

A HISTORY OF PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE.

BY A. H. FINCH.

PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE, on the main line of the C. P. R., is the headquarters of the Manitoba and North Western Railway and the terminus of the Northern Pacific and is situated in the heart of the world famous Portage Plains, the best agricultural region in the world to-day, only two places equalling it in the quality, quantity and constancy of its wheat yield; these being the delta of the Nile and the Plains of Esdraelon in Palestine.

Historically Portage is the most interesting place in the North-West, eclipsing even Winnipeg itself. For ages it has been the connecting land link between the northern and southern waters, ever since the Assiniboine ceased to flow into Lake Manitoba and made for itself a new channel into the Red at Winnipeg. Then the Portage began to lengthen till at the present writing it is some ten miles.

From 1730 to 1750 there was a Catholic Mission established across the river, on the land now known as "The Island," the river having since receded and found a new channel a mile or so further south, leaving "The Island" surrounded by the old bed, which in the near future will be flooded at small expense and be turned into one of the most delightful inland lakes imaginable, and Portage will then take her rightful place as the most delightful summer resort in the Canadian North-West.

Trading houses were established in connection with the Mission, and in 1780 the Crees and Assiniboines made a joint attack. They found three trading houses belonging to three distinct companies with quite a village of traders' huts opposite the

Mission, and where Portage now stands, two they took, killing the occupants, but were repulsed from the third and vanquished so completely that they left their dead and wounded to the white man, and their depredations ceased.

Later, when the Sioux Indians swarmed in from Dakota and Minnesota, the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Trading Company built strong fortifications for protection of life and property.

The Metis or Half-breeds established a prosperous colony where Portage now stands, purchasing land from their brethren the Indians, and in 1850 a Catholic Mission Church and Parsonage was established among them.

In 1859-60 Archdeacon Cochrane purchased the present site of Portage from the Saltieus, paying for it in goods. The chief later sold the Island and Slough River for the consideration that each settler should give him a bushel of wheat annually till he died. This was faithfully carried out.

In 1861, the first eastern emigrant, John McLean, pitched his tent among the Indians and Metis, who looked with jealous eye on the encroachments of the white man. By the time of the Rebellion in 1869-70, there was a flourishing colony of an even fifty households—farmers and merchants, from the east, and, loyalists to a man, they nearly all were put in durance vile in Fort Garry. But their families and properties were unmolested.

Previously having no assistance from the central government, and constantly harassed by the feuds of the different trading companies, and