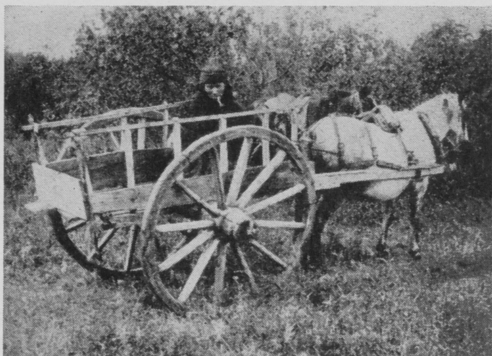


Fort Dufferin

by SERGEANT H. A. STEWART

THOUSANDS OF tourists travel annually to Emerson. The town is known as the southerly gateway to Manitoba and the western provinces. It is situated on the east bank of the Red River and if you row across to a little farm, three miles north of the border, you'll come to a historic site—old Fort Dufferin, the setting of a famous occasion. For it was from here that the North-West Mounted Police started their epic trek westward over the plains.

That was sixty-six years ago. What had originally been an Indian trail then skirted the murky Red River, which wound from Fort Pembina (later Emerson) to Fort Garry (now Winnipeg). Almost daily Red River carts and settlers' wagons bearing newcomers travelled over its rutted course. Pioneers in quest of fortunes and new beginnings on the fertile plains of the Great West came to know this colonization trail that had its inception in St. Paul, the big border town of the north-western States, 500 miles away.



Typical old Red River cart made exclusively of wood, as used on the 500 mile trail from St. Paul to Fort Garry via Dufferin. The doleful screeching of its ungreased axles was inseparable from prairie travel.

Captain (afterwards Major General) Cameron, R.A., son-in-law of the late Sir Charles Tupper, M.P., became the Canadian Commissioner of the North American Boundary Commission, formed early in 1872 to survey the 49th parallel from Lake of the Woods to a point in the Rockies adjacent to Kootenay Lake, B.C. Unguarded, this most peaceful international boundary in all the world, now stretches from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Captain Cameron commanded a unit of Royal Engineers, a corps of Civil Engineers and a detachment of scouts recruited from among the local inhabitants. The Headquarters of the boundary party were established opposite Pembina. Local carpenters assisted in erecting the buildings, offices, warehouses, barracks and stables. This depot became known as Fort Dufferin after Lord Dufferin (1826-1902), who in the previous year was appointed Governor General of Canada. It was used as the base for the survey expedition.

Although most of the original buildings were demolished long ago, one still remains—a monument to those early expeditions. Old timers say this structure was used as an orderly-room for the first contingent of the North-West Mounted Police.

On May 23, 1873, an Act assented to by the Dominion Parliament, authorized the formation of the North-West Mounted Police. The purpose of this civil constabulary was to establish and maintain the Queen's law among the Indians and rapidly-increasing population of the newly-acquired Canadian territory known as the Great North-West.