

Commissioner L. W. Herchmer

1886 - 1900

WHEN COLONEL IRVINE retired as Commissioner of the N. W. M. Police, the authorities at Ottawa decided that his successor must, above all things, be a man who would enforce discipline rigidly. Their choice fell on Lawrence William Herchmer, who had had no previous association with the Force.

Colonel Herchmer was born at Shipton on Cherwell in England on 25th April, 1840. His father was Rev. William Macaulay Herchmer, who came of United Empire Loyalist stock and was Chaplain to the Bishop of Bristol and Rector of St. George's Cathedral, Kingston. The new Commissioner was educated at a school at Henley on Thames and later went to Trinity College, Toronto, and to the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich. At the age of seventeen he was given a Commission as Ensign in the 46th Regiment (now the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry). With his regiment he went to India, a voyage which took sixty days in a sailing vessel owing to being becalmed en route. After a stay of two or three years there his Regiment was moved to Cork, Ireland, and while there he acted as Musketry Instructor. In 1862 he sold his Commission and came to Canada. He inherited some property near Kingston, Ont., where he farmed and kept race horses for ten years.

In 1866 Colonel Herchmer married Miss Mary Sherwood, who also was descended from the United Empire Loyalists. She was the daughter of Henry Sherwood, the first Attorney General of Upper Canada. It was in Henry Sherwood's office that Sir John A. MacDonald studied law.

In 1872 Colonel Herchmer was appointed Commissariat Officer on the Boundary Commission. He stayed with them till their work was concluded in 1874. Later he built and operated the first Brewery erected in Winnipeg. In 1876 or 1877 he was appointed Indian Agent at "Bielli" and had jurisdiction over the agencies at Fort Pelly, Fort Walsh, Riding Mountain, Fort Ellis and others. He was appointed Commissioner of the Rebellion Losses in 1885 and his next appointment was Commissioner of the N. W. M. Police, which office he assumed on 1st April, 1886.

Colonel Herchmer commenced at once to make changes, and during his régime many of the innovations for which he was responsible proved to be of real benefit to members of the Force. He it was who persuaded the Government to establish a pension scheme for the Non-Commissioned Officers and men. This gave stability to a career in the Police which could have been secured in no other way. The knowledge that they had a number of years service behind them, which counted towards pension, has proved the means of retaining in the Force the services of some splendid men, who might otherwise have been enticed away to more remunerative positions in civil life. He believed a recruit's first impressions of Regina should be reasonably pleasant and commenced to brighten up the barracks. He permitted beer to be sold in the Canteens, reasoning that many of the men would probably drink somewhere, so it would be vastly preferable to have them consuming beer in barracks rather than whiskey in the bars. A system