

CANADIAN NORTH-WEST  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
PUBLICATIONS

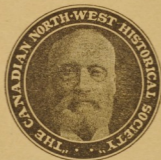
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Chapters in the North-West History Prior  
to 1890 - - - Related by Old Timers

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The Dominion Telegraph

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BATTLEFORD  
SASKATCHEWAN

VOL. I, NO. VI  
1930

# Canadian North-West Historical Society

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## THE AIMS OF THE SOCIETY

1. To collect and save the life sketches and historical stories of our pioneers, also the documents which throw light on the West's development prior to 1890.

2. The publication of historical works which contain the original stories of the Pioneer. All the stories relating to an historical event will be edited in one publication and will provide an up-to-date source history of the Prairie Provinces. The members will receive the publications of Volume I, of five or six publications, on payment of the subscription of \$5.00. A Special offer of Life Subscription of \$25.00 is being offered for a short time.

3. The Historical Archives at Battleford contain books, maps, pamphlets, relics, documents relating to North-West History, for use of the research student.

4. This Society will assist in the publication of historical works for individuals and other Societies, and it has secured the assistance of Western history men to assist in this research.

5. Historic spots are marked and historic interest in these is created. Public meetings are held to further this work.

6. This is the West's urgent problem. Save the Source History and Honor the Pioneer.

# The Dominion Telegraph

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Written by J. S. MACDONALD, of Edmonton, Alberta,  
General Inspector of the Government Telegraph Service.  
Settlement in this great lone land was made possible  
by the coming of the C.P.R.; by the North-West  
Mounted Police and the Telegraph. The author, J. S.  
Macdonald, has been connected with the Telegraph for  
almost 50 years. He has held the various positions from  
lineman to General Inspector, and is the only  
person in active service who was an  
employee under the original  
contract.

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(Copyright applied for.)

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Canadian North-West Historical Society,  
Battleford, Saskatchewan.

VOL. 1, No. VI.  
1930.



DR. J. T. M. ANDERSON, M.A., LL.B., D. Paed.,  
*Premier of Saskatchewan.*

## Preface

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In preserving the authentic history of our country there are two bounden duties imposed upon us—one to honour the memories of those who by their undaunted courage, their high and indomitable spirit, their steadfast loyalty to the traditions of their race, and the sufferings and privations which they endured made possible the road for those who were to follow after; and the other to perpetuate by the written word their struggles and achievements for the profit and emulation of posterity.

It has become a platitude to speak of the debt we owe to the pioneers, but surely in no country and at no period has this been more strongly exemplified than in our own Saskatchewan. We do not yet realize it; the perspective is still too near. Our development has been so rapid, so stupendous that the imagination fails to grasp it.

A little over fifty years ago—not even the span of a man's life—there was neither home nor habitation of a white man between Fort Qu'Appelle and the Rocky Mountains; and yet we in our own day and hour have seen hundreds of millions of bushels of grain garnered from the same region. What a sublime faith and courage must have been the attributes of those who ventured forth to set up the sign posts on the western trails in the days before the coming of the railways, and how well that faith has been justified.

Within the memory of people still living, the traveller who adventured west of the Red River was immediately swallowed up in the solitudes. The distances were vast, and the plains with the exception of a few outposts of the Great Fur Company were inhabited only by wild and warring Indian tribes, and the wild animals native to the wilderness. There were always the daunting qualities of the unknown to face, and the wayfarer was menaced by the asperities of an austere and unknown climate. There are those who still survive who recollect a time when it was not safe to ride west of the Moose Jaw Creek for fear of a Blackfoot war party, and the prairie schooner often had to rely for his life on the speed of his horse or the accuracy of his rifle.

## PREFACE

It is unfortunate that to many of our people, the history of the country prior to the coming of the railway has remained a closed book; yet at that period the Western Plains has a vivid and barbaric life all its own. Isaac Cowie, who served as an officer of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Qu'Appelle during the middle years of last century, relates that during the sixties as many as four thousand carts were travelling westward from the Red River to take part in the summer buffalo hunt.

The hunting camps that were each year, established throughout the western plains were great centres of activity. The hunters, Metis for the most part from the Red River, travelled in large parties to protect themselves from Blackfoot or Sioux war parties, and they carried in their train many women and girls, who occupied themselves not only with the domestic affairs of the camp but cut up and dressed the meat of the buffaloes killed by the hunters, and dressed the skins. These camps were institutions, and the characteristic life which prevailed in them has been described by various writers, and their passing marked an epoch in the life of the West. There is a wealth of western material, not only for the historian but for the romantic writer as well.

Early in the nineteenth century the great explorer Sir John Franklin—then plain Captain Franklin, of the Royal Navy—accompanied by Dr. John Richardson and a considerable party, wintered in the Saskatchewan country, and their journals, still extant, contain valuable information of the conditions which then existed. At that time Franklin was preparing for a dash to the Arctic Sea by way of the Coppermine River, and the exploits of his party, and the sufferings which they endured on that expedition form an epic that will be told as long as the British race endures. It is also interesting to note that years afterwards when in a subsequent expedition to search for the North West Passage, Franklin with his two ships had disappeared in the icy silence of the Arctic night, and after millions of dollars had been spent in efforts to learn his fate, it was the slimly-equipped party of prairie wayfarers under the leadership of Dr. Rae, of the Red River, which, after crossing the Saskatchewan Plains, forced the icy ramparts of the North and obtained the evidences of the tragedy which had overtaken the intrepid explorer and his men.

Captain Palliser, for the British Government, was perhaps the first official explorer to cross the Southern plains, and although we may not always agree with his conclusions, he obtained a good deal of valuable information which was incorporated in a parliamentary blue book. After him came a succession of distinguished travellers, chief amongst whom was

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Sir William Butler, then Captain Butler, of the Intelligence Staff of General Wolseley, whose experiences and observation have been given to us in his books which make valuable contributions to the history of the country. Lord Chaplin, who for more than half a century was regarded as the beau ideal of the English squire and country gentleman, came west for a buffalo hunt in the late sixties and had his name perpetuated by having it bestowed on a large lake west of Moose Jaw.

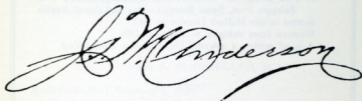
High tribute must be paid to the intrepid missionaries who carried the message of their faith to the Indian tribes of the remotest solitudes and who contributed not only to the spiritual but the material welfare of those who came under their influence. The tale of their labours approaches the sublime, and is well worth a history of its own.

Two of the most important milestones in the history of the West were the coming of the Mounted Police, and the building of the Government Telegraph line. The story of the Police has often been well told, as indeed it deserves to be, for it has all the qualities of high romance, but the tale of the telegraph is not so well known, although its establishment was attended by tremendous difficulties, and its administration was carried on under the most arduous conditions. When the members of the North West Mounted Police, in 1874, made their first march to the westward and established their posts in the wilderness, it was decided by the Government to endeavour to establish touch with them by means of telegraph communication, and so the Government Telegraph system in the West came into being. Those connected with its construction and maintenance were pioneers in the truest sense. Their situation was remote and their labour arduous. By reason of their occupation, they had a unique knowledge of every important happening throughout a widely-spaced country. In this connection the article of Mr. J. Stuart Macdonald which appears in your publication is of great value. Mr. Macdonald has had an honourable career of more than half a century almost entirely connected with the Government in the Canadian North West, and during that period has witnessed every phase of development. His knowledge is full and authentic, and the publishers are to be congratulated on securing his article.

The North West Historical Society is doing a splendid and patriotic work in preserving the record of the pioneers, for the example and instruction of those who follow after. The field they are tilling is a fertile one and there is much work to be done. Pioneers are rapidly passing away, and in some cases the

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tales they could have told have gone down to the grave with them. Only a few years ago Madame Julie Desjarlais died at Lebret at more than ninety years of age. She was the daughter of the famous Metis leader who was in command of the party of North Westers which defeated the forces of the Hudson's Bay Company at Seven Oaks and killed Governor Semple. From this conflict came the amalgamation of the two great Fur Companies and peace on the plains. John Louis Legare, a great historical figure, is not long removed from us; and Wm. McKay, one of the greatest of the Saskatchewan pioneers, is still hale and hearty. But the list is long; the work is there to be done. It has an inspiration all its own, and is a work of duty and high obligation.

A large, elegant handwritten signature in black ink, reading "J. M. Anderson". The signature is highly stylized with long, sweeping flourishes, particularly on the "A" and the "n" at the end.

*Premier of Saskatchewan.*



## In Memoriam

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### REGINALD BEATTY

*Melfort*—Died September 11, 1928, at the age of 74.

In 1872 joined the Hudson's Bay Company, serving it at

Fairport Post, Swan River, Le Pas and Grand Rapids.

Settled in the Melfort District in 1883.

Western farm delegate to England, 1906.

A good settler, a splendid citizen and a kind friend.

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### MRS. PATRICK BURKE

*Battleford*—Died January 22, 1929, at the age of 80 years.

Pioneer of St. Boniface, Shoal Lake, Pelly and Battleford.

Experienced the horrors of the Rebellion of 1870 and 1885.

Her husband, Bugler Burke, who was in the Wolseley

Expedition, was killed at Cut Knife Hill fight.

A faithful pioneer who made many sacrifices.

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### MATHEW HENDERSON MEREDITH

*Battleford*—Died December 6, 1928, at the age of 64.

Member of the North-West Mounted Police at Fort Walsh,

Regina and Battleford until 1886.

Hudson's Bay Company clerk for 17 years. Civil servant

in the Land Titles at Battleford.

A kindly, industrious citizen, deeply interested in all phases  
of local development.

T. H. STEDMAN

*Macleod, Alberta*—Died April 21, 1929, at the age of 76.

Born in Hampshire, England.

Joined the Mounted Police in 1875.

Served for three years cattle punching and horse trader in  
Montana.

Served in the Rebellion of 1885.

Proprietor of the Queen's Hotel at Macleod for 20 years.

A councillor, mayor and police magistrate.

Admirer of good horses; lover of clean sport.

A keen student of the early history of Montana and  
Southern Alberta.

Fellow member of the Society, 1928.

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REV. GEORGE A. SUTHERLAND, M.A.

*Battleford*—Died February 1, 1930.

Born at Earltown, Nova Scotia.

Educated at Dalhousie University and Pine Hill College.

Pastor at Phoenix, B.C. Missionary in British Guiana,  
Sunny Brae, N.S.; Kensington, P.E.I.; Wilkie, Sask.

Principal of the Battleford School Home, 1921-29.

Director of this Society.

A cheerful, enthusiastic and willing worker in all good  
works.

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JUDGE ALPHONSE GRAVEL, B.A., LL.B.

*Gravelbourg, Sask.*—Died February 20, 1930.

Born at Arthabaska, Quebec.

Educated at Sacred Heart College, Arthabaska; at Nicolet  
College, Quebec; at Fordham University, New York;  
at Laval University.

Admitted to the Bar 1899.

Came to Saskatchewan 1908. Practised law at Moose Jaw  
and Gravelbourg.

Appointed District Court Judge 1922.

A respected citizen, deeply interested in the promotion of  
good causes.

Fellow member 1928.

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The Rural Municipalities of Battle River, Britannia, Prairie, Meota, Mervin, North Star, Turtle River, Maryfield, Great Bend, Park, Buffalo, Paynton, Hillsdale, Glenside, Biggar.

The Wynyard Teachers, The West Battleford Teachers, The North Battleford Teachers, The Olds Teachers, Wadena, Herbert.

The Towns of Watson and Battleford.

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J. STUART MACDONALD

# The Dominion Telegraph

Of the factors instrumental in changing that portion of the North West Territories which now comprises the Provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta from a vast wilderness to the greatest wheat exporting district on the globe, undoubtedly the Canadian Pacific Railway ranks first. But the country had to be prepared for the railroad and for settlement. Here the North-West Mounted Police takes first place. Second only in importance was the building of a telegraph line by the Dominion Government from Winnipeg to Edmonton, a distance of almost 1,000 miles by the route taken, and the establishment of telegraph offices at strategical points along the way. Today the original line has disappeared from the prairies, while the furrows of the old cart trails which ran alongside of it for hundreds of miles have been obliterated by the plow of the settler. Its glory and usefulness have passed away, but while it is yet a matter of recent memory, it may be well to make some record of its early history, together with mention of the men who had to do with its construction and maintenance. The writer has been associated with the service for almost 50 years, has filled all the various positions from lineman to superintendent, and has been for many years the only person in active service who was an employee under the original contract.

In July, 1874, the Government despatched a force of 500 mounted men westward from Dufferin, Manitoba, where they had been assembled, with the object of policing the North-West Territories—at that time a wide area in which strife between rum-selling "Whites" and horse-stealing Indians was a grave menace. In order to keep in touch with this force a telegraph line was a necessity. Apart from that it had been long felt desirable to link up the British Settlements on the Pacific Coast with those in the East by telegraph and road. Back in the days of the Hudson's Bay Company, in fact in 1863, a contract had been let and material accumulated. The form which this project took at Confederation was a Canadian Pacific Railway uniting the provinces of the New Dominion. Naturally, the first step was to build the telegraph, and for that purpose the Canadian Government acquired the material lying at Fort Garry. A general reconnaissance had determined the route of the railway. It was to run from Selkirk and between Lakes Winnipeg and Manitoba, and to pass westward near the present Pelly, and cross the South Saskatchewan at Clark's Crossing, about where the Canadian National now crosses it east of Warman, and



north of Saskatoon. It was then to skirt the elbow of the North Saskatchewan and run from Battleford westward to the neighbourhood of Edmonton and to the Yellowhead Pass.

It was deemed that a telegraph line following this route would best serve the interests of settlement and the Government. In 1871 the Government had linked up Fort Garry with the American Telegraph System to give immediate connection with the West while the line from Fort William to Selkirk and Winnipeg was being built. In 1874 contracts were entered into to build various sections of a line from the Great Lakes to connect with the Telegraph System of British Columbia. The contracts included the clearance of a line 132 feet wide for the railway, and the formation of a trail or road for mules or horses, the same to be made as soon as the location of the line was fixed. Accordingly, in 1874 a contract was entered into with Sifton, Glass & Fleming, of Winnipeg, to construct a telegraph line from Selkirk via the Narrows of Lake Manitoba—the route of the proposed railway—to Livingston, where the headquarters of the North West Mounted Police were to be placed, as it was thought, and where the first Government of the Territories were to be temporarily established. Livingston, or Swan River as it was generally known, was 36 miles north of the present town of Kamsack, twelve miles beyond Fort Pelly, the Hudson's Bay Company's post, and six miles beyond the present town of Pelly on the Canadian National Railway. The telegraph office was called Pelly, after the Hudson's Bay Company's post. Livingston did not long play the part of capital, but was abandoned a few months later in favor of Battleford, which was more central, while the headquarters of the Police were kept at Fort Macleod and later at Fort Walsh, in the areas of greatest unrest, until they were finally fixed at Regina when the capital was removed to that place from Battleford. Meanwhile Battleford was the capital and was the station of the North West Mounted Police for the north. It had the advantage of being situated upon the Saskatchewan River, on which, in those years, steamers plied during the summer months. The Sifton contract to build to Livingston was completed, and the line in operation by July 22nd, 1876. The average amount paid by the Government was \$492.00 per mile for woodland areas and \$189.00 for the prairies. \$16.00 per mile per annum was given for maintenance and operation, together with the profits of the line.

The building of the line from Winnipeg to Pelly was a much more difficult task than the construction of the western portion. Dense woods, muskegs and lakes were encountered from the outset, and at times the Indians offered obstruction.

The work was in charge of Mr. George Wright, who became agent at Pelly, upon the completion of the line to that point. Upon one occasion, when about 40 miles from Winnipeg, a band of Indians rode into camp and in the name of the "Great Mother" demanded that the provisions on hand be delivered to them. Mr. Wright remonstrated, pointing out that he would be unable to continue work if he acceded to their request. This argument had no effect upon the Indians who, with threats, persisted in their demand. They had no idea of the purpose of the wire, but they understood that the party was working for the Government, by which they understood Queen Victoria; hence, by their method of reasoning, they were entitled to food. Mr. Wright finally prevailed upon them to wait until next morning, when he promised to discuss the matter with them and arrive at a decision. As soon as the Indians had gone, he telegraphed the state of affairs to Winnipeg. The authorities immediately despatched a number of armed militia, who, by hard riding, reached the camp before the return of the Indians. When the latter arrived to find themselves confronted by armed men in uniform, they made off without waiting for explanations. It transpired later that they believed that by some superhuman agency the soldiers had been transported over the telegraph line during the night and they decided that it was hopeless to oppose such magic.

Swan River, 22nd December, 1875.

Dear Sir:—

As I have not my memorandum book of last summer here I am unable to give you any dates of delays or stoppages of Sinclair's train last summer. We had no stoppages, or delays until we arrived at Carlton House, which was in the latter part of July. Here a number of Indians and Chiefs came to our camp led by Mistawasis and Altacoupe, head Chiefs; they enquired where we were going, and asked if we were going to cut any poles. I told them we intended cutting some poles and hay for wintering a number of cattle. The Chiefs brought Peter Balentyne to act as interpreter for them. They spoke for some time repeating their words over and over. They said how the Government had promised them a treaty; that they had received a letter from Governor Archibald, making them all sorts of promises, of which none had ever been fulfilled, and now the Government was sending the telegraphs (or speaking iron as they called it) through their country without saying anything to them, or asking their permission. Now they wanted their rights; they were not going to let the constructing party come any further than the south branch. The Government had made a treaty

with the Indians as far as the south branch, and if Sinclair wanted to cut any hay or poles he might cut them on the east of the above mentioned river; and they strictly forbade us cutting any hay or poles until a treaty was made with them; and they were not going to allow Sinclair to go any farther; but after a short confab amongst themselves, they said we might go on and lay down our wire, plant, etc., but cut nothing. I went and saw Mr. Clarke, Hudson's Bay Company officer, who is a Magistrate, told him what the Indians had said and asked his advice, as a private citizen, what I should do. He told me not to cut any hay or poles if the Indians had forbidden me. He said he had written several letters to the Government, and told them something ought to be done for the Indians, but they always treated his letters with contempt. He told me that it would be perfectly safe in going on and laying down our wire, etc., as we intended doing, but it would not be safe to cut any hay or poles. After laying at Carlton two days, I got a half-breed to carry a letter back to the constructing party. Sinclair left his mower and horse-rake at Carlton, and we continued on our trip west. According to my instructions, I laid two loads of wire (4) four miles west of Cook's last pile; and had only gone about four miles farther west when we were met by more of the Indians, but these belonged to the bands west of Fort Pitt; they numbered three (3). One of them reported himself as head speaker. He went in front of the head cart and told David Harcrow, of Portage la Prairie, who understood their language fluently, that he forbid this train (Sinclair's carts) going any further, in behalf of himself and his friends, and that he was authorized by his chief ("The Little Man" as he is called in English) to stop any Government proceeding until a treaty was made. He said he had never saw wire like that before, and that if they allowed this to be put up it would frighten all their game away. Now he wanted the Government to send out a man and tell them what their intentions were—whether the Government hated them or liked them, or was it going to make a treaty with them or take their country by force.

I told them that a treaty would be made with them, but I did not know when. I asked him who gave him his information about our coming with this wire. He said he knew nothing of our coming only what he had got from a half-breed the day before, and from him he had learned we would be along the next day; but he said he had been expecting a Commissioner up to speak to them (meaning all of his friends), and when he saw the wire first and heard nothing of the Commissioner, he felt as if something was sticking in his throat. He said that if we insisted on going ahead that they would soon get enough

Indians that would make us stop, and that we had only been delayed by him for two days, but they would keep us for weeks. He said all the Indians were of the same mind. When a treaty was made with them all their rights of the land and country would be the Government's. Now, in my instructions from Mr. Fuller, I was not to have or permit any dispute with Indians, and if I was stopped by them, or from any other cause, I was to take and keep an accurate account of the same, communicating with Messrs. Westfall or Milne, who were in my rear, which I did, as you already know. Under the circumstances I was placed in, I could do nothing but put all the wire, insulators, brackets, etc., in one large pile, protected from fire, and turn the train.

(Signed) GEO. W. WRIGHT.

The contract for the second section of the line was awarded to Richard Fuller, of Hamilton, Ont., and extended from Swan River via Humboldt, at the junction of the Prince Albert and Battleford trails, crossing the South Saskatchewan at a point later known as Clark's Crossing, about 18 miles below where Saskatoon now stands, thence to Battleford and on to a point near where the Town of Leduc is built. To its terminus, the line followed the original survey of the Canadian Pacific Railway, which, keeping south of the Saskatchewan River, passed Edmonton by. At a later date the Canadian Northern Railway was built over practically the same route, but with Winnipeg as a starting point instead of Selkirk, and crossing the river to enter Edmonton. This western section of the Telegraph line was completed in November, 1876, with repair stations at Poplar Plains (some 50 miles west of Pelly); Richard Matheson and Walter Salsbury, linemen. Humboldt: George Weldon, lineman; Mrs. Weldon, operator. Battleford: John Little, superintendent and operator; Thomas Dewan and Bernard Tremont, linemen. No offices were opened west of Battleford at this time. None of those named are now living. Richard Matheson, who already had spent many years in the West, was a citizen of Battleford until 1887 when, catching the gold fever, he went into the Yukon and there died. Walter Salsbury later took service as agent and lineman at Henrietta, near the elbow of the Saskatchewan. He was somewhat of a recluse, but an exceptionally well-read man and a sterling character. He died of typhoid fever in the North Battleford Hospital December 31st, 1916.

George Weldon and his wife, being situated on the main trail to Winnipeg, were widely known and highly esteemed, their hospitality being freely extended to all who passed that way.

Mr. Weldon, upon the opening of the C.P.R., became the company's agent at Grenfell, which position he occupied until superannuated upon reaching the age limit set by the company.

John Little, the superintendent, was an eccentric character with very strong likes and dislikes. He was good-hearted to a fault, but never forgave a man who offended him. As an instance, the writer and he were seated in the office one night when a "call" came over the wire from a distant office whose lineman he disliked. Upon my answering, the man told us that the Indians were battering in the door of his shanty and meant to kill him. Reaching to the telegraph key, Little asked: "Are you sure?" and upon receiving assurance that it was beyond doubt, he said to the terrified man that he hoped that the Indians would "make a good job of it." It may be added that no serious harm resulted. In the winter of 1880-81, Little and Dewan became partners in a ranch scheme and went to Montana to purchase breeding stock. Little never returned to Battleford, Dewan and he having had a disagreement. Later he entered the service of the C.P.R. as agent at Langdon, and died there in 1887.



THOMAS DEWAN  
*A Pioneer founder of Battleford*

Thomas Dewan, one of the original builders of the line, and later a lineman, was successively freighter, trader and business man, one of the founders of Battleford. He was well known and liked by every old-timer in the Territories. Always ready to help friend or stranger, he made many friends and no enemies. He remained a citizen of Battleford until his death, February 25th, 1912.

As an instance of the difficulties and perils frequently encountered by linemen travelling alone, the following incident may be cited: In March, 1877, Superintendent Little had occasion to send Dewan to Fort Carlton on an errand connected with supplies. At that time two dog trains were maintained at Battleford for the use of the linemen in winter travel. With one of these drawing the usual flat sled and his equipment. Dewan set out early in the morning. He elected to travel on the north side of the river, the distance by this route being some 20 miles shorter owing to the bend of the river at the Elbow. When he left Battleford the day was clear and calm. A light snowfall during the night before had covered the earth with a mantle of white which sparkled in the strong rays of the March sun. When he had gone about 15 miles of the 90 his eyes began



JAMES MCKERNAN

*The Senior of the Old Timers of the original Telegraph staff*

to feel the effect of the glare, and by the time he had travelled 30 miles he was completely snow blind—one of the most painful afflictions known. In this dilemma, he decided to push on for Carlton. His lead dog had been purchased there a short time before, and he reasoned that his chances of making Carlton offered a greater chance of safety than if he attempted to retrace his way. He did not dare leave his sled for an instant, since to do so meant death. Throwing himself on the sled and wrapping a buffalo robe about him, he urged the dogs on, trusting that their instinct would direct them, there being no trail. Hour after hour he called words of encouragement to his dogs. At length, when almost discouraged, chilled to the marrow and suffering torture from his blinded eyes, he felt the dogs stop and heard voices. Quickly discovering his plight, kind hands assisted him into the Hudson's Bay Post at Carlton, where he was soon warmed, fed and otherwise ministered to. It was some days, however, before his eyes were sufficiently recovered to permit of his return. But for his own resourcefulness and the sagacity and endurance of his dogs, he must have perished.

Bernard Tremont, universally known as Barney Freeman was by birth a Belgian, and never altogether mastered the English tongue. Before coming to Canada he had lived several years in the Western States where he followed the occupation of cattleman and at times Indian fighter, for these were the times made familiar by Beadle's Dime Novels. He has told me of his brother being shot down by his side while they were driving cattle through Wyoming, and had frequently expressed his contempt for, and absence of fear regarding Indians. He remained as lineman during the period of Mr. Fuller's contract, and then took service with the Government, retaining his position until 1884. He then resigned, having entered into a partnership with Thomas Dewan when they established a ranch a few miles out of Battleford. Due, doubtless, to his feeling regarding the Indians as mentioned above, he refused to leave the ranch on the outbreak of the rebellion, and so became one of the first victims when they went on the warpath. He was killed in March, 1885, and in March, 1886, a tablet to his memory was placed in St. George's Episcopal Church, Battleford, by his former fellow-linemen.

No use was made of that portion of the line west of Battleford until 1877, when Mr. Fuller entered into a contract with James McKernan to maintain the line from a point 30 miles west of Battleford to its western terminus. Mr. McKernan associated with him in this work his brother, Robert McKernan, who selected Grizzly Bear Coulee, about midway between

Edmonton and Battleford, as his headquarters, while James McKernan settled at Hay Lakes, about 30 miles east of the western terminus of the line. No office was opened, but Mr. McKernan, being an operator, frequently sent and received messages, chiefly for Government officials passing through the country, as also for the North-West Mounted Police, whose headquarters were Fort Saskatchewan. The first message transmitted was sent by Major Jarvis, Fort Saskatchewan, to Col. Walker, commanding at Battleford, November 20th, 1877.

Mr. McKernan, still a resident of Edmonton, has had an eventful career. He was a member of the original Mounted Police Force organized in 1873, and took part in the famous march from Dufferin, Manitoba, to Macleod in 1874—the longest march recorded in modern military history—during which he had charge of, and was responsible for the entire water supply. Contrary to the general belief, little difficulty was experienced in finding a generous supply of good water throughout the march.

An interesting fact revealed by Mr. McKernan, which I have not seen noted elsewhere, was that the first official act of the N.W.M.P. after being sworn in at Lower Fort Garry, was the despatch of 10 men—of whom Mr. McKernan was one—to the north shore of Lake Winnipeg, in charge of Col. Macleod, for the purpose of arresting a gang of whiskey peddlers. The round trip occupied 10 days and was entirely successful, all members of the gang being arrested and punished—an auspicious beginning for a force destined to become famous the world over.

In 1879, Mr. McKernan notified Mr. Fuller that he would do no more operating, his contract calling only for maintenance of the line. Mr. Fuller thereupon sent Alex. Taylor, as operator, to Hay Lakes, but he remained there only for a month or two, removing to Edmonton, where he remained until his death.

Edmonton was at that time little more than a Hudson's Bay Post with the addition of a number of free traders, but in 1878 the people of the village, feeling the need of telegraph connection, petitioned the Government to extend the line from its terminus to Edmonton, offering to defray the cost of extension if the Department would establish an office. The contractor, Mr. Fuller, offered to supply the necessary wire and other material free of charge. The offer was accepted, and, under the supervision of Mr. McKernan, the extension was made, the Hudson's Bay Company contributing the poles, and most of the labor. The line was completed on January 18th, 1879, and an office opened in a building opposite the Fort owned by Walters



& Irvine, Mr. Taylor being the first operator. Mr. Taylor held the position for a few months, being succeeded in June, 1880, by George Slack Wood. Mr. Wood was operator for three years when he resigned and left the country, re-appearing in 1885 as operator with General Middleton's force. He remained with the troops during the period of the rebellion, returning east with them, and later went to the United States.

He was succeeded at Edmonton by Mr. Taylor, who again assumed the duties of agent and operator, a position which he held for several years, eventually resigning in order to enter business in a larger field. He died February 14th, 1916.

Upon completion of the line to Edmonton, the tariff was fixed by the contractors on the basis of \$3.00 for ten words Edmonton to Winnipeg; \$2.00, Battleford to Winnipeg, and \$1.00, Edmonton to Battleford. The Press rate was half a cent per word, the Herald and later the Bulletin using the wire freely.

During the years 1879-80 very few settlers came into the country, and but little telegraph business was transacted, the uncertainty of communication and the high tariff being added deterrents. The writer arrived in Battleford in October, 1880, and at once took charge of the Battleford office as chief operator. At the same time, A. V. Lindeberg took charge of Humboldt Station, succeeding George Weldon, the latter, however, remaining at Humboldt. During the winter Superintendent Little resigned and the writer succeeded him as superintendent for the contractor. Mr. Fuller's contract expired in June, 1881. He had fully expected it would be renewed, and I was instructed to carry on with that end in view. However, the Government of the day, apparently dissatisfied with the manner in which the line had been maintained and possibly under some political pressure, decided to take it over and make it a branch of the Public Works Department, to take effect in the summer of 1882. Accordingly, Mr. Fuller came to Battleford in July, 1881, disposed of his equipment and paid off his employees.

From the beginning much trouble was experienced in the attempt to maintain the line in a working condition, especially on the eastern section. The poles were poplar, a wood altogether unsuitable; the wire was much heavier than that ordinarily used for telegraph purposes. On the plains, buffalo, using the poles as scratching posts, overturned numbers of them, while the wire running through uncut, leafy groves lost so much current in wet weather that at such times it was impossible to telegraph any considerable distance. With linemen 100 miles or further

apart, their only conveyance a buckboard with a single horse over a trail without bridges and at times impassable, it was practically impossible to maintain continuous operation. In



*Repairing the Government Telegraph line.*

Spring and Autumn, prairie fires were the chief source of trouble. A fire starting in the southern portion of the country met no barrier until it reached the South Saskatchewan River, and unless extinguished by rain, might burn over a vast area, destroying great numbers of poles as it progressed. Then, as later, the wire worked well and without interruption from the first frosts of Autumn until the coming of Spring. The position of lineman during these years was a particularly trying one. Far from trading posts or any source of supply, there was but little variety of food, and strangely enough few of the men had shot-guns despite the abundance of game. A few cases of scurvy developed, the victims coming to Battleford in the Spring for treatment. Often, too, provisions would give out or be spoiled because of rain coming through tent or shack while the occupant was absent repairing the line. On one occasion, the lineman at Poplar, returning home observed an Indian on horseback galloping away. Upon entering his shack, he found that his entire stock of provisions—not very large—had disappeared. Suspecting the Indian, he slipped a cartridge into his Winchester rifle and made off in pursuit. He had to ride some five miles before he came in sight of his quarry, who immediately increased his

speed. Finding that he could not overtake the red-man, he brought his rifle into play without any thought of doing injury, but expecting that the shot would have the effect of frightening the other into stopping. The result, however, was not what he had anticipated. The Indian, finding that there was no second shot, proceeded to shoot in turn, while the lineman, having no other cartridges, hurriedly decided to return home. This did not apparently satisfy the Indian, who, becoming pursuer in turn, followed his enemy to within half a mile of his home, firing at intervals all the time.

Some weeks later the Indian was arrested by the Police on charges of stealing and attempted murder. His defense was that he had stolen nothing; that while returning to his band he had been fired on by the lineman whom he believed had gone crazy, and that he himself had fired into the air with the object of frightening the other. In short, he contended that he was the aggrieved party and that he should be compensated for the trouble caused him. He was promptly acquitted.

During the years 1878 to 1884 numerous parties of surveyors were engaged in running meridian, base and township lines, preparatory to dividing the land into sections and quarter sections. Being the capital and possessing a telegraph office, Battleford was a gathering point for the heads of these parties when it became necessary for them to communicate with their Department at Ottawa. With a mail but once in three weeks, communication by letter was out of the question. On one occasion, in 1879, while waiting for the line to be repaired, Mr. Wilkins, C.E., erected a sun dial in front of the telegraph office. It was a most ingenious affair consisting of four arms so graduated that each threw a shadow on the other, showing the time at intervals of five minutes. It remained in working order for several seasons during which it was the standard for time the country over, Battleford office giving the time over the wire to the various points on the line. The first meteorological reports were telegraphed from Battleford in the Summer of 1879.

But it was not only in the transmission of telegrams that the wire found a use. At the head office at Battleford was a medical work, containing full instructions as to what should be done in cases of illness or accident. The operators at the various stations made use of this information when necessary, and advice was freely given to anyone who requested it. Rough doctoring, but frequently the means of alleviating suffering, and the best that could be done when there was no doctor within a radius of hundreds of miles. Later, as settlement increased and

doctors established themselves at points far apart, it was a matter of common practise for them to give advice to their patients over the wire. No charge was made for this service.

Another use made of the telegraph in its earlier years was its employment as a medium in long distance checker playing. Players at Battleford challenged those of Edmonton, and I remember that the late J. A. McDougall was one of the Edmonton players who occasionally took part. Later, when Qu'Appelle (then Troy) became the eastern terminus of the line, games were frequently played with that village whose leading player was the well known old-timer, Ace McLean. For a time Battleford had no player who could cope successfully with him until D. M. Finlayson brought in from the farm a young French-Canadian employed by him. He could speak very little English, but he could point out the moves for me to transmit. He won every game, both on that occasion and others following, until the interest died out.

But there were tragic events also in which the employees participated. About Christmas time in the Winter of 1881-82, a young daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Weldon was taken seriously ill. No medical aid could be obtained, there being no doctor nearer than Rapid City. The child died, and the distracted parents, wishing to give their little one Christian burial, knew not what to do. Prince Albert was the nearest point at which there was a resident minister, and the trail was blocked with snow. There seemed no solution except to keep the little body frozen all winter. But the two linemen at the station, A. Lindeberg and R. Finlayson, the youngest of the Finlayson brothers, rose to the occasion. Constructing a hand-sleigh, they fastened the body on it, and on snowshoes tramped 150 miles to Prince Albert, one man breaking trail while his companion drew the sled. The journey occupied several days, through an uninhabited country at the coldest season of the year. If the Victoria Cross were awarded for heroic acts of peace, these men surely earned it.

No steps were taken immediately following the termination of Mr. Fuller's contract to re-open the line. Finally, Mr. La Touche Tupper was sent over the line by the Department with instructions to re-open it for business and report upon its requirements. All the former employees were ultimately re-engaged with the exception of the writer who was replaced by Hugh Richardson, Jr., son of the resident stipendiary magistrate, the telegraph office being installed in the latter's residence, where the post office had also been established.