

# Old-timers' Column

## Founding of the Police Horse Farm Pincher Creek—1878

*The Quarterly is indebted to Mrs. Corbett Lynch-Staunton of Pincher Creek, Alta., for this story, written by her father-in-law ex-Cst. Alfred Hardwick Lynch-Staunton before his death in 1932. The tale is of a little-known activity of the Force's early days—the horse breeding farm at Pincher Creek, but it also gives a first-hand account of life in the pioneer West.*

As Reg. No. 241, A. H. Lynch-Staunton joined the NWMP at Toronto on June 5, 1877. When he travelled west to Fort Macleod, he went up the Missouri River to Fort Benton—the usual route in those days. Mr. Lynch-Staunton used to tell of the great buffalo herds he saw on that journey. So numerous were the animals, that at times when they crossed the river, all boat traffic was forced to come to a halt.

Introducing his story, Mr. Lynch-Staunton wrote:

In the year 1874, when the Indians, hitherto a strong and healthy race, began to show the effects of rotten whiskey and smallpox—both supplied by traders from the south—their scouts reported seeing a column of strange white men in scarlet uniforms. It was the North-West Mounted Police on their way to Fort Whoop-Up, the stronghold of pioneer bootleggers.

The police found that the fort had been vacated in great haste, so they marched another few miles, encamped on the Old Man's River and built Fort Macleod. Of the men who marched a thousand miles for 75 cents a day, enduring all the dangers of cold, hunger, thirst and Indian raids, there are few remaining. (Editor's note: The last surviving member was Reg. No. 50 ex-Staff Cst. J. B. Mitchell who died Nov. 14, 1945.)

Sometime after I arrived in the West, orders were issued to establish a police farm and detachment on Pincher Creek. With no idea how this was to be done, eight of us set out from Fort Macleod. This trip was not as it is now. There were no roads, no fences, no bridges and the only ranch was at the mouth of Pincher Creek, and belonged to a man named Lee. All around us stretched the prairie, a sea of grass reaching to our stirrups. Ahead

wandered our 200 head of horses, behind came the wagons and implements. The whole country swarmed with duck, chicken, antelope and deer—the nearest railroads were the G.T.R. ending at Sarnia, Ont., and the Union Pacific in the U.S. It was not till we crossed Freeze-out Flat and Ridge, that we saw the land of our endeavors. It was not called Freeze-out then.

At this point in his story, the author explains how the colorful and descriptive name "Freeze-out" was given to that area.

Some years later, Dave Grier, a gentleman called Scotty, and myself, had a supply of hay on the flat for the police in Macleod. I was in Macleod getting supplies when a bad storm came up. I managed to get to the shack we had there, and found Scotty and Grier almost frozen. We had to stay the night but next morning we left for Pincher Creek with the Christmas supplies for the police—groceries and a cheering liquid not subject to frost. Before we left we tacked a board with "Freeze-out" written on it, to the door of the shack. Thus was it named.

Mr. Lynch-Staunton said that when they reached Pincher Creek in the year 1878, they turned the horse herd out to graze on the flat below what is now the town. There—his story continues—we proceeded to build the barracks which was a fine structure in those days—a log shack with a sod roof and a dirt floor; the accepted habitation for whites west of Winnipeg. When it rained the roof usually leaked, causing the buffalo robes to smell very unpleasantly, but our roof did not leak—at least not much—and we had a floor.

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