



Materials from Steele's childhood home, Purbrook, were used to construct this roadside facility. The house in the distance replaces the former Steele residence.

Photo by Rev. G. McMillan

which today is a provincial historic site.

From 1888-1898, Supt. Steele commanded the Macleod district, a territory embracing lands of the proud Blackfoot and border country frequented by international horse thieves, cattle rustlers, outlaws and smugglers. There couldn't have been a better man in charge, for he mixed strength with compassion, efficiency with common sense.

Klondike Gold Rush

The first discovery of gold at Forty Mile, 40 miles north of Dawson, in 1886, had attracted 700 men. William Ogilvie, a Canadian government surveyor, was concerned for the Yukon, since there was no law enforcement except for the unruly miners' meetings. Ogilvie sent word to Ottawa asking that a police force be dispatched. Then in 1893, Bishop William Bompas of the Church of England sent a complaint to Ottawa stating that the whites were demoralizing the natives and he also stated the need for police presence.

Stan Horrall, former RCMP historian and author of *The Pictorial History of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police*, said the government realized that it couldn't continue to leave the area north of British Columbia unattended. Horrall said the government sent

NWMP Insp. Charles Constantine to investigate. Eventually, Constantine returned to Ottawa with a report stating a need for 40 to 50 officers. The government complied and the first police post was constructed at Forty Mile in 1895, and called Fort Constantine after its builder.

In August 1896, George Carmack registered a claim at the Forty Mile Detachment. Two days earlier, he and his friends Skukum Jim and Tagish Charlie had made a fantastic find. News of the find soon spread worldwide and the Yukon Gold Rush was on with thousands of visitors converging on the Yukon. To deal with the influx, the government set up an Administration Civil Authority and appointed former NWMP officer James Morrow Walsh as Commissioner. There were now 90 NWMP officers in the Yukon.

The NWMP was divided into two divisions in the Yukon: "H" Division (Tagish), under the command of Supt. Z.T. Wood, and "B" Division (Dawson) under Supt. Sam Steele's command. Leaving his family in Fort McLeod, Alberta, for the duration of his northern service, Supt. Sam Steele had arrived in the Yukon in 1898. When Steele first arrived at the foot of the Chilkoot Pass from Skagway, Alaska, he found a thousand men with supplies waiting to get across into the Yukon. Since there was no main border crossing, he built a NWMP detachment between the White and Chilkoot summits. As soon as people arrived, they'd see the Union Jack flying and realized that British rule had been implemented and there was law and order.

By 1899, Supt. Steele had tamed the dance halls and gambling dens of the boomtown of Dawson, thus assuring the safety and security of the original inhabitants and the newcomers to this formidable northern frontier. In his book, *Klondike*, Pierre Berton describes the contrast between Skagway, Alaska, where Soapy Smith and his lawless gang ruled, and the Yukon Territory, where the Mounted Police enforced the law. Steele was concerned about new travellers, as many had come unprepared. People were dying