

As It Was in Red River Days

By Aubrey Fullerton.

THE approach of winter and its holiday season means in many ways a great deal more to-day than it meant in the pioneer days of Western Canada. There is a larger range of cold-weather activities than there used to be. It is a question, however, if we nowadays get any more out of our crisp, sociable winters, in proportion to our opportunities, than did the early settlers, for instance, in the old Red River colony. With all the troubles of the Selkirk colonists, life sometimes went merrily with them, and some pleasant pictures of how they spent the winter months still remain.

Christmas was one of the very special occasions in that first settlement of the Canadian West. It was then, as now, the great social event of the year, and in the rambling frontier village which had grown up along the Red it was observed with a surprising elaborateness and enthusiasm. The energy that made all the other festivals of the year socially successful was very particularly focussed upon the Christmas celebration, and almost from the first days of the colony the settlers were in the habit of keeping their yuletide right merrily.

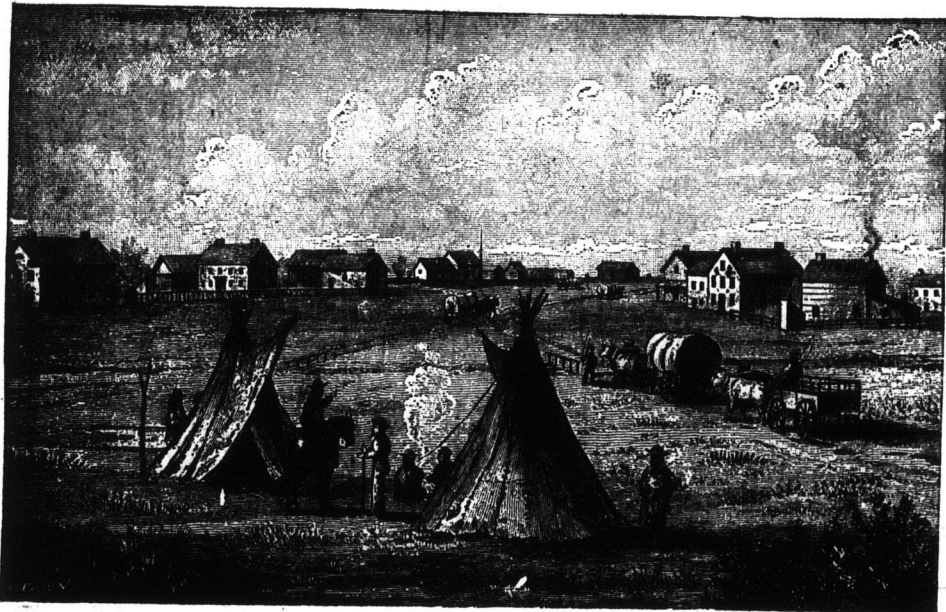
Christmas came but once a year, however, and another kind of fete-day, which repeated itself as often as circumstances permitted, sometimes outshone it in splendor, though never in general popularity. Weddings were as wonder-

kirk's colonists had the knack of stepping off.

Some time in the following week the groom took his bride to his father's house, and there another celebration, on a smaller scale, was put on, this latter occasion being known as "the home wedding." When this was over, the newly-weds were allowed to take up the quiet course of their own domestic life, and public interest shifted to some other couple next on the wedding list.

In the social events of the old Red River days there was a warmth, a sincerity, and a simplicity of manner that have for all time given a pleasant coloring to the early colony life. Some features of those social doings, however, were not so pleasant or so commendable. Nearly always, for instance, there was an accompaniment of hard drinking, provision for which was considered one of the necessary duties of the host. Strangely enough, funerals kept pace with weddings as occasions for general drinking bouts.

It is an interesting if not a pleasing fact that considerable prominence was given in the early history of the Red River colony to the matter of a local liquor supply, and the regulation of the demand for drinking facilities, and the way that demand was met, forms a striking commentary upon the olden days as compared with these prohibition times in which we now live. In 1833, when the colony did not yet number



After Red River Settlement had given way to a new order. The pioneer village of Winnipeg as it was fifty years ago

ful events in the Red River settlement as anywhere else in the world, and were fittingly celebrated. Many a time did the little log houses at the edge of the wilderness ring with the merriment that accompanied the marriage doings.

Winter was the favorite time for weddings in those days. Lovers were somehow able to arrange their dates, in most cases, so that the great event was timed for the year-end or for some time within the next two months thereafter, when the long winter nights gave ample opportunity for festivities. For some reason, too, Thursday was the popular wedding day, and it came to be a generally recognized rule that that time of the year and that day of the week were the correct marriage occasions for strictly proper people.

A Red River wedding began on Monday with the passing around of the invitations. This was usually done by the father of the bride, or by someone acting in his behalf, and it was understood that in the case of guests coming from a distance the invitation was good for overnight. When the ceremonial day had fully come, and the service at the church was over, there followed a ride home in carriages, a reception with a salute of firearms, and a long night of revelry. With only such interruptions as the eating of a wonderful wedding dinner—made up of choice buffalo-meat dishes, plum puddings, and the like—the programme of dancing went on till nearly daylight again. It was then one could have seen the real Red River jig at its best, with all the other reels and waltzes that Sel-

5,000 souls, Governor Simpson reported that after weeding out a number of spurious claims there were still twenty-nine men who had some reasonable rights to the privilege of making whiskey. When it came to making compensation to these men, for the purpose of getting the liquor business under government control, some of them wanted as much as £200, but Governor Simpson recommended an average of £20 as quite sufficient.

Perhaps never before or since in Canada has the privilege of making whiskey been set over against the privilege of having a preacher of the Gospel in the community. There was a time, it will be recalled when the sturdy Scotch colonists on the Red River were without a church or a minister of their own creed, and considerable dickering and delay ensued before they got their desire. During the time of their shepherdlessness the whiskey matter was under discussion, and some of the men most closely concerned in it told Governor Simpson that they would be willing to forego their claims to the right of distilling liquor if they could have a clergyman of the kind they wanted. It is not on such a basis as this that ministers are sought to-day.

The end of the year was always a time of particular interest in the early Manitoba settlement by reason also of its being the time when the new supplies from England were received and distributed. The freight route from the Old Country was then by way of Hudson Bay and York Factory, and the

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