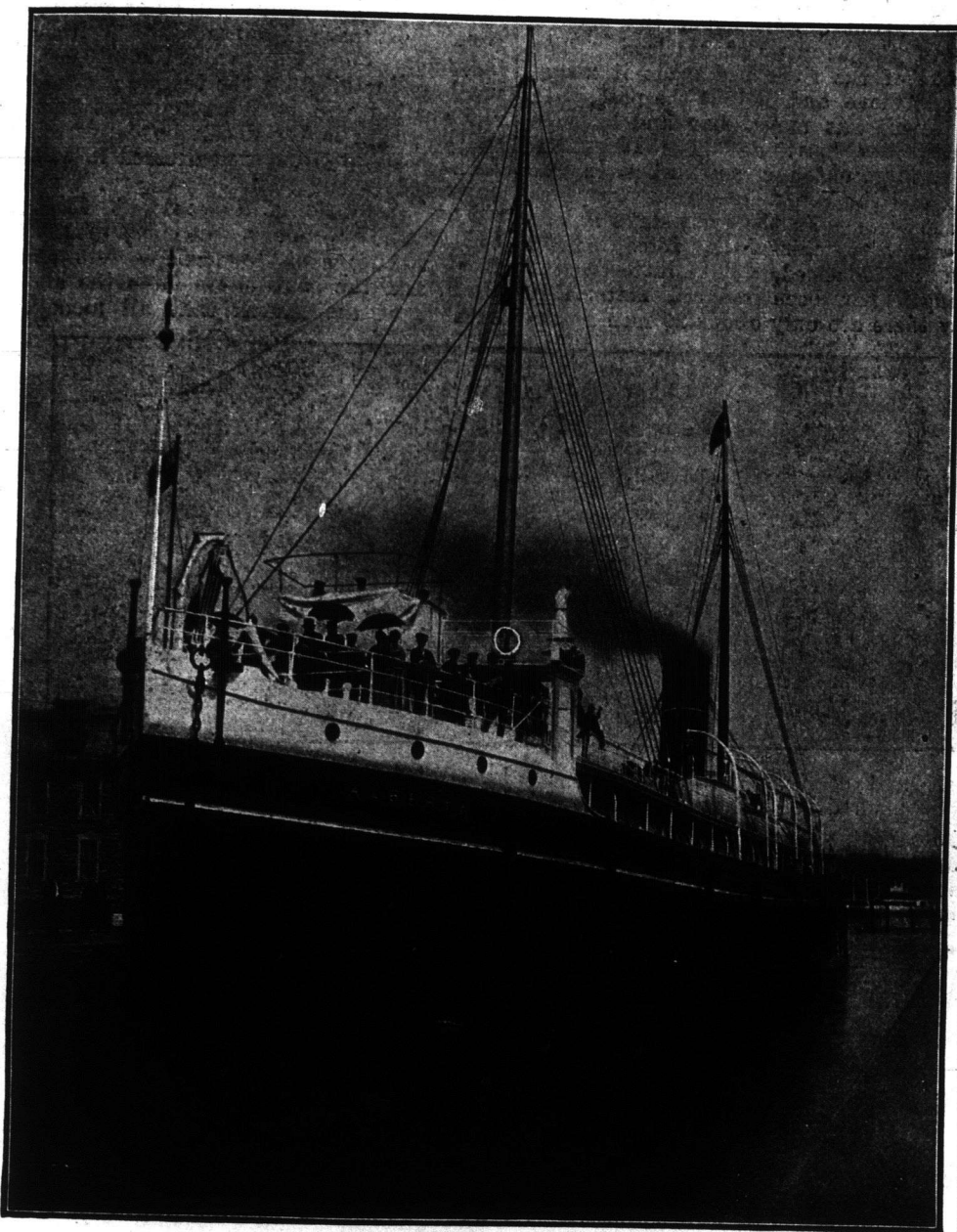


Tales of the vast prairies where buffalo made their stamping ground, and where their hides could be bought from the Indians, attracted those who would become wealthy through the fur trade. These traders built forts for protection from the Indians, and carried on an illicit trade in whiskey. Fort Benton was the trading post for the whites and Indians in all the borderland of the West, and the main trail ran south from the Bow river near Calgary to the Missouri river at Fort Benton. At sundry points in Canada, such as Kipp and Whoopup, the American whiskey smugglers had constructed very strong forts. The inmates of these comprised all classes of people, about 400 in number, in the very early days. The Indians were afraid of them. An Indian's life was not worth a cent if he gave them any trouble. They used whiskey principally in their barter.

The later sixties and early seventies were years of unbridled licence—years when their business was at its height.

Rivers. The object of the force was to put a stop to the liquor trade, and to endeavor to bring the wild Indians into the ways of civilization. The force was small, only about 300 strong, but work was at once begun on a fort on an island in the river. Cottonwood logs were daubed with mud, whitewashed outside and lined with factory cotton inside. Then a British flag was hoisted in opposition to the smugglers' regime.

Here then was a handful of men, about 100 stationed at Fort Macleod, surrounded by a confederacy of Indians noted for their aggressive ferocity. Not a day's ride distant was a fort much stronger than that of the Mounted Police, with cannon, abundance of ammunition and provisions, and four times as many outlaws as there were police. Inside the smugglers' stockades was whiskey enough to win the whole Blackfoot Confederacy as allies for the traders. The first thing was to secure the friendship of the Indians. Colonel Macleod, after whom the fort was



"Alberta," C.P.R. Great Lakes Fleet

These bad characters came over from the States with money enough to outfit themselves and procure whiskey for trading purposes. The "Wolfers" were supplementary forces, which could be called to the defence of the forts and posts if attacked by Indians. They were supplied with food and arms by the whiskey traders or smugglers, and for them they hunted wolves and buffalo. The general desperados hung about the forts or trading posts prepared for any mischief or devilry that was afoot. The traveller would find a few blankets and trinkets in these shops at the posts, but these were only bluffs. The medium of exchange was whiskey, and poor whiskey at that.

On one occasion, in the year 1873, some of the traders, wolfers, and desperados, while wildly drunk, fell upon some forty lodges of defenceless Assinaboines, and, not content with massacring them, men, women, and children, they mutilated their bodies terribly.

It was to deal with this class and their Indian foes that the Royal Northwest Mounted Police came to Southern Alberta. In the spring of 1874 they were sent to the North-west (not then made into territories) their objective point being Whoopup, the trader's fort at the junction of the St. Mary's and Belly

named, invited the chiefs to Fort Macleod. They were feted by the police, given exhibitions of military skill, and shown the cannon. Pointing out a tree more than a mile away, the colonel bade the chiefs watch it. The next instant a cannon ball tore it up by the roots. That was a better shot than the old mortar over at Whoopup could make. The Blackfeet were greatly impressed, and their visit marked the beginning of a friendship between the Mounted Police and the Indians that has lasted to the present day.

The smugglers were on the most friendly terms with the police, and frequented Fort Macleod just as the police frequented Whoopup. There were no white men in the country except traders and police, and no trails of any kind except those made by the buffalo, and one wagon trail over which supplies were brought from Fort Benton. Mail for the police fort also came via Fort Benton, and was received once a month. The nearest railroad was a narrow gauge branch of the Missouri Pacific 500 miles to the south.

Fort Macleod was late in building. The horses after the long ride over the prairies were sent to Sun River, Montana, to winter, and were in charge of

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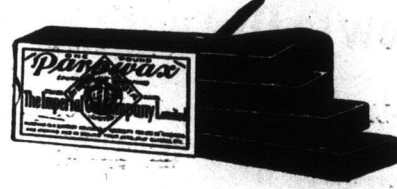
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