

Force itself. With their police experience, a number of officers believed that they deserved the appointment. To make matters worse, Commissioner Lawrence William Herchmer, not to be mistaken for his brother, Superintendent William Herchmer, had the worst kind of personality for the job to which he had been appointed. He was described as arrogant, overbearing, vindictive, ill-tempered, vengeful with a hasty temper and a brusque manner. He maintained these character weaknesses throughout his 14 years in office — which obviously prevented good relations between himself and his officers. In fact, he was detested by most of them. But in spite of the difficulties created by his personality weaknesses, in many respects he was ideally suited for the position.

Herchmer had experience in dealing with the Indians, had been in the West since before the NWMP arrived, and was familiar with the difficulties facing newcomers. Above all, he was looked upon by Sir John A. Macdonald as a hard-working civil servant. Macdonald did not appear to be aware of his personality weaknesses, and the cleavage it would create between him and those he expected to carry out his orders.

Policing of the Prairies included problems not usually associated with normal police responsibility. The Force was occasionally involved in labour relations. When disputes erupted between management and labour in coal mines and railways, the Force maintained a delicate balancing of protecting property while preventing the abuse of workers. Settlers required assistance in many ways and looked to the police for help. The Force was the only authority that could deal adequately with administering agriculture, immigration and customs regulations. This and the handling of many matters outside of policing brought about the apt description of the NWMP as agents of the (Macdonald's) National Policy.

In spite of the continual turmoil within the command of the Force, its reputation for honesty and efficiency continued to grow. But when Herchmer left the Force in 1900 to go to South Africa with Canadian Troops, the government was pleased to appoint a member of the Force, A. Bowen-Perry, to replace that "irascible" Herchmer. However, Herchmer deserves much credit. He guided the organization through a period of difficult transition without being able to count on the personal support of his subordinates. He inherited a Force in which many of the men were inexperienced and many others were quite unsuitable for the duties required of them. He established systems on which were based sound administrative practices. He transformed the basic uniform of the NWMP to the dashing Prairie dress of Stetson, red serge, striped breeches and high boots, and he approved of the Musical Ride, all of which have become enduring symbols of the Force, and indeed of Canada.

The authors have produced an important and highly readable book. It details not only the history of a significant time in the history of the Force, but have chronicled the development of the North-West Mounted Police. As indicated in this review, they have also included fascinating descriptions, humorous situations and an insight into personalities that bring this book to life for the readers.

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