

Canada's national police force, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), a modern organization that is a living tradition and a vivid reminder of the romance of Canada's past, was 100 years old on May 23. On that day in 1873, Lord Dufferin, the Governor General of Canada, gave royal assent to an act of the Government of Canada for the establishment of a "Police Force in the North-West Territories".

The growth of the RCMP into one of the world's best known and most versatile police organizations is reflected in the 1973 centennial program, which began May 23, when Governor-General Roland Michener opened a special exhibition in Ottawa entitled "The RCMP - its History and its National Role". Many events will commemorate such outstanding chapters in the force's early history as its famous March West in 1874, its establishment of posts throughout Western Canada and its outstanding police work in the Klondike gold-fields. Also recalled will be the discovery voyages through the Northwest Passage by the RCMP ship *St. Roch*, the first vessel to navigate this almost legendary route in both directions. Other centennial activities will generate more public awareness of the contemporary force and its operations in an area that extends across the whole of Canada and northward from the United States border to the high Arctic.

#### Early days

The plan for the establishment of the force called for the enlistment of 300 men between the ages of 18 and 40 who would be paid at 75 cents a day for sub constables, and \$1 a day for constable. The North West Mounted Police, as it was soon called, came into existence on August 30, 1873, when the provisions of the act of Parliament were enforced by Order in Council and recruiting began.

Credit for the peaceful settlement of Western Canada rightly falls to the NWMP, who were organized to administer justice in the regions ceded by the Hudson's Bay Company. In July 1874, 275 men rode westward from Fort Dufferin, Manitoba, their mission to pacify the warring tribes and protect the plains country from adventurers. By autumn of the same year, they had made their presence known as far west as the foothills of the

Rocky Mountains. Two years later, the force had become firmly established and had won the confidence and respect of native chiefs and their people. Devoid of the arrogance and brutality so often displayed by newcomers to the West, the NWMP endeavoured to make law-abiding citizens of both white and red men.

As a semi-military body, modelled partly on the Royal Irish Constabulary, the North West Mounted Police followed the army style in administration and dress. The scarlet tunic, worn earlier by the highly respected and popular soldiers of Queen Victoria during their years in the West, was from the first an important part of the uniform, and was destined to become a badge of friendly authority.

#### Gold-rush days

By 1895, the northern regions of Canada came within the scope of the force, and in particular the Yukon, as thousands of prospectors flocked to the gold-fields. The NWMP moved quickly into the region and established posts at strategic points. By vigilant and determined law enforcement and a ban on firearms, fewer than 250 members kept murder and serious crime to a minimum. Among their many tasks,



*George Arthur French  
First Commissioner*

the NWMP carried mail to the scattered camps, adding 64,000 miles in one year alone to patrols branching out by boat and dog-sled over the North.

After the Boer War, in which many members of the force served conspicuously with Canadian regiments, settlement of the West accelerated as some 300,000 homesteaders made their homes on the plains. A total of 84 detachments stretched from the U.S.



*During the March West, Assistant Commissioner James F. Macleod was invariably riding in the vanguard of the cavalcade. He is seen here, with*

*his hand on his horse's saddle, flanked by two of his officers in a picture taken at Fort Walsh in 1878.*