

Book Review

SHOWING THE FLAG The Mounted Police and Canadian Sovereignty in the North, 1894 - 1925 by William R. Morrison. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985. \$18.95.

Between 1894 and 1925, the Canadian government took significant steps to assert its sovereignty over the Canadian North. Lack of official presence in the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions allowed the U.S.A., Norway and Denmark to entertain claims in various regions. To forestall challenges to its dominion over the northern frontier, the government turned to the Mounted Police, who had managed the orderly development of the frontier west. In 1894, the North-West Mounted Police were sent to the Yukon where the activities of American traders and miners gave cause for concern. This was a fortunate decision because the police had a base established before the Klondike gold rush of 1898. Further east in the Arctic, the government perceived threats to its sovereignty by the uncontrolled movements of American whaling ships in Mackenzie Bay and Hudson Bay. Moreover, Norway was claiming sovereignty over the Arctic islands explored by Otto Svendrup. In 1903, two expeditions of Mounted Policemen were launched to show the flag, one under Superintendent Charles Constantine to the Mackenzie Delta, and the other under Inspector Douglas Moodie to Hudson Bay. These were the first steps in the task of extending government control over the Arctic, a task which occupied the Mounted Police for several decades.

Professor William Morrison of Brandon University knows the story of the Mounted Police in the North

better than anyone. He wrote a Ph.D. thesis on the subject in 1973, and has continued to research it since. As far as it goes, his book *Showing the Flag* is accurate, scholarly and a most valuable addition to RCMP historical literature. Previous works on the subject have been largely anecdotal, concentrating on individual Mounties, with epic tales of heroism and hardship in the harsh environment of the Arctic. Such stories were often quite true and rightly added to the RCMP legend. Professor Morrison does us the service of sketching a larger canvas of the Mounted Police role, not only in law enforcement, but also in the extension of most other public services into the northern frontier.

Professor Morrison shows us the police as the symbols of sovereignty and the agents of control of the central government. Establishing detachments ever farther north, and conducting patrols of hundreds and even thousands of miles over virgin territory demonstrated to the world that Canada insisted on its claim to the North. And besides being busy with jobs related to personal survival, the Mounted Police had government work to do. In the Yukon, a myriad of responsibilities was dumped immediately in the laps of the police with the gold rush. Besides enforcing the law, the North-West Mounted Police collected taxes and customs, protected gold, delivered mail, distributed welfare to indigent Indians, and laid down travel safety regulations. To the east, development in the Arctic came more slowly, and the police met the challenges in a similar manner but at a far less frantic pace than in the Yukon. For the most part,