

Scraps of History.

Written for THE COLONIST.

The early history of that part of Canada which lies to the west and northwest of the great lakes is a very interesting subject of study for the thinking classes of its present inhabitants, but unfortunately what is known of its early history is very meagre in details and only leaves us with a tantalizing desire for more. Unlike the older parts of the continent, this has been without the simplest forms of civilization until within the last century and a half. With only the rude and untutored Indians for inhabitants it could not be expected that much care would be taken to chronicle the events of note that have taken place previous to the coming of the white man. No doubt the origin of some of those old Indian legends of which we occasionally get a specimen, was in the most important epochs in the history of their tribes, but these in their present form are useless for historical purposes. After the first visits of the whitemen, however, we begin to catch glimpses of the passing events which give us an imperfect idea of their real nature.

The first authentic knowledge we have of whites visiting the country is of a trip which was made by two French gentlemen named Radisson and De Grosselier, in the year 1666, who after passing around Lake Superior, ascended the Kaministiquia, crossed to the Rainy River, and followed its course to the Lake of the Woods. From there they proceeded by the Winnipeg River to the lake of that name, across it to the Nelson and on to the Hudson's Bay. What a wonderful trip they must have had. If they could have known that they were on the very outskirts of the richest of the world's granaries, the future home of a multitude of happy people, how much more interestedly they would have studied their surroundings. Previous to this time, although the Indians who dwelt on the shores of the Great Lakes and who were well acquainted with the whole country had sometimes told of its wonders to the few whitemen who were venturesome enough to cross the mighty stretches of primeval forest and rocky wilderness which lay between them and civilization, nothing was known of a land of which praises are now being sung in the tongues of a score of nations.

As a result of representations which these two men made to English merchants on their return home, a Captain Gillam fitted out in 1667 a vessel and set out on a voyage of discovery. He first visited Radisson's Bay, and from thence sailed southward to almost the extreme of James Bay where he entered a river which he named Prince Rupert's. On this he erected a small fort. Shortly afterwards he returned to England and no doubt with glowing accounts of the new and wonderful country with its great inland seas. At any rate he awakened a deep desire among the English merchants to control the trade which they saw would inevitably spring up with this vast and resourceful country. They applied to Charles II. for a patent which he granted. This was the original Hudson's Bay Co. Charter, which bore the date May 2nd, 1670. No sooner was it

obtained than they began to make preparations to occupy the country. A governor named Bailey was sent out with a full equipment of supplies and instructions to build forts at advantageous points in which the fur trading could be carried on. He first built Forts Rupert and Nelson, and by the year 1686 had added Albany, Moose and Severn, on rivers of the same names, to these. Here that trading for furs with the Indians was begun which has since made the company so famous.

The period in the country's history immediately following this was distinguished for its quarrels between the English and French traders. The English as we have seen came in by way of the Hudson's Bay while the French came around the lakes from their towns in what is now eastern Canada.

At one time the English forts mentioned were all in the hands of the French who had taken them by force from the British possessors. It was not long however till they were all retaken. In 1697 by the Treaty of Ryswick these again passed to the French with the exception of Albany. From that time till the Treaty of Utrecht the English trade was of a desultory character and was only noted for its lack of organization and energy. But after this last treaty was consummated they became possessors of all the lands and forts on the Bay with the understanding that subjects of other countries were to be allowed the privilege of going "by land or sea whithersoever they pleased."

Naturally all these events had a tendency to attract attention to the country and its resources with the result that merchants of eastern Canada and the mother countries began to strive for a monopoly of its trade. A number of Montreal merchants formed a company in 1731 for the purpose of sending out traders. The first expedition under their instructions was that of which M. Verendrye's and Pere Messager were the leaders. They proceeded direct to Lake Superior, and from thence over what is now known as the Dawson route to the Lake of the Woods, on which they built Fort St. Charles in 1732. Two years later we find them on the Winnipeg River building Fort Maniwapas and a little later at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers building Fort Rouge. They must have travelled over the major portion of what is now the Province of Manitoba as they afterwards visited Portage la Prairie, Lakes Dauphin and Manitoba, and nearly all the surrounding country. From there they went westward and northward till they reached the point on the Saskatchewan where now stands Fort a la Corne, the establishment of which is attributed to them. This was the farthest point reached by any of the French until after the year 1763.

It was not customary with the Hudson's Bay Company at this time to send out traders, and the Indians were in consequence compelled sometimes to travel long distances to the company's posts in order to dispose of their furs. Some were known to come all the way from the Athabasca and Peace River country. In 1775 M. Frobisher conceived the idea of intercepting the Indians on their way to the forts and obtaining the furs. This he did, and by the first

venture cleared \$50,000. His idea was acted upon by many of the Canadian traders, and very often they would go as far as the Athabasca country in their efforts to get ahead of rivals. Of course this had a bad effect on the business of the English company and they were not long in adopting the new plan. In a short time it became the established method of trading, and men could be found in almost every part of this immense country bartering with the Indians.

But after a few years of the petty jealousies and quarrels, the outcome of this every man-for-himself way of doing business, the Canadians, as the French and Americans were then called, resolved to combine all their interests and form a large company, by which plan they could put an end to the quarreling and at the same time put themselves on something like an equal footing with the Hudson's Bay Company. It would also enable them to systematize the traffic. The company was formed without delay, and a name adopted for it, which is familiar to every Canadian, the Northwest Trading Company. After a few ruptures which at one time threatened to destroy its usefulness, the new organization got settled down and began to work for the mutual good. They made Fort William on Thunder Bay their headquarters, and held yearly meetings of all the shareholders there.

Most naturally the new phase in the situation did not please the older company, and they took no pains to conceal the fact. Their jealousy developed into open hostility which quite often brought about fighting.

Prominent figures in the history of this period were: Lord Selkirk; Sir Alexander MacKenzie; Miles Macdonell, who was Lord Selkirk's deputy; Mr. Campbell, the Northwest Company's representative at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers, and Governor Semple. Lord Selkirk was a strong Hudson's Bay Company supporter, in fact he held about two-fifths of the shares of that company, which he had bought when the company was on the verge of insolvency, through the mismanagement of its officials. He had very little sympathy with the fur trade, though, his chief object being to get a controlling interest so that he might the more firmly plant his colonies of farmers. He very shrewdly saw that this country had a great future ahead of it, with which the fur trade would have nothing to do, or account of the richness and fertility of its soil and its general adaptability to farming.

In May, 1811, the stockholders of the Hudson's Bay Company were called together and informed that the Governor and officials considered it advisable to grant Lord Selkirk 116,000 square miles of what was supposed to be the Company's territory, on conditions that he establish thereon a colony. This measure, after meeting with great opposition was finally passed, thus placing his lordship in active control of a tract of country, the value of which is to-day estimated in billions of dollars. The boundary of this land ran westward along latitude 53° 51' from Lake Winnipeg to the Assiniboine river, thence south to the height of land, east to the source of Winnipeg River and north along its course and through the centre of Lake Winnipeg to latitude 52° 31' again.