

Major-General Cortlandt Starnes 1923 - 1931

THE SIXTH COMMISSIONER of this Force was Cortlandt Starnes, who succeeded Major-General A. B. Perry on April 1, 1923.

He was born in Montreal on January 31, 1864, the son of G. E. Starnes who sprang from good United Empire Loyalist stock and whose wife was a daughter of the Honourable J. L. Beaudry. He was educated at the Plateau Academy in Montreal and at the age of seventeen became associated with the firm of Hector Prevost and Company, Customs Brokers in that city. His, however, was not the spirit that could be cooped up in an office and on the outbreak of the North West Rebellion of 1885, Starnes, who had previously joined the 65th Regiment of the non-permanent active militia and had been gazetted as a Lieutenant, volunteered for active service with his regiment and throughout the whole North West campaign acted as adjutant thereof.

It was on the trackless prairie of the West during the hectic days of the rebellion that Starnes and Perry first met, the former a young lieutenant of the militia and the latter a stripling inspector of the North West Mounted Police. Little did either suspect, one may be sure, during their march from Calgary to Edmonton, that each would serve his native land in the ranks of the North West Mounted Police for more than forty years and that both would rise to the rank of Commissioner of the Force in question.

On March 1, 1886, Lieutenant Cortlandt Starnes was appointed an inspector in the North West Mounted Police, being then twenty-two years of age. His life's career had started and he, with his robust frame, was well suited to endure the hardships and privations which were the lot of the Mounted Policeman in the far off Western days.

For three short months he served in Depot Division and from thence to Prince Albert where he remained until October, 1886, being transferred at that time to Battleford, the Headquarters of "C" Division. At Battleford he remained until 1888 and then went further West, this time to Fort Macleod, the Headquarters of "D" and "H" Divisions, under the command of Superintendent Sam Steele, one of the historic characters of the Force. He remained at Macleod for three years busily engaged in successful efforts to put down the unscrupulous gangs of cattle and horse rustlers, together with the peddlers of "fire water" to the roving bands of Blackfoot and Cree Indians. Starnes gained invaluable experiences which were to stand him in good stead in his later career.

In 1891 we find Starnes transferred back to Depot Division, not to Regina itself this time, but to Estevan near the border line where he remained until 1897. The Estevan district was then notorious for the gangs of cattle rustlers living in the U.S.A. who committed many depredations among Canadian stock and Starnes dealt with them in no uncertain fashion. On leaving the district in 1897 he left behind him a record of impartiality and fearless service.

Contrary to impressions one may have formed of Starnes during his latter years, in his early days in the Force he was known as a daring and