

THE OLDEN TIME.

Winnipeg a Hundred Years Ago

The Early History of the Red River

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As early as 1736 a party of French adventurers from Quebec, under the command of La Verendrye, who had authority from the French authorities to penetrate into the interior of the country to the west of Lake Superior, arrived at the mouth of the Assiniboine, where it merges its waters with that of the Red river. The Assiniboine, so named from the tribe of Indians of that name living in its vicinity, was rechristened the St. Charles, and afterwards the Upper Red river. At the junction of the two rivers a post was established, with the name of Fort Rouge, and, according to an eyewitness, the ruins of such a post was plainly discernable in 1800 on the point about where the Hudson's Bay Co.'s mill now stands. So we may say that La Verendrye was the first real estate owner in Winnipeg, after the aboriginal inhabitants.

In 1763 occurred the conquest of Canada by Great Britain, and some fifteen or twenty years after fur traders from Canada began to seek the Northwest for trade with the Indians. In 1783 a powerful company of fur traders was formed in Montreal, consolidating the interests of several small private concerns who had been struggling with each other for some time. This company bore the title of the

NORTHWEST FUR COMPANY,

and it soon began to push its operations inland to even the Athabasca and McKenzie rivers. The trade of the Red River seems to have been, for some unaccountable reason, quite neglected, and it was only towards the very close of the last century that we find mention made of the establishment of posts on the upper waters of what we now call the Red River. The point between the Red and Assiniboine Rivers was known to the fur traders at that time, and for fully twenty-five years after, as

"THE FORKS,"

so that the second name given to this site was recorded. The Hudson's Bay Company had long confined their trade to the neighborhood of Hudson's Bay—indeed, from 1670 to 1774, they had not established posts on the banks of the streams flowing into Lake Winnipeg. It is most likely that their first post on the Red River was established as late as 1796.

For some years The Forks was resorted to simply as a camping place for the boat brigades passing up the Assiniboine River, whereon numerous forts were erected by the Northwest Company, the Hudson's Bay Company, and a new body of traders who styled themselves the X Y company. The last company was short-lived, amalgamating with the Northwest Company in 1804. About 1803 Alexander Henry, of the Northwest Company, who was in charge of the Red River district, sent a party of his men to build at The Forks the post afterwards named.

FORT GIBRALTAR,

which was at first probably only consisted of one or two buildings, for there is a record, later on of a more extensive establishment than existed at this time. That a post of the Northwest Company was maintained at the Forks in 1803 and 1804 is settled by the Journal of Alexander Henry, which is still in manuscript. The writer extracted from that journal amongst other items, the following statement of the trade of The Forks establishment during the winters of 1803 and 1804, when Mr. Dorion was in charge: 356 beaver, 10 black bear, 1 brown bear, 76 wolves, 8 foxes, 25 racoons, 36 fishers, 26 otters, 20 martens, 13 mink, 3 wolverines, 15 lynx, 6 moose skins, etc., 22 parchement, etc. As trading posts existed at Rosseau River and Pembina the same year, it may be accepted that the above furs were obtained from animals killed in the vicinity of Winnipeg. By the erection of Gibraltar, the foundation of the future

COMMERCIAL GREATNESS

of the town was laid in 1803 as well, for ever since that date mercantile business has flourished within what are now the limits of the city of Winnipeg.

The old Fort Gibraltar had both parks and natural farms eighty years. Henry informs us incidentally, on two or three occasions, that he visited the forks to enjoy himself. After describing the heavy woods which covered the country south from the Assiniboine, near the forks to the Salle river, he says he caught a number of whitefish, sturgeon and gold-eyes, while the women gathered hazel nuts, red and choke cherries, Pembina berries, three kinds of plums, and wild grapes, the men going out on the prairie "towards little Stony Mountain" and returning with the carcasses of cow buffalos, which they had killed, varying this amusement by bringing in red deer and bears, "which were here in great abundance. Wild fowl in great numbers frequented the mouth of the Assiniboine and the rapids at St. Andrew's was a favorite resort of pelicans. Nature evidently boomed the wild animal, water fowl and fruit features of Winnipeg at that early date. That the present site of Winnipeg was early recognized as a central one for the

DISTRIBUTION OF SUPPLIES

is shown by the custom pursued by the traders of landing here to assort and re-pack the outfits for distribution to the posts south and west. The Ojibway and Snake Indians, who frequented the country bordering about the mouth of the Assiniboine during the first part of the present century, at least on one occasion, entrenched themselves in pits at The Forks on account of a threatened attack of the Sioux, which is the first military operation recorded in the history of Winnipeg. The Hudson's Bay Company began to push up the Red River about 1796, and during the next decade had placed trading posts in the vicinity of those of the Northwest Company, with the exception of at the Forks. In 1811

LORD SELKIRK.

after controlling a large share of the stock of the Hudson's Bay Company, secure from it a grant of land along the Red and Assiniboine rivers, covering an area of some 116 000 square miles under the claim of that company, that their charter gave them control of the country described, which claim was contested by the Canadian fur traders. Lord Selkirk issued a most glowing description of the land, climate, and general advantages to be gained by persons joining with him in settling in this tract of country, and induced a number of persons in Scotland and Ireland to avail themselves of what a writer in 1817 describes as the benefits of "Liberty of conscience, freedom from taxes and tithes, and all the temptations of a

LAND OF PROMISE

painted in most glowing colors." The party sailed in the spring of 1811 for York Factory, but on arriving there found the season too far advanced to proceed on their journey to Red River. They accordingly wintered at York Factory, and suffered severely before they arrived at the Red River during the next year. Miles Macdonell was in charge of the party, and on their arrival in the vicinity of the Forks, he paraded them, and exhibited his commission as governor of the colony, which, apparently was the first occasion of such an official making his debut in this district. Other parties were sent out in 1813 and 1814 to augment the number of the first arrivals. arbitrary manner to the Northwest Company's people, which was at once resented by them, as they viewed the settling of the country and claims of Lord Selkirk, as illegal and unjustified, claiming that they had taken possession of the Red River country as traders from Canada half a century before the people of the Hudson's Bay Company had ventured into it. A struggle at once began between the

RIVAL COMPANIES

for supremacy and resulted in bloodshed on more than one occasion, and the total destruction of the property of the Selkirk settlers, who were generally simply on-

lookers. On the 17th March, 1816, the Hudson's Bay Company people who had a fort at Point Douglas, about three-quarters of a mile below the forks, attacked Fort Gibraltar of the Northwest Company at the mouth of the Assiniboine, captured the inmates, ransacked their stores, and finally razed the buildings to the ground, carrying away the timbers to Fort Douglas to use for their own purposes. Five days later they attacked the Northwest Company's fort at Pembina and destroyed it also. In the following spring the employes of the Northwest Company came into collision with the Hudson's Bay Company's people, under Governor Semple, a few miles north of the present city limits, and it resulted in the

DEATH OF GOVERNOR SEMPLE

and about twenty of his men, while only one Indian on the side of the Northwesters was killed. Then matters were in a very disturbed state until the coalition of these two powerful companies in 1820 when the united Hudson's Bay Company established themselves at the forks and opened stores to supply the settlers, traders and Indians with goods, so another era in the trade of Winnipeg was entered on. The present Fort Garry was erected in 1835 by Governor Christie. The people who from time to time came to the country settled along the banks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers, those of the same nationalities generally settling in localities by themselves. The Hudson's Bay Company had repurchased in 1836 all Lord Selkirk's rights in the settlement for the sum of £25,000, and according to Sir George Simpson, afterwards sold land to settlers for seven shillings and six pence, or five shillings an acre, according to location. The land was conveyed under leases for 999 years, and the holder agreed not to traffic in furs, violate any of the chartered privileges of the company, evade any of the restrictions governing the law relating to the distillation of spirits, etc.

Owing to dissatisfaction in the settlement and of American intrigues of a body of

BRITISH REGULAR TROOPS

was sent out from England to Fort Garry in 1846, under command of Col. J. F. Crofton, consisting of 383 persons, covering detachments from the 6th Foot, Royal Artillery and Civil Engineers. Of these, twenty men remained in the country. Jas. Irwin, of Winnipeg, Chas. Lant, of St. James, and Richard Salter, of the Boyne, are the only survivors today. These troops returned to England in 1848, and in that year were succeeded by a corps of 56 pensiners under the command of Lt. Col. Caldwell, many of whom afterwards settled in the country, with Lt. Col. Caldwell as governor of the colony. Again, in the year 1857, one hundred men of the Royal Canadian Rifles, were sent round by the Hudson's Bay, like the others, leaving Canada for that purpose, and were likewise quartered at Fort Garry. It is not known, to most people at least, that three different expeditions of troops were sent to Fort Garry before the

RIEL REBELLION

of 1869-70, when what is called the first Red River Expedition, composed of regular troops and Canadian volunteers, was despatched from Ontario and Quebec, and arrived here in August, 1870, to find that Riel had fled. It was from this date that Winnipeg, as a place distinct from the Hudson's Bay Co.'s Fort Garry, became known. On the arrival of the troops in 1870, the village consisted of a collection of about twenty seven houses, centering about the present site of the post office, the population only numbering about one hundred or one hundred and fifty souls.

Under the terms of the agreement between the Dominion Government and the Hudson's Bay Co., a large block of land about Fort Garry was reserved by the latter for their own purposes, the balance of the territory included within the ill-defined limits of the village of Winnipeg, being owned by McDermot, Bannatyne, Schultz, Ross, Logan and others, who had the river lots, which, with a few chains frontage on the river, ran back two miles.