

The Mounties and Masonry

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Like every little boy growing up in Canada, I had a great fascination with the Mounties. With their dress uniform of a low, broad-brimmed hat, scarlet jacket, and blue trousers with a yellow stripe, their Musical Ride, their horses, everything associated with them. That is everything but Jeannette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy, because I was sure that Mounties did not paddle canoes and sing to girls, well at least not at the same time. No, they had dogs called King and saved the world from all types dastardly deeds and they "always got their man".

I can remember during either the late 50's or early 60's Commissioner Harverson coming to our house in Perth, to speak at some function my father had arranged. I was all excited, the Chief of the Mounties (the Mounties' Mouny) was coming to my house. He arrived dressed in a suit and tie, and I was devastated.

After an hour or so socializing, he asked if he could change into his uniform. My parents showed him upstairs and he went to change. I thought things were definitely going to improve. Finally, a Mouny uniform. Shortly he came down the front stairs, dressed in the Commissioners full dress uniform sword and all. All dressed in blue, from head to foot, not a single bit of red anywhere.

Once again I was crushed. However he did have on his dress Wellington boots and spurs. Oh yes, I remember the spurs. They made a lasting impression. I thought that my mother was going to kill him. For as he descended the staircase his spurs left a gouge on the riser of every second step. A solid pine staircase that had been built in 1853. A staircase that had stood for over a century. A staircase that my mother had lovingly refinished by

hand. It is worthwhile to note that the marks on the risers survive to this day, and my mother did not kill him. But I don't think she ever forgave him.

Early in the 19th century, residents of British North America began to fear that the United States wanted to absorb all of North America. As a result many colonists sought to unify the British colonies. In 1867 Great Britain's Parliament passed the British North America Act, which formed the colonies into a union called the Dominion of Canada. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario and Quebec were the first four provinces to join the new Dominion.

By 1873 the Canadian people and their government were stirred by the prospect of a greater Canada. A new era had dawned, expansion and unity had become the foremost topic of discussion. Not only was added territory in the West of the utmost importance commercially, but also a call to adventure had been sounded.

The Canadian Government had from time to time contemplated the plan of 1870, to patrol the Western frontier with a small number of mounted men. But it was felt something more comprehensive was essential. An adequate application of the law, without show of aggression, was the primary requisite.

On March 31, 1873 Dr. [later Sir] John Schultz, drew the government's attention to the Imperial proclamation of July 15, 1870, which added Rupert's Land and the North-West territories to Canada, and which had pledged the Dominion of Canada to care for and protect the thousands of Indians which lived there. In the nature of a warning, he pointed to the state of war and pillage prevailing south of the international boundary. Other Members of Parliament took up the subject; one attributed the unrest among the Indians to the recent transfer of government from the Hudson's Bay Company, another Member hinted that the Americans had cast a covetous eye upon the North-West, another said that most of the trouble could be blamed on American whiskey traders from the Missouri River.

On April 28, Prime Minister Sir John A. MacDonald (a Freemason) gave notice in the Commons of a proposed bill "Respecting the Administration of Justice and for the Establishment of a Police Force in the North-West Territories." This was communicated to His Excellency the Governor-General and recommended to the consideration of the House of Commons.

The following day, an invasion from Montana culminated in an outburst of almost unsurpassed frontier depravity. In Battle Creek in the far off Cypress Hills of southern Saskatchewan, blood lust and liquor had combined to wipe out a hapless band of innocent Indians wrongfully accused of stealing horses. Wholesale murder on the part of the Missouri River gangs had reached an outrageous climax on Canadian soil!

As news of the Cypress Hills Massacre spread, indignation and anger exploded on the front pages of Canada's Eastern press, and when tidings were received that warned of possible further bloodshed in the Canadian West, arrangements for the guardianship of the far flung territorial acquisition were speeded up.

On May 23, 1873, Royal assent was given to the parliamentary bill and on that afternoon [2000 miles distant from the recent bloodletting] the North-West Mounted Police became a living entity. The original intention was to call the proposed law-enforcement body "Mounted Rifles", but hearing this, alarmists in the United States spread the story that Canada was organizing an armed force to patrol the international boundary. Telegrams telling of the disturbed state of mind in official Washington D.C., reached Ottawa. Newspapers in the States asked on what grounds Canada was planning such a warlike expedition. Criticisms ran high, but eventually a confused apology was sent to Ottawa from Washington. Meantime Prime Minister MacDonald had asked to see the official draft of the Act, and drawing his pen through the words "Mounted Rifles" substituted the words "Mounted Police."

Accordingly the North-West Mounted Police was established, and 150 men were sent to the West. They spent that winter at Lower Fort Garry. Colonel French (The Commissioner) soon realized that he had too few men, and so the following year he was joined by 150 more members who came West via the United States and entered Canada through Fargo, North Dakota. This enlarged Force traveled over the Old Boundary Commission Trail through Roche Percee, near Estevan, Saskatchewan and on to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, where a barracks was built at Fort MacLeod.

Commissioner French and half of the men moved eastward from here, leaving Colonel MacLeod in command of the barracks. Colonel MacLeod had his work cut out pacifying the thousands of Indians, including Chief Sitting Bull, who had moved northward into Canada after the Battle of the Little Bighorn in which Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer and a regiment of the Seventh United States Cavalry were annihilated. MacLeod and his men routed out the American whiskey traders and smugglers, and assisted in the making of treaties with the Blackfoot, the Blood and other Indian tribes.

The scarlet tunics were symbolical, especially to the Indians, of the good faith and fairness of the police who represented their Great White Mother, the Queen.

Some three months before the North-West Mounted Police barracks were set up in Regina, the Grand Lodge of Manitoba, which had jurisdiction over all the North-West Territories, granted a dispensation for the formation of a Masonic Lodge in Regina, this was Wascana No. 23. Among the members of the North-West Mounted Police were several Masons; most of them affiliated with the new Lodge and others were initiated into it. By 1894 there were some 14 Masons at the Barracks. Following the suppression of the second Riel Rebellion in 1885, there had been a period of comparative relaxation, and consequently much thought was given to the formation of a lodge in which the first qualification should be membership in the North-West Mounted Police.

After careful preparations, the new Lodge was formed on October 1, 1894, and the first officers were duly installed by M. W. Bro. Goggin, P.G.M. It was known as North-West Mounted Police Lodge No 61, G.R.M. The following historical record which was included in the first printed bylaws of 1895 reads as follows:

The history of the first Masonic Lodge organized by members of this force must be a subject of deep interest to all Brethren of the Craft who have served, may be at present serving, or who may become members later on, therefore the following facts are briefly stated for their general information.

In a large body of men such as the North-West Mounted Police, whose members are scattered over such a vast extent of territory, and who are gathered from almost every civilized country in the world, certain percentage of Masons are bound to be found, and it would not have been consistent with the usual perseverance and enlightened teachings of Freemasonry had the members of the Order failed to organize a Lodge among themselves, and so be in a better position to carry out the precepts and tenets of the Order than could otherwise have been done while so many different Lodges were represented by them.

A Mounted Policeman's duties are various, and his continued place of residence (with a few exceptions) uncertain. Principally for this latter reason it was thought that a Lodge at Headquarters, Regina, would relieve a Brother from the necessity of continually changing his allegiance from one Lodge to another, and so be the means of concentrating his energies in a more systematic manner towards the good of the Craft in general.

It is said with truth that "from small beginnings great things often accrue." So in the present case the above idea having once been expressed by some zealous brother, it quickly became a source of conversation by many, until finally it was decided to hold a

meeting of all members of the Craft then present at Headquarters and discuss the subject in detail.

The meeting was accordingly held on the 6th of July, 1894. The matter was thoroughly discussed, and some of the preliminary arrangements made; another meeting, however, was necessary before the final steps could be taken.

A most essential requisite, a suitable room in which to hold our meetings, had to be secured in the first place, and in this matter we are to be congratulated on our successful endeavours.

Commissioner Herchmer, having been consulted on the subject, very kindly allowed us the privilege of using a large room in barracks, and thereby earned the sincere gratitude of all members of the Lodge.

Our final meeting to complete arrangements, preparatory to forwarding our application for a Dispensation, took place on the 24th August, 1894, when the following brethren affixed their signatures to the petition, and therefore became charter members of the Lodge:

Bro. R. Belcher, Wascana Lodge, No. 23, Regina

Bro. M. H. Hayne, Wascana Lodge, No. 23, Regina

Bro. H. Des Barres, Wascana Lodge, No. 23, Regina

Bro. G. Bates, Wascana Lodge, No. 23, Regina

Bro. F. Smith, Ancient St. John's, No. 3, G.R.C.

Bro. A. Stewart, Wascana Lodge, No. 23, Regina

Bro. R. Croy, Wascana Lodge, No. 23, Regina

Bro. J. A. Martin, Wascana Lodge, No. 23, Regina

Bro. H. T. Ayre, Wascana Lodge, No. 23, Regina

Bro. P. Wolter, Wascana Lodge, No. 23, Regina

Bro. J. Ritchie, Lodge St. John, No. 175, Greenock, Scotland

Bro. E. A. Faulds, Wascana Lodge, No. 23, Regina

Bro. H. T. Otis, Bow River Lodge, No. 28, Calgary

Bro. S. G. Main, Wascana Lodge, No. 23, Regina

The selection of officers, as follows, was made at a meeting held on the 26th September, 1894:

W. M., Bro. Belcher

S. W., Bro. Martin

J. W. Bro. Hayne

Treasurer, Bro. Stewart

Secretary, Bro. Ritchie

Chaplain, Bro. Cochrane

S. D., Bro. Main

J. D., Bro. Wolters

D. of C., Bro. Robinson

S. Steward, Bro. Otis

J. Steward, Bro. Cummings

I. G., Bro. Bates

Tyler, Bro. Faulds

All the above were duly installed in their respective positions on the first day of October, 1894, with the exception of Brothers Martin and Hayne, who were prevented from taking offices selected for them on account of matters of duty taking them away to other posts. Bros. Smith and Ayre were therefore elected to take the vacant positions.

The ceremony of installing the first officers of the Lodge working under Dispensation, was conducted by M. W. Bro. Goggin, P.G.M., assisted by W. Bro. Chatwin, the Lodge room having been suitably prepared and nicely decorated by the Brethren for the

occasion, and to celebrate the event refreshments were provided after the conclusion of the business, when a couple of hours of social intercourse were very pleasantly passed.

As previously stated the first Worshipful Master was Regimental No. 3, Robert Belcher, who was hired by the North-West Mounted Police at Lower Fort Garry on November 3, 1873. He rose through the ranks, was commissioned in 1893, and eventually retired 1907. The reason that I specifically bring Robert Belcher to your attention, is that he has a connection with Virginia Lodge of Research, No. 1777. Because he is the great-uncle, by marriage, to a previous speaker to this Lodge, R. W. Bro. Wallace MacLeod P.G.S.W. of the Grand Lodge of Canada, in the Province of Ontario.

The original altar, pedestals and columns were made at the Regina Barracks by Constable Phillips for \$15.00, and were painted white and trimmed with the North-West Mounted Police colours blue and gold. The pillars were grained golden oak and may now be seen in the Red Room of the Regina Masonic Temple. The Volume of the Sacred Law was presented to the Lodge in 1894 by Bro. Louis Castellain. The first Worshipful Master's regalia was given by Bro. Staff Sergeant J. Martin in 1895. The original sword was presented by Inspector Church who originated the famed Musical Ride, his father had carried the sword in the Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava. In the Blue Room of the Regina Temple may be seen the original ashlar, hewn by the first members when the North-West Mounted Police Lodge was formed. It was not until 1924 that the crest of the North-West Mounted Police was officially adopted by the Lodge. Permission to use it was granted by the acting Minister of Justice, the late Honorable Ernest A. Lapointe.

Even as the force grew in stature, privilege and scope of duties, so Masonry flourished, and more and more members of the renamed Royal North-West Mounted Police became members of the fraternity by initiation. This was a natural development, as the high ideals of the one are similar to and intermingled with those of the other. By 1920 the Force was Canada-wide in scope, and once again it was renamed and is now called the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. A few years later the provinces asked the Royal Canadian

Mounted Police to take over their provincial police work. Therefore by 1932 the Federal Force had contracts with Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Alberta, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island to police their provinces. Newfoundland entered Confederation in 1949 (as foreseen in 1867), and on August 1, 1950, that Province contracted with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to perform its police duties.

Fifteen days later British Columbia made a similar agreement, and so today the former Newfoundland Rangers, Newfoundland Constabulary and British Columbia Police members are proudly wearing the Royal Canadian Mounted Police uniform as full-fledged members of the great Federal Force.

A man who is ever faithful to the grand principles of Freemasonry and to the high ideals of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police cannot help but be a credit as a Mason, as a policeman, and as a good citizen of the great Canadian democracy. May the Great Architect of the Universe ever guide and aid them in preserving law and order and in upholding the Royal Canadian Mounted Police motto "Maintiens le Droit" [Maintain the Right].

Today a Degree Team of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police annually performs an average of 10 Degrees and 2 to 3 exemplifications. The Team has performed in many Lodges in Canada, and in a number of States in the U.S.A., including Indiana, Ohio, Massachusetts, New York and Vermont.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police Degree Team at commencement of every Lodge meeting perform a Flag Ceremony which is carried out with military precision. As a Canadian I find the words are stirring, and I close with them:

*I present our flag, our symbol of Unity and of Sovereignty,
Between bars of red and on a field of white,
It blazons forth in its full Autumnal glory,
The Canadian Maple Leaf,
Whose points represent the provinces and territories,
Which comprise our Great Dominion;
To Freemasons, the red symbolizes the dauntless courage of our forefathers, which we
strive to emulate,
The white, that blameless purity of life and conduct, to which we aspire,
And the points, the eleven knightly virtues, of which Patriotism is the greatest,
And to which we are ever dedicated.
And finally it inspires in us a reverence to Him, To Whom we fervently pray:
God Save the Queen and Heaven Bless The Maple Leaf Forever.*