

Married Men Need Not Apply

by C/M S.W. Horrall, RCMP Historian

I consider Cst.... more or less weak headed caused by living continually with such a woman as Mrs....; having had an interview with her, I consider she would drive any man crazy in a short time; consequently, I did not punish him, but have sent him to finish his term at Red Deer.

Thus wrote the Commanding Officer, "G" Division, in 1888, when confronted by yet another case where a member's marital affairs were thought to undermine the Force's efficiency. In just over a century, the RCMP has turned full circle on the question of marriage regulations. In 1873, as now, the married state was no barrier to engagement. During the intervening years, a variety of regulations were introduced, aimed at subordinating members' natural desires for a mate to the exigences of the Force. In fact, throughout most of its history, the Force has officially and unofficially regarded the marriage of its members as a nuisance which should be discouraged in every way possible.

What benefits accrued from these attempts to regulate human nature is difficult to assess, but there is no doubt that they had an effect upon the morale and service of many members. At their most stringent in the 1920s, constables were required to have a minimum of 12 years service before their application for permission to enter the blissful state of matrimony would even be considered. When you realize that the disciplinary code required unmarried men to be sexually chaste, you will appreciate that

this regulation presupposed a herculean sense of self-discipline on the part of all concerned. Members unable to face the monastic life imposed upon them could either secretly break the rules and live a double life, or seek their discharge in one form or another.

There were many reasons behind the Force's resistance to marriage. Married men were seen as an additional burden on the public purse, and difficulties associated with transferring married members seriously reduced the mobile capabilities of the Force, particularly in times of emergency. Another long-held belief was that married men's loyalties were divided because they could not devote themselves, body, soul and mind to the Force if they had to worry about responsibilities at home. Marriage, therefore, was a privilege only to be conferred upon those who had demonstrated their loyalty with many years of devoted and celibate service.

The first marriage regulations appeared in 1877. The Commissioner's Annual Report for that year noted that married men had been taken on in early years in the hope that their wives would wash, cook and sew for the men. The experiment, however, turned out to be unsuccessful and the government found that transporting and feeding families was an expensive business. As a result, it was ruled in 1877, that married men would no longer be engaged into the Force.

Although members did not need permission to enter the matrimonial state once