him with false arrest. He was briefly detained until the warrant was cancelled by a local judge who pointed out that Macleod was in no way personally responsible for the arrests; he was simply following orders in which the Canadian and American governments concurred. The temporary detention must have sharpened Macleod's anxiety to get back to Canada, even though he returned without prisoners. There was a surprise for him, however, when he got back: Philander Vogle and James Hughes were living quite openly in the vicinity of Fort Macleod and the assistant commissioner, sitting as a stipendiary magistrate for the Northwest Territories, quickly dispatched them for trial to Fort Garry in care of Inspector Irvine. The latter set out for Manitoba by way of the Cypress Hills, intending to take Abel Farwell and Lebombard to the scene of the killing, go over the grounds with each of them separately and thereby get an indication of how valuable their testimony was. This he did, and although the two men differed by 100 feet in their estimation of where the campsites stood, their descriptions of the massacre and of where the various parties had been corresponded fairly well. Apart from this partial confirmation of the prosecution's evidence, Irvine's trip had another cheering feature: while he was in the Cypress Hills he found yet another of the men whom he was hoping to arrest, Soloman's old trading partner, George M. Bell. He was quickly added to the little procession heading towards the Winnipeg jail.

Irvine's arrival at Winnipeg was greeted by the local press with some enthusiasm and special attention was paid to Bell, the one prisoner who had not yet been through a preliminary hearing. Bell, wrote the correspondent of the Free Press, was a relatively young man who from appearances "might or might not be a murderer." Still, he looked every inch a frontiersman and had "probably been educated at Benton and thereabout, to believe that the killing of a few Indians is only what is expected of him, as his mite of assistance towards the march of civilization." (In fact his initial instruction along these lines had been during his stint in the infantry.) Bell was brought before Judge Bétournay at the police court where he pleaded not guilty. The hearing took only three days; Farwell was interrogated first, gave his story succinctly and escaped unscathed from Bell's attempt at cross-examination. He was followed by Lebombard, who began nervously in the unaccustomed solemnity of a courtroom, but gained confidence as he moved along, finally giving a curt and dignified defence against Bell's insinuation that he had been drunk and lying under a cart during the whole affair. (Witnesses on later occasions would swear that Lebombard had not been present at all!) Irvine was the third witness: he presented a map he had made of the massacre ground and testified about the measurements he had taken on the site and the walks he had taken across the terrain with Farwell and Lebombard. The defence called only one witness, Farwell, and counsel's attempt to shake him from his former story was wholly unsuccessful. As a result, Bétournay committed Bell to stand trial for murder, along with Hughes and Vogle, at the October assizes.

At this point James Wickes Taylor, the American consul in Winnipeg, intervened to muddy the waters of justice. It is unclear how he first became involved, but he was successful almost immediately in delaying the trial. His intervention added eight months to the proceedings, forcing postponement from the October assizes to those of February 1876 and then to June. He failed then to se-
Accordingly, Taylor sought the postponements while he tried to secure a conviction and he entertained severe doubts whether the prisoners would get a fair trial in Winnipeg. He evidently shared the view of the Benton traders and editors that the crown’s evidence was perjured, but would suffice for a conviction in a Canadian court. Accordingly, Taylor sought the postponements while he tried to secure admissible testimony from other members of the Benton party. The latter were willing enough to come to Winnipeg, but only if they received a guarantee that they could testify without fear of being arrested, as Van Hale put it, “by the same officers, chained in the same den’ as the men ‘whom we can prove innocent.” To secure this testimony Taylor waded into a sea of red tape which ultimately engulfed Canada’s justice minister, Edward Blake, the British minister in Washington, Sir Edward Thornton, the governor of Montana, B.F. Potts, and John H. Evans, who had become the owner of the impudently named Extradition Saloon at Fort Benton. All were anxious to see the witnesses given safe conduct to and from the court, except for Blake, who coyly washed his hands of the affair by saying that he would not interfere with the interpretation put on the law by the court before which the prisoners stood charged. Thus Taylor’s scattered pleas all returned him to his own doorstep. Ministers and secretaries of state had failed to get results: the fate of the trial rested with Manitoba’s chief justice, Edmund Burke Wood. That fiery old jurist gave short shrift to the suggestion that Hardwick, Evans and party should enter his court any way but in chains.19

Taylor had a short-lived hope that the testimony of the Benton party might be taken by a rogatory commission in American territory. Blake turned down this suggestion too, but Taylor anticipated an amendment in the laws of Canada and the United States and continued to hope that evidence might soon be taken from Evans, Hale and the rest on the American side of the frontier.20 With this in mind he approached the court on 19 June and in an affidavit presented by the prisoners’ counsel, S.C. Biggs, pleaded for yet another adjournment. Wood could no longer be induced to hold the prisoners longer simply on the distant prospect that men accused of the same crimes might give evidence. Nor, for obvious reasons, was Wood about to release the prisoners for trial at a later date. So on 19 June the trial of Bell, Hughes and Vogle finally got under way in the crowded Winnipeg courtroom.21

The prosecution entered the lists with some misgivings. Representing the crown was Francis Cornish, a recent immigrant from Ontario who had been a troublesome character in the province until the government calmed his political passions by the simple expedient of putting him on the public payroll. Irvine had used the postponements of the trial to round up additional witnesses for the crown and he had brought in some of the Assiniboine from whom he had taken written depositions the previous winter. The Indian witnesses proved a disappointment to Cornish, who found them “through no unwillingness on their part” unable to give clear evidence to incriminate any of the three men actually on trial. Several Métis witnesses proved an even greater disappointment. Cornish suspected that they could “give important evidence” if they wished, but were “most unwilling, and inclined to favor the prisoners.” After three meetings with them he concluded they were being tampered with.22 He resolved not to call them, but Biggs summoned them for the defence and the testimony they gave put a serious dent in the prosecution’s armour.

The first morning of the trial was inconclusive. Taylor’s unsuccessful plea for postponement consumed a good deal of time and the examination of Farwell did not elicit much information before the recess was taken for lunch. In the afternoon, however, he gave the evidence on which the crown’s case rested. He had seen trouble brewing over Hammond’s missing horse and hurried to the Assiniboine camp, explained the problem to a chief and convinced the chief to surrender two horses until Hammond’s should be found. But, Farwell said, the other whites were by now in the coulee and calling to him to get out of the way so they could fire on the camp. Farwell tried to convince them to hold fire, but they did not believe his story of a deal with the Indian chief. One of them promised to wait until the trader could get Lebom bard, but as soon as Farwell turned his back, Hammond started to fire. At the trial, Farwell was quite certain the prisoners had taken part in the fight:

When the firing was going on Hughes was in the coulee: Bell and Vogle were near it; I saw Hughes shooting in the direction of the camp; all the men at Soloman’s took a hand in, after the firing commenced; they stood near Soloman’s fort, firing in the direction of the Indian camp.

Cornish must have been pleased with this statement and more so when Biggs’s vigorous cross-examination failed to shake Farwell from his story, apart from the unimportant admission that the Indians might conceivably have shot an arrow before the whites began firing.

On the following morning, the case began to turn against the prosecution as Alexis Lebombard took the stand and shook Farwell’s account to its foundations. When the trader was in the Indian camp, said Lebombard, he was
surrounded by Indians, and seeming as if trying to make himself understood; I knew from my relation with Farwell and the Indians that he could not understand them, and that there was none in the Assiniboine camp who understood any English, except a few words about trade.

This statement cast a pall across Farwell’s testimony; his story of negotiating with the Indian about the missing horse was not vital to his contention that the whites fired first, but to anyone even remotely sympathetic to the prisoners this revelation that Farwell was lying in one part of his testimony must have opened the floodgates to all sorts of doubts about other aspects of his story which stood uncorroborated by the prosecution and contradicted by the defence. Despite this setback, Cornish returned to his examination of the interpreter after the noon recess and once again Lebombard’s testimony let Cornish down badly. He did not remember seeing Hughes that day and as for Bell and Vogle, “I did not notice the two men . . . participating in the fight.” There were men firing from the roof of Fort Soloman, but they were partially concealed and too far away to be recognizable.

The remainder of the prosecution testimony was of little use to either side; Biggs’s cross-examination of Lebombard failed to elicit any new information, but corroborated Farwell’s view that Vogle, though slightly lame, was well able to walk by spring. Mary Farwell’s evidence, given in the last few minutes before the court rose on the twentieth, contributed nothing to either case. It was a bad day for the prosecution and Cornish must have realized that the deck was stacked against him when he informed the court he expected to present his last evidence for the crown the following day.

Cornish called no more witnesses. When court opened at 9:30 Wednesday morning, 21 June, the crown surprisingly rested its case and Biggs’s witnesses were summoned from the dock. The first was Bell, whose hazy story was tied in knots before Cornish had finished. He testified, on behalf of Vogle, that the latter had barred the gate of Fort Soloman when the fighting started and therefore could not have gone outside. Bell claimed he was in the bastion above the Indian room when the fight started, when he called down to Vogle to put the bar across the gate. When Cornish pressed him on the point of whether or not Vogle could have slipped out of the fort during the fight, he became confused and said, at different times within the space of an hour, “I did not stay in the bastion all the time,” “I did not go down to tell Vogle because I wanted to see the fight” and at last, under heavy pressure from Cornish, “I was not watching the camp steadily; I only looked now and again.” As for Lebombard’s assertion that some-body was shooting from the roof of the fort, Bell made the absurd claim that it was impossible to get on top of the bastion.

Vogle himself told a more coherent story. He had been in the Indian room when Bell called down and told him to bar the gate; instead he seized his gun and went to the door where a Métis tried to take his gun, telling him he was too lame to fight. Instead of giving him the weapon, Vogle left the Métis and went into Soloman’s room where he got on the bed and watched the fight through the window. From where he was at various times throughout the fight, claimed Vogle, he could swear with certainty that Bell had not left the fort until the fighting was over.

The two prisoners from Soloman’s party, then, were each other’s witnesses for the fact that neither had left the fort or fired from within it. Hughes was not called. His defence rested on Bell’s assertion that he was not among the men in the coulee, a story corroborated by affidavits written by Hale and Evans, which had been submitted to the court by Taylor. So far the testimony for the defence rested entirely on the evidence of men indicted for murder. Biggs, however, drew a trump card: the Métis witnesses, brought to Winnipeg by the prosecution, were willing to testify that the Indians had been unruly before the fight and had probably fired the first shots.

The witnesses were members of the party of Métis whom Farwell had hired to cart his stock and furs back to Fort Benton. Their testimony was inconsistent, but the weight of numbers and the apparent objectivity of the witnesses themselves cast further doubts on many facts for which Farwell alone was the source. Their testimony was directed by Biggs to prove two points: that the Indians had fired first and that they had been threatening for some time to slaughter the whites in the two trading posts. Joseph Vital Turcotte said of the circumstances immediately preceding the general firing that “four Indians came towards them [the men in the coulee] apparently challenging them,” the Assiniboine fired in the general direction of the whites and moments later the latter responded. Baptiste Champagne, the second Métis witness, stated that he had anticipated fighting and, while he was moving his horses out of the probable line of fire, two naked Indians passed by loading firearms. Shortly afterward he saw four Indians fire a volley at the whites before hiding among the lodges. A third Métis, Joseph Laverdure, admitted under cross-examination that the Americans had fired the first volley, but only as a warning. The Indians had taken it as a challenge and the battle was on. The effect of this testimony was to undermine Farwell’s statement that Hammond fired first without provocation.
Laverdure was also induced to advance a further point which had already been mentioned by Turcotte, that the Métis had been warned in advance of an Indian attack upon the traders. Turcotte claimed that an Assiniboine had detached himself from the camp a few days before the massacre and had gone to the Métis, to whom he confided that “the Indians intended to attack the whites, but he had left them sooner than be a party to such an evil affair.” Turcotte also claimed to have heard an Indian in his cups warn Laverdure, about two hours before the massacre, that “It is a pity you half-breeds are here now, for we have determined to clean out the whites and take all their stock.” Such warnings and bragadocio were probably commonplace for the Métis do not seem to have paid any attention nor to have communicated the warnings to the whites. On the other hand, this evidence may simply have been a dramatic embellishment on the well-known friction between the Assiniboine and Soloman.

Biggs now concluded his courtroom tactics with an unprincipled appeal to prejudice. Notwithstanding the civilized disdain with which the Free Press had treated the prisoner Bell, public opinion was by no means all on the side of the Indians and Cornish was disturbed to find that a section of the community thought the attack was justifiable. This comment is reminiscent of the American Indian agent’s remark three years earlier that people felt “the fact of those murdered being Indians, a justification for the outrage.” Biggs played up to this feeling when he called the Honourable James McKay to the stand. McKay was by birth half-Scottish, half-Indian, but in the course of a remarkable career he had managed to assimilate himself to the Métis, white and Indian elements of the Northwest. (He had been the indispensable go-between during the Indian treaty negotiations in Manitoba in 1871.) Now he shed all pretence of sympathy for the Indians; he had had a bad experience with Little Soldier years before and he assured the Cypress Hills trial jury that “from what I know of the Assiniboine Indians I have no hesitation in saying that they would rob, pillage and murder if they had the opportunity.”

It is hard to say how much effect this irrelevant diatribe had on the jury; considering the other testimony, it was hardly required. Chief Justice Wood furiously struck McKay’s remarks from the record and ordered the jury to disregard them. He also pointed out every avenue by which the jury might find the prisoners guilty of the murder of Little Soldier. It was not necessary to prove that the prisoners, or any one of them, had actually killed the chief; it was enough to prove that they had acted in a criminal combination with the individuals most directly responsible for the killings, and it was necessary to find that the killing was actually murder. This the jury refused to do. The foreman, according to Cornish, declared it “unsafe to convict for want of sufficient evidence of actual participation by the parties under trial.” There were two other charges pending against the three men, but Wood chose simply to discharge them on their own recognizances to reappear when summoned. They quickly left the province and were never called back. The affair languished for years until 1882 when Consul Taylor, still in contact with John Evans in Montana, persuaded the provincial attorney general to issue writs of nolle prosequi for all the accused. The dossier was closed on the Cypress Hills massacre.
Epilogue
Eager writers have tried to attach as much importance as possible to the Cypress Hills massacre. Significant it was, but traditions cling to it which can be swept away by extensive research. The massacre and its result have been credited with everything from the formation of the North-West Mounted Police to the establishment of the force's reputation for efficiency and fair dealing with the Indians. The real circumstances of the creation of the Mounted Police have been alluded to above and the tradition is clearly in error, but the second legend is at least partly true. The collective courage and fairness of the early Mounted Police had an enormous influence on the Indians in permitting the peaceful settlement of the northwestern prairies and the pursuit of the actors in the Cypress Hills affair was one of the more conspicuous episodes in the force's first decade. But a lot of that image was due not only to the force's handling of the affair, but to the government in general. As Lieutenant Governor Morris told the North-West Council when he opened the winter meeting in 1875, You called attention to the necessity of steps being taken to punish the actors in the Cypress Hills tragedy, and your recommendation has been acted upon by the Privy Council, with the best effect, as regards the Indian population.

In 1873 the Dominion's possessions west of Manitoba were a house of cards. A stiff breeze of American annexationism or an energetic flurry of Indian hostility could have brought the whole thing tumbling down. Manitoba was considered safe only because of its garrison. Morris was deeply, often painfully, aware of this and Ottawa, to his chagrin, was less aware. Yet the early Canadian adventure into sovereignty over the Northwest survived its initial fragility. This has inevitably invited comparison with the American frontier experience, a more costly and more bloody enterprise. The patient integrity of the Mounted Police, the scrupulous respect for individuals regardless of race which appeared to be at the basis of the investigation of the Cypress Hills massacre, all buoyed up the Dominion's image in contrast to the military battles and vigilante raids which were a widely deplored but firmly entrenched aspect of American conduct of Indian affairs beyond the immediate frontiers of settlement.

Paradoxically, it was in part the vulnerable state of the Canadian frontier which induced the government to move quickly but delicately to consolidate its hold on the lands in question. There were no regiments of cavalry in reserve, no ample treasury to pour out gold to fight the Indians and retain the West. Good diplomacy was the indispensable weapon against every danger. Until a patchwork of settlement could be spread across the prairies and stitched together with railroads, the authority of the government would rest wholly on the consent of the governed. This was the challenge facing the Dominion and the handling of the Cypress Hills massacre was ideally suited to reassure the Indians and win their confidence.

None of this ought to suggest that Canadian expansion through the Northwest was either painless or blameless. Nor were all the advantages Canada enjoyed purely the result of sound policy. To name but a few factors, the Canadian government's ability to settle most Indians on reservations well in advance of the coming of white settlers was one asset in averting frontier conflict. This development was itself encouraged, grimly, by the subjugation of tribes by the United States Army, by smallpox and by the disappearance of the buffalo, all of which made the Indians more tractable, because more dependent on the government. Different circumstances, then, help to explain the contrast between United States and Canadian westward advances.

Yet the traditional story has merit: before any of the other trends had become decisive, a degree of the Indians' confidence was won by the Canadian government, its agents and its emissaries to the Northwest Indians. The good news of the government's firm handling of the Cypress Hills massacre, as Morris said, reassured the Indians that they might fare better under the subjects of the queen than under the citizens of the republic to the south. It also inhibited the development of a frontier mentality as rabid as that which prevailed in Montana. The massacre did indeed prove a landmark in Canadian administration of the Northwest Territories and it was not the disaster that Morris, in 1873, had feared. The Canadian frontier failed to breed many men in the mould of Tom Hardwick and his friends. To the extent that this was not due to chance and circumstance, it was the conscious outcome of Canadian policy. This policy was inspired, if not by superior virtue, at least by superior wisdom.
Appendix A. Abel Farwell and the Cypress Hills Massacre Story.

The preceding pages have established a fairly clear pattern of events, a comprehensive tale to which virtually every witness, regardless of bias, added an element of truth. The whites—Hammond, the Benton gang and one or two others—went to the Indian camp determined to get Hammond’s missing horse or a replacement for it. The Indians saw this hostile party approaching and, already alarmed by reports that the whites had come to kill, either fled, slipped away armed, or danced around, drunk and provocative. All these movements and gestures were interpreted by the whites as the start of a fight from which they had no thought of retreating. The battle was one-sided and decisive.

The only substantial body of discordant evidence is that of Abel Farwell. This is most perplexing for Farwell is the man who did most to raise the massacre from a sordid frontier incident to a cause célèbre, provoking intense local excitement and political headaches in two capitals. Farwell, alone among the witnesses to the massacre, challenged the picture of a drunken affray with his grim portrait of deliberate and unprovoked murder. His unique tale held him up to enormous opprobrium during his lifetime and makes him a subject for intense scrutiny even now.

There is every reason to believe that Farwell lied in at least one part of his testimony before Chief Justice Wood and the jury in the Cypress Hills case in Winnipeg three years after the massacre. The testimony which sheds the most important light on that of Farwell is, of course, that given by his interpreter Lebombard. The latter’s testimony, like Farwell’s, ruined his status among the men whom he had traditionally relied upon for his living, the Benton-based traders. Yet the story he told was nowhere near complete enough to put a rope around anybody’s neck. He swore that he had been unable to see either the Indian camp or the men in the coulee when fighting first broke out and he refused to attempt to identify the men firing from the roof of Fort Soloman. He must therefore be excused from any suspicion of bias or deliberate perjury. At the same time, no effort was ever made to incriminate him in the shooting, so he had no need to exaggerate the crimes of others to expiate some personal guilt. Lebombard’s testimony, then, rests on solid ground.

On this basis, what Lebombard had to say about Farwell’s evidence is revealing, even crucial. Lebombard was the trader’s interpreter and consequently must have known what he was saying when he said Farwell and the Indians had only a few words in common. Farwell must therefore have been prevaricating when he described the deal he had worked out with the Indian chief to hold two of the Assiniboine’s horses until Hammond’s should be returned. The curious part of this story is that it is by no means central to Farwell’s story that Hammond fired first, without provocation. According to Lebombard, Farwell tried to make himself understood to the Indians, then turned and talked to the men in the coulee before returning toward his fort, shouting for the interpreter. Why did Farwell not relate these facts in the same simple fashion?

The quick, coarse answer came from the Benton gang and their apologists, that the trader was a bought witness, a perjurer. But if so, who bought him? Two answers may be offered—the obvious one, the Canadian government, and a more fantastic one, the T.C. Power Company. (The latter is suggested by Paul F. Sharp in *Whoop-Up Country*.1) On the proposition that the government might have bribed Farwell, there seems to be little evidence either way except that the government’s records of payment of witnesses are still available in the unsorted records of the deputy minister of justice in the Public Archives of Canada and show no unusual payments to Farwell. Moreover, if Farwell was bribed to testify against the Benton gang, he was evidently underpaid for his evidence was insufficient to produce a conviction. He repeatedly maintained that he did not think there would have been firing if the Indians had been able to return Hammond’s horse immediately and when he positively identified the killers of specific Indians, he named men not on trial.

Nonetheless, Sharp’s contention that Farwell was part of a conspiracy by the T.C. Power Company to blacken their rivals, the I.G. Baker concern, by incriminating some of Baker’s supposed associates, is put forward as a serious hypothesis and deserves to be examined as such. But it falls down on one of its most important points—the story that Farwell altered his version of the massacre story after he had consulted with his “employers,” the T.C. Power Company. The supposed evidence for this change of story turns out to be the deposition which John Wells, a plains trader, gave to the Canadian government early in 1874.2 The crux of Wells’s tale is that Farwell came to his camp to trade and to hire carts a few days after the fight and said that the Assiniboine had started it in a dispute over liquor, but later testimony makes this appear absurd and Wells’s affidavit is obviously wrong in many other respects. Farwell, of course, had hired his transport a few days before the massacre. Thus Sharp’s evidence that Farwell changed his story after returning to Fort Benton proves unacceptable.

So far as the general hypothesis of a commercial conspiracy goes, it is highly doubtful whether the ties between wholesale houses and individual traders were strong enough to fit the theory—even the hanging of a notorious horse thief like Evans would
hardly have cast much disgrace upon the wealthy Baker, for whom Evans had once allegedly worked. There is another strong indication that Farwell did not try to entangle Baker by falsely accusing the Benton gang. This evidence is in the account books of the T.C. Power Company, which show that Farwell’s relation to the T.C. Power Company was more that of a client than that of an agent or employee. Other facts suggest the same conclusions—Farwell sheltered independent traders within his fort and had to hire his own transport to take out his returns at the end of the season. Moreover, these account books also suggest that Moses Solomon stood in roughly the same relation to the T.C. Power Company as did Farwell—in other words, they were both independent traders who happened to draw their goods from the same wholesale house. It is not altogether likely that Power would have continued to supply Solomon if Farwell, Solomon’s most immediate competitor, had been an agent of the Power concern. But what is crucially important is that, if commercial connections really were as close as Sharp supposes, then Farwell’s testimony, implicating as it did the Soloman party as well as the Hardwick gang, would have tarred Power and Baker with the same brush.

To dismiss Sharp’s conspiracy theory makes it no easier to assess Farwell’s true motives. It can be argued that no two witnesses see an incident in the same fashion; that Farwell really was what he purported to be, an honest man appalled by the horror of what he had witnessed, a man willing to sacrifice his standing in the frontier community to see justice done. The defendants at the Helena extradition hearing did their best to destroy this image, but the witnesses they invoked are equally suspect.

In one respect, this is less important now than it was at the time, for a comprehensive story of the massacre can be pieced together without reference to Farwell’s account for any but non-essential details. But in studying the conflicting interpretations presented to the extradition hearing, the preliminary hearing for George Bell and the Winnipeg trial, it would be useful to know Farwell’s inner thoughts.

Indeed, we know very little about the man. We do not know how intelligent he was; was he, perhaps, too simple to distinguish fact from fiction? Did he unwittingly believe that it was proper to let imagination fill the gaps created by a faulty memory? We know that he was sober enough to realize that somebody had to mediate between the angry whites and the unsteady Assiniboine, but was it drink that prompted him to attempt the mediation himself, without his interpreter?

Sharp has failed to present a plausible case for a commercial conspiracy using the courts for private advantage, yet there remain myriad possibilities that Farwell was consciously lying. Perhaps, for instance, he bore a deep personal grudge against Hammond, who had shared his roof for a season and whom he repeatedly accused of firing the shot which precipitated the whole massacre. This is speculation, but the evidence of Farwell’s untruthfulness or carelessness over details is not. Lebombard’s disclosure must be noted and there were some discrepancies in the evolution of Farwell’s testimony over the years—in 1873, for example, he had spoken to Little Soldier moments before the massacre began; two years later, he claimed it was a minor chief, not Little Soldier at all. There is also the mystery of Garry Bourke who, from a documentary point of view, appeared out of nowhere to accompany Farwell to Major Simmons’s office at Fort Peck, then vanished from the record altogether. Thus, although the major incidents of the massacre are now laid bare, Farwell remains the only piece of the puzzle which seemingly does not fit.
Appendix B. Descriptions of the Massacre Site.
Accurate physical descriptions of the massacre site in the 1870s are extremely scarce; directions were generally expressed not by points of the compass but in relation to the creek and the coulee; the Indian camp and trading posts are scantily described. Nevertheless, three useful pieces of information can be extracted from contemporary testimony. The first is a partial description of Fort Soloman; the second is an indication that Fort Soloman and the camp were on the east side of the creek; the third is Irvine’s description of the site as he found it in 1875.

Description of Fort Soloman
George M. Bell testified:
I was in one of the bastions of Fort Soloman; I had been lying down, but was looking out of the port-hole when I saw the Indians stripped to fight; I then called down to Vogle, who was in the Indian room, to shut the gates; I could see him in the room; the ceiling of the Indian room is always higher than the upper floor of the bastion, and a log is cut out so that the watch-man, who is supposed to be in the bastion all the time, can see, in case there should be any trouble in the Indian room; . . . I did not see Vogle again until after the firing commenced; I then saw him in the kitchen . . . .1

Philander Vogle testified:
I saw Bell in the bastion; he called down something about the Indians, and said to shut the gate; no one could go out of the fort except by the gate; it is fastened with a log chain; I did not see Bell go out of the fort; he could not go out unless I saw him, as I was in the Indian room or kitchen all the time and he would have to pass through the Indian room; I did not see the fight commence; I was in the kitchen when it began; the first I knew of it was when two or three bullets struck the house; I went to get my gun and go out of the house; I was lame; a Half-breed who lived with said George M. Bell gave me your gun; you’re lame and I can use it better; ’ I said ‘No’; I got on Solomon’s bed and looked from the window; I could see the Indians firing; some of them were in the bush . . . . There was a stockade on two sides of the fort; the house was built like a letter L, and the fence makes a square; the space within the square is for a corral; I could see both the Indian camp and Fort Farwell from the window.2

The Locations of the Forts and Indian Camp
Testimony from all witnesses clearly established that Fort Farwell was on one side of the creek, while on the opposite side were Fort Soloman, the Indian camp and the coulee from which the white men fired. The testimony of George M. Bell clearly indicates that the camp and Fort Soloman were on opposite sides of the coulee.3 (The evidence of Joseph Vital Turcotte that there were two coulees between the fort and the camp,4 is muddled and can be disregarded.) The following excerpts from the testimony of Farwell and Lebombard clearly indicate that the camp and Fort Soloman were on the east side of the creek and Fort Farwell, by implication, was on the west. This testimony revolves around the death of Edward Legrace.

Lebombard testified “Legrace was shot on the east side of the river, about four o’clock in the afternoon.”5

Farwell had testified the day before, “When they [the whites in the Indian camp] saw the men being driven back they started across the river to help them, but before they got across, the leader, Legrace, was killed by an Indian hiding in the brush.”6

In other words, the camp was on the east side of the river, as tradition has always claimed.

Inspector Irvine’s Description
I obtained information from parties there as to the position of affairs on that occasion on the ground. I received the information from Mr. Farwell and Alexis LeBombard, the two previous witnesses. I took measurements from the information I received of the position of the parties. I heard their evidence here in Court and the measurements which I took correspond with their evidence. I made a sketch of the scene of the massacre which I now produce. On this sketch . . . . Farwell’s post is distant from Soloman’s five hundred and twenty four (524) feet in a straight line. Soloman’s to the coulee is 158 feet and from a point on the coulee in line with Soloman’s the camp is 195 feet. From the nearest point on the coulee the camp is distant 42 feet. I saw the remains of a camp and saw some human bones there. I also saw at the places indicated on the sketch the ruins of Farwel’s and Soloman’s posts . . . . The position of the cart referred to by the last witness LeBombard was pointed to me by him. I went to the place indicated as the camp ground and sat down on the ground there, and I could then see a man whom I had stationed where the cart is said to have been, quite plainly, and he could see me . . . . Farwell laid down in the coulee, where the Benton party had been, and I stood where his post had been and could see him plainly.7

Unfortunately the map referred to has disappeared; the cart was one which Lebombard claimed to have climbed onto to watch the firings. The end of Irvine’s testimony indicates that the coulee had been stripped of brush, probably by the Assiniboine during the previous winter. The coulee is now (1973) lightly wooded.
Appendix C. The Date of the Massacre.

It is widely believed that the Cypress Hills massacre took place 1 May 1873. In fact it occurred a month later. The error appears in a handful of even the earliest accounts, but the majority of first-hand reports make it clear that 1 June 1873 is the correct date. Baptiste Champagne swore at the Winnipeg trial that the massacre day was a Sunday: this fits 1 June, but 1 May was a Thursday. Throughout the trial, witnesses were routinely asked to state their whereabouts during the months of May and June 1873. Abel Farwell testified under cross-examination that "the Cypress Hills Massacre took place in the last of May or first of June, 1873." Finally, two participants, John Evans and Trevanion Hale, swore out affidavits at the end of 1875 which alluded to the fact that they were about ten miles from Fort Benton, en route to that place, in the middle of May, 1873; they lost their horses there about 17 May and subsequently set out from Fort Benton to recover them. Thus they could not have reached the massacre site much before the end of May. These references and many others outweigh the small number of vague accounts which place the massacre before 1 June 1873.
Endnotes

Prologue
1 It is not intended to suggest here that there was neither crime nor disorder in the territories before the advent of the American-based liquor trade. Such disorder, however, rarely involved whites and seldom threatened the fundamental bases – cultural or economic – of the lives of the native tribes. Writers frequently quote the remark made by Captain Butler in 1871 that “crimes of the most serious nature have been committed ... without any vindication of the law being possible.” Few note, however, that this is a parenthetical remark in a paragraph whose full meaning tends towards the other direction: “I do not mean to assert that crime and outrage are of habitual occurrence among the people of this territory ... the position of affairs rests at the present moment not on the just power of an executive authority to enforce obedience, but rather upon the passive acquiescence of the majority of a scant population who hitherto have lived in ignorance of those conflicting interests which, in more populous and civilized communities, tend to anarchy and disorder.” William Francis Butler, The Great Lone Land ... (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Low and Searle, 1872), pp. 357–8.

The Characters
1 Large bands of Indians continued to frequent the Cypress Hills for about a decade after the massacre, but there was always a dominant white element present – the whisky traders until 1875, the North-West Mounted Police thereafter.
2 For the visit of the Stonies, see the testimony of Abel Farwell, 19 June 1876, at the murder trial of Bell, Hughes and Vogle (Standard [Winnipeg] [hereafter cited as Winnipeg Trial], 24 June 1876). For the remaining chiefs and their bands, see Dan Kennedy (Ochankugahe), Recollections of an Assiniboine Chief, ed. J.R. Stevens (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), pp. 42–7. This includes the memories of Eashappie, who as a boy of 12 was present at the massacre. Kennedy refers to the principal chief as Hunkajuka, “Little Chief,“ but this is clearly the same man referred to as Manitu-potis, “Little Soldier,” in the contemporary official accounts.
4 The list of traders is compiled from the full range of primary documents employed for this study, but the major single source is Abel Farwell’s testimony at the Winnipeg trial, 19–20 June 1876. Farwell, under cross-examination (see Winnipeg Trial, 19–20 June 1876), placed the number of whisky traders within three miles at the stated figure, 13.
5 Ibid. George Bell referred to his military career during his examination at the Winnipeg trial (Winnipeg Trial, 21 June 1876); for the Métis camp, see ibid., examination of Joseph Vital Turcotte. Farwell said the Métis camp was on the Frenchman River (ibid., 20 June 1876).
6 See ibid., testimony of Joseph Vital Turcotte and Joseph Laverdure, 21 June 1876.
7 See Canada. Public Archives (hereafter cited as PAC), RG7, G6, Vol. 24, Bonnot to ______, 5 Aug. 1873, in Thornton to Dufferin, No. 29, 23 Aug. 1873, “The general reputation of Evans and Deveraux ... is that of horse thieves and traders of whisky to Indians.” For the other comment, see “Extracts from Department of Justice Files; Data Re. the Cypress Hills Massacre and Rounding Up of the Hardwick Gang,” (manuscript on file, National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Parks Canada, Ottawa, n.d.) (hereafter cited as “Extracts ... Re. the Cypress Hills Massacre”), Page to McMicken, 1 Jan. 1874.
8 The main sources for this account are in PAC, MG27, I, H2, Taylor Papers, depositions of Trevanian Hale and John H. Evans, 15 Dec. 1875 and 20 Dec. 1875 respectively. See also an anonymous but similar account in the Fort Benton Record, 26 June 1875. For the information that the horses were actually stolen by the Creek, see Dan Kennedy, op. cit., p. 44.
10 Winnipeg Trial, examination of Abel Farwell, 19 June 1876.
12 Daily Independent (Helena), 25 July 1875.
13 The names of the Benton party are gleaned from a number of sources; for the two Métis, see Winnipeg Trial, examination of A. Lebombard, 20 June 1876.
14 Donald Graham, “Cypress Hills Massacre,” Edmonton Journal, 9 and 29 March 1924, reprinted, with some slightly muddled commentary and annotation, by Hugh A. Dempsey in Montana Magazine of History, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Autumn 1953), pp. 1–9. Many passages of Graham’s story are wholly inconsistent with aspect of the real story as agreed to by all contemporaries and it is likely he was indulging in the respectable old pioneer’s sport of pulling an editor’s leg.

The Scene
1 There was evidently a fair amount of intercourse between the two forts over the winter – see Winnipeg Trial, cross-examination of A. Lebombard, 20 June 1876.
2 For a more detailed description of Fort Soloman, see Appendix B.
3 Distances were paced off and recorded by Inspector Irvine and presented in evidence at the preliminary hearing of George Bell; see United States. National Archives. Diplomatic Branch, Dispatches from the American Consul in Winnipeg to the [U.S.] Secretary of State (hereafter cited as NAD, Dispatches), No. 219, Taylor to Cadwalader, 22 Sept. 1875, Enclosure No. 1, transcript of the hearing of George Bell.
5 “Extracts ... Re. the Cypress Hills Massacre” contains some notes on this effort about 1943 by Sgt. D. A. Flemming of the RCMP.
6 The map was submitted by Irvine to the Bell hearing. Unhappily, Winnipeg police court records no longer exist for this early period and no other copy of the map has been found.

The Tragedy
1 PAC, MG27, I, H2, Taylor Papers, deposition of Trevanian Hale, 15 Dec. 1875; also Winnipeg Trial, examination of George Bell, 21 June 1876.
2 Winnipeg Trial, cross-examination of A. Lebombard, 20 June 1876.
3 Ibid., examination of George Bell, 21 June 1876.
4 There was no clear consensus afterwards about what time the fight started, but it was between noon and four o’clock, probably about one. For the return of Hammond’s horse, see ibid., examination of A. Lebombard, 20 June 1876.

5 This is Lebombard’s account, which is substantially corroborated by the testimony of Farwell and a defence witness; see ibid., testimony of A. Lebombard, 20 June 1876; ibid., testimony of Abel Farwell, 19 June 1876; ibid., testimony of Baptiste Champagne, 20 June 1876.

6 Ibid., examination of Abel Farwell, 19 June 1876.

7 NAD, Dispatches, No. 219, Taylor to Cadwalader, 22 Sept. 1875, Enclosure No. 1, deposition of A. Lebombard, 13 Sept. 1875. See also Winnipeg Trial, examination of A. Lebombard, 20 June 1876.

8 Dan Kennedy, op. cit., pp. 44–6, is useful, but the basic (and hitherto unexploited) source of information from the Indian point of view is in five depositions taken by Inspector A.G. Irvine from Assiniboine survivors of the massacre (Manitoba. Provincial Archives [hereafter cited as PAM], Morris papers, file 1177). These depositions establish the crucially important fact that the Indians were warned that the white men were coming for hostile purposes. The evidence also corroborates or explains various dubious or ambiguous statements in other people’s testimony.

9 Farwell swore afterwards that the white men in the coulee were calling to him to get out of the way as they intended to fire on the camp and that Hammond told him when he returned to the coulee, “G-d d—n you, why didn’t you come out when we told you first, for we would have had a good shot”? This is not corroborated by other witnesses and the intent of Farwell’s testimony was to minimize the hostility of the Assiniboine and to exaggerate that of the whites. See Winnipeg Trial, examination and cross-examination of Abel Farwell, 19–20 June 1876.

10 No two witnesses saw the opening shots of the massacre in the same fashion; nor is it particularly important who fired first, since the Indians clearly assumed they were on the defensive.

11 “The Extradition Case,” Weekly Herald (Helena), 15 Aug. 1875, provides a summary of Farwell’s testimony; his opinion about the whites’ intentions in going to the camp was unchanged a year later. See Winnipeg Trial, cross-examination of Abel Farwell, 20 June 1876.

12 The Helena Weekly Herald printed in full the remarks of Commissioner W.E. Cullen in its issue of 29 July 1875.

13 Farwell said that the men were standing between the fort and the coulee: see Winnipeg Trial, examination of A. Farwell, 19 June 1876; Lebombard swore he saw men on the roof: see NAD, Dispatches, No. 219, Taylor to Cadwalader, 22 Sept. 1875, Enclosure No. 1, deposition of A. Lebombard, 13 Sept. 1875, “I saw some people on the roof of Solomon’s house; and behind the chimneys [sic], firing at the Indians.”

14 Lebombard is unequivocal on this point; see his deposition of 13 Sept. 1875, (NAD, Dispatches, No. 219, Taylor to Cadwalader, 22 Sept. 1875, Enclosure No. 1) and his testimony under examination at the Winnipeg trial (Winnipeg Trial, June 1876). Farwell’s testimony (Winnipeg Trial, 19 June 1876) corroborates this in a general way, though he was under the impression that the whites were not chasing the Indians in the bushes by the river but those on the hillside. Farwell also described this incident forcefully at the extradition hearing in Montana.

15 The death of Legrace (often referred to in unofficial accounts simply as “Grace”) is described in Winnipeg Trial, testimony of Abel Farwell, 19 June 1876.

16 The death of Little Soldier was described by his wife and mother-in-law in their depositions to A.G. Irvine (PAM, Morris Papers, file 1177). There is some confusion over who was clubbed to death and decapitated; Lebombard stated that it was an old crippled man, but added that he had been told the decapitated head belonged to Little Soldier (Winnipeg Trial, examination of A. Lebombard, 20 June 1876). Eashapple, Dan Kennedy’s source, claimed it was Wankantu, “an old Indian” (Dan Kennedy, op. cit., p. 46.) The most detailed account, not surprisingly, is among the depositions taken by Irvine (PAM, Morris Papers, file 1177). Miskotakikotena ("The Man Who Took the Coat") swore that “I saw some of the Americans come to where the ‘Old Man’ was and strike him on the head with a hatchet, leaving the hatchet there in his head and then take up a pole and run it through him from his backside to his head.” The old man may have been a chief, but not Little Soldier, who was relatively young. There is no reliable corroboration for the fact that the old man was impaled; decapitation, though equally revolting, seems more likely on the basis of contemporary testimony.

17 The obsequies for Legrace are described in Winnipeg Trial, testimony of George Bell, 21 June 1876, as well as ibid., testimony of Joseph Vital Turcotte. Contemporary accounts do not mention a coffin, but the skeleton discovered in 1972 was in a wooden coffin.


19 Winnipeg Trial, cross-examination of Abel Farwell, 20 June 1876.

20 PAM, Morris Papers, file 1177, deposition of Keeshkesan (“Cutter”), Dec. 1875, ”...we started in the night for the end of the mountain to the half-breeds, they treated us kindly giving us dogs, kettles etc.”

21 For the departure of the parties, see NAD, Dispatches, No. 219, Taylor to Cadwalader, 22 Sept. 1875, Enclosure No. 1, Abel Farwell and A. Lebombard, 13 Sept. 1875. From Lebombard’s testimony, it appears that he may not have accompanied Farwell all the way back to Fort Benton, for he was in the Cypress Hills again very shortly after the massacre. For the activities of the Benton party before it split up, see Winnipeg Trial, examination of A. Lebombard, 20 June 1876, “The Benton party went to the Indian camp and gathered up everything in a heap and burned it.” See also Daily Herald (Helena), 11 June 1873, “Two of the men loaded 2 wagons ... and started for Benton while the others started north on the trail of the Crees.”

22 Daily Herald (Helena), 11 June 1873.

23 Wheeler’s letter to the Department of the Interior is alluded to in PAC, RG7, G6, Vol. 24, Clurn to secretary of the interior, 8 Aug. 1873, in Thornton to Dufferin, No. 27, 21 Aug. 1873.

24 In addition to the dispatch cited above, ibid., Thornton to Dufferin No. 29, 23 Aug. 1873, with its enclosures, is also important. The material quoted is from two enclosures in ibid., Thornton to Dufferin, No. 27; first, Simmons to _____, 12 July 1873, and second, Cox to Smith, 26 July 1873.

25 The interdepartmental correspondence is ibid., Thornton to Dufferin, No. 27; see also PAM, Morris Papers, Letterbooks, Morris to minister of the interior, 20 Aug. 1873, Ottawa Daily Citizen, 29 Aug. 1873.

26 PAM, Morris Papers, item 1945, McKay to Urquhart, 24 Aug. 1873. A copy of this was forwarded by Morris to Ottawa with a covering dispatch (PAC, RG13, Acc. No. 68/263, Dominion Police Files, 1873, No. 60n, 26 Aug. 1873).
27 PAC, RG13, Acc. No. 68/263, Dominion Police Files, 1873, Morris to minister of the interior, 20 Aug. 1873.

Anti-Climax
2 "Extracts . . . Re. the Cypress Hills Massacre," McMicken to Dorion, minister of justice, 29 Nov. 1873 (see Preface); also ibid., Bernard to McMicken, 18 April 1874.
5 "Extracts . . . Re. the Cypress Hills Massacre," Page to McMicken, 1 Jan. 1874.
6 The Montana press for the period June–July 1875 is full of references to the extradition case; a useful cross-section may be found in the Helena Weekly Herald, 8, 15, 22 and 29 June 1875; a more colourful version emerges from the Fort Benton Record, 26, 24 and 31 June 1875.
8 Weekly Herald (Helena), 22 July 1876.
9 An account along these lines was written by an unnamed member of the Benton party and was published shortly before the extradition hearing in the Fort Benton Record, 26 June 1875.
10 For Cullen's remarks in full, see Weekly Herald (Helena), 29 July 1875.
11 From the text of a series of resolutions passed by a public meeting at Bozeman, reported in the Bozeman Times, 6 July 1875.
12 Fort Benton Record, 26 June 1875.
13 Ibid.
14 Bozeman Times, loc. cit.
15 Weekly Herald (Helena), 29 July 1875.
16 NAD, Dispatches, No. 219, Taylor to Cadwalader, 22 Sept. 1875, enclosure, deposition of A.G. Irvine, n.d.
17 This article was reprinted with much indignant commentary by the Fort Benton Record, 16 Oct. 1875.
18 NAD, Dispatches, No. 219, enclosure in Taylor to Cadwalader, 22 Sept. 1875.
19 An enormous amount of correspondence on this topic passed between the various officials named and even appeared in the press; see especially Potts to Hale, 22 Sept. 1875, and Hale to Potts, n.d., in Weekly Herald (Helena), 7 Oct. 1875. Much official correspondence is in PAC, RG7, G6, Vols. 26–7, Thornton to governor general or acting governor general, No. 23, 15 May 1875; No. 26, 22 May 1875; No. 32, 12 June 1875; No. 47, 12 Oct. 1875; No. 50, 15 Oct. 1875; No. 1, 1 Jan. 1876; No. 9, 31 March 1876, and No. 14, 5 May 1876. Blake’s stand is outlined in an order in council attached to the dispatch of 12 Oct. 1876. Fish’s capitulation is dated 4 May 1876 and enclosed in Thornton’s dispatch of 5 May 1876: "As the authorities of Canada . . . seem unwilling or unable to assist . . . I shall no further refer to the question."
20 This is explained in detail in the petition presented by Biggs on behalf of Taylor at the opening of the Winnipeg trial (Winnipeg Trial, 19 June 1876).
21 Ibid.; the defendants must have expected this result. In any case, a fairly comprehensive defence had already been prepared.
22 Cornish discussed the trial in a lengthy report to the minister of justice, written shortly after the end of the trial. The original of this report does not appear to have survived and the typescript copy in "Extracts . . . Re. the Cypress Hills Massacre" is undated.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 The procedure is described in PAC, MG27, I, H2, Taylor Papers, Letterbook, Taylor to Evans, 20 March 1882.

Epilogue
1 This controversy is discussed at length in Philip Goldring, "The First Contingent: The North-West Mounted Police, 1873–74," Canadian Historic Sites: Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History, No. 21 (1979), Appendix C.
2 PAC, MG9, G1, p. 31, Morris to the North-West Council, 1875.
4 The Montana press, or some parts of it, made frequent references during the extradition hearing and Winnipeg trial, to the differences between Canadian and American political institutions. The Fort Benton Record for instance, railed at the "spite and malice" which Canadian officials, "hirelings of a Queen," exhibited toward the "citizens of a republic" (18 Sept. 1875). The Record also accused the Manitoba Free Press of "an inveterate hatred against the representatives of a free and civilized people" (16 Oct. 1875).

Appendix A. Abel Farwell and the Cypress Hills Massacre Story.
1 Paul F. Sharp, op. cit., pp. 58–9, 66–7.
2 PAM, Morris Papers.
3 Robert Allen, pers. com. The T.C. Power Company account books have recently been made available to the public through the Montana Historical Society.

Appendix B. Description of the Massacre Site.
1 Winnipeg Trial, testimony of George M. Bell, 21 June 1876.
2 Ibid., testimony of Philander Vogle, 21 June 1876.
3 Ibid., testimony of George M. Bell, 21 June 1876.
5 Ibid., testimony of A. Lebombard, 20 June 1876.
6 Ibid., testimony of Abel Farwell, 19 June 1876.
7 NAD, Dispatches, No. 219, Taylor to Cadwalader, 22 Sept. 1875, enclosure, testimony of Inspector Irvine, Winnipeg examination of George Bell, Sept. 1875.

Appendix C. The Date of the Massacre.
1 Winnipeg Trial, testimony of Baptiste Champagne, 21 June 1876.
2 Ibid., cross-examination of Abel Farwell, 19 June 1876.
Unpublished sources provide roughly half the useful material for a study of the massacre and of its outcome. Important documents on the fight itself are in the Provincial Archives of Manitoba collection of papers of Lieutenant Governor Morris, while most of the administrative correspondence about the attempt to punish the perpetrators of the massacre is in the dispatches of Sir Edward Thornton in Washington to Lord Dufferin and (in 1875) Lieutenant General Haly in Ottawa.

**Bozeman Times**
1875.

**Butler, William Francis**

*The Great Lone Land: A Narrative of Travel and Adventure in the North-West of America.* Sampson, Low, Marston, Low and Searle, London, 1872.

**Canada. Laws, Statutes, etc.**

*An Act Respecting the Administration of Justice, and for the Establishment of a Police Force in the North-West Territories.* 36 Victoria, cap. 35. [Ottawa], 1873.

**Canada. National Library.**

Scrapbook Debates, 1872–73

**Canada. Public Archives.**

MG9, G1, Minute Books of the Council of the North-West Territories, 1875
MG27, I, C8, Papers of Alexander Morris. Microfilm copies of originals in the Provincial Archives of Manitoba and the library of Queen’s University, Kingston.
MG27, I, H2, Papers of James Wickes Taylor. Microfilm copies of originals held by the Minnesota Historical Society.
RG7, G6, Governor General’s Office, Dispatches from the British Minister at Washington
RG9, II, Militia and Defence Papers, B1, Adjutant-General’s Correspondence
RG13, Department of Justice, Unsorted Deputy Minister’s Records, 1873

**Daily Herald (Helena)**

1873.

**Daily Independent (Helena)**

1875.

**Dempsey, Hugh A.**


“Extracts from Department of Justice Files; Data Re. the Cypress Hills Massacre and Rounding Up of the Hardwick Gang”

Manuscript on file, National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Parks Canada, Ottawa, n.d.

**Fort Benton Record**

1875.
Goldring, Philip

Horrall, S.W.

Kennedy, Dan (Ochankugehe)

Manitoba. Provincial Archives.
Papers of Alexander Morris

Ottawa Daily Citizen
1873.

Sharp, Paul F.

Shepherd, George

Standard (Winnipeg)
1876.

Stegner, Wallace

Turner, John Peter

Dispatches from the American Consul in Winnipeg to the Secretary of State, 1875

Weekly Herald (Helena)
1875.
The *Dawson Daily News: Journalism in the Klondike*
by Edward F. Bush

Canadian Historic Sites
No. 21
Abstract
Like many of the demands for services in Dawson created by the rush to the Klondike gold fields, the demand for information was met almost as soon as it appeared, but only one newspaper, the Dawson Daily News, achieved a lasting measure of success.

The first issue of the Dawson Daily News was printed on 31 July 1899. The News had been preceded by the Klondike Nugget, a semi-weekly, and the Yukon Midnight Sun, a weekly, both of which began publication in June 1898, and the Klondike Miner and Yukon Advertiser, a weekly begun in September 1898. The Miner, a paper of relatively narrow interests, ceased publication in August 1899, but the Nugget, which saw itself as the people’s champion; the Sun, the government organ; and the News, also critical of the government but more moderate than the Nugget and broader in scope than either the Sun or the Nugget, vigorously joined in acrimonious duels. They were briefly joined by The Gleaner, a weekly which was convicted of libel soon after it started in late 1899. Two other papers also appeared: the Dawson Record, a daily news sheet for miners, which appeared in July 1902, and the Free Lance, a weekly, the “family paper of the Yukon,” which appeared in January 1903.

Reduced circulation put the Nugget out of business in July 1903 and limited circulation did the same for the Record, which was absorbed by the Sun in November 1903, and the Free Lance, which ceased publication some time in 1904. The Sun was the next to succumb, forced out by the Yukon World, which was created in February 1904 as the government organ and a political instrument of Frederick Congdon, the commissioner of the Yukon Territory. Deprived of government patronage, the Sun was unable to continue and ceased publication by 1906. However, by the federal election of 1909, the World had become opposed to its creator and Congdon, no longer commissioner but a candidate for the Yukon seat in Parliament, published the Labour Advocate. The Advocate ceased publication in late January 1909 when Congdon won.

By 1909 the Dawson economy was reflecting the passing of the mining boom. Dawson could no longer support two newspapers and the News purchased the World in January 1909. The World ran as a weekly until August 1909, then ceased publication. The News, Dawson’s only surviving newspaper, followed the fortunes of the town. In 1924 it cut back to tri-weekly publication, then to weekly publication in 1946, but lost its government printing contracts with the transfer of the territorial capital from Dawson to Whitehorse and could not recover the income from other sources. The last issue of the Dawson Weekly News was printed on 25 March 1954.

Submitted for publication 1971, by Edward F. Bush, National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Ottawa.
Office of the *Yukon Sun*, November 1900. (Public Archives Canada.)
Introduction
On the morning of 17 August 1896, Skookum Jim, Tagish Charlie and George Carmac staked claims on Rabbit Creek, a tributary of the Klondike. The full import of the rich gold strike reached the outside world with the docking of the steamer *Excelsior* at San Francisco on 15 July 1897 and of the *Portland* at Seattle three days later as the first successful stampeders staggered down the gangplanks lugging suitcases heavy with gold. Appropriately renamed "Eldorado," the Rabbit Creek discovery within two years transformed Dawson, a hamlet at the confluence of the Klondike and Yukon rivers, into a sprawling mining camp with an itinerant population estimated between twenty and thirty thousand. The news of the strike drew adventurers, miners, gamblers, hustlers and camp followers from every quarter of the continent and indeed from all over the world. In the summers of 1898 and 1899 Dawson boasted the largest and certainly the most colourful population of any Canadian community west of Winnipeg. Restaurants, cafes, dance halls, hotels, bathhouses, theatres and brothels sprouted like dandelions to serve the motley host gathered there.

Among the sundry enterprises evoked by the stampede in June 1898 were two newspapers, the aptly named *Yukon Midnight Sun* and *Klondike Nugget*. Printed on light hand presses, they broke forth in self-confident print primarily to serve the mining camp, but also, they hoped, to provide a little news from "the outside," as Klondikers referred to the rest of the world. A little over a year later, in July 1899, the *Sun* and the *Nugget* were joined by a competitor that would outstrip them both, a paper which in news coverage, format, features and editorial style bore fair comparison with many of the large metropolitan dailies in the early years of the century. This, then, is the story of the *Dawson Daily News*, born at the height of the world’s last great gold rush, a vigorous daily which later boasted that it had never really had any substantial competition, but fated to end its career as a village weekly 55 years later.

The Klondike, 1886–99
The first important gold strike, made in the winter of 1886–87, determined the immediate future of the Klondike. With increasing popular interest in the Yukon evident, the Canadian government began to establish Canadian jurisdiction over the area: in 1895, surveys of the area were commissioned, a detachment of the North-West Mounted Police despatched to the Yukon, and the Yukon declared a district of the Northwest Territories. Two years later the land between the 141st meridian and the Liard River, and north of the 60th parallel was designated Yukon Territory and a territorial commissioner, a gold commissioner and a chief magistrate appointed.

By the summer of 1897 the population of Dawson had swelled to an estimated 5,000, most of whom were aliens, largely Americans. News of the Carmac strike reached San Francisco and Seattle that summer and was given such publicity that the population of Dawson quintupled within two years. In the summer of 1898 the gold rush was in full spate, though ironically most of the valuable ground had been staked out the previous season.

In those 20-hour-long, hot summer days with a three- to four-hour bright twilight between sun and sun, Dawson must have presented a fascinating sight to those new arrivals not too exhausted or penniless to appreciate it. They beheld a sprawling shack and tent town with a wide, dusty main street, frame shops, cafes, hotels and mushrooming brokerage and insurance offices, many with the false fronts so much a feature of town architecture in the late 19th century. With neither street names nor numbering, addresses could only be designated vaguely; many new arrivals spent days searching for lost partners. Despite the surveillance of the North-West Mounted Police, Dawson was a "wide-open" mining town in which bars, gambling rooms and dance halls prospered (though with the fantastic prices prevailing that summer and in some measure through the summer of 1899 as well, one wonders who could afford to patronize them). A jeweller’s advertisement reflects the spirit of the summer of 1898: "Daylight all the time. The only thing that will save you from too much dissipation is Correct Time. Have your watches repaired by E. Merman."

Dawson’s Pioneer Press
Clearly so thriving a community called for a newspaper and in June 1898 not one but two, publishing weekly, were forthcoming. The two argued subsequently which could rightfully claim to be Dawson’s first newspaper. On the basis of the very first issue, according to Pierre Berton, the distinction belongs to the *Klondike Nugget*, whose enterprising editor, George M. Allen, borrowed a
2 Yukon Sun office with staff. (Public Archives Canada.)
typewriter to produce his first edition on 27 May 1898 although admittedly this would hardly pass as a newspaper, even by small-town standards. The Yukon Midnight Sun, whose editor and proprietor was G.B. Swinehart, came out with the first issue from a proper printing press, a diminutive quarter-size, eight-page edition, on 11 June 1898. The annual subscription was $15, “invariably in advance,” and 50 cents per copy. As might be expected, mining and local items formed the early fare of these pioneer newspapers, particularly before the days of the government telegraph line to the outside, but the first issue of the Sun did include brief items on the Spanish-American War and an Anglo-French dispute in West Africa. The Sun’s edition of 20 June retained the same quarter-size dimensions, but increased to a dozen pages and by 18 July the paper appeared in the size and format it was to retain—four pages 17-1/2 inches by 23 inches, seven columns to the paper. The opening editorial announced:

It is with no small pleasure that with this issue of the Yukon Midnight Sun we see fulfilled our repeated promises to furnish the people of Dawson a weekly newspaper . . . . The Yukon Midnight Sun will be a clean, bright sheet, free from domination by any class, clique or organization. It will be conscientious in the effort to be reliable on all subjects at all times: reflect the social and business life of the city and be an intelligent exponent of the great mining and other valuable interests of the Yukon valley.

In an issue a month later the editor assured his readers that he would give them a paper offering value for the money, rather than charging what the traffic would bear in the inflated conditions of a gold rush. This same issue, 18 July 1898, stated that their plant had been shipped from a West-Coast American port (probably Seattle) to Saint Michael, at the mouth of the Yukon, the year before. There it had had to be stored for the winter due to the lateness of the season while they used a light makeshift printing plant that had been packed in over the passes and thence down the Yukon by steamer. The permanent plant arrived on the steamer John J. Healey from Saint Michael on 9 July 1898, probably accounting for the greatly enhanced appearance of the paper, expanded to its full size, by 18 July.

As a service to the miners, the Sun offered a Guide to Dawson and the Yukon Mining District, to be available by 10 August and to include such useful information as mining regulations for both Yukon and Alaska, dominion land and timber regulations, descriptions of mining districts, tables of weights for gold dust, and a business directory. This was the first of a number of public service features produced by the newspapers of Dawson.

The Klondike Nugget, managed by Zachary Hickman and Eugene C. Allen with George M. Allen and A.F. George as editors, began its stormy career as a mere typewritten sheet posted on a bulletin board in May 1898; the first printed paper was issued on 16 June. It became a semi-weekly after publication of its third issue. The original plant, described as a “small army press (200 lb.),” left Seattle in February 1898 together with one ton of paper and reached Dawson by scow from the head of navigation on 10 June 1898. Like its contemporary, the Nugget was a four-page issue, 11 inches by 17 inches. Its annual subscription was $16. Its opening editorial began:

Good Morning, Gentlemen

The outside world is anxious for authentic information concerning the Klondike gold districts. The miners and other residents of this region are equally desirous of learning what is going on outside, as well as of home occurrences. Hence the publication of the Klondike Nugget. We have no higher ambition than to satisfy our readers.

Under the heading, “The North and the Unsuccessful Gold Seekers,” the Nugget also commented on the ambitions of the gold seekers: if this rush were like others, not one man in a hundred would strike it rich; however, in the future, resources other than gold would support the territory and “no one may be expected to play a more important part than the man who came expecting to find gold and was disappointed.”

The Sun welcomed the Nugget, expressing the perhaps facetious hope that “pleasant relations may always subsist [sic] among the fraternity in Dawson.” It did not take long for both editors and readers to be disabused of this notion for Dawson journalism, as was common in newspapers of the last century, was characterized by outspokenness and frequently descended to scurrilous abuse.

The Nugget early saw itself as the champion of an oppressed citizenry, 80 per cent of whom were American, against profiteering Canadian officialdom. It adopted a scathing roughshod style in which issues were seen in black-and-white terms. On the other hand, the Sun, though comparably ruthless in penning pugnacious leaders, evolved as the defender of the government while still pressing for reasonable reform. A wild free-for-all competition soon developed in which staff and readers of both papers enthusiastically joined. Berton describes the 67-year-old newsboy, “Uncle Andy” Young, tearing along the wooden duckboards which served Dawson as pavement, hawking the latest issue of the Nugget: “The Nugget! The Nugget! The dear little Nugget!” and disposing of a thousand copies in the course of an evening.
3 Interior of the *Yukon Sun* office, 1900. (Public Archives Canada.)
Interior of the Yukon Sun office, 1900.
(Public Archives Canada.)
5 Inking the press, Yukon Sun, 1900. (Public Archives Canada.)
6 Men working at type trays. Yukon Sun, 1900. (Public Archives Canada.)
The personal columns of the two papers reflected the activity of the frontier as well as the gossip of the small town. From the Yukon Midnight Sun of 27 June 1898, the following items recall the activity of that summer.

Edward Marks of St. Paul, a recent arrival has a postion behind the Monte Carlo bar.

Jas. Schneider of St. Louis and C.R. Houghton of Los Angeles came in Friday. They were among the few who made the trip successfully on a small raft.

Leon Brock, of Buffalo, N.Y., one of the fortunates who escaped death after burial in the Chilkoot avalanche, is a recent arrival. He is a correspondent for the Buffalo Daily and Sunday Times.

Ellis Lewis, half owner of No. 23 on Eldorado, an old Alaskan and successful miner, having been ten years at the business, left yesterday on the Bella, for California. He intends to take life easy and will probably be seen in this country only at cleanup time. It is hinted that he carried out about fifty thousand! Mr. Lewis is but one among many who, similarly fixed, left on the Bella, Weare and Hamilton. The personal column of the rival Nugget offered yet more colourful fare.

Mose Warren, a Canadian who arrived some months ago, has gone out into Sulphur with three horseloads of grub and two men. He has acquired interests on [claims] 25 and 31 above discovery [the first claim on a creek] and will work both claims.

Mr. Lueders, the clever violinist, is quite sick with the prevailing dysentery. On Sunday night he had great difficulty in conducting the concert, but brought it through successfully in spite of his weakness.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Cahill have departed for their home in Portland. The sweet voice of Mrs. Cahill has beautified many a church service and lent pleasure to many a social evening and it is with regret we see the pair depart.

Among the passengers on the steamer Columbian were Messrs. W.H. Miller, David W. Jones, Wm. Neville and Jacob Edholm. The two first named brought with them a large shipment of liquors amounting to in all 3000 gallons. They have secured a cabin on First Avenue, and for the present leave their goods in storage.

The Nugget’s edition of 24 September 1898 graphically describes the mire on Front Street, of such a depth and consistency that many wagons overturned in the efforts to extricate them and often several teams could be seen struggling ineffectually in the morass. The Nugget also attacked the gold commissioner, a favourite target in its columns, observing that he had advertised for wood and that it was to be hoped that he would arrange to have it cut into stove lengths so that the line of waiting men at his office door will not have to suffer in the bleak cold while the muscular gold commissioner cuts his own wood, as happened last winter. Not but what the gold commissioner is a much better wood chopper than official head of his own office.

Through the summer and fall of 1898 both papers featured for the most part local and territorial news with some items from neighbouring Alaska, but by early July the issue of nationalism became apparent. During the gold-rush era Dawson was predominantly American with perhaps four in five of its populace hailing from the United States or Alaska. Located about 50 miles east of the international boundary on the 141st meridian, Dawson undoubtedly was in Canadian territory although at that date the boundary had yet to be fixed by joint survey and agreement. It is perhaps not surprising that many Americans on the outside were unaware that the Klondike was not part of Alaska; indeed, some Canadian newspapers fostered this misconception by referring to the Klondike product as “Alaskan gold.” The American-owned Nugget naturally developed an American orientation, particularly as an opposition organ to the territorial government. The Sun, on the other hand, under the aegis of its first editor, Henry J. Woodside, an Ontarian of ultra-imperialist caste, and as the government organ, developed a strongly nationalist and anti-American bias. The Sun’s Canadian orientation developed quickly; in its 4 July 1898 edition it ignored the American holiday completely while devoting a page to the celebration of Dominion Day. On 5 July the Nugget displayed its American sentiment in an editorial concerning the one-sided Spanish American War, including a generalization about the American Revolution.

The Americans have demonstrated one thing to a great certainty, i.e., that they are nothing if not fighters, and more than this, that they can always produce the man for the emergency. All their wars have shown this. The war of the rebellion was the hottest in history, because between two factions of the same people and race; but now ’tis the whole people against a foreign foe, and the result can be well guessed as being the complete and full humiliation of haughty Spain.

The excerpt is also typical of the chauvinism found in all the Dawson papers – the English-speaking peoples were held to be manifestly superior to all others in both war and peace – however, this was not peculiar to the Klondike during the twilight years of the “white man’s burden” and colonial empire.

The rival papers displayed a significant contrast in their attitudes toward the administration of justice and specifically the scaffold. Both agreed that hanging was proper punishment for a murderer, but the Nugget gloated over the mechanics and minu
Interior of the Nugget office, Klondike Nugget, 12 August 1899. (Public Archives Canada.)
Fourth of July celebration, North-West Mounted Police square, Dawson, 1899. (Public Archives Canada.)
ties of execution whereas the Sun reported hangings in a more restrained and less detailed fashion. The Sun contrasted the swift efficacy of British justice with the endless appeals and procrastination of the American system. In the case of four Indians sentenced to death in July 1898 for murder, the Sun favoured commutation of the sentence in consideration of the fact that the Indians were alien to the ways of white society. Contrast this attitude with the following from the Nugget:

The Treacherous Instincts of the Aborigines
Will Get Their Necks Stretched With Hemp
Probably in Dawson – Villainous Savages in the Toils

In a remote community in which typhoid was rife, one subject on which the rival editors could agree was the need for sanitation. Most Dawsonites drew their water close inshore from the Yukon River. By early October the first hard frosts had checked the contagion, but another summer was coming when the population of the tent-and-shanty settlement would perhaps double. According to the Sun’s editor, As you were your own pilots coming down the Yukon, so now must everyone be his own health officer and board of sanitation. Therefore inspect and clean up your own locality like men, or supinely like sheep, fester and die in your tents.

By the fall of 1898 both papers had taken up their political stance. Both sought representative government and reform of the mining regulations, but whereas the Sun made allowances for governmental shortcomings due to the remoteness of the region, the Nugget saw federal authority as the ruthless exploiter of the miner, on whom the whole economy of the region depended.

At this period the Yukon council was wholly appointive. This was due in part to the high proportion of aliens in the territory and in part to the fact that the government was dealing with a transient population. The Nugget itself complained of the lack of community interest in a largely itinerant population, few of whom had any notion of staying in Dawson. Since few stampeders were Canadian, pressure had been exerted on the Ottawa authorities to ensure that the aliens would not be permitted to strip the territory of its wealth with no return to the dominion. Hence a royalty of ten per cent had been levied on all gold mined in the Yukon. Unlike many countries, including the United States, Canada permitted aliens to dig for gold, subject to the royalty and reservation of a portion of the claims to the crown. Yet even the pro-government Sun found the royalty a burden, not in principle but in application. “The excessive burden of the royalty tax has been a lodestone on the mining industry. The small extent of mining ground sufficiently rich to meet this tax is only found on the richest claims of Eldorado.” In contrast the Nugget declared itself adamantly opposed to both the royalty and crown reservations on the grounds that these hobbling and unjust regulations were based on totally misleading reports on the richness of the goldfields.

The Fawcett Issue

The prime grievance that summer of 1898, and an issue not resolved until the following spring, was the alleged malfeasance of Thomas Fawcett, the gold commissioner. He was held by the Nugget to have favoured certain claimants and conducted his office with utter incompetence. (The gold commissioner’s office was inundated with a torrent of business which the staff was utterly incapable of coping with; men queued up throughout the night in order to be admitted to file their claims the next day.) On 27 August 1898 the Nugget accused Fawcett of illegals in claims registration for the benefit of his friends. Fawcett resigned his office, but brought suit against the Nugget for libel. The commissioner, William Ogilvie, wrote to Sifton on 28 February 1899, making clear where the Nugget stood in his estimation.

You will probably see a copy of the Nugget of last Saturday which treats of the affair in a most inflammatory and seditious way. This sheet is run by Americans, with an Englishman (E.C. Allen) for editor. It appears these people have never had any newspaper experience heretofore and have not learned that many of the stories they hear are simply emanations of frenzied individuals who imagine they have lost a fortune because they cannot get the claim they wish or some similar idea.

Despite the Nugget’s withdrawal of its charges, Fawcett insisted on the case taking its course and was completely exonerated. Ogilvie was appointed a royal commissioner under letters patent of 7 October 1898 to investigate fully the operations of the gold commissioner’s office. It transpired that Fawcett had closed the claims on Dominion Creek in November 1897 not for the benefit of his friends, but because conflicting claims made an investigation necessary. It does not appear from subsequent issues that the Nugget accepted the verdict in a chastened mood; lawsuits were common in the Klondike. The Nugget persisted with notions derived from American mining camps in which camp meetings formed by elected miners served the function of legislature and court of justice combined. Since at this date the Yukon was not represented in Parliament, the Nugget proposed the despatch of a miners’ delegation to the capital. This was never implemented even though the Yukon had to wait until 1902 for parliamentary representation.
A third paper, a four-page seven-column journal which began publication probably in September 1898, was known as the *Klondike Miner and Yukon Advertiser* and was originally under the managementship of W.V. Sommerville with C.A. Walsh as editor. The earliest issue available is that of 16 December 1898. As its title indicates, this paper catered to the mining community and concerned itself mainly with local and territorial news. In contrast to the *Sun* and *Nugget*, the *Klondike Miner* displayed considerable advertising matter on its front page, though not to the exclusion of news. The *Miner* may be considered more of a tradesman's journal than the other two, though all three claimed to be the self-appointed champions of the miners.

The 30 December 1898 issue of the *Miner* contains an editorial indicative of Dawson society of the time. A dance-hall manager apparently had requested a visiting celebrity, a well-known actress, to leave the premises because of the disreputable character of the dance-hall girls employed there. The visitor complied, but the editor held forth on the condition of society in the mining town with its few virtuous and respectable women, and he concluded in histrionic style on the inevitable depravity of such a society, stating “Dawson society is an odouriferous stench.”21

As their first season drew to a close the rival journalists sharpened their pens. G.B. Swinehart, publisher of the *Sun*, drew the fire of the *Nugget* with the allegation that the *Nugget* was in financial difficulties. On 30 November, not scrupling to make game of the rival publisher’s name, the *Nugget* delivered the following riposte:

> We would have been pleased to allow Swinehart to sink into obscurity without attention being called to that fact. But Swinehart, and the name peculiarly fits the man, could not yield the ghost without endeavoring to vent the spleen which a defeated and routed opponent always feels towards a successful rival. . . . The Nugget has succeeded where the Sun has failed; and long after the latter has set forever the Nugget will be in the field doing business at the old stand and championing the cause of the people against every enemy whether it be in the shape of a misfit official or a twopenny newspaper whose editorial columns are the beck and call of every man who responds to a request to open his purse strings.22

It was the *Sun*, however, which displayed greater staying power than the *Nugget*, albeit as a satellite of the redoubtable *News*.

Berton asserts in *Klondike* that paper became in such short supply in the hard winter of 1898–99 in Dawson that the *Nugget* was printed for a time on butcher's wrapping paper.23 This may be so, but is not apparent from the microfilm copies available in Ottawa nor was reference found to it in either paper.

Early in 1899 the *Nugget* boasted that its circulation had risen from an initial 350 to 1,992. Unfortunately, research to date has not uncovered a corresponding statement for the *Sun*. Through February and March, issues of the *Miner* and the *Nugget* gave evidence of printing a little more international news; the *Miner*’s edition of 10 March 1899 included on its front page a despatch from the Philippines and a description of the Omdurman engagement, as well as an article on the queen’s grandson, Prince Alfred. The same paper performed a notable service to the largely alien population on the creeks by printing a three-column editorial explaining the basic principles of the Canadian constitution, concluding with a defence of the much-maligned Fawcett. Certainly some measure of the discontent felt in the Yukon was based on ignorance of Canadian practice or the assumption that it resembled American. On 19 May the *Miner* administered a well-merited rebuke to irresponsible journalists who engaged in continuous abuse of public officials: “The freedom of the press is a great blessing, the license of the press is a great curse to the community when it is under the knavish direction of self-seeking men.”24

And on 14 July the editorial columns of the *Klondike Miner* responded to an anonymous attack on Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Steele, officer commanding the North-West Mounted Police Yukon detachment, published in the *Seattle Times*. Steele had allegedly behaved in an arrogant manner with an American citizen. The *Miner* defended Steele, referring to the anonymous originator of the yarn as a “drunken scoundrel.”

The *Nugget* had charged as early as 7 December 1898 that the *Sun* and the *Miner* had merged under one management. The *Miner*, alleged the *Nugget*, had based itself on defence of the common interest whereas the *Sun* had become an unabashed government hack; the two interests were surely incompatible. However, the subject was closed by the following summer; the *Miner* ceased publication in August 1899.

**The Nugget and William Ogilvie**

The *Nugget* had at first welcomed William Ogilvie’s appointment as commissioner, hoping for reform at his hands. In September 1898 the *Nugget* editor wrote that Ogilvie’s appointment had done much to reassure the miners and that he could not be expected to correct overnight all the abuses perpetrated by his subordinates, there being only so many hours in the day, but by the following March the paper had lost patience with the commissioner. In its 23 March 1899 edition it had published an open letter from the chief executive in which he explained how he had disposed of personal land holdings on being appointed commissioner. The following week the *Nugget* editor, alleging some small dis-
Dawson Daily News office. (Public Archives Canada.)
crepancy in the dates quoted by Ogilvie for the sale of his property, printed a mean-spirited, insinuating attack on the commissioner’s integrity under the heading, “Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin.” At one point, however, the Nugget doubled back upon itself: “The prevarication is really not of serious moment except as showing which way the wind blows.” In July 1899 the Nugget pronounced Ogilvie’s tenure a disappointment “as he has done little but assist in saddling exactions upon the country which Sifton had overlooked.”

In contrast, the Sun, under the editorship of Henry J. Woodside as of May 1899, on 23 May proclaimed its editorial policy: criticism of the government when facts warranted it, but avoidance of continuous fault-finding.

Woodside, a native of Bruce County, Ontario, staunch Orange-man and ultra-royalist, was to editorialize trenchantly in the columns of the Sun, apart from a few months’ leave of absence on volunteering for service in South Africa, for the better part of two years. Woodside had begun his career as a CPR telegrapher and had gained his first experience with journalism in Portage la Prairie. He had served with the Manitoba Grenadiers in the Northwest Rebellion and finally arrived in the Klondike in March 1898 as correspondent for the Manitoba Free Press and the Montreal Star.

The obverse of Woodside’s imperialism was a militant anti-Americanism, exacerbated by the American orientation of pioneer Dawson. Woodside considered the Americans in Dawson much too obstreperous, presumptuous, aggressive and numerous to be suffered quietly. He took it on himself, through the editorial columns of the Sun, to set the Americans straight, a policy which finally cost him his job. At the outset he seemed a good choice as editor of the government paper and might have continued in this office had he exercised a little prudence in the editorial chair.

About the time Woodside joined the Sun staff, the paper’s first office and plant was destroyed by fire; the 2 and 9 May issues were reduced to the old quarter-size with which it had begun, but by 16 May it had resumed its regular format.

The Debut of the Dawson Daily News
July 1899 saw the publication of a competitor that was to outlast both the Nugget and the Sun and to hold the field as Dawson’s prime newspaper for nearly half a century. The Dawson Daily News first came from the press on 31 July 1899 and from the beginning outclassed its contemporaries. Initially numbering four 20-inch by 24-inch pages, the paper’s format and quality classed it with the metropolitan dailies – which indeed it was. Like the Nugget, the News was to be an opponent of the administration, but apparently the former’s owners did not foresee this, anticipating that the News would be a government supporter like the Sun. In its leader of 1 July 1899, the Nugget welcomed the newcomer. The Nugget extends the glad hand of fellowship to these gentlemen, and wishes to assure them that there is a wide and almost unoccupied field in Dawson for their activity.

When the Daily News is installed and ready for business we hope to see the government’s position supported and upheld with the energy and ability which the situation requires, and which we are aware the publishers of the News to be possessed.

Referring to the Nugget as the “yellow rag,” the Sun commented that since the proprietors of the new paper were also Americans, they could not be expected to know much about the Canadian scene: hence their support would not be of much use to the government.

As the first and for a time the only daily in the territory, the News took for its slogan, “The News When it is News.” The paper came out every evening except Sunday, for 25 cents per copy or $35 per annum. The News also published a weekly edition, for an annual subscription of $10, directed at the mining population out on the creeks. Substantially the same news appeared in the weekly as in the daily edition.

The News was founded as a joint venture by the New York-born Tacoma publisher, Richard Roediger, and his Canadian partner (from Simcoe, Ontario), William McIntyre. Roediger, who began life at sea (from which may have been derived his popular title of “Captain”), acquired extensive experience in the newspaper business in association with McIntyre, acquiring a large interest in the Tacoma News which he ran until 1898 when he left for the Klondike. McIntyre accompanied Roediger to Dawson to set up the plant, but thereafter the control of the paper rested entirely with Roediger. W.A. Beddoe, an Englishman who was one of its later editors, was called by a rival “that Juneau blackguard,” but such epithets were not to be taken too seriously in frontier journalism at the turn of the century.

The issue of Americanism was to become a sore point with all three Dawson papers. Of the trio, the Sun best merits the designation “Canadian,” but there is little doubt which of the three was the best paper. The News led in typography and plant, editorial writing, news coverage and features though it was perhaps not quite a match for the vituperation in which the Nugget excelled.

The first copy available, though not the first printed, of the Dawson Daily News, that of 5 August 1899, devoted one whole page to international news. From the outset the News took a broader view than its contemporaries although it gave ample evidence of its proclivities, particularly on Washington’s Birthday and on the Fourth of July. Outspoken as it could be in the fashion
An illustration from the Washington’s Birthday anniversary issue, Dawson Daily News, 22 February 1906. (Public Archives Canada.)
of the time, because of its position in a predominantly American community within clearly designated Canadian territory, the News avoided the issue of Anglo-American relations. In 1899 the Alaskan boundary was already a contentious issue, involving Canadian access to the coast on the Lynn Canal within the Alaskan panhandle. As the News saw it, the United States and Great Britain were adopting a diplomatic and mature attitude over this matter, refusing to be stampeded by Canadian hotheads who talked of war. 

We are certain that the United States does not want a war with Great Britain; we are even more positive that the latter power does not wish to exchange blows with the United States. In the meantime, it would be well to shelve this talk of a resort to the "arbitrament of arms", which comes from Ottawa. While it is a nice, high-sounding phrase calculated to stir the blood, it cannot be taken seriously at the present time. In fact it is the veriest rhodomontage.  

But more cosmopolitan though its outlook was, the News devoted its main editorial energies to the same issues as the Nugget and the Sun: mining regulations and representative government. By mid-August the new paper had definitely aligned itself with the critics of government in the Yukon. Its first target was the ten per cent royalty which had been defended by the Vancouver World on the grounds that the Yukon cost Canada a great deal of money; the News contended that the revenues derived from the territory matched the parliamentary appropriations. Mining license fees were too high. The federal government was mulcting the territory when it should do everything to encourage the miners and hence to open the country up. In its issue of 11 September 1899, the News warned the government that the limit of endurance had been reached in the Klondike, that another year of neglect, excessive fees and restrictions would strangle the mining industry and drive the miners to fresh fields. 

Despite the intense competition for gold and the presence of so many nationalities in a remote region, the Klondike was considered a model mining camp in the sense that felonies were promptly punished. Brawling, drunkenness and prostitution were inseparable from the mining camp and the frontier, but the authority of the law was never challenged, let alone set at naught as had happened in Skagway and in some measure in most American mining camps. The exceptional quality of the North-West Mounted Police was acknowledged by all three papers. Yukon justice was speedy, but followed due process of law in the British tradition.

It is interesting to note that the Dawson Daily News had the temerity to express doubts about the efficacy of capital punishment when society not only condoned it, but justified it as suitable retribution for those who had willfully taken life. The News nonetheless cited quite modern arguments against the practice: life imprisonment (with no qualification or possibility of parole) was surely a more fearful deterrent than the death penalty and with capital punishment there was no opportunity to redress a miscarriage of justice. At the same time this editorial was written in the first week of August 1899, the hanging for murder of one Robert Henderson and two Indian accomplices was in train. In reply to the News, the Sun on 15 August came out strongly for the continued employment of the hangman.

We have no sympathy with the mawkish sentimentality that speaks of an execution as "judicial murder"! If there are extenuating circumstances, the man slayer is seldom hanged. In Canada we do not cultivate that love for the "dear criminal," which makes a hero of a brute murderer like Jesse James or the Younger brothers. We simply hang them as high as Haman and have done with it. Therefore Canada is entirely free of that class of desperadoes. At the execution of Henderson on 5 August, the Sun contended itself with a modest description of the proceedings. "Everything worked smoothly and most decently, without a hitch of any sort, but a glance at the scaffold and the drop gave evidence of a very careful arrangement and attention to the most minute details." In contrast, the Nugget devoted the whole of its front page to the execution to the last grim detail, complete with a sketch of the final scene on the scaffold. It was Klondike's first hanging and the Nugget outdid itself, justifying the lynching in the southern states of Negroes accused of raping or molesting white women.

An incident occurred early in April 1899 involving the American consul, James McCook. It must have been an acute embarrassment to the American community, though affording much amusement, and was the sort of drunken vaudeville that occurred from time to time in frontier settlements all over the world. From the columns of the Nugget comes this report.

Consul J.C. McCook, the American representative to the Yukon territory, constituting the buffoon of a dance hall crowd while in a state of intoxication, was a lamentable spectacle witnessed at the Phoenix on Thursday morning last . . . .

Mr. McCook appeared at the Phoenix at a late hour in the morning, apparently under the influence of a heavy "jag". He was inclined to be merry and was evidently out for a good time; but above everything else was evidenced his dignity as the American
consul. “Who isn’t an American citizen?” was the form of his salutation, as he entered and gravitated gracefully toward the bar. A young man standing by assumed to believe that the inquiry required an answer, and he said he was not. “Then I’ll make you one in two minutes,” roared the consul, and he made a rush at the other. The two careened across the floor into a room occupied as a branch office by the Nugget Express, and were only saved from going through the window into the street by the timely exertions of Proprietor Pete McDonald. The men were separated and a treaty of peace was happily ratified over a round of drinks.

The consul then endeavoured to show that his heart was in the right place by ordering a fresh round every time anybody declared him or herself to be an American – for by that time the girls had been attracted from the dance hall and had gathered about the celebrator. He could not, however, overlook or forgive the temerity of his late adversary who had presumed to declare his allegiance to the queen, and the additional drinks taken had put the consul in a state of utter recklessness. So it was not long before he again turned his attention to the young Canadian who stoutly refused to forswear his country, and the two were soon mixed up again. Their manoeuvres finally landed them in the dance hall, where they fell to the floor, with Pete the night porter – who was not sober himself, – on top of them. A couple of interested spectators took hold of the squirming men by the heels and dragged them into the barroom, where they were disentangled and again the bloody chasm was bridged with the flowing bowl. Mr. McDonald also attempted to restore order by suppressing the young man.

The consul then turned his attention to lighter things than upholding the dignity and greatness of his country and, with one of the seductive damsels at his side, was soon participating in the merry maze. He made himself a strong favorite with all the girls and they are not easy to please, either – and he became the centre of their group. To again show that his heart was in the right place – and that he knows a pretty girl when he sees one – the gallant colonel unfastened his gold watch from its chain and formally presented it to Nellie James. This special mark of favor made the other girls envious and disgruntled, and in order to placate the beauties he proceeded to distribute among them a choice collection of gold nuggets which he had about his person. His unexpected generosity seemed to grow with the giving, for he suddenly threw up his hands and invited the girls to help themselves to anything they could find: “Take the whole works!” he exclaimed encouragingly. The girls couldn’t withstand such eloquent and manly persuasion and they soon had the pockets of his coat, vest and pants turned inside out. The utmost jollity prevailed, and the good humor of the consul being exceedingly infectious and one of the party contributed to the humor of the occasion by pinning a small symbol of the Stars & Stripes to the rear of the consul’s pants. It may have been this which inspired the consul with a most original idea for contributing further to the amusement of the crowd. Taking hold of the bar railing he bent forward until his coat-tails stuck out conspicuously, and then called “Kick me, Pete.” This referred to the aforesaid night porter, who not wishing to disappoint the expectant throng, Pete several times planted the toe of his boot against the consul’s posterior.

The effect was so extremely delightful to the colonel that he urged Pete to still greater exertions, and being willing to oblige to the extent of his power, the porter would start on the run from the other side of the room and almost send the consul over the bar with the force of the impact between shoe leather and tweed worsted. Though it was nearing the breakfast hour, the throng, which gathered to witness the granting of the consul’s desire to be kicked was large and scornful; but nothing could detract from his own enjoyment of the scene. Each succeeding impact was greeted by roars of coarse laughter from the colonel at the fact that breath was getting knocked out of the porter while his own remained intact and strong. Thus the time passed merrily until, exhausted with his own merriment, the jolly consul could stand no more, and he begged permission to retire. It was a difficult accomplishment alone, and two men – each holding an arm – accompanied him out the back door, past the row of bawdy houses down the alley to Second Street, where he was left to make his way as best he could to his room across the way. Genuine hardship here befell him for he met with a chilly rebuke from a girl whose “cigar store”, standing at the corner of the alley, he attempted to enter, lost his equilibrium and fell to earth. He made several vain but heroic attempts to arise, but being unable to do so, he finally resigned himself to his fate and crawled on his hands and knees across the muddy alley upon the sidewalk to the door leading to his office building, which he entered. A score of people, standing in a group at the corner, were witnesses of this spectacle, but only the consul and his Maker, possibly, knew how the final journey up two flights of steep stairs to his room was accomplished.

In the same issue the Nugget entreated the consul to resign “before you further trail the glorious flag in the mire,” but instead McCook sued the Nugget for libel. In court, however, witnesses verified the Nugget account and McCook left before judgement was rendered against him. The Nugget pursued its victim, demanding his recall, but predictably the harrassed consul found a defender in the rival Sun. Though he lost his lawsuit, McCook re-
tained his post, his government less concerned by the consular indignity in remote Dawson than the *Nugget*.

Concluding Days of 1899
A police ban on carrying firearms on the streets of Dawson was opposed by the *Nugget* but supported by the *News*. As late as early November 1899 the *News* observed that there were still a few roughs who carried guns in their hip pockets, but police vigilance made armed violence in Dawson at the height of the stampede much less frequent than in many an American city of Dawson’s size. The rough ways of the frontier, however, had their lighter side, as witness the reception given a former suitor who attempted a belated apology to an irate virago:

*She hardly waited for him to get through before she produced a ‘Malamute persuader’ with a twisted cracker and wound the same with artistic accuracy about the deep-dyed villain’s ears.*

*Her honour having been thus vindicated the happy pair (her husband) went to Lousetown and from there went into temporary retirement at West Dawson to enjoy another honeymoon.*

By November 1899 the *News* noted the passing of the crudities of the mining camp, gradually displaced by “the enervating luxuries of a gay metropolis.” Tuxedos and beauty parlours had made their appearance to the disgust of many of the old sourdoughs. The fantastic prices of the previous summer were gradually declining: turkey now retailed for $1.25 a pound whereas the previous summer it had been double that. A turkey dinner could be had in a Dawson restaurant for $1.50 compared with $5.00 the summer before. Fortunes changed hands with dramatic suddenness: a man who had been a penniless indigent last winter had just gone “outside” after having sold his claim for $7,500. The advertisement columns of the *News* in August included two bathhouses, a palmist and three dance halls. The *Nugget* disclaimed indignantly at the open and thriving trade done by prostitutes on 4th Avenue.

Rival Plants: *News* and *Nugget*
Late in July the *Nugget* boasted a new printing plant, described as a large cylinder press, and a Thorne typesetting machine. With its 5 August edition, the *Nugget* expanded from four to six pages. The editor proudly announced that a new type was to be used with the cylinder press which would be much easier to read in poor light. The possibility of the paper launching out as a daily had been considered, but the decision deferred for the present. In its 12 August 1899 edition, the *Nugget* crowed over the *News*, boasting that the *Nugget* had the first typesetting machine in service in the territory, the bulky device having been brought in over the White or the Chilkoot Pass and thence downriver to Dawson. The advantage enjoyed by the *Nugget* was not to last for long. Presumably, before this date all Dawson newspapers had used hand-set type. Typesetting machines, whereby an operator could work with much greater facility from a keyboard like that of a typewriter, had been developed during the last two decades of the century and had come into use on large metropolitan dailies. In *A History of Journalism in Canada*, W.H. Kesterton states that this important printing device, the invention of Otto Mergenthaler, first saw service on the *New York Tribune* in 1886 and was introduced into Canada by the *Ottawa Journal* in the 1890s. By 28 August 1899 the *Nugget* had expanded to eight pages, but was content with publishing semi-weekly on the basis that there was not sufficient news to justify a daily.

Even before the advent of the government telegraph line, the *News* had no doubts as to the need for a daily. Not to be outdone by its rival, the *News* boasted a cylinder press (probably steam driven), a Thorne typesetting machine, and job presses for printing contracts, and had an engraving machine on order, expected over the ice the following winter, which would permit the reproduction of halftone illustrations. In a leader of 10 November 1899 the editor announced “Dawson has now a daily paper, the *Dawson Daily News*, which in typography and make up present a very creditable appearance for a publication emanating from a point so near the Arctic circle.” A perusal of these early issues confirms this claim. Over 15,000 copies of the Special Mining Edition issued in September 1899 had been circulated, many of which were sent to leading newspapers in the United States and Canada. The *News* might well be proud of this special issue. Late in 1899 the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* paid the *News* the following tribute that was indicative that the *News*’s plant had kept pace with its rivals:

*One of the great enterprises of Dawson is its great printing house, established by the Dawson News Publishing Co. The plant is extensive and thoroughly up to date. It includes three power presses, typesetting machine, boiler and engine, paper, and card cutters, job and newspaper type, as well as over 100 different styles of large wood type, typewriters, safe and complete office fixtures.*

Certainly the *News*, and to a somewhat lesser degree the *Sun* and the *Nugget*, had taken on the format familiar to readers of the metropolitan dailies in the 1890s and 1900s – use of headlines; use of the “inverted pyramid” style of presentation (headings in decreasing size descriptive of further detail), an anti-chronological style but one enabling the reader to scan the news quickly; greater variety of type, and its use, with clear spaces interposed,
11 The Nugget’s Thorne typesetting machine, Klondike Nugget, 15 March 1900. (Public Archives Canada.)
to produce an attractive appearance in contrast to the solid columns of type characteristic of the papers of an earlier period. Advertisements were plentiful in the three papers, representing all phases of retail trade, professional and catering services, and steamship and railway companies; leading American railways, such as the Great Northern, the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul, and the Sante Fe advertised in the Dawson papers.

If one characteristic stands out in Dawson journalism of 1898–1908, it was the rancour and vituperation of its editorials. In this one would accord the Nugget and the Sun first place, but the editors of the News did not hesitate on occasion, stung by their contemporaries, to descend to mud slinging. Perhaps the Nugget set the pace for the future in its 5 August 1899 edition.

It's a bad beginning you've made, neighbor. Come right out in the open and hoist your flag. There is nothing we like so well in this country as plainness of statement. Don't try to carry water on both shoulders at once. . . . Such wishy-washy stuff as you have been handing out so far might do very well in Tacoma, but will scarcely pass muster in the Klondike.

Journalism in the Klondike was nothing if not partisan. By 25 October the Nugget was referring to the Sun as "this harlot of journalism" for its defence of government officials against the unmeasured abuse of the Nugget, at the same time resenting its own sobriquet "the yellow rag." Both the News and the Nugget opposed the government, asserting that the mining regulations, the royalty on gold output and import duties would strangle the territory whereas the Sun made allowances for the extraordinary conditions in this region populated largely by aliens and administered by a government necessarily ill-informed concerning the best interests of the territory.

Late in 1899 there appeared briefly a weekly, known as the Gleaner, founded by a William Semple. It has been described by a contemporary as "one of the hottest sheets ever published in Canada and I don't except the Calgary Eye-Opener." In December the Sun agreed to print the Gleaner on condition that any articles verging on libel be first shown to the Sun's editor. Somehow the arrangement miscarried, for the Gleaner was sued and convicted of libel and its editor hastily left the territory. In its Boxing Day issue the Sun apologized to the crown prosecutor, F.C. Wade, for the Gleaner's statements. The Sun pointed out that British practice did not permit newspapers to comment on a matter before the courts. The Gleaner's brief but colourful career has left little but its reputation to posterity.

In rendering judgement in a contempt case, Justice Dugas commented critically on the character of the Dawson press that abused its privilege by unwarranted attacks on respectable individuals. No particular paper was cited, but the News apparently felt that a response was necessary and alleged that it had followed the line of "clean, unobtrusive journalism." The proprietors and editors were aliens, but had not lost sight of the fact that they were living on the soil of a friendly nation where it was incumbent on visitors to observe "the reasonable laws of the country." The editor ended with the doubtful claim that both Canada and the United States "abound in clean, healthy newspapers." Perhaps in this connection and undoubtedly inasmuch as two of the newspapers were foreign-owned, late in 1899 the Yukon council introduced a regulation requiring proprietors, editors and managers to file an affidavit with the clerk of the territorial court within a month, citing the names of each journalist, his nationality and his place of residence, and calling for 12 months' notification prior to entry to the Yukon. Fines ranging up to $500 were prescribed for non-compliance. The News objected to the declaration of nationality as an invasion of privacy and discrimination, "for that smacks too much of czarism, and Dawson is not Russia." The Nugget predictably objected to the ordinance while the Sun found no alternative because the two foreign-owned papers, it averred, had given the Klondike press a very bad name in Canadian journalism. The News observed that although the journalistic code was similar in both countries, it was more strictly enforced in Canada. The Nugget maintained that the registration of newspapers violated the freedom of the press and was not to be tolerated in any democratic state.

With the completion of the government telegraph line in September, news from the outside became immediately available to the Dawson papers, each of which paid a fee for access to telegraphic despatches. On 28 September 1899 the News claimed to be the first to print telegraphic news. Access to the government telegraph line led to an acrimonious row between the News and the Sun which continued into the new year. By October 1899 the South African War had broken out, with its series of British reverses in the early phases. On 23 November the News criticized an unspecified contemporary for printing fabricated telegraphic reports from South Africa when it was common knowledge that a news blackout had been imposed. The News asserted that it had an American press agent in its employ, hence that News despatches were reliable. On 27 December 1899 the News attacked the Sun for having printed as its own copy telegraph despatches which were the property of the News. The Sun had been taken in by a ruse, printing a fake telegram which the News had devised as a plant: the Sun was a receiver of stolen goods. The following day the superintendent of the government telegraph service promised an investigation.
On 30 December the Sun answered the charges:

**THE DAWSON DAILY NEWS IS A LIAR**

*Its Editors Responsible for Making Charges*

**Against the Yukon Sun are Individually, Severally And Collectively Liars**\(^*\)

The *Nugget* at first favoured the *Sun*: ordinarily the editor disapproved of strong language in the editorial columns, but perhaps in the circumstances its use was now justified. On 3 January 1900 editor Woodside’s intemperate harangue in the *Sun* caused the *Nugget* to entertain second thoughts. Woodside accused the *News* of bribing a government telegraph official to gain first access to the line although as the official government paper, this perquisite properly belonged to the *Sun*.

On 1 February 1900 under the banner headline

**WOODSIDE IS A PERJURER**

*If Superintendent Crean Is Speaking the Truth*

the *News* countered with Crean’s statement that the telegraphic despatch in question, describing the Jeffries-Sharkey fight, had been sent to both papers, the Skagway operator having admitted clearly the telegram for transmission to the *Sun* as well as the *News*.\(^{45}\)

The unresolved row continued for many months with the *Sun* as late as November denying the charges of “the Boer organ.” In its edition of 22 May 1900 the *Sun* claimed to have proof that the Skagway agent was in the pay of both papers, but in the *Sun’s* service under an assumed name. The issue, so far as has been determined, rests at that, the charges and refutations rumbling away into the distance like the aftermath of a summer storm.

The gold rush and frontier phase of Klondike journalism had set a standard for acrimony and editorial abuse that would be maintained in the next, more settled decade.

**Political Agitation and Journalistic Ferment, 1900–09**

Political agitation for representative government and a revised mining code dominated the first decade of the new century. The gold rush was over, but the issues to which it gave rise were far from settled. Dawson’s population in the spring of 1900 stood at a little over 5,000, a quarter or less than at the height of the stampede, but still gold production rose and the days of placer mining seemed unthreatened. The community already was assuming the shape and attributes of a settled and, it was hoped, permanent community – a trend which was to reduce the night life to a shade of its former self. Dawson had a notoriety to live down and reformers were there to see that it did so.

In the intense journalistic competition which marked most of the period, the *Dawson Daily News* was to witness the demise of both of its pioneer predecessors as well as yet a third competitor which entered the lists as the government organ in 1904. By the close of the period, the *News* had the field to itself nor was it to be challenged again during its long twilight years. The price of its survival until mid-century was decline from a daily comparable with all but the best metropolitan dailies, to a small-town weekly whose horizon generally did not extend far beyond the tree-denuded hills surrounding Dawson.

The *News-Nugget* Duel

The new year (1900) was scarcely a week old when the aggressive *Klondike Nugget* issued its first daily in a three-page, four-column format. Henceforth the semi-weekly edition for distribution on the creeks was to be printed on Wednesdays and Saturdays in order that it would include the principal news items and editorials of the daily. Advertisers who patronized the daily were to be given free space in the semi-weekly editions. It was contended that such an arrangement gave to advertisers a clientele unsurpassed by the other two papers combined. On the other hand, the *News* claimed a circulation little short of all other papers of the Yukon combined by 1900. The eight-page *Dawson Weekly News*, which could truly be considered a compilation of the six preceeding daily editions, was delivered by a *News*-operated carrier service as far as Eagle City, more than 75 miles downstream on the other side of the boundary. The *Weekly News* of 19 January was to be a 12-page issue, the largest paper ever printed in the territory, carrying a wide coverage of news from the Dawson fire to an uprising in Manila and an action at Ladysmith, South Africa.

The year 1900 witnessed a broadening of the *News* to include a greater spectrum of Dawson’s undoubtedly limited cultural activity. Although on 20 January the *News* in principle supported clo-
sure on Sunday (which had been rigidly enforced by the North-West Mounted Police in the otherwise wide-open days of 1898 and 1899), it pleaded at the same time for common sense; the banning of a concert devoted to sacred music on Sunday was not warranted. On the other hand, 

No honest man or woman questions the propriety of shutting down all saloons, theatres and every other business for that matter on Sunday, and practically enforcing it as a day of rest against the many who would otherwise desecrate it with debauches of many kinds.¹

Besides offering a lively review of a performance of Shaw’s A Hole in the Wall, the paper lauded the second concert given by the Dawson Philharmonic Orchestra Sunday evening, 21 January.

To anyone at all familiar with the condition of affairs here, say a year ago, the sight of a fashionable audience and an orchestra of talented musicians rendering classical selections with the precision of trained artists, seems like a transformation scene, hardly credible and not looked for in this far-off section of the “frozen north.”

The concert last evening was just long enough – two hours – not to prove tiresome and the selections afforded a pleasing variety of style to suit all tastes . . . (Il Bacchio, Because I Love You, Schubert’s Serenade, The Palms, The Holy City, and The Minstrel Boy.)²

One suspects that the music critic of the News was easily pleased and that the “philharmonic orchestra” might not have made Carnegie Hall. Nonetheless, it was a start for Dawson where hitherto there must have been little in the way of musical entertainment other than the homely airs of the ubiquitous mouthorgans and fiddles. At the end of January the News started an art department under Arthur V. Buel, late of the rival Nugget, and a society column, under the heading “Social News and Literary Notes,” followed in the 21 April issue. In May 1900 the News pleaded for the continuance of the Dawson Free Reading and Recreation Rooms, opened the previous fall, and deplored the decision of the Yukon council to discontinue the $37 per month needed to keep the institution open. Closing the library and recreation centre would encourage idle men with time on their hands to return to the saloons and gambling houses. In broadening its scope and adding new features, the News, and to some extent its Dawson competitors, was following the trend of the large dailies of this century which sought a public service function that they might be sources of information and inspiration, rather than merely party organs or news sheets. The following November the Nugget introduced a society column, editor of which was a Mrs. Belle Dormer. But the “dear little Nugget” still retained its original spirit for on 2 October 1900 a detailed account of a hanging, running through two columns and complete with sketches, was followed by a terse one-line ad:

Best Canadian rye at the Regina.³

In the closing months of 1899 and throughout a good part of 1900 the Boer War was a front-page item everywhere. British reverses at the outset of the conflict provided a source of contention between the Sun and the Nugget. The redoubtable editor of the Sun, Woodside, was thoroughly Loyalist and charged the Nugget with pro-Boer proclivities. In an isolated community where by the spring of 1900, British subjects numbered less than one-third of the population and where two of the town’s newspapers were owned and run by Americans, Woodside’s militancy on behalf of queen and empire is understandable. At first the Nugget reported the opening phases of the war objectively, generally based on despatches emanating from London. These issues of the paper were far from pro-Boer in sentiment, but to Woodside it was a case of he that is not with me is against me. In its 27 December 1899 issue, the Nugget reported a Boer victory under the headline

DISASTROUS TO BRITISH

General Buller Meets Heavy Losses at Tugela River
Most Severe English Defeat Since the Indian Mutiny
Position of British Troops Grows Daily More Perilous⁴

Three days later the Nugget quoted Lord Wolseley: “We have found that the enemy who had declared war against us are much more powerful and numerous than we had anticipated.” On 3 January 1900 the Nugget reported Britain “panic stricken” and calling for volunteers for the first time, to which the Sun replied on 9 January, “The yellow rag betrays a vindictive spirit toward the country in which it is published and where it enjoys protection.”⁵

The most, however, that the Nugget could rightly be taxed with was an element of sensationalism in reporting a serious British defeat. On the other hand, the News restricted itself to copious factual reporting and catering to patriotic sentiment, calling for a full commitment at Britain’s side. Commenting on the despatch of a second Canadian contingent to South Africa, the News proclaimed:

The reinforcement of the hard-pressed troops speaks volumes for the general loyalty to the Empire of the people of England and Canada, and with such an unanimity of sentiment, coming from peer and peasant alike, there can be only one result, the annihilation of the Boers, and the union of the empire on a foundation as firm as the rock of Gibraltar.⁶
The Toronto *Empire* or the *Toronto Evening Telegram* could scarcely have done better.

The *Sun* meanwhile fulminated against the Boers, vilifying their character. On 13 February the *Nugget* snidely reminded Woodside that there were still a few Boers left unkilled in the Transvaal.

The South African War issue was indicative of undeniable anti-Americanism in the Yukon, when charges of “alien” were freely bandied about by the Canadian and British-born minority. Feelings were further exacerbated by a suggestion appearing in the *Nugget* that now perhaps was the time to withdraw the Yukon Field Force from the territory. To this Woodside replied: *We freely believe that the government was right in sending it, notwithstanding the opinion of the yellow rag editor, and that force will be retained here until such time as it may be considered advisable to withdraw it, which will not be because of the formation of a militia company here. It served its purpose of stopping any more threats of hauling down the British flag; it prevented such as the yellow ragman and boys of his stamp, as well as unthinking men, from getting too saucy; it formed a backing to the N.W.M.P.; it prevented any attempt at raiding our banks (this is not a joke, as we can show by the history of the western states), and the government of Canada is not taking any advice from cheeky outsiders as to when it is proper to withdraw its force.*

In a perhaps well-meaning attempt to straddle the issue, on 19 February the *News* suggested that the proceeds of a public dinner in honour of George Washington’s anniversary be donated to South African war widows and their dependents. On the appointed day, 23 February, the *News* had a banner headline across its front page:

**UNCLE SAM’S DAY**
*Washington’s Anniversary Celebrated*  
* Palace Grand Blow-Out*  
*Big Attendance With Many Happy Features*  
*Pictures of Victoria and Washington on the Stage*  
*House Draped with Stars & Stripes and British Flag*  
*Tommy Atkins Serves as Usher*

With this edition and that of 4 July, the charge of pro-Americanism had some substance. It should be recalled too that the contentious Alaska boundary issue was prominent in the early years of the 20th century. It seemed at times as if the *News* were deliberately provoking Canadian hostility. With such ardent imperialists and Canadian nationalists as Woodside editing one of the papers, it was obvious that the local press contained a highly combustible mixture. The *Sun* charged its contemporaries with having not one British subject or native-born Canadian on their staffs. The *Sun*’s quarrel was not so much with the native-born American as with the “galvanized” American, the offensive immigrants to the United States who then became extremely chauvinistic. Why were Americans so thin-skinned? continued Woodside: American public life and the American press were no strangers to the anti-British tirade, catering to the Irish-American vote, whereas constructive criticism in Canada of the American scene was very much resented.

Referring to the rumour that the *Yukon Sun* was government-owned, in a leader of 20 February 1900 Woodside expressed his contempt for those who assumed that a newspaper that supported the government was in its hire. On the contrary, the owner of the *Sun*, Thomas O’Brien, and the editor supported the government because both were Canadians. Since two-thirds of the Klondike population was still foreign-born, the *Sun* interpreted the widespread discontent as alien-inspired. It availed nothing for the other two papers to point out, as they did frequently, that native-born Canadians and British subjects in general were just as dissatisfied with the onerous mining regulations and the want of representative government as were the Americans.

**The Indefatigable Woodside**

A *Sun* editorial from the contentious Woodside’s pen early in April 1900 brought a libel action about his ears. The plaintiff was Joseph A. Clarke, a Canadian-born migrant to the Yukon, who had been briefly employed in the gold commissioner’s office and who at this time was beginning his turbulent career in Yukon politics. Clarke was active on a citizens’ committee seeking popular representation on the then wholly appointive Yukon council. Rumour had it that Clarke had been dismissed from the gold commissioner’s office for accepting bribes and that he had defrauded a group of citizens of his home town (Brockville, Ontario) of $1,200 to finance an undertaking in the gold fields. Woodside did not mince his words.

*If we had a record like Joseph Clarke we would want to keep very quiet indeed.*

*With any faults that we may have we can say at least that we never were discharged from a position for taking bribes, and we never swindled Brockville friends out of two thousand dollars. We would welcome another cyclone if it would goad Mr. Clarke into acting like a sane person.*

Clarke won a judgement against Woodside in January 1901. In commenting on the case the same month, Woodside observed that as the law then stood, it was easier for the defendant in a libel action to plead not guilty than to demonstrate his innocence.
In the spring of 1900 Woodside left his editorial desk on leave of absence to volunteer for service in South Africa. A fall from a horse prevented Woodside’s sailing with his own contingent and he subsequently arrived too late on the veldt to see any action. His absence – during which time W.F. Thompson was editor of the Sun – was reflected in a sharp veer in the Sun’s policy towards Americans, apparent in a leader in the 4 July 1900 issue. We must continue to encourage American energy and enterprise as well as our own, if we want to see our country grow prosperous and great, and we hope the day will never dawn when John and Jonathan will be separated... There is nothing “alien” here. Neither in language, in the love of liberty and fair play, nor in religion are they aliens to us, and we assure our American cousins that so long as they continue to sojourn with us their rights and their feelings will be respected by Canadians and Britishers, from every corner of the globe.

With Woodside reinstated in the Sun’s editorial office by November 1900, the paper urged Canada to take a firm stand on its rights in the Alaska boundary dispute and press for a tidal outlet on the Lynn Canal. Nor should it permit the Yukon to be exploited for the benefit of neighbouring Alaska.

Although the Sun had taken him back, Woodside had a foreboding that it would not be for long. On 26 November he wrote to Sifton applying for a position in the assay office. By early February 1901 the irrepressible editor had gone too far. “My crime is too much Canadianism,” wrote Woodside to a Regina correspondent. He had offended the manager of the Alaska Commercial Company who thereupon withdrew his patronage from the Sun. At this point the owner considered his editor too much of a liability and on 9 February 1901 Woodside wrote his last editorial in the Sun.

With this issue we terminate our connection with the Yukon Sun as editor. We have no apologies to offer or regrets to express for our course, which has to the best of our ability, been in the higher interests of Yukon and Canada. To our readers and friends we wish a goodly share of that prosperity which we predict for this young and growing territory and its ambitious capital, the most northerly city in the British Empire.

The Sun maintained that the paper was well clear of Woodside, that it had languished during his editorship and that circulation had picked up considerably since his departure. This no doubt was attributable to the anti-American line taken by Woodside, but the Sun was unjust in its leader of 30 March 1901 in which reference was made to the paper’s emergence “from the military magazine class into the ranks of live newspaperdom.” Woodside’s editorials commenting upon the South African campaign were knowledgeable and must have contributed to a subsidence of the civilian hysteria induced by early British reverses. Though not a professional soldier, Woodside’s militia service had given him a basic understanding of military theory which far exceeded that of his belittling critics and his wartime editorials were interesting and informative. His removal from the editor’s desk was understandable, but regrettable.

**First Territorial Election**

The first territorial election for the Yukon council, held on 17 October 1900, provided a stormy arena for the rival journals in which the protagonists were the News and the Nugget. Both papers had favoured the introduction of the popular principle on the Yukon council the previous winter. Hitherto the preponderance of aliens in the Klondike had been the reason for not introducing the popular principle earlier, but by April 1900 the Nugget contended that there were enough British subjects in the territory to justify holding elections. The News supported the Nugget, quoting the latest census returns indicating that no fewer than 1,712 British subjects were resident in Dawson. The News was more scathingly critical of the arbitrary nature of Yukon government than was the Nugget: an editorial headed “Abuse of Public Trusts” on 16 April 1900 asserted that such an arbitrary government as that of the Yukon had made the territory a byword throughout the rest of Canada. In contrast, the Sun recommended caution to enable a wise selection to be made by the eligible voters for the two elective seats on the council.

Four candidates campaigned for the two seats: Arthur Wilson, Liberal and former coal miner from Nanaimo; Alexander Prudhomme, Conservative from Quebec; Thomas O’Brien, trader in the Yukon since 1886, a Liberal and owner of the Sun, and Augustine Noel, Liberal and a lawyer. The Sun supported O’Brien and Noel; the Nugget backed Prudhomme and Wilson initially. The chief feature of the heated campaign was the News’s charge that the Nugget had deserted its original choice because it had been bought by O’Brien and Noel. The Nugget indignantly stated that its reason for dropping Prudhomme and Wilson was their attempt to buy the paper’s support. On 16 October 1900, as the campaign ended, the Nugget published an affidavit, sworn out by Thomas O’Brien, in which the defeated candidate testified that he had been approached by the News which offered to maintain a benevolent neutrality for a consideration, $2,500. The News had already been offered, the statement continued, $1,500 to support Wilson and Prudhomme. O’Brien alleged that he refused to have anything to do with the News. The Nugget made the most of this incriminating disclosure, concluding its editorial, “Let the galled
The ensuing vote returned Wilson and Prudhomme to the council. Since the defeated candidates had been the choice of the Liberal party as against the citizens’ committee, Commissioner Ogilvie found himself out of favour with his superiors and was shortly thereafter forced to resign for mishandling the situation. The News came out of the first election with the satisfaction of having backed the winning candidates, but with its own integrity jeopardized.

Three-Way Journalistic Rivalry

The year 1900 brought some reform in the mining regulations. With the assurance of the gold commissioner that the royalty would shortly be reduced to two or three per cent and that appeals from the gold commissioner’s office would shortly be handled by an appellate court rather than by the Department of the Interior, the Nugget crowed.

The Nugget congratulates the people of the Yukon territory upon the success of the fight for right which they have won after three years of effort. Nearly everything asked for has been or will be granted shortly. The dawning of prosperity for the Yukon is just begun.

Little more than a month had passed since the presentation of a citizens’ memorial, setting forth their grievances, to the governor general on 16 August 1900.

The years 1901 and 1902 were witness to a continuing duel between the News and the Nugget (by the end of which the latter’s decline was noticeable) and to the first election campaign for a federal seat, in which the News backed a loser. Dawson was still a prosperous mining town although the days of 1898 were obviously history.

From the outset the Sun had been a government supporter although reserving the right of criticism on occasion. By an ordinance dated 25 April 1901, the Sun was created pro tem the official gazette for the territory; government announcements, ordinances and mining regulations were printed on the Sun’s editorial page. The opposition papers were not above contending for government patronage. But until dispossessed by the World on instructions from Commissioner Congdon in 1904, the Sun retained the perquisite. By November of the following year, 1902, the acting commissioner complained to the proprietor of the Sun about the exorbitant rates – $3.50 per inch. The paper defended its rates, contending that they were lower than the commercial rate and 12-1/2 to 25 per cent lower than those of its competitors in Dawson. The News did not accept this statement, but until the advent of the World, as shall be seen in a later context, the News became the indirect recipient of government patronage in any case.

March 1901 saw a second acrimonious press telegraph row, this time between the News and the Nugget. The News accused its contemporary of faking a telegraph despatch on the seventh of the month concerning the inauguration of President McKinley. Under the blazing headlines, “THE DAILY NEWS IS JUST A PLAIN, COMMON, ORDINARY EVERYDAY LIAR, WITH THE ACCENT ON THE LIAR” in its 13 March issue, the Nugget published a letter received from the local manager of the Dominion Telegraph confirming the authenticity of the telegram in question and giving particulars as to its length and charges. The following day the News acknowledged its error. It was perhaps too much to expect a gracious acknowledgement from the Nugget:

We were once young in this business ourselves and we can readily understand how the enthusiasm of youth occasionally leads our contemporary into serious errors of judgment . . . . The News is somewhat akin to the man in the witness box who assured his Lordship: “Faith, yer honor, what I just said was a lie, but what I’m tellin’ yer now is the truth.”

The Nugget did much crowing over the News that spring of 1901, but to date the issues of the latter for this period are not available and so there is no point in reproducing one side of what must have been a dialogue.

Beginning in June 1901, the Nugget gave top priority to the celebrated George O’Brien murder trial and execution. The trial proceedings were given front-page coverage with headlines, the accounts sometimes running two full columns. A perusal of any newspaper of 70 years ago, whether in the Klondike or elsewhere, strikes one with the change in popular attitudes on hanging. O’Brien was convicted of a triple killing a year and a half previously, but referring to the police work required to convict him with the rather pained sensibility which its editor sometimes evinced for the cruder aspects of life, the News described the achievement as “worthy of a better cause.” The Nugget thereupon took umbrage: What better cause could there be than in bringing to justice a killer responsible for one of the most fiendish crimes in the territory’s history?

O’Brien was hanged on 23 August 1901. The Nugget devoted the whole of its front page to a luridly detailed account of the hanging, including woodcuts of the scaffold and the mechanical details of the drop and actuating lever, and concluded with his- trionic reflections on the law taking its inevitable course in obedience to a code as old as man and sanctioned by a Higher Power. The extra edition offered a further three pages, summarizing the case from the start. But five days later, under the heading “Simply
Disgusting,” the *Nugget* took strong issue with the *News* for its lack of good taste in printing an article featuring the hangman. It is bad enough for a man to undertake such a job under any circumstances, but to parade the thing before the public in all its revolting details is positively indecent. O’Brien certainly deserved his death, but we cannot say that we have much respect for the man who bid for the privilege of killing him. In that particular the *News* and the hangman are about on a par.

With its 25 April 1901 issue, the *Semi-Weekly Nugget*’s eight-page issue increased from a five- to a six-column format. On 29 May a new feature, “Over the Divide,” was introduced, devoted to news from the creeks. The *Nugget*’s printing plant boasted two new monoline composing machines which first went into service on 23 September 1901. Serving the same function as the linotype, the new device was more compact, operating on one-eighth the horsepower. Wilbur Stephen Scudder had first introduced the monoline at the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893. (Although this issue offers a detailed and highly technical description of the new machine, there were no photographs.) In this as in other technicities, the *News* was ahead of its contemporaries.

On 15 October 1901 the *Semi-Weekly Nugget* increased from a six- to an eight-column format. About the same time the subscription rate was reduced to three dollars per month, thanks, the paper maintained, to lower costs through the introduction of a more modern plant. In November a society column and a children’s feature made their appearance.

**The Freight Rates Issue**

Throughout 1901 the *Nugget* mounted a sustained campaign against the White Pass and Yukon freight rates, held to be inordinately high. The narrow-gauge railway had been completed from Skagway, on tidewater, over the White Pass to railhead at Whitehorse by the summer of 1900. From Whitehorse the company operated a fleet of sternwheelers downstream to Dawson. Beginning in January 1901 the *Nugget* attacked the high freight rates maintained by the company to the detriment of business in Dawson. The editor observed that construction costs had been high and hitherto most of the profits had gone to absorb this backlog; now the shareholders expected a return on their investment. All this was understood, continued the paper, but in future the territory must have rates on which it could survive. On 8 July 1901 the *Nugget*, in an editorial headed “Monopoly’s Iron Heel,” accused the White Pass and Yukon of charging whatever the traffic would bear. From this date until the government’s ultimatum to the company to lower its rates or get out of business late in November, the *Nugget* pursued the company relentlessly, the cartoons often illustrating the sharpness of the assault which the pioneer Klondike paper mounted on the monopolists.

A perusal of the *Semi-Weekly Nugget*’s issues for 20 and 24 July 1901 leads to the surmise that both the crusading *Nugget* and the *News* had financial interests in the outcome of the competition between two transportation companies—the Dawson and Whitehorse Navigation Company and the aforementioned White Pass and Yukon Railway. The *News* appears to have been affiliated with the latter and the *Nugget* with the Dawson and Whitehorse Company. On 20 July 1901, in what had probably developed as a war of nerves, the *Semi-Weekly Nugget* denied a report in the *News* that three of the Dawson and Whitehorse barges had been wrecked near Kodiak, Alaska. The *News* retracted this statement a few days later. A *Nugget* editorial on 24 July 1901 stated,

> It looks significant that the weird reports of storms, wrecks, and disasters on the west coast should be published in our contemporary just at the time of the visit of the officials of the White Pass & Yukon Railway. Two and two make four and the *News* greatly underestimates the intelligence of the people of Dawson when it attempts such rank perpetration. . . . As a sensationalist in behalf of the W.P. & Y.R. and at the expense of the people of Dawson the *News* got off on the wrong foot. Its work is too coarse for other than the natives.

Continuing the attack on 27 July under the heading “Pass the Crow,” the *Nugget* reported the convoy a few days below Dawson under the command of one “Black” Sullivan: “And when they do arrive it will be the least the *News* can do to meander to the water front and not only apologize to 'Black' Sullivan but also to the scows.” The 7 August edition reported the arrival at Dawson of the steamer *Tyrrell* towing one of the allegedly missing barges. The passage from Vancouver via Saint Michael had been made without incident.

Whether with an interested motive or not, the *Nugget* took to itself full credit for the eventual defeat of the White Pass and Yukon for both its contemporaries had hung back on the issue, the *News* because of its affiliation with the railway and the *Sun* allegedly because some of the Dawson merchants had preferential rates with the company and did not wish their competitors to enjoy the same advantage. The *Nugget* charged that the *News*’s suggestion in December, after the triumph over the company, that a rebate should not be demanded by the merchants from the railway indicated the *News*’s complicity. “The position of the *News* is that of one compounding a crime.”
Journalistic Rivalry as Dawson Comes of Age

In March 1901 a lawyer from Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia, who was to play a great, if controversial, role in Yukon politics, arrived in Dawson to take up a post as legal adviser to the commissioner. Frederick Tennyson Congdon was a Toronto graduate in law and had been resident a year at the Inner Temple, London. He had made a name for himself in his profession by preparing the first Nova Scotia digest of legal cases in 1890. Congdon’s term in Government House in 1903–04 gave rise to the most hotly debated political issue in the Yukon’s brief history. Congdon was accused of establishing a political machine in order to run the territory in his own interest and his most stubborn antagonist was the Dawson Daily News. This, however, is to anticipate the story a little.

According to Woodside in a letter to Laurier in 1904, Congdon’s first move on arriving in the Yukon was to buy up the Yukon Sun, installing a cousin, H.S. Congdon, as manager. This young man did not meet with the ex-editor’s approval. "That useless individual apparently considered it his chief duty to form an extensive acquaintance with fast women, and strong whiskey. He was thus able in about a year’s time to run the Sun into $10,000 of debt. This compelled Mr. Congdon to dispose of 2/3 interest in the Sun, to his chief creditor, Mr. R. Roediger, owner of the opposition paper here, the Dawson Daily News."

In July 1901 the Sun became a daily in order to compete more effectively with the News. In November of the same year the Nugget charged that the Sun was now nothing more than a morning edition of the News, under the same ownership and using the same plant. This was long denied by the News although in the end it did admit to a part ownership in the Sun for a few months only. As far as the Nugget was concerned, its rival now supported the government in the morning, gaining the benefit of government patronage, and in the evening reverted to attacking that same administration. In a leader of 28 December 1901 the Nugget stated that printing the Sun was no more than another job-printing contract and in no way prejudiced the News’s integrity.

As 1901 drew to a close, the News was not alone in its optimism concerning the bright future of the Klondike. In his report for 1901 the commissioner saw “unmistakable signs of permanency.” Dawson had a new post office, courthouse, administration building, schoolhouse and residence for the commissioner. Electric street lamps lit its thoroughfares during the long winter nights. Dawson gave promise of developing into a thriving, settled community.

The mainstay of the economy was still (as it was to remain) gold although there were hopes for diversifying the economy. With gold production at $17,368,000 in 1901, only five million dollars off the peak season of the year before, residents and the business community must have been optimistic about the future. Was not 1901’s production higher than that of 1899, at 16 million dollars, let alone of the first year of the rush at ten million dollars?

By 1902 the News was mounting considerable righteous indignation against the town’s still numerous prostitutes. On 19 April 1902 the News editor approvingly noted that three prostitutes had been sentenced to a month in jail in addition to a $50 fine. One of the defendants, going under the name of “Willie” Wallace, denied that she was the woman identified by a witness, but a respectable married woman. “Her evidence,” however, “was unconvincing, and she will eat porridge with the rest.” Pimps came under heavy fire in several May issues of the News and by the twenty-eighth of the month the editor noted a wholesale exodus of the prostitutes and pimps from the town. It was all a sign of the changing times: the press had been tolerant of prostitution in the days of the mining camp, but with the community evolving toward a more settled, residential character, middle-class mores gradually assumed dominance until finally there was no place for dance halls, casinos or brothels. In this respect the newspapers of Dawson were reflecting the changing standards and tastes of the public.

On 19 April 1902 the News began a letter column for readers under the heading “Tell It to the News.” At about the same time a fashion column, entitled “Fashion the World Over,” made its appearance. A two-column feature, “The Play and The Players,” providing drama critiques, was yet another feature. A series of articles on astronomy, reprinted from the New York World, appeared in the News in the spring of 1902; these consisted of a short series rather than a running feature. The month of June saw the addition of a women’s page to the paper and the first News sports page made its debut on 27 June 1902. A book review column was not neglected. As early as 1902, the News was provid-
THE OLD SNAKE PROBLEM: WHEN THE SWALLOWING PROCESS IS COMPLETED, WHICH WILL SURVIVE?
ing its readers with most of the features to which the public was becoming accustomed in the larger Canadian and American cities. The Nugget and Sun were less enterprising in this respect although the Nugget enjoyed the services of a fairly talented cartoonist at this time. The Nugget, too, boasted “The Stroller’s” column (E.J. “Stroller” White was a humorous street corner philosopher). Nevertheless, a comparison of the three Dawson papers for any period leaves little doubt as to which of the trio led the toonist at this time. The Nugget, although the Nugget enjoyed the services of a fairly talented car­

The public services performed by the News are the daily envy of its contemporaries. A long way behind in enterprise, with the faintest idea possible of the effect of government policy, with little or no conception of how to deal with public questions, the Sun and Nugget employ the only talent they respectively possess, attempted ridicule and derision. Although this jibe scarcely accorded the two papers due credit, there was a measure of truth in the concluding statement. To compare the News with its competitors is to compare a large metropolitan daily with a small-town weekly or semi-weekly. At the turn of the century, however, newspapers followed a party line much more than they do now and for that reason a supporter of the Yukon administration or an ardent imperialist would prefer the Sun to the News.

In July the Nugget returned to an old theme: the News and Sun were evening and morning editions of the same paper, acting out a farce. The Nugget’s editor attempted to emphasize the charge with a mangled quotation: “God and Mammon cannot be successfully served at one and the same time.” To this repeated charge the News answered that the printing of the Sun was simply a job-printing contract like any other and that its own integrity as an opposition paper was in no whit jeopardized.

The foolish statement the News is fighting the government with government money is worthy of the paper which utters it. If money is paid the News for work, that money becomes the property of the News and can be devoted to any purpose whatsoever. The News does not sell its soul or sacrifice its independence because it has a job of printing, in this regard it differs from the Nugget.

On his return to Dawson in the fall of 1902, Woodside was urged by the party to start a new newspaper which would be Liberal and Canadian, but Congdon’s interest in the Sun blocked his plans. The debts Congdon’s profligate cousin had run up during his tenure as manager of the Sun rendered its purchase impractical, for $20,000 would have been required for a plant and busi-

ness worth some seven or eight thousand. The Nugget could have been bought for about $10,000, but Woodside did not consider it worth it. Hence he was forced to drop the project. In a letter written to J.H. Ross on 10 November 1902 at a time when the latter was campaigning for the federal seat, Woodside put the Sun stock and plant at about $23,000 and the Nugget’s at $12,000.

The News-Sun ownership wrangle continued through the summer and fall of 1902 until the public must have become indifferent to the issue. On 22 November, however, the Sun announced that R.H. Prichard had purchased the interests of Roediger and McIntyre in the paper. From this date, the editor went on proudly, all the shareholders in the Sun enterprise were British subjects. The paper’s office had been remodelled and within a few days the Sun would be issuing from its own plant again. Then on 3 December 1902 the Sun disclosed the details of its ownership. In September last it had become necessary to sell a part-interest in the paper. The present owner, W.F. Thompson, had appealed to his long-time friend, Roediger of the News, with the result that the owners of the latter purchased a temporary one-third interest in the Sun until such time as another purchaser could be found. This had been accomplished in November, hence the owners of the News no longer held any interest whatever in the Sun. The following day the News berated the Nugget for not admitting the facts. The controversy did not rest at this point, but rumbled on into 1903.

The Concession Controversy

The concession controversy was to muddy the political waters of the Yukon for over two years. Both the Nugget and the News were strongly committed against the practice while the Sun took a more moderate line. The issue hinged upon the government practice of granting large tracts of long-term leases to companies and syndicates for working creek gravel by hydraulic processes, requiring expensive equipment and abundant capital. The practice was held to be detrimental to the interests of the individual prospector and placer miner, without whom there would have been no gold rush and no Dawson.

The largest concession was issued to an Englishman, A.N.C. Treadgold, who obtained from the minister of the interior, Clifford Sifton, rights to the richest creeks – Bonanza, Eldorado, Bear and Hunker. Treadgold’s scheme was at once seen as a monopoly inimical to the interests of the individual miner. Before the lease was cancelled by order in council on 22 June 1904, at Treadgold’s own request for want of the necessary capital, the press and the politicians of Dawson had plunged to their armpits in the melee.
13 Nugget cartoon concerning Richard Roediger's ownership of the Sun. Klondike Nugget, 2 September 1902. (Public Archives Canada.)

14 Nugget cartoon attacking the Treadgold concession. Klondike Nugget, 13 February 1902. (Public Archives Canada.)
Much to the scorn and obloquy of its rivals, the News supported Joseph A. Clarke despite his tarnished reputation and predilection for cheap demagoguery. The News opened its campaign on 23 August 1902 with a wholesale denunciation of the government of the Yukon to date. "If the history of the administration of the Yukon could be written it would stand forever as an example of incapacity, inefficiency and dishonesty."\(^{41}\) Whether a stronger opposition candidate could have been found than Clarke is debatable; the News backed him as the champion of the miners’ rights against the concessionaires and represented itself, as always, as the champion of the people against bureaucracy and privilege. Each paper accused the others of base motives; the News ridiculed the Sun for referring to a man who had been only a year in the territory as "the darling of the people."

In November, during the mounting climax in the closing phases of the campaign, the News and Nugget disputed Ross’s health and whereabouts. On 11 November the News asserted that the previous evening it had received word from the Toronto Mail and Empire that there was no truth whatever in the rumour that Ross was to be taken into the cabinet. In the same issue the News printed a telegram received from the Los Angeles Times stating that Ross had been confined to the Hospital of the Good Samaritan for three weeks with rheumatism. With all due sympathy to Ross in his affliction, a stern sense of duty compelled the News to reveal the truth to the people. The following day the Nugget contradicted the News, stating that Ross had fully recovered and was about to leave Los Angeles for Vancouver or Victoria momentarily. On 13 November the Nugget printed a telegram under Ross’s signature from Los Angeles stating that he had not had a day’s illness since leaving Whitehorse and that the report was a cruel rumour devised by his political foes. The News thereupon accused the Nugget of having printed a bogus telegram date 12 November, signed Hospital of the Good Shepherd, Los Angeles; the News’s contention was that there was no such hospital in Los Angeles, proof of the fictitious character of the Nugget telegram. On 15 November the Sun came to the aid of the Nugget, printing a telegram purportedly from Ross, in which the convalescent referred to the Hospital of the Good Shepherd, whereupon the Sun in righteous indignation delineated upon “the dastardly attack on Mr. Ross, the most infamous the Sun has ever known . . . A more cruel and cold-blooded attempt at political assassination has never been made in Canada.”\(^{42}\) The alleged telegrams agreed on one point – the identity of the patient and the locality, but as to whether in the Good Shepherd or the Good Samaritan infirmary remains a mystery to this writer. It is plain that one or other of the papers was lying. The News story gains a little more credence by
inference inasmuch as Ross’s health was so poor after his election that he was forced to neglect his duties in the House.

The News accepted Ross’s victory (by about 900 votes) with good grace, attributing it to the force of his personality. The “creek vote” came as a surprise to the News, which had always championed the miner, but no doubt the miners believed that Ross could secure them the reforms they needed more effectively than his opponent. The News could not forbear a sharp crack at the Nugget. “As everybody knows filthy lucre is the pivot upon which everything turns with the Nugget, and when that is arranged the inexplicable jumble of truncated sentences follows in nauseating succession.”43 A letter from Congdon printed in the Sun on 6 December deprecated that paper’s description of the election result as a Liberal victory; on the contrary, wrote Congdon, it should be considered a victory for the better man, in which Conservatives had thrown party loyalties aside to vote for Ross.

The year 1902 closed with a Sun challenge to its two competitors: in its Christmas Day issue, the Sun offered to pay a forfeit of $100 to the town’s hospitals if its claim to a November circulation of 33,545 copies could be bettered by either of its contemporaries. The News does not appear to have replied.

The Dawson Free Lance

In the increasingly competitive world of journalism in the early years of this century, many ventures fell by the wayside. Such a one was the Dawson Free Lance, a Saturday weekly, whose manager and editor was E.J. (“Stroller”) White, mentioned earlier in connection with his several columns of chit-chat in the Nugget. Described as the “family paper of the Yukon,” the four-page, six-column weekly devoted itself to local news. The reader might well doubt that the little sheet was to be a family paper on reading its first issue of 22 January 1903. On the front page, under the heading “Inch Rope Reminiscences,” the editor defended capital punishment and reminisced fondly on a long series of lynchings in the United States. Clearly the “Stroller” held that, in the absence of a legal execution, a lynching was an acceptable and salutary alternative. In the same issue, White commended his sheet to the residents of Dawson and the denizens of the creeks: “A daily paper is fresh for one day only, while a weekly paper is read for a week. The Free Lance contains spice enough to relieve the monotony of life and enough common sense to commend it to all sensible people.”44 On the editorial page of the first issue appears this homely directive reflecting the rough and ready conditions of the Klondike: “Any subscriber paying in cord wood will please bring it free from knots in order that a woman may be able to split it.”45

For all its drolleries and appeals to family sentiment, the Free Lance lasted for only a season.

The 1902 Election Aftermath

The backwash from the 1902 federal election rolled well into 1903, with the News roasting its two contemporaries on the Ross issue: that he was to be taken into the cabinet and that his health was sound. On 22 June the News called for the member’s resignation on the grounds that his health had been so poor that he could not attend to his duties in the House and he had accomplished nothing since going to Ottawa.

It was a grave mistake to send Mr. Ross to Ottawa. The News contended throughout the election that his return would be regarded as an endorsement of Sifton, and that the poor health enjoyed by Mr. Ross would militate against his usefulness . . . . Yukoners are accused in the house of endorsing the government and finding fault at the same time. Mr. Ross neglects his duties because he is said to be too sick to attend the session.46

By this date the Nugget too was reviewing its espousal of Ross’s interest. On 1 July 1903 the Nugget owned itself disappointed in the member’s poor performance. The Nugget had supported Ross because he gave assurance of being the better candidate, but the paper had not undertaken to endorse a repudiation of campaign promises. The Sun attacked the Nugget for its abandonment of Ross. It was well known that Ross was not well at the time of the election, but his supporters had confidence nonetheless that he would accomplish more for the territory than his opponent. This had been borne out, continued the Sun: reduction of miners’ licence fees and appointment of a commission to investigate concessions, maintaining the import of mining machinery duty free, and a liberal appropriation in the budget for Yukon development. At least the News had been consistent in its opposition to Ross, but the Nugget was changing sides.47

Concessions and Press Rivalry

The News renewed its stand on the issue of the Treadgold concession in a leader of 28 April 1903 in which it claimed to have been the only one of the three papers to have opposed the enterprise from the outset. Early in May the News editor clarified the paper’s stand on the issue: the principle of hydraulic concessions was not wrong per se, but should only be resorted to when the ground no longer offered a return for placer mining. Obviously the Klondike had not yet reached that stage and yet large tracts were reserved in idleness for future development by concessionaires. This was strangling the economy of the district and it was this to which the News was so adamantly opposed. Sifton was responsi-
News cartoon attacking the Treadgold concession, 1 April 1903. (Public Archives Canada.)

HE IS IN A POSITION TO EAT ALL THE FRUIT THAT DROPS FROM THE TREE.
ble and with his resignation, the News could only rejoice, but the damage was done. On 22 July the editor gave vent to his sentiments regarding the maladministration of the territory.

The fact that Clifford Sifton will no longer be empowered to administer the affairs of the Yukon is a source of much congratulation, but "the evil that men do lives after them."

The evil that Mr. Sifton has done in this country will be permanent, and the present condition of its mining industry, and commercial paralysis are monumental evidence to his narrow-minded views and limited administrative capacity.48

On 14 August 1903 the News announced in banner headlines that the royal commission appointed to investigate the concession issue had arrived in the persons of Byron Britton, K.C., and Benjamin T.E. Bell, an engineer. The latter warned, on the day of his arrival in Dawson:

The people must come to realize that mining is not a gamble, but a business. It must be conducted along the lines of the utmost careful management and strictest economy.

The people of the Yukon will do well to awaken to this fact.49

On 26 August a mass meeting held in the Auditorium Theatre passed a resolution condemning the Sun for its equivocal policy in the government interest and paying but lip service to the interests of the miners. Then on 8 September the commissioners arbitrarily closed the hearings in the course of a sharp exchange of words between councilman Clarke and Judge Britton. The News saw nothing to be gained from the inquiry and charged Britton with being partisan. Predictably the Britton report defended concessions, but this did not affect the outcome for by June of the following year the remedy had been applied by order in council.

Undoubtedly the News displayed a more mature and broader outlook than the other two Dawson papers; its editorials are proof of this. Still, by current standards, its ready acceptance of violence in human affairs and its nationalistic and jingoistic sentiments seem archaic. Consider the News’s attitude to boxing, street brawls and war.

On 22 February 1904 the News took up the defence of prize fighting against the strictures of the Dominion Ministerial Association which had attacked the sport as brutal and degrading. The News contended that war and prize fighting were close to the heart of Anglo-Saxons; this might be decried, but was fact. Therefore a newspaper must feature these items in order to sell copies. On the whole, continued the editor, this fascination with the prize ring was a good thing for prize fighting and the spirit it engendered were closely associated with war. It would be a sorry day when the great Anglo-Saxon race lost its martial ardour. In its 26 March 1904 issue the News devoted fully half its front page to the Britt-Corbett fight, but felt it necessary to defend a sport as yet assailed by few. In an editorial in the same edition the editor branded opponents of the prize ring as weaklings and cowards; every Briton and American worthy the name loved prize fights and only the hypocritical denied it.

A description of a one-sided street brawl reported in the 2 September 1903 edition of the News further illustrates the point. Robert Anderson, a concessionaire (and this factor may have coloured the account), and George T. Coffey, manager of the Anglo-Klondike Company, had been testifying before the two-man royal commission previously referred to, in the course of which Anderson had made some belittling remarks about Coffey. On leaving the hearings, Coffey attacked Anderson, driving him off the sidewalk into the gutter, thence across and down the muddy street, raining blows on him at will, while a crowd looked gleefully on. Poor Anderson, totally outclassed by his agile opponent, cried for help as he back-peddled his way down the street, finally making a pitiful attempt to arm himself with a stick. With relish, the News continues,

When they reached the gutter on the other side of the street Anderson went down and fell in the mud. He seized a stick which was imbedded in the earth, probably intending to use it as a club but Coffey came down on top of him and the fight continued until a couple of policemen arrived and pulled Coffey off the concessionaire.

Anderson’s face after the fight looked as if some one had tried to print the map of the Lynn canal on it.50 Coffey was fined five dollars while the case against his badly mauled victim was dismissed.

The News’s racism is apparent in an editorial of 16 November 1903, commenting on President Roosevelt’s concern over the foreign influx into the United States.

The question which appeals to the observer today is whether a government, the genius of which is Anglo-Saxon, is altogether safe in the hands of Huns and Slavs . . . . The change of racial stock in America is so rapid, many now living will yet be alive when America’s Anglo-Saxon ancestry will be but a memory as the Norman conquest is but a memory in England today.51

The News on Higher Education

On the subject of university education the News displayed an almost rustic pragmatism, very dated today when so much is made of university degrees of whatever sort and wherever obtained. Schools of journalism may well have been in their infancy in 1903; in any case, they had yet to gain the respect of the News. The contempt the News editor affected for higher education runs
through the editorial. The art was “not to be bestowed by a
gowned professor, nor to be acquired in the lecture room.”52 The
News may well have had a point in its commentary on the plight
of graduates with general degrees in the humanities who were
thereby fitted for no specific profession or calling. Citing an exam-
ple of a young man of his acquaintance who had an expensive
education, the editor observed,

The man’s education had fitted him for nothing and had unfit-
ted him for everything, and the alleged mental training he had re-
ceived at great cost to his parents finally left him stranded in a
restaurant as a waiter – and a very poor one at that.53

In taking issue with a Harvard professor who had ventured the
opinion that culture, not earning power, should be the prime goal
of the university, the editor of the News gave himself over to a
spate of philistine abuse of a liberal education all too typical of a
frontier society. For coarse pragmatism and cheap eloquence,
the following passage from the editorial columns of the
News of 7
January 1904 is hard to equal, let alone surpass.

To an observer at a distance the equipment of the college grad-
uate would appear to be less literature than that possessed by an
ordinary library attendant; less Greek than was known by the
bathhouse attendants of ancient Greece; less Latin than was spoken
by Caesar’s cook; less practical mathematics than is known
by a bank employee at $25 a week; less art than is in the posses-
sion of many art studio scrub attendants; less baseball than the
ordinary professional graduated from the highways and byways;
less watercraft and oarmanship than an ignorant fisherman out of
St. John’s; less theology than a Salvation Army convert; less pow-

erful oratory than a sandlot demagogue; less practical knowledge
of the world as it is than the bootblacks and newsboys on the
streets. This is about the equipment of the ordinary collegeman as
seen in the Klondike.54

This was probably the work of W.A. Beddoe, an Englishman
who at that time was a News editor, a man for whom Woodside
had so little respect that he consistently cut him dead in the
street. In writing to Steele in September 1910, Woodside referred
to Beddoe as a “spy, blackmailer, turncoat, blowhard, and a
liar.”55 Whatever Beddoe was, he was not a man of letters. The
News maintained that the hallmark of a good editor lay in accu-
rately gauging public opinion and catering to popular taste. If the
above editorial reflects in any way the mentality of Dawsonites in
1903, then (economic factors aside) Dawson was well along the
road from mining camp to tank town. The Sun took a middle-of-
the-road approach to the value of higher education, but the atti-
dude of both was strictly utilitarian.

The Demise of the Nugget

Early in 1903 the Nugget renewed its charges of a News-Sun
combine directed against the Nugget in a bid by the News to gain
a newspaper monopoly in Dawson. In a defensive mood the
Nugget announced on 29 January a lowering of its subscription
rate to stimulate circulation. Early in February the Nugget
repeated its allegations against the News, stating that the latter’s
policy was not in the public interest. By this time Nugget news
coverage was declining noticeably, indicative of the paper’s lan-
guishing state.

On 29 January 1903 the Sun announced a reduction in its sub-
scription rate to $1.98 per month, undercutting the Nugget by two
cents. On 4 April the Sun proclaimed that its Sunday edition
would total 16 pages by May and that it was the only Dawson pa-
per with an Ottawa correspondent. A four-page colour art supple-
ment was to be added to the Sunday Sun. On 4 June the Sun
announced the shipment of two Mergenthaler typesetting ma-
chines to replace its present monoline equipment. Coloured
supplements and halftone illustrations were in the offering.

On 1 July 1903 the Nugget made a special subscription offer in
conjunction with the Toronto Globe. Arrangements had been
made to include a six-month subscription of the Weekly Globe
with an equivalent number of issues of the Nugget for only $12.
This is a curious development in view of the fact that on 11 July
1903 George M. Allen informed his readers that both the Daily
Klondike Nugget and the Semi-Weekly Nugget, together with
plant, stock and fixtures, had been sold to the Record Publishing
Company. The last issue of the Nugget, dated 14 July 1903, con-
tained nothing in its six pages to intimate that the paper had ap-
peared on the streets of Dawson for the last time. The two editori-
als in the final edition dealt with Alaskan self-government and the
abuse of parliamentary privilege. There was neither farewell nor
valedictory.

The News bade farewell to the Nugget in a leader on 15 July
1903. While acknowledging their differences, the News paid trib-
ute to its rival’s spirit: the Nugget had never avoided a fight. Allen,
a formidable editorial opponent, had yet been a personal friend
“outside the editorial sanctum.”

Whatever the future may have in store for him he will leave
Dawson with the assurance that among the friendships that will
be cherished he must number among the most sincere, that of his
friend, the enemy, and none wish him greater success in the
sphere of usefulness in which he may find himself than the News
and its staff.56

The Sun was more frank on its relations with the Nugget.
The Sun and the Nugget have had lots of trouble between themselves – hard, bitter, stern troubles – but between ourselves, gentle reader, most of that trouble never happened. Apparently we were the most bitter of enemies, at daggers drawn all the time, but (on the side) that never prevented our borrowing paper and ink of each other whenever the necessity arose – we never borrowed money of each other, because neither has ever had any more money than was needed to keep going.\footnote{How seriously, one wonders, should editorial warfare be taken? Was much of the journalistic rodomontade written with tongue in cheek? Certainly to all intents the rival papers had gone at it hammer and tongs.}

Bankrupt on leaving Dawson, Allen returned to the United States where he continued in the precarious trade of catering to the public opinion.

With the Sun’s absorption of the Dawson Record on 1 November 1903, the government organ and the News had the Dawson newspaper field to themselves. The Record, edited by L.C. Branson and managed by V.H. Smith, had been a short-lived sheet, its first edition dating from 16 July of the previous summer. The six-page, six-column daily had been a morning paper catering to the creeks and was strictly a news sheet with no special features. Its editorial policy had been similar to that of the News: concessions were anathema and the woes of the territory were directly attributable to Sifton, but it was less implacably critical than the News. The Record had adhered to the basic Liberal principle that the Canadian economy was closely tied in with the American and in view of the discrepancies between the two countries in terms of power and wealth, Canada should govern itself accordingly. On Branson’s retirement, the Sun at once took over the Record.

The Sun had not long swallowed its short-lived contemporary when misfortune struck in a form all too common in the days of early Dawson. Shortly before four o’clock on the afternoon of 19 November a tin of benzine exploded in the Sun’s basement. Fire partially destroyed the printing plant, covered by only $5,000 worth of insurance.\footnote{The Sun thereupon moved in with the News, which placed stock and plant at its unfortunate neighbour’s disposal. By 9 December the Sun had returned to its own premises: enough of the plant had been salvaged to continue publication. Before taking leave of its host, the Sun acknowledged the timely and generous help received.

*We are deeply grateful to the Dawson Daily News management and force for kindness shown us since the fire. All the News has in the way of equipment and paper stock (and it has about all there is in the Yukon) has been at our disposal without money and without price.*\footnote{We are deeply grateful to the Dawson Daily News management and force for kindness shown us since the fire. All the News has in the way of equipment and paper stock (and it has about all there is in the Yukon) has been at our disposal without money and without price.}

The News and the Congdon Machine

Early in 1904 Commissioner Congdon began to move to ensure his tighter control of the Yukon’s political destiny and as one means of doing so he was instrumental in establishing another newspaper. Congdon decided that the Sun was too blunt an instrument to use to influence the voters even though the Sun, barring the Treadgold issue, had supported the government faithfully. Congdon instructed his henchman, William A. Temple, a sometime railroader supposedly in charge of diamond-drill operations, to establish a new government organ and to secure the services of Beddoe of the News as editor. This Temple did and the result was the appearance of the Yukon World, published daily except Monday, a four-page, seven-column paper selling for 25 cents per copy or two dollars per month. It carried the twin slogans at its masthead: “Reliable and Newsy,” “Aggressive, Courteous.”

Although the World soon demonstrated its aggressiveness, courtesy was foreign to its editorial columns. In the first issue, 29 February 1904, the editor stated the paper’s policy.

*Today the Yukon World enters the field of Dawson journalism.*

*In politics the World will be Liberal, supporting the government of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, but with a Yukon policy well defined and quite obvious.*

*The World has an abiding faith in Yukon and its future, and also entertains the view that the government has done much and may be confidently expected to do more to encourage those who have made this remote portion of the Dominion famous.*

The World commented that the Sun has had no comprehension of the importance of the functions it was expected to perform, and as a newspaper it may properly be described as a failure.

*The World entered the field because the field was not covered, that was not our fault, but our opportunity.*

The News reacted coolly: “Papers may come and papers may go, but the News goes on forever.”\footnote{We are deeply grateful to the Dawson Daily News management and force for kindness shown us since the fire. All the News has in the way of equipment and paper stock (and it has about all there is in the Yukon) has been at our disposal without money and without price.}

The Sun fought back, still maintaining its position as the government organ and mouthpiece of the Liberal party in the Yukon and asking how the World could claim such a role while employing as editor one who had served the principal opposition paper for years? Although the World relegated the Sun to spokesman of a mere splinter group within the Liberal party, the Sun insisted that there was no split in the party and that it still was the one Liberal paper in Dawson. This was little more than bravado, however, for by the end of March it had been announced officially that after 2 April 1904 the Sun would no longer contain the Yukon official gazette.\footnote{We are deeply grateful to the Dawson Daily News management and force for kindness shown us since the fire. All the News has in the way of equipment and paper stock (and it has about all there is in the Yukon) has been at our disposal without money and without price.} The Sun had been deprived by the commissioner of...
16 Anti-Congdon cartoon in the News, 4 January 1904. (Public Archives Canada.)
government patronage, so long a source of contention in the Dawson journalistic world, in line with his policy to replace it with a paper more to his liking.

It is surely no coincidence that on this same date, the Sun denounced Congdon for ignoring his splendid opportunity to redress long-standing grievances on becoming the chief executive of the territory and instead choosing to surround himself with time-servers and party hacks in his endeavour to dominate the territory in his own interest.

*It is only right to state the Sun is distinctly and mightily embarrassed over having to come to this point. The Sun stands for the government of Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the Liberal party, believes in it and can conscientiously preach to all . . . . That Commissioner Congdon will be replaced, and soon, is as certain as that the Liberal government of Canada is right . . . . Commissioner Congdon, W.A. Beddoe and the commissioner’s select coterie of paid supporters must travel together in future to the end, for the Sun must stay with the Liberal party which they are attempting to disrupt.*

In effect, the faithful Sun was forced into opposition.

**The News and National Sentiment**

In an editorial of 21 July 1904, the News discussed the principles of the British and American constitutions. Liberty was safeguarded in both, but whereas the Americans’ source of authority was the people, that of the British was the crown. Although the British parliamentary system was basically as democratic as the American form of government, the dignities and titles with which officials were honoured under the British system proved a heady potion for vain or arbitrary individuals. Herein lay the need for a vigorous and critical opposition press in order that officialdom not be carried away with a sense of its own importance. The News served this salutory purpose in the Yukon, a territory worse governed than any other part of Canada. Certainly until the appointment of McInnes as commissioner, the News had been a forthright and consistent critic of government.

In the same edition, the News took issue with the treatment accorded Americans in the Yukon in contrast to the rest of Canada. In the Yukon, contended the editor, Americans were referred to as aliens and treated as such and many had left the territory in bitterness. This regrettable state of affairs was directly attributable to the exactions and follies of the territorial government, and to the federal authority.

By April 1904 a trend in the direction of a more imperial and at the same time Canadian sentiment (not incompatible at this period) was discernible in the editorial columns of the News. On the subject of imperial expansion, whether British or American, the News showed itself the creature of its times: American acquisition of the Philippines and British conquest of the Boer republics was in the natural order of things whereby the weak were displaced by the strong and the only regrettable features were the hypocritical rationalizations advanced by the powers.

Woodside continued to assail the Americanism of the Dawson press. In writing to Steele in September 1904, Woodside observed that one of the curses of the Klondike from the start had been that the newspapers were controlled and edited by “‘Yankees who do not know the first thing about Canada.’” That spring Woodside had addressed a long letter to the editor of the News, taking him to task for giving ill-informed people a distorted and anti-British concept of the American Revolution. The News had in fact used the word “barbarous” to describe measures taken by the British authorities to dampen the revolutionary ardour of some of the agitators. Woodside considered it outrageous that a paper so mislead its readers in British territory, engendering a prejudice against the crown through a historical fallacy. The News did Woodside the courtesy of publishing his letter in full on 21 May, while defending itself by means of a play on words. The News saw the Revolution as very much of a family quarrel in which the British authorities in the colonies, through a temporary aberration, violated the rights cherished by all Britons as a part of their heritage. It is noteworthy that the News accorded Woodside a courteous hearing, rather in contrast to his former paper, the Sun, not to mention the now-defunct Nugget.

**News Versus World**

The summer and fall of 1904 saw rapidly deteriorating relations between the News and the World. The duel between the News and its last rival was to prove the most acrimonious of all in the brief but tempestuous period since newspapers had been introduced to the Klondike. Woodside’s allegation that Beddoe had been dismissed by the News for his attempt to blackmail J.B. Tyrrell, an explorer, gave rise to the News dubbing its contemporary “The Blackmailer’s Gazette.” The News observed editorially on 6 August that the World was to be found at every roadhouse and saloon whose licence had been renewed; Temple, Congdon’s creature, had been appointed licence commissioner: hence subscription to the Congdon organ had been made a condition of licence renewal.

In the 5 October edition the News contrasted its own plant and facilities with those of the “Blackmailer’s Gazette.” In storage, perhaps a standby plant, the News had two monoline typesetting machines of Canadian manufacture, as well as one American-made Thorne typesetter. This alone equalled the World’s plant.
The News had in service two Mergenthaler typesetters, each of which was of double the capacity of the older monoline equipment. The News was printed on a large-size Babcock cylinder press, whereas the World used “a country Campbell press.” For a wager, the News would undertake to print its competitor’s paper in less than a half hour.\(^\text{67}\) (Apparently the challenge was not taken up by the World.) To sum up, the News plant was thrice the size of the World’s and its circulation six times greater. In its tedious but repeated attacks on “the ignorant News,” the World alleged that the News had shipped the bulk of its plant to Tanana (Alaska) and that it was shortly to pull out of Dawson. On the contrary, replied the News, its Tanana plant was a separate venture and furthermore the proprietors expected to enjoy the same success there as in Dawson.

In September 1904 the News introduced a curious and rather messy format on its front page. Multiple headlines were set down the length of each column, but it was an unpleasing layout largely abandoned by the following year.

The 1904 Election: Defeat of the Congdon Machine
The 1904 election campaign for the federal seat was the most hotly contested in the Yukon’s history. On 29 October Congdon resigned his commissionership in order to contest the seat. Both the News and the Sun supported Dr. Alfred Thompson, an Independent and former council member, nominated by a Liberal splinter group in opposition to Congdon. The World of course supported Congdon, who had brought it into existence. Congdon secured the nomination of the “Tab” clique of the Liberal party, so named because of Congdon’s practice of issuing chits or receipts for services rendered in the campaign against future reward. Temple resigned his post as licence commissioner in order to devote himself to Congdon’s campaign.

Although Congdon retained Laurier’s confidence, Morrison, in his Politics of the Yukon Territory, 1898–1909, holds that there is little doubt that Congdon sought to dominate the administration and the politics of the territory for his own ends.\(^\text{68}\)

The Sun vied with the News in attacking both Congdon and Temple. The former licence commissioner had allegedly used his office to buy political support, refusing liquor licences or their renewal to those not disposed to support Congdon. The News scouted the World’s crude threat that civil servants who did not do Congdon’s bidding would be dismissed. The World had quoted the Yukon Act which empowered a commissioner to suspend any official; however, the News pointed out that this applied only to territorial officials, not federal; hence, the North-West Mounted Police (who incurred Congdon’s animus at this time), the post office and the courts were not subject to the commissioner’s fiat. Only the “underlings of the Administration building” could be so bullied; in any case, they formed the Tab wing of the Liberal party and worked solely in Congdon’s interest regardless of party decisions to the contrary.\(^\text{69}\) Writing to Laurier in July 1904 while still commissioner, Congdon assured him that he had done nothing of which he need feel ashamed. In reply, Laurier reassured his Yukon chief executive: “The Government has absolute confidence in your zeal and judgment and hitherto, whilst we have received numerous complaints as you well know, we have taken no heed of the same and left the whole matter to your discretion.”\(^\text{70}\)

By late July the commissioner was referring to the “reptile American press” while the News labelled its former editor, now in the service of the World, a “Juneau blackguard.” The News editor contended that he himself was English-born and bred, that he could trace his ancestry through parish registers back to Tudor times, and that he had lived in North America nearly a quarter-century, but that this was the first time that his nationality had been cast in his teeth. Since Congdon held it to be so vital that Canadians be in control of the Yukon press why, asked the News, had the commissioner offered to sell his interest in the Sun to the News on assuming office?\(^\text{71}\)

As the campaign quickened the News warned its readers:

_The News is confident that this is the last opportunity that will be given Yukon to break the galley chains which have been thrown about the territory. It is the last time it will be in the power of the people to throw off the Old Man of the Sea._\(^\text{72}\) On 30 November the News sounded a final warning to the electorate: beware of false telegrams purporting to emanate from Ottawa with promises likely to affect the vote in Congdon’s interest. This had been done before, during the campaign of 1902; then many of the public had been led to believe that Ross was to be taken into the cabinet.

Despite his machinations, Congdon lost the election by 618 votes. Thompson, represented by the News as a standard-bearer in the fight against political jobbery, had won the seat. The World accepted the results with ill grace: “Yukon is a hotbed of disloyalty,” raged the editor.

_The people have spoken and told the government that what has been done in Yukon during the last few years is not appreciated, that big appropriations are not wanted, that government help is unnecessary, and that from this time on the people will ask the government for nothing but will fight the powers that be through the person of an Independent, a man who will stand alone in the house with not another to second his resolutions._\(^\text{73}\)
On 19 December, two days after the polls had closed, the News moralized on the folly of having the elective machinery in the hands of one of the candidates. Basic to the whole concept of British liberty was the opportunity afforded the people to express the popular will without violence. The territory’s interests now lay in rallying behind Thompson. The News, concluded the editor, had been in the forefront of the fight against Congdon from the start and it had won.

The new year, 1905, was not many days old when the News gleefully announced an overdue reduction in the serried ranks of the territorial civil service: “AND THEY GOT IT WHERE THE CHICKEN GOT THE AXE!!!”³ Thirty-three officials had received notice, some of whom were “our friends” and hence the measure could not be taken as one of political vengeance. With the decline in the territory’s population from 40,000 to a quarter that number, a reduction in the civil service was a necessary economy, at an estimated saving of $100,000 annually.

The Conspiracy Charges
Following the election 17 men were charged with conspiracy in connection with election irregularities. The preliminary hearing lasted six weeks, as a result of which six of the accused were dismissed and eleven arraigned, but for want of sufficient evidence the crown did not press charges. The News, which no doubt would have preferred retention of the old Scottish verdict of not proven in addition to guilty and not guilty, was particularly distressed at the dismissal of two of the defendants, Creswell and Black, who most certainly had tampered with the ballots. Dropping the charges, contended the News, would allow the Tabs to recover themselves. The battle against corruption had just been joined; weakness now would mean a more costly campaign later. The winning of the federal seat for a reformer was only the first step in the reform campaign.

Joseph Clarke supported the News’s opposition to dropping the charges, but the News did not support his demand that the crown prosecutor, J.B. Pattullo, and the acting commissioner, Major Zachary T. Wood of the North-West Mounted Police, should be impeached for partisan activity. Wood had simply followed orders from Ottawa and had done so much to ensure a clean election that Clarke’s proposal was preposterous. Nonetheless the News printed Clarke’s letter demanding that charges be pressed for election irregularities, but without the two paragraphs concerning the impeachment of Pattullo and Wood. On being badgered by the World, the News reluctantly published the letter in full on 20 March 1905 in order to discourage Clarke from seeking further abetment from the World.

Mining Regulations: Congdon’s Return
On 1 April 1905 the News’s headlines heralded reform in the mining regulations and attributed it to the new member. Three days later, however, the World published a letter written by Congdon to the secretary of the Dawson Board of Trade in which the former commissioner referred directly to reforms in the regulations which he hoped soon to have introduced. Hence the credit, asserted the World, properly belonged to Congdon and not Thompson. It was a valid point, but the News had not yet done with Congdon. It was rumoured according to an editorial of 1 June 1905, that the defeated candidate was making desperate efforts “on the outside” to secure a government office and return to the Yukon. The editor contended that there was no chance of such a manoeuvre and that Congdon was too heavily discredited to show his face in the Yukon again. In this the News was wrong for not only was the ex-commissioner to return to the Yukon sooner than expected, but he was yet to sit for the territory in the House. On 3 June the World announced Congdon’s imminent return as legal adviser to the government, the same office that had brought him to the Yukon in the first instance. On 6 June the News editor deplored the announcement which indicated all too clearly that the Tabs were still active and that the battle against corruption was but half won.

The World proved clearer sighted than the News on one subject. Years of opposition to federal authority in the territory had led the News to favour union with British Columbia as a possible solution to the Yukon’s ills. This province had the best mining regulations in the country and retained a greater measure of control over its own resources than any other province. On the other hand, the World scouted the suggestion as utterly impractical. British Columbia already was the largest province and furthermore a vast wilderness, much of it unexplored, lay between the southern boundary of the Yukon and the fringes of civilization in central British Columbia. Apart from recent overtures from the province, the World contention has been borne out.

McInnes Reform
The appointment of W.W.B. McInnes as commissioner of the Yukon ushered in a new era for the territory. With Frank Oliver replacing Sitton as minister of the interior, the Yukon could indeed look forward to better times. A native of Dresden, Ontario, McInnes was a Toronto law graduate who had sat both in the federal House and the British Columbia legislature. The World welcomed the McInnes appointment in an editorial on 23 May 1905, but the News was understandably reserved. The World’s suggestion of a seemly cessation of political agitation on the arrival of the new commissioner was rejected by the News. On the contrary, wrote
the editor of the latter on 27 June, the new commissioner should be made amply aware of what had been going on in the territory in order that he could never complain that he had not been warned.

McInnes arrived in Dawson on 4 July and promptly announced a programme of widespread reform that soon won over the News. Banner headlines on 8 July proclaimed:

**SWEEPING REFORMS ANNOUNCED FOR THE YUKON**

**NEW COMMISSIONER PROMISES TO REMEDY**

**THE GREAT EVILS THAT HAVE CURSED THE KLONDIKE**75

On visiting Dawson in August, the new minister spent three days listening to grievances. A reforming commissioner in conjunction with a sympathetic minister augured well for the future of the territory. Idle concessions were revoked and the mining code revised. In commenting facetiously about the mistake Ottawa had made in sending an honest man as commissioner, the News drew the heavy censure of the World.

The cowardly contemptible vulture that would slur the character of the prime minister and of the men who are dearest to all Canadians and insinuate that their reason for sending Mr. McInnes here was because of their relief that he was a dishonest man – a mistake found too late – is about the rawest thing the territory has had yet to suffer.76

The News retorted that of course the editorial in question had been written jokingly, but that such subtleties were beyond the World. The News was sincere, however, in its support of McInnes.

In July 1905 the World revived the News-Sun ownership debate, charging that Roediger and McIntyre, proprietors of the News, also owned the Sun. The News scoffed at this clumsy attempt to evoke the spectre of a combine; the newspaper registration ordinance required all newspaper proprietors to file this information under oath at the courthouse. Of the three papers currently publishing in Dawson, only the World evaded naming its individual owners. W.F. Thompson owned the Sun, Roediger and McIntyre the News, with Arnold F. George as editor. And George was an Englishman, not an American. It was readily seen, continued the News, why the World was secretive about its ownership (cited as the World Publishing Company); most of its stock was held by civil servants who had been forced by Congdon to invest in the enterprise.77 On 12 September 1905 the News returned to the ownership issue – originally Congdon, Thompson and Pritchard had been joint owners of the Sun, Congdon subsequently selling out his interest on his appointment as commissioner. The Sun had been partially owned by the News for only two months in 1902, but had been independent ever since.

**News-World Confrontation**

Under the reforming administration of the new commissioner, 1906 witnessed a relaxation in political tension and agitation. The News and the World were now the journalistic protagonists in Dawson, with the Sun apparently below the horizon. (At the time of writing this paper, research has not produced the last issue of the veteran Klondike paper nor has reference to its demise been found in the News.) The year opened with the News and World squabbling over the printing of mining notices, official descriptions of grants issued by the gold commissioner’s office. The News antagonized the World, now the government organ, by printing these notices free of charge at a savings to individual grantees of up to $50. The News’s assumption of one of its perquisites galled the World, but the gold commissioner’s office ruled that the notices were valid regardless of where they appeared (including the Whitehorse Star). In a leader of 8 January 1906 the News accused the World of charging exorbitant rates for this service. The News ridiculed the World’s claims to a high creek circulation, maintaining that in many cases the papers had been literally given away. Not scrupling to attack its competitor’s integrity, the News referred to the World as “the grafter’s gazette.” Perhaps in retaliation, the World charged the News editor, A.F. George, with extortion. Apparently having second thoughts on the validity of this charge, the World printed a full retraction in its issue of 19 June 1906.

It is often the case that a newspaper in the heat of controversy is led to attach the weight of fact to what is afterward found to have been unfounded suspicion.

The lapse of time enables the World to state fully and frankly that the serious charge against Mr. A.F. George of having attempted to extort money, or anything else from anyone, is absolutely foundationless and without basis in fact. The World makes this statement voluntarily and in barest justice to the gentleman injured. There has nothing transpired on which such a charge could be based and it is withdrawn and retracted without reservation whatsoever.78

Whether the retraction came about through the threat of a libel suit or whether the World decided to be prudent is open to speculation although the former is more likely.

As mentioned previously, the North-West Mounted Police had incurred Congdon’s enmity by refusing the accede to his behests during the 1904 election campaign. At that time Wood, in command of the force, was acting as administrator following the resignation of Congdon to contest the seat. In March 1906 the News attacked the World for publishing abusive letters, signed “Dawson,” whose target was the force and a woman of social
standing, presumably the commandant’s wife. A Major A. Ross Cuthbert, writing to Woodside from Dawson on 28 March 1906, identified Congdon as the source of the libel. Replying to Cuthbert from Ottawa on 27 August, Woodside wrote that he suspected that the World got a tip from Ottawa to stop that nonsense, for in the only copy seen by me for a long time, there was a very laudatory article on the police. You see the fool [presumably Beddoe, the editor] hardly seemed to be aware that he was striking at Sir Wilfrid’s own department.79

Talk of this campaign of vilification reached the prime minister. Laurier had always had confidence in Congdon notwithstanding the many complaints of his machinations; however, on 31 May, in writing to McInnes, he mentioned the anonymous letters, scarcely believing that “our friend Congdon” could be capable of such action, particularly against a woman of standing. Nonetheless, continued the prime minister, he had informed Wood that he was at liberty to direct the patronage of his office elsewhere than the columns of the World.80 McInnes replied in June that the “unfair,” “unjust” and “scurrilous” attacks had been carried on throughout the winter. He attributed the animosity to social rivalries among certain leading families “and to many petty and ill-advised acts of administration, which were not calculated to cement our friends.”81 It is perhaps difficult to understand how Congdon, former commissioner and future MP, could so lower himself as to attack anyone under the cowardly shelter of a nom-de-plume, but such apparently was the case, a rather shameful chapter in the life of this undoubtedly able if overly ambitious man. The World lent itself to the discreditable proceedings, whereas predictably the News exposed “Dawson.”

From a sampling of the two papers in September 1906, it is apparent that the News was the larger (six pages, eight columns) and more progressive daily of the two, the World putting out a four-page, seven-column paper. The News was better illustrated and more cosmopolitan in outlook. The amount of advertising in the World had declined since the previous spring; however, the World was not yet finished as a competitor.

Americanism as a contentious issue was noticeably declining. In commenting on recent American legislation providing penalties for those exploiting the American flag for use in advertising, the News editor did reveal an American rather than British sentiment in which the veneration accorded the flag in the United States was reserved for the crown in Britain and its dependencies. The News issue of 4 July 1906 is the first which did not proclaim the American holiday with banner headlines and fulsome editorials as if the Klondike were American territory. Empire Day had been commemorated by the News with a large-scale photograph of the recently deceased queen. The day following the fourth, the News stressed the theme of Anglo-American concord. If the News were moderating its American sentiment, the World was forswearing its erstwhile “Yankee Go Home” line. On 28 June a World editorial had laid to rest the anti-American spectre.

The World is a Canadian paper, first, last and all the time. But it believes in the wise saying of Earl Grey, that the closer Canada affiliates with the more powerful nation at the south of her, the better it must be for her continued prosperous growth.82

**News Trends and the Decline of the World**

Although in its earlier years the News had expressed indignation over prostitutes and pimps, it did not follow that the paper was rigid enough to accept a measure like the Sunday Observance Bill. The editor found this coercive degree of sabbatarianism inconsistent with the growing cosmopolitan character of Canada and particularly the Yukon. Immigration would lead to greater tolerance and render it more difficult for one group, sect or denomination to impose its will on others. The News felt it fortunate that the provisions of the Bill called for its implementation in each province by the attorney general; the territory had no such official.

In the fall of 1906 the News took up a fad it pursued intermittently for a number of months. A simplified phonetic style of spelling had allegedly been adopted by the American government under presidential authority; however, it is indeed questionable that the British government, as the News believed, was considering the new practice. Quoting the New York Globe, the News stated that of the 300 proposed revisions, only 67 need be considered radical and some of these might never find their way into general use:

Heapt for heaped
washt for washed
mixt for mixed
altho for although
molt for moult
stript for stripped
woful for woeful
and trapt for trapped83

The News generally followed American usage, but never in its career of more than a half-century adopted such solecisms as these.

A marked drop in News advertisement patronage is evident in the early issues of 1907, reflecting a gradual decline in Klondike prosperity. In an issue selected at random (3 January 1907), it is
noteworthy that the paper retained the patronage of such American concerns as the Great Northern Railway, the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway, and Harper Brothers, a New York publishing house. The Yukon World exhibited the same symptoms of mid-winter slump in Dawson retail trade. The two papers retained their wonted size – eight pages for the News and four pages for the World. The season was quiet. A curious feature in the pages of the News was Bovril advertisements in French in a paper otherwise wholly printed in English. The two editors devoted their columns to topics of general interest in the national and international scene, avoiding items of local and controversial nature. By late 1907 News advertising had revived considerably, but the editorials filled little more than one column. The front page of this edition exhibited much telegraphic news, mostly of North American origin, but with one despatch from St. Petersburg, the czarist capital.

David R. Morrison asserts that by 5 April 1907 the News had taken over the management of the World, the latter appearing from this time as the morning edition of the News. Editorial controversy between the two papers had declined by this date to the point that Morrison’s assertion is feasible, but no indication of this was found in either paper.

On 30 November 1907 the World announced its reversion to weekly publication during the winter months when advertising patronage was at a minimum. The Weekly Yukon World was to appear on Saturday mornings and was to include the official gazette. (On 1 May the following spring the World resumed daily publication.) The weekly was of the same dimensions as the daily – four pages, seven columns – and sold at the rate of one dollar per month. This move no doubt reflected the slimmer financial resources of the World as compared with the News which was to continue daily publication until the 1920s. Or, assuming the accuracy of Morrison’s statement, the reversion to weekly publication may be seen as an economy measure adopted by the News management to see them through the lean winter months. In either case, a decline in the Klondike’s economy is clearly evident.

A significant shift in News editorial policy is clearly indicated in a leader of 10 September 1907. Commenting on the Borden platform, the News solidly supported the Laurier administration, a volte-face indeed from the pre-McInnes era.

Thompson, the Yukon’s member of Parliament, reported to the News manager that former Klondikers now resident in Edmonton, Calgary or Victoria assured him that the News compared very favourably with the best dailies in these much larger centres. People who had never been to the Yukon continually expressed surprise that so remote a region should be served by a paper of such quality. The News in turn kept in touch with former residents and subscribers who proudly showed the paper to their friends. At this date (1907) the News’s standards had not deteriorated; however, the Klondike economy had. By 1908 the Yukon population had declined to less than 10,000. The steady drop in gold production told the story.

In 1908 it was announced that the Yukon council would become an elective body. The commissioner was no longer to sit in council, but was to retain the powers of reservation and disallowance. Hence, the territory won fully representative but not responsible government, no cabinet being instituted. In a leader of 20 July 1908 the News welcomed the new constitution, it being sufficient that the long fight for representative government had been won and that future legislation be in the hands of resident Yukoners rather than in those of remote bureaucrats in Ottawa. The News was content with the division of powers between commissioner and council. As Morrison points out, the arrangement fell short of responsible government, but nonetheless the elective council would exercise a measure of control through voting supplies. In the words of a News editorial, “It will be a snug, round-the-table affair.” The World seemingly offered little commentary on the legislation (Bill to Amend the Yukon Act, 1908), contenting itself with a discussion of the parliamentary scene in Ottawa. With the adoption of a revised and improved mining code, the introduction of representative government and the cleaning up of the concession issue, the years of heated political controversy were over.

As Dawson became a settled community after the Canadian pattern in which the nonconformist Methodist-oriented conscience predominated, an assault was mounted on the last colourful vestiges of the wide-open boom town of the so recent past. The dance halls with their bars, gambling rooms, vaudeville and women (not necessarily prostitutes) had already been attacked by the moralists who would have Dawson as quiet and respectable as, for example, Palmerston, Ontario, or Charlottetown. As early as 5 October 1906 the News was defending the dance hall against the strictures of a Nanaimo divine who had not been in Dawson at the time of the gold rush and hence had not witnessed the scenes he declaimed against from the pulpit and in the press. He declared that the Dawson dance halls of the present were even worse than at the time of the gold rush and had become a byword throughout the country. The News countered that rigorously policed Dawson, a town small enough that everyone knew everyone else, was as law abiding as any other town of comparable size in Canada, but the combination of sex and hard liquor found in the dance halls was more than the reformers could toler-
ate. As Dawson increasingly became a settled community in which people raised their families and made their homes, the surviving dance halls came under closer surveillance. Perhaps the foremost reformer, the zealous Reverend John Pringle, a Presbyterian graduate of Queen’s who had come into the territory with the stampede, roused the most controversy. By 1902 he had begun a campaign against the remaining dance halls in Dawson and on 18 January 1908 the Floradora, the last of the colourful and plush dance halls synonymous with the gilded nineties, closed its doors. Subsequently the order was rescinded until June in order to give the proprietor time to wind up his affairs. The closing of the Floradora marked the end of an era. According to the News of 20 January,

_Millions in gold have flowed through the dance halls of Dawson, millions of men have trod their boards, and countless little dramas have been enacted. Millions have been spent in the upkeep, in the engagement of talent for the auxiliary shows, the elaborate orchestra and other accompanying amusements._

Some reformers suspected the dance halls of doubling as brothels, but a statement of Commissioner Alexander Henderson, dated 7 December 1907, cleared them of this charge. He stated that the worst feature of the dance halls was that the men visiting from the creeks were induced to drink heavily and spend exorbitantly by the dance-hall girls. Congdon supported Henderson’s statement, but there was no help for it – the dance halls must go.

Both the News and the World attacked Pringle, whose structures on the vice of Dawson had been given wide publicity in Canadian newspapers. On 29 February 1908 the World published a letter from the commissioner in which Pringle’s allegations were demolished one by one. The World accused Pringle of exploiting Dawson’s notoriety for political purposes. It was noteworthy that Pringle had laid no charges in Dawson before the relevant authorities at the time these misdemeanours had allegedly taken place. The News felt that once open prostitution had been suppressed, there was no point in further attempts to eradicate the last vestiges of a lusty era.

The News’s Change of Ownership
The 1 July issue of the News was the first to feature Dominion Day; prior to 1908 the fourth of July had shared with Empire Day the top place in the News calendar. Still more to the point, on the fourth the News carried no commemorative editorial nor any front-page features of the “Let The Eagle Scream” variety. Although a continental orientation is evident in its editorial columns – the News frequently discussed the theories of Goldwin Smith, the celebrated, if controversial, English-born essayist who advocated the annexation of Canada to the United States, an evolving Canadian outlook is obvious by this period. Perhaps it did not come, therefore, as a complete surprise to its readers when the News announced a change of ownership on 31 October 1908, McIntyre and Roediger having sold their interest in the paper.

_It is hard to say goodbye to our many readers who have always proved such staunch friends. Many of them have been with us since we founded the establishment, July 26, 1899, and we trust we shall not be altogether forgotten. . . . We have fought the people’s battles faithfully and honestly, never for an instant betraying our duty to the public which so generously supported us; never permitting an encroachment upon our editorial independence. . . . For all this there is a deep sentiment attaching to our long connection with the newspaper we founded, and which we shall always read with a certain thrill of pleasure, and there must necessarily be some regrets. But these we cut short in order to ask our friends to continue their patronage to our successors._

From Dawson Roediger went to Fairbanks where he had already established one paper a few years before and was to launch another.

In the following issue, Monday, 2 November, the paper announced that it was now Canadian-owned, but that there would be no change in editorial policy. The paper had originally been known to stand in the Conservative interest and it had come therefore as a surprise to many when the News had announced its support of Robert Lowe, a Liberal, in the forthcoming federal election, but in fact, continued the editorial, the paper had been advocating a non-party policy, first in territorial politics and then in federal. The slogan, “NOT FOR PARTY, NOT FOR SELF, BUT FOR YUKON” headed the editorial page.

Congdon’s Return: The Election of 1909
The election campaign of 1908–09 for the federal seat returned Congdon to the centre of the newspapers’ interest. Both the News and the World supported a Liberal candidate, Robert Lowe of Whitehorse. J.A. Clarke and George Black, a lawyer, also ran. At first the World discounted Congdon as a candidate on the grounds that his salary as a member would hardly make up for the loss of his lucrative law practice. The editor observed that Congdon had been defeated even though his clique had controlled the electoral apparatus at the last election. By the third week in December, however, the World had turned more strongly against its creator: he was too great an opportunist for whom the end justified the means. His attack on the North-West Mounted Police was a case in point. Four years earlier he had praised the...
force whereas now he boasted of having "succeeded in wrestling from them the power that so long had been so shamefully abused." The man was unprincipled.

Although under new management, the News took a strong stand against Congdon. The candidate had evinced no regret for his past machinations; surely Sir Wilfrid would hesitate to support this man who had brought such discredit to the party as commissioner of the Yukon. The News had adopted the principle that Yukon's member should belong to the party in power, but that man was surely not Congdon.

Since both papers rejected him, though the News more emphatically than the World, Congdon launched a short-lived organ of his own, the Labour Advocate, edited by a "Jimmy Pickles." Referring to its first issue early in 1909, the World described the Congdon organ as a "journalistic abortion" and a "mimeographed special." Warming to his task, the World editor continued, "Editorially, it is hybrid as to character, idiotic as to composition and infamous as to assertions." Whether or not the sheet contributed to Congdon's victory is difficult to say; in any case, it does not seem to have survived for long and to date it is not known whether any copies are on file anywhere.

The campaign was hotly contested and was fought over personalities rather than issues for by this date there were few grievances other than high freight rates to agitate the residents of the territory. The polls opened on 19 January and not for the first time did the News discover that it had backed a loser. The electorate chose Congdon.

The News accepted the result gracefully, calling on all to accept the verdict and to lend every support to the new member. For its own part, the paper felt that it had served its purpose in stimulating interest in the election and encouraging the voters to get out to the polls. The World was more enthusiastic over Congdon, taking comfort that the seat at least had gone to a Liberal. There was no doubt concerning Congdon's manifest ability. By June 1909 the News itself, Congdon's greatest opponent in the past, congratulated him on completion of his first term in the house.

Demise of the World
By 1909 the transition from individual placer and slope mining to dredging, carried out by large well-financed companies with costly equipment, was complete. The gravel was so worked out that complex processes were now required to make Klondike mining pay. Already Dawson had the seedy aspect of having known better days. A visitor, T.A. Rickard, commented on Dawson's decline:

Northward are many untenanted buildings, and even the centre of the town bears a bedraggled appearance, indicative of shrunken commerce. During the boom days the population was 50,000; now it is 2000. Dawson looks like a stout man who has grown very thin and yet wears the clothes made for him in his adipose days. Although it has been difficult for Dawson to accommodate itself to straightened circumstances, the adaptation has been effected heroically. The boom has gone, but business remains.

Both papers condemned the mail-order business which diverted so much trade from local retailers. The News saw a major evil in this practice and considered those who placed orders with the large mail-order houses on the outside as lacking in local spirit. Large department stores in Toronto, Vancouver and other cities contributed nothing to the Yukon economy, yet siphoned off the trade of those who did. Queried the World, "Will we buy the goods that send the dollar out of the country or the goods that keep it in?" But there was no saving potion for the ailing economy. On 27 March 1909 the World reported that government accounts kept in Ottawa showed that the federal treasury had expended two millions more on the territory than the revenue received from it.

As early as October 1908 the News admitted there was room for but one daily paper in Dawson and less than a year later the News was the sole paper. Early in January 1909 the World was acquired by the Dawson News Publishing Company, the new owners' title first appearing on the editorial page on the ninth of the month. The World eked out a nominally independent existence for another seven months as a weekly. The last issue available is that of 7 August 1909 in which no mention is made of this being the paper's final edition. The World, like the Sun, disappeared unobtrusively.

The year 1909 marks the end of the politically volatile period. In June of that year the first election was held for a fully elective council, a long-sought goal pursued by the News and the Nugget. In 13 brief years Dawson had progressed from a general store and trading post to the mining camp that made Klondike a household word around the world, to a settled community seemingly with a viable future, and finally to a town of 2,000 bearing the marks of economic decay. The rest of the story of the Klondike and its one surviving newspaper is anti-climactic in comparison with the period that preceded it.
Ghost Town, 1910–54

The vital part of the story of the Dawson Daily News has now been told; in the last 44 years of its existence the paper followed the fortunes of the town. While the rest of the world lived through two world wars and the Great Depression, the Klondike subsided into a staid middle age. The News grew old with Dawson, cutting back to tri-weekly publication in 1924, then to weekly in 1946. With the notable exception of the war years, the News confined itself in greater measure to the local scene.

On New Year’s Day 1909, the News had proclaimed:
Yukon territory stands on the verge of its most successful era. With triumphs in material wealth at which to point with pride during an eleven years of active production which have passed, the country has a future which will pale into insignificance the outpost of the first decade.1

Whether the editor believed that his confidence had been justified by events, the New Year’s Day issue of the News a year later carried but seven columns on its four pages in contrast to the former eight although the paper still presented the aspect of a metropolitan daily with vigorous editorials and various features. Sports spectacles, such as the Johnson-Jeffries heavyweight fight, were given full coverage.

By July 1910 the News was suggesting various gimmicks to publicize the once-renowned Klondike. Perhaps an auto race could be organized across Alaska and the Yukon or a race from Dawson down the Yukon to Saint Michael and thence to Vancouver or Seattle. It should be given the widest publicity, for example, that Chicago was only ten days travelling time from Dawson with good rail and steamer connections. Too many prospective investors thought of the territory as remote and difficult of access. Now that the stampede was a decade in the past, it was more than ever necessary to publicize the territory. On 20 October 1910 the editorial page of the News carried the following declaration of faith.

As long as water runs down the Yukon, Dawson will be Dawson. It was predicted years ago that when the individual workers had ceased operations on Bonanza, Eldorado and Hunker there would be no Dawson. The prospectors and the individual operators on those creeks have eagerly given way to the large concerns, and the same may be said respecting the other creeks. But the prospectors and operators have not by a long shot left Yukon. They are scurrying through the hills, overturning the rich gravels and getting the golden reward, and the change has proceeded far enough to prove Dawson always will be a live place.2

The Yukon was a good place to live and to raise a family, continued the paper editorially the following day. It provided a stimulating and healthy climate and was not visited by the disasters which befell so many other parts of the world.

Election of 1911

In September 1911 the Conservatives, led by Robert Borden, ended 15 years of Liberal rule. A month later the polls were opened in the Yukon territory to decide whether Congdon should continue to represent the Yukon in the Liberal interest, or the veteran Thompson in the Conservative. Now that the News was the sole paper in Dawson, the editor took a less partisan and more objective look at the candidates and issues. There were few of the latter by this date. The decision really lay in choosing between the personalities of the candidates. The News repeated the counsel it had offered in 1908 when it had passed to new ownership; that is, that Yukon would be best served by returning a member belonging to the party in power, which now meant a Conservative. For this reason the News favoured Thompson. Congdon lost his seat, but the treatment accorded him by the News was in sharp contrast with that of the old days. The paper intimated that it would have supported Congdon had Sir Wilfrid retained power. As it was, the defeated candidate merited the respect and gratitude of the territory he had served so well.

It must not be forgotten that although one candidate won, the man who lost had a large share of the people of Yukon back of him. But in deciding the best course for Yukon, the people chose the Conservative candidate. Mr. Congdon doubtless will find other lines in which to employ his talents to advantage, and his work on behalf of Yukon may not be counted ended.3

The territory had passed the politically contentious, faction-ridden phase in its history and future elections for the most part were to devolve upon the merits of rival candidates more than upon party issues.

The First World War

Through the prewar years the Dawson Daily News retained the same size and format – four pages, seven columns – and sold for 25 cents per copy or two dollars per month. Editorial columns, rarely exceeding one and one-half to two columns, were about subjects of general interest. With no rival paper and political controversy settled, the editorial page was a bland offering now compared with the gold-rush days and their aftermath.

The News covered the First World War as effectively and thoroughly as most of its outside contemporaries, with liberal use of banner headlines and recent telegraphic news from the front.
News editorials dealt with various aspects of the war. The paper had its share of chauvinism, after the armistice demanding the execution of the kaiser.

Even in the final crisis of the war, an ominous item of local news was given priority on the front page. On 23 March, headlines announced a cut in the Yukon federal spending estimates of no less than 40 per cent. On 6 April the editor vigorously protested this cavalier treatment by Ottawa of a territory which had sent 500 volunteers to the front and produced in all 200 million dollars in gold.

"The Dominion is not justified in reducing the territory to a vassal state." Last year alone, commented the editor on 10 May, the Yukon had produced $4,700,000 in mineral wealth.

The Yukon is not done for, and never will be. As long as water runs down hill and as long as the sun shines, Yukon will be on the map. And it will be peopled and productive. The occupation of this realm is permanent. The evidence is here to those who will open half an optic.\(^5\)

Then on 4 May 1918 the News carried the still more foreboding headline, "YUKON COUNCIL TO BE ABOLISHED." The news had come in a telegram from Arthur Meighen to the gold commissioner. The editor again stated his unshaken confidence in the territory's future, with the assurance that "Dawson will be here as long as there is a map and as long as the sun shines." Anxiety on this count was unfounded for although the council was reduced from eight to three members in 1921, it has never been abolished. Whether Dawson will survive as long as the sun shines is more problematical.

Early Postwar Years

In an editorial dated 24 February 1919, the News lamented the lack of favourable publicity by someone other than their own member of Parliament. The editor still assumed that the mineral wealth of the territory was virtually inexhaustible; this being so, what could account for the apathy toward Yukon displayed by the rest of the country? One wonders whether the editor's confidence was based on knowledge or wishful thinking.

The postwar issues featured the virulent influenza epidemic, disarmament, the peace conference, reparations and rehabilitation as did the News's contemporaries on the outside. By New Year's Day 1920 the paper, its four-page issue carrying six rather than seven columns, was in apparent decline. Editorials by now rarely filled more than a column or a column and a half. Advertising had decreased and was principally that of local retail merchants in and about Dawson. The paper had become restricted in format and character in comparison with the editions of a decade earlier.

Like all the provinces with the exception of Quebec, the Yukon had adopted temperance legislation as a war measure during 1916-17, with Quebec following suit in 1919. Temperance appealed to many from a sense of dedication and self-sacrifice. It is curious to note, in a leader of 20 February 1920, that the paper which had defended dance halls against the meddlesome hands of the reformers should preach temperance in its editorial column, granted, under new management, a little more than ten years later.

**Intoxicating beverages have no place in a world where machinery occupies such a prominent place as it now does. The safety of too many others is involved when the unsteady hand is left in control of the steering wheel or the engine throttle.**

The editor continued: "The greater our democracy, or our civilization, the more restricted become our liberties." The "dry" period ended for the Yukon, as it did for British Columbia and one or two other provinces, in 1921.

The News's decline from the status of a metropolitan daily to a small-town paper was reflected during the early postwar years in the quality of its editorials and its diminishing advertisements alike. By the early 1920s reprints from other papers increasingly replaced leaders from the hand of its own editor. Periodically the editor would bestir himself to comment on some matter of local interest or to stimulate confidence in the territory's economic future. By the mid-1920s advertisers in the News were reduced to a half-dozen local retailers and the Canadian Pacific coastal steamship service. The constricting economy of this depressed region inevitably regulated the scope of the journal which had so often boasted of having the finest plant north of Seattle. On 11 October 1924 the News ceased publication as a daily; henceforth the paper appeared tri-weekly, but until 15 November it clung to its original title, then became simply the Dawson News in keeping with its reduced circumstances.\(^8\)

From the time of its change of ownership, the News had carried at the head of its editorial page the simple designation "Dawson News Publishing Company" as owner. By March 1924 this security measure, if such it was, had been relaxed sufficiently to disclose the name of the editor, Arthur Hazelton Dever, described as an American citizen by birth. A trio, two of whom (Charles Reed Settemlier and Harold Malstrom) were American citizens by birth and the third, Otto Frederick Kastner, surprisingly of British origin, managed the enterprise.\(^9\)

The 6 December 1924 edition carried the banner headline, "YUKON RADIO SERVICE OFFICIALLY OPENED." Communication by wireless or radio, as distinct from land line, had been opened between Edmonton and Dawson. At this date transmis-
sion was by Morse rather than voice or radio telephony. It was as well for the fortunes of the little community that technology kept pace with the times in that region for on 4 March of the following spring, 1925, the government telegraph service discontinued operation. On 7 May 1925 the News proudly printed the first press news from its Edmonton correspondent. Wireless press service using Morse transmission at 25 words per minute was to be a major medium of news dissemination until supplanted by teletype following the Second World War.

By August 1925, however, the News was encountering trouble with its news service and had incurred criticism for inadequate coverage of outside events. Both the American Press and Canadian Press service had been cool to a News proposal for a radiotransmitted news service since anyone with a properly tuned receiver and competency in Morse would have access to the service for nothing. The News’s solution had been to engage its own Edmonton correspondent who transmitted selected news items culled from the Edmonton papers; however, atmospheric and ionospheric blackouts periodically interrupted radio communication for days and sometimes for weeks at a stretch and news had to be sent by post. Although the News retained its enterprising spirit, its misfortune lay in being tied to a declining and isolated community at a time when technology was transforming the newspaper world elsewhere. Many metropolitan dailies on the outside, however, found that implementing the technological advances so expensive that they were bankrupted in their efforts to compete with better-financed rivals. By the 1920s and 1930s daily newspaper publication in the large cities had become big business. In contrast the News had no competition, but by 1930 was serving a community shrunk to village dimensions.

The Great Depression

The thirties, however, were not as harsh in the Klondike as in the country in general. Dawson’s economy was tied to gold production, the price for which did not fluctuate. Hence when gold production increased, the Klondike economy revived. Pronounced increases in Klondike gold production occurred in 1931 and again in 1933, reaching a prewar peak in 1939 with an output of four to five times that of 1928. A revival in the local economy is in some measure discernible in the pages of the News. Still the issues of the early 1930s make dull and parochial reading compared with those prior to 1909. The early 1930s witnessed a fourpage, six-column paper largely patronized by local storekeepers and the products they stocked—Blue Ribbon Coffee, Hippress Boots, Winchester Cigarettes, Cuticura Powder. The large headlines had disappeared, although they were revived later. Several December 1930 issues exhibited a smattering of short items from the international scene, most of the datelines being one or two days old.

Two years later, 30 December 1932, the front page of the News had revived its old format with banner headlines and a fair coverage of outside news. Although the paper maintained its former size, the editorial page still carried little original matter. Three years later, in January 1935, the News answered substantially the same description. It carried proudly the title “Canada’s Farthest North Newspaper,” with which there could be no dispute. This edition carried a half-column editorial on American unemployment, and foreign news coverage was fair, generally consisting of short items from abroad, although it had by no means regained the standard set by the paper in its heyday. Often the few editorials that appeared were on subjects of local and domestic concern; an example is a short leader of 25 July 1935, urging merchants and residents to repaint and refurbish their premises in preparation for the tourist season. On 31 October, however, the editor did discuss the League of Nations sanctions in the Italo-Ethiopian crisis.

The Second World War

Even the stimulus of war in 1939 on the whole did little to revive editorial life in the paper. The few editorials appearing in the war years were generally on some aspect of the struggle. On 18 June 1940 the News headlined on the front page the imminent fall of France.

FRANCE IS MAKING DESPERATE STRUGGLE
MARSHAL PETAIN IS NEW PREMIER OF FRANCE
ASKS ENEMY FOR THEIR TERMS IF FRANCE
LAYS DOWN ITS ARMS

Curiously enough, the one editorial on that day discussed phlegmatically the subject of hydro-electric power development in Canada. On 22 June 1940 Churchill’s eloquent speech to the House of Commons and the free world was printed verbatim in the News. The paper gave good coverage to war news from the various theatres. It is notable too that in the first winter of the war, advertisement patronage about doubled, with a few entries from as far afield as Seattle.

In the spring of 1944 the News faced a local crisis. On a Friday afternoon, 5 May, the Yukon River began rising ominously, and by that evening most of South Dawson was under water. Four days later, on 9 May, the News office on Third Avenue was flooded with 18 inches of murky water sloshing about in the main composing room. The greatest damage was to paper stock. The base of the linotype machine and the heating plant were both
inundated. Several hours were taken drying the machine out, but not in time to set the type for the Thursday edition. On Saturday, however, the News was again on the streets, having missed but one issue.  

The VE Day edition, 8 May 1945, featured an editorial on the San Francisco Conference, birthplace of the United Nations, through which the powers were to make a second attempt to banish war. The News editor pleaded for the individual and collective practice of Christian ideals in order that the cost of war would not prove vain a second time. To the sophisticated this must have seemed a naïve appeal, but however idealistic, its sentiment was more humanistic than the chauvinistic crowing of a quarter-century earlier.

The Uncertainties of the Postwar World
On 14 November 1945 it had been ten years since the Dawson News had adopted the slogan "British Empire's Farthest North Newspaper." With the conclusion of the war already three months in the past, the News faced the vicissitudes of the postwar world. This was a prosperous and expansive period for Canada as a whole, but the burgeoning prosperity of those years did not extend to the Klondike. By the new year, 1946, a definite decrease in international news coverage was noticeable and the paper as a whole was reverting to the standards of a small-town sheet. On 2 May 1946 the News became a weekly, at a subscription rate of 50 cents per month or six dollars per annum. The four-page, six-column format was maintained. Thenceforth news coverage in the main was restricted to local and territorial items for no doubt air-mail service brought in newspapers little more than a day old from the outside. The once thriving and progressive daily was now a village weekly.

Advertising patronage seemed to increase if anything in the course of the early postwar years as the remote community withdrew into itself. Canadian Pacific Railway, Canadian Pacific Air Lines and two of the large American insurance companies still found it worth their while to advertise in Dawson.

With the war years now well in the past, the editorial page lapsed to its former comatose condition, using occasional reprints from other papers. On 7 April 1949 the paper that had 30 to 40 years earlier freely exchanged journalistic fire with Seattle and Vancouver dailies was not too proud to reprint an editorial from the Simcoe Reformer, a small-town weekly from the tobacco belt of southern Ontario, which may well at that time have had a higher circulation than the Dawson Weekly News.  

It must have been obvious by the early 1950s that Dawson's days as the territorial capital were limited, rumours to that effect having circulated as early as 1949. Whitehorse, a town that had grown to 8,000 during the war years and only declined to about 7,000 by the early 1950s, had become the centre of a copper-mining industry and a communications hub as the rail head of the White Pass and Yukon Railway. The completion of the Alaska Highway during the war years confirmed Whitehorse's importance. On 21 September 1950 the News published a telegram from their member of Parliament, J.A. Simmons, assuring his constituents that he had protested to the minister regarding the proposed transfer. The News remarked, "It is generally agreed here that transfer of the capital would mean a calamity for this district."  

The transfer was effected in the spring of 1953 and the News lost the government patronage it had inherited from the World.

On 12 October 1950 a letter from a former resident appeared on the editorial page, encouraging Yukoners to maintain faith in the territory's future. Time magazine, among others, had been depicting the Yukon as a forlorn land with bleak prospects barring some unexpected miracle. An article by an unidentified journalist roused the oldtime fire from the editorial columns, with no doubt an accurate, if patronizing, description of Dawson.

"The capital of the Yukon is setting up a howl that echoes through the musty, empty saloons of the '99ers . . . . But today the batwing doors of the haunts of Sam McGee and Dan McGrew swing idly back and forth on rusty hinges, patiently waiting for prospectors who never come.

This prosy description was too much for "A.A.G.," a regular contributor to the News editorial page.

"Batwing doors be damned. There's not a batwing door in any hotel today and the doors that are in our Dawson hotels today do not swing idly back and forth on rusty hinges.

In the first place Dawson's hotels are not known as saloons and what's more the beer parlours and the lobbies are not musty, nor are they empty.

Some of the high-grading re-write men who insist upon recreating a Dawson in the image of fifty years ago, should take time out and come up this way and see what a lot of rot they're talking about."  

Even in its comparative dotage the Dawson News could still defend the Klondike.

In March 1951 the editorial page introduced a new feature entitled "Weekly Report From Ottawa," a summary of House proceedings and government measures composed by the member for the territory. In some measure this compensated for the
paper’s narrowed horizon that for several years had taken in little beyond the territory. A revival of editorial writing was apparent in 1951 and 1952, and advertising patronage was well maintained. The editorial revival may have been in part due to the stimulus of the Korean War. For example, on 10 September 1953 a two-column editorial discussed Canada’s role in that conflict.

With Dawson reduced to village dimensions, bereft of its function as territorial capital, and the News’s loss of government printing contracts, continuance of publication became difficult even on a weekly basis. On 25 March 1954 the Dawson Weekly News ceased publication.

This paper after serving the Dawson area and its many subscribers at outside points for the past fifty-five years, has through adverse conditions been forced to cease publication with this issue . . .

We thank our advertisers, subscribers, contributors and all others who have so faithfully patronized us over the many years and leave with the hope the period of suspension will be short. Unless the well-worked hills of the Klondike disclose further treasure, the News’s suspension of publication may be considered permanent.

So passed from the scene one of Canada’s pioneer newspapers. By the standards of the best Canadian dailies, no doubt even in its prime the Dawson Daily News left something to be desired, but to adventurers from all over the world, this vigorous, progressive and varied paper must have been welcome. Although the News was not born with Dawson — it was several years too late for that — the story of the Dawson Daily News is also the story of Dawson and of the Klondike.
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