

213

The Mounted Police Detachment at Wood Mountain and Its Activities From the Organization of the Force In 1873 Until 1882

By Vernon La Chance.

ON August 14th, 1874, while on the line of march from Fort Dufferin, Man., to the Rocky Mountains, Commissioner French sent Asst. Commissioner MacLeod south of the main body with 16 carts to procure a supply of oats from the International Boundary Commission Depot at Wood Mountain. This was the first contact of the Police with Wood Mountain. While returning from the West, on October 7th of the same year, Commissioner French, himself, swerved from the line of march, to pay another visit to this point, in order to leave the weakest Police horses there for the winter; while at Wood Mountain, Commissioner French purchased the Boundary Commission storehouse.

In 1874 the population of Wood Mountain was small. The settlement had arisen, originally, when the buffalo were numerous in the vicinity; these had almost disappeared in 1874, and the few inhabitants, mostly Half-Breeds, had to go as far as the Cypress Hills to hunt. What little wood there had been, was, in great measure, chopped down. No attempt was made to cultivate the soil, either at Wood Mountain or at Cypress Hills. The Cypress Hills massacre and the periodical tribal wars between the Crees, Blackfeet, Assiniboines, Salteaux and the American Sioux, had all tended to give the locality a reputation of being dangerous.

The International Boundary Commission storehouse was a timber or log structure. It was purchased by the Police with the intention of using it as a Supply Depot for future operations in the district.

The weakened animals left there in October, 1874, by Commissioner French—6 horses and 1 ox—were in charge of two members of the Force: Sub. Constable Thomas Mooney of "E" Division and Sub. Constable John E. Richardson. The first detachment was probably removed in May, 1875, when Fort Walsh, under Inspector James Morrow Walsh, one of the original officers, was established in the Cypress Hills. From this date until January, 1877, there was no detachment at Wood Mountain.

Sub. Constable Thomas Mooney, the first member of the Force to be stationed at Wood Mountain, was one of the 1874 recruits, engaged in the East. He was an old Imperial Army soldier, and had served with the 13th Hussars for 14 years. Sub. Constable John E. Richardson of "D" Division was another April, 1874, recruit; his antecedents are not known.

After the establishment of Fort Walsh a system of patrols in small parties of Police served the surrounding country. In this way Wood