

# THE EARLY YEARS OF DEPOT DIVISION

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North-West Mounted Police barracks, Regina, 1890. On the extreme left is the hospital, next to it the riding school. The roof tops of "A" and "B" Blocks can be seen at centre to the left of the water tower. The commissioner's house is on the far right.

It is the oldest division in the Force. All of the others are either younger or have been re-located or re-established at least once. It is the only division to have had a commissioner as its commanding officer. It is the only division to have seen all three changes in the Force's name. It has been training recruits for a century. It is Depot Division, of course, and it will be one hundred years old on November 1, 1985.

Until the establishment of Depot, training was the responsibility of each division. Recruits were simply engaged at headquarters and then transferred to the field without any training, sometimes even without uniforms. At the divisions they might receive some training right away, or they might not. It depended on how busy the senior NCOs were with police duties, and whether the division was short of staff. It was not unusual for recruits to find themselves on detachment with no training at all. Training in most divisions was left to the winter months when many detachments and outposts were closed and the men brought into division headquarters. It was not an efficient system, as more than one commissioner noted.

In 1880 Commissioner Irvine visited Ireland to study the organization of the

Royal Irish Constabulary. He was impressed with its permanent training centre, the Depot, in Phoenix Park, Dublin. All recruits were posted there for a regular period of training, and advanced courses were provided for senior ranks.

Upon his return to Canada he strongly recommended the establishment of a "depot of instruction" for the North West Mounted Police (NWMP) to which all recruits would be sent for training under experienced instructors before being sent into the field.<sup>1</sup> His request fell on deaf ears. The fact was the government of the day gave a low priority to affairs in the Northwest Territories, and the NWMP was still believed to be a temporary force that would be disbanded once the railway was completed and settlement began. In 1884 Irvine was still complaining that the exigencies of police work made it impossible to employ NCOs as instructors, and all the recruits for that year had been posted to divisions as soon as they were engaged.<sup>2</sup>

Within a year the situation had changed completely. The rebellion in 1885 finally convinced the government

<sup>1</sup> *Annual Report, NWMP, 1880, p. 8.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid., 1884, p. 22.*