

On the St. Paul Trail in the Sixties

(Biographical Note.—Mr. W. G. Fonseca, the writer of the following paper, is a pioneer of the old Red River days. A native of Santa Croix, he was attracted to St. Paul, Minn., many years ago, and seeking new scenes, found his way to Red River Settlement in 1859. Here he engaged in business, married one of the Logan family, and settled on Point Douglas, now a part of the City of Winnipeg. Mr. Fonseca has ever been a public-minded citizen, and this paper is a reminiscence of the cart-trail from Fort Garry to St. Cloud, or St. Paul, and return in the days when Winnipeg had not yet come into existence.)

The following paper was read in the City Hall, Winnipeg, and before the Historical Society, on the evening of Jan. 25th, 1900, in the absence of the writer through sickness, by Mr. K. N. L. Macdonald, a Vice-President of the Society.

"Tempora mutantur" comes to the writer's lips as he sees to-day the railways running over the prairies, parallel to the ruts of the Red River cart, and thinks of the slowness and difficulty of travel mingled with a strange romance and interest attaching to the trail and its primitive life, as compared with the present hurry, bustle, and commonplace of the puffing engine and the Pullman car.

One such journey comes to the writer's mind, surrounded with more incident than others on which the writer crossed the plains. While in those days supplies still came by way of York Factory, brought by the Hudson's Bay Company's ship from Britain, and were carried by bands of hardy voyageurs in York boats by way of lake, river and portage, in the early sixties of the century the cart route over the prairie to St. Paul, Minnesota, was largely availed of by the Red River settlers. The Red River cart—aptly called the "prairie schooner"—took out loads of fur for the Hudson's Bay Company to St. Paul, and came back laden with supplies for the Company or for the settlers.

BEFORE STARTING.

For company and safety many carts went on the same expedition and for days before the start all was activity. As