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[TH]E RYERSON
[CANADIAN] HISTORY READERS

[The] Canadian Mounted Police

By
C. F. HAMILTON

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THE RYERSON CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

LORNE PIERCE, *Editor*

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THE ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

PROLOGUE

THE Royal Canadian Mounted Police began their work in 1874. In their history there have been three heroic episodes: The taming of the prairies at the beginning of their career; the policing of the Yukon during the gold-rush; and the control of the Arctic to-day. The life of the Force has not been all a matter of brilliance and adventure. From the first there have been a continuous and punctual discharge of duty, a strange diversity of work—often at once arduous and tedious—and a building up of a habit of discipline. And through all the years that the Force has been in existence, its tasks, and the conditions under which they have been performed, have changed, from time to time, often in a surprising manner.

I. THE TAMING OF THE PRAIRIES

The history of Canada has this peculiarity, that the Government nearly always has sent its servants into new regions ahead of the settler, so that when the farmer or the rancher has taken up his land and begun his labours, he has felt that he lived in a settled

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society: order has been maintained, violence has been prevented, the law has been enforced. In some countries new settlements have been founded with little oversight or support from their governments, the people have had to provide their own protection against lawlessness, and in consequence their social life often has been turbulent. Western Canada might have become a lawless country, but did not.

When the Dominion acquired the prairies in 1870, the situation in the region between Manitoba and the Rocky Mountains was disquieting. The home of the Blackfoot Confederacy—from the Moose Jaw of to-day westward, and from somewhere near Calgary southward—was hostile territory to the Hudson's Bay Company, whose friendship was with the enemies of the Blackfeet, the Cree tribes to the north and east. It is well known that the Blackfeet and the Crees lived in a constant bickering sort of war, but it is not generally understood that this southwest corner of the land, the ranching country of the Alberta of to-day, was practically unknown to the people of the Red River Settlement, and to all British subjects.

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THE GREAT MARCH OF THE NORTH-WEST MOUNTED POLICE

In the summer of 1874, the recently organized Mounted Police made the long journey across the prairies from Dufferin, Manitoba, to their posts in the North-West Territories. The force consisted of six troops, each mounted on horses of a uniform color, bays, dark browns, chestnuts, greys, blacks and light bays. They were accompanied by some 8 pounder field guns, by beef cattle, cows and calves, and by wagons and carts containing provisions, supplies, ammunition and farm implements. The main body proceeded to southern Alberta where it established Fort Macleod, while a smaller detachment marched north-west to Edmonton. In the autumn, three troops from Macleod made a wide circuit through Saskatchewan and Northern Manitoba, returning to Dufferin, the starting point, at the end of November, after a march of 2,000 miles.

A good trail led from Fort Garry northwestward to Edmonton, but no road ran to the upper waters of the Southern Saskatchewan, for the Blackfeet were at once unvisited and greatly dreaded.

Again, in the country under the influence of the Hudson's Bay Company there was much lawlessness, and murders and other outrages were frequent, scanty as the population was. This was not all. The Blackfeet were being visited from the south by American traders, wickedly unscrupulous men who sold them whiskey, robbed them, debauched them, and if not stopped, would turn an exceptionally fine race into a wreck, degraded and dangerous; their crimes included one or two abominable massacres. Everywhere, too, there was unrest, for the Indians seem to have felt that their position was becoming precarious; the buffalo were being killed off, and by 1870 were scarce; smallpox was lessening their numbers; and they were greatly afraid of white settlement, which they could see was drawing near.

Across this dangerous, restless region it was proposed by the statesmen of Ottawa to build a railway to connect Old Canada

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with British Columbia. Had things been left to drift, there would have been wild disorder. At that time the United States Government was spending twenty million dollars a year in dealing, in one way and another with the Indians of the American West; yet the total revenue of Canada in 1872 was only twenty million dollars. The Government of Canada created the North-West Mounted Police. There followed peace with and among the Indians, and obedience to the law.

Control was established quickly, and in a surprising manner, with the credit largely due to two men: the first Commissioner of the Force, Lieutenant-Colonel (afterwards Major-General Sir George) French, and his Assistant-Commissioner, Lieut.-Colonel J. F. Macleod, who after a year or two succeeded to the command. When the Force was being planned it was expected that it would be strung out along the trail leading to Edmonton, and from that would work into less known territory, but Colonel French, as soon as he had assembled his three hundred men in Southern Manitoba, marched due west, straight to the danger-

spot, into the Blackfoot country. There were no roads, there were no guides; difficulties of food for man and beast were many, and one of the incidents of the first year of the Mounted Police was the displeased astonishment of the Red River people, who were persuaded that the red-coated policemen from Eastern Canada could not find a road which was unknown to them, and deal with Indians whom they dreaded. It was a fine stroke of policy, for the Blackfeet welcomed the men whose uniform showed that they were British—and the whiskey sellers at once were chased away. By the end of the season Fort Macleod had been established, the fear of the law had come to the prairies, and the problem of the troublesome corner was on its way to settlement.

At the end of the summer Commissioner French marched away, to establish law and order in the northern and the eastern prairies, while Assistant-Commissioner Macleod remained in the post named after him to deal with the Blackfeet, and, in a very short time, to establish a powerful influence over them. The secret was that the

Indians soon came to trust the Mounted Police, and in particular that Colonel Macleod won their confidence. Good manners, inflexible justice, uprightness, and disinterestedness, gave him his hold, though from the beginning he assured them that Indians who broke the law would be punished, and tussle after tussle with wrongdoers and their sympathizers were necessary to enforce submission. Steady pressure and unvarying fairness won, and in 1877, three years later, the Blackfeet signed a treaty with the Canadian Government.

Changes came very rapidly. The buffalo suddenly became extinct, and the Indians, who had been powerful and prosperous, were ruined, and plunged into distress and starvation—troubles of a sort which usually mean raids by hunger-pressed warriors upon their more prosperous neighbours. White ranchers came, and in a very short time the land was filled with their cattle. The railway builders came, and eight years after the arrival of the Police the Canadian Pacific Railway trains were running as far as Calgary. All this happened without dis-

order, for the Indians were under a strong influence. The prairies were ready for settlement.

Trials of strength were numerous, between the wild spirit of the savage and the steady purpose of the civilized man. Here is the tale of one.

Near Macleod two Indians of Red Crow's band had killed cattle—a specially serious offence in those days. A sergeant and a constable rode into the Indian camp and arrested their men, only to meet with violent resistance. The culprits shouted for help, and at once a crowd of Indian women and young warriors rushed up with great clamour, laid hands on the prisoners, and after a struggle wrested them from the policemen, who had to return and report that there had been a rescue. Thanks to the coolness of the sergeant, no weapons had been used and no blood had been shed. From Macleod at once were sent two officers, and twenty-one other ranks, to go to the camp and demand the surrender of the offenders. With the party went Jerry Potts, a half-breed, the best guide in the country, a superb warrior, who in the old wild days

had led the Blackfeet against the Crees with notable success. He had from the beginning given his loyalty and service to the Force, and he now went as interpreter. When the party was near the Indian camp, but concealed by some low hills, Jerry Potts went forward alone with the Superintendent's message that he wanted the prisoners, and also the men who had torn them from the policemen. Red Crow sent a message back that he was smoking his pipe and would think the matter over; also that his excited young men were holding a Sun Dance, and getting out of hand. Back went a message giving the chief one hour in which to produce the men wanted; if they did not come by the time named, the Police would ride in and take them—in which case Red Crow would "have to abide the consequence."

The message at first seemed to drive the Indians to the fighting point, for their young men were wild with excitement. But they did not fight—instead, as the hour ebbed away their determination sank. The party of police had mounted, and were about to march upon the camp, when a single Indian came over the top of the ridge—then another

—then two more—then Red Crow himself with a straggling crowd. Policemen and Indians rode together to Macleod, and there the Superintendent opened court—by virtue of his commission he was a magistrate—tried the men over whom the trouble had begun, sentenced them to imprisonment, and rebuked the warriors who had rescued them. The incident ended with the two offenders being handcuffed and marched off to the guardroom—that is, the jail—in front of the friends who had failed to save them from the consequence of their wrongdoing.

In such a manner the Indians learned to submit to the new white man's law which now ruled the prairies. And they submitted, on the whole in a good temper, for they had not been insulted, had not been humiliated, and had been enabled to see that what they were required to do was reasonable.

The famous incursion of the Sioux, from 1876 to 1881, after destroying General Custer's column, gave the Government a fright, and drew public attention to the way in which the North-West Mounted Police could deal with Indians. Let us quote an incident or two.

First, a tribute to the honour of the Blackfeet. When the Sioux went to war with the Americans they asked the Blackfeet to join them—asked with a mixture of promises and threats, so that there was danger in refusing. Join us, they said, and we will help you to exterminate the whites in the Canadian prairies, and let you share the plunder; refuse, and we will attack you. The Blackfeet replied that they were the friends of the whites. It was done in the stately, romantic, figurative Indian way: the Sioux sent tobacco; if the Blackfeet smoked it they acceded to the proffered alliance; they sent it back unsmoked.

Next, a scene from the period when the Sioux were camped near Fort Walsh, in a very bad temper, not quite decided whether to obey the Canadians or ravage the country. They encountered a few Salteaux Indians and killed all except one; him they pursued to the Wood Mountain detachment, and they demanded that he be yielded to them. Instead, three constables went into the Sioux camp, collared the murderers, and marched them back. The angry warriors hustled the policemen and tried to provoke

them to a fight, but again, with wise restraint the constables did not draw their weapons, no blood was shed, and they were allowed to carry off their prisoners.

A dozen years after that first march the plough came to the prairies in earnest, and the North-West Mounted Police, in addition to controlling Indians, had to enforce the law in white settlements, which grew, spread, and became great Provinces. A year before these Provinces were formed in 1905, the Force was, for its valued services, included in the Coronation Honours of King Edward VII. The Honours list, published on June 24, 1904, reads:

> His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to confer the title of "Royal" upon the North-West Mounted Police.

II. The Yukon

Twenty-five years after the Great March the wild old times had come to an end on the prairies, and the North-West Territories were beginning to pour out their millions of

bushels of wheat. Suddenly a new region became important.

The great discovery of gold in the Yukon was made in 1896, but the Mounted Police had been in the country for two years already, and had proved to the miners that the country was under Canadian law, and that they must respect that law. One of the remotest places in the world, the district apparently was of little worth, and the hardships endured at first were very great, but the principle was upheld that Canadian territory must be properly governed. Then suddenly the "great strike" was made, and the incoming adventurers found good order, settled law, and a strong administration awaiting them. And moreover, outside, the eyes of the world were on "The Klondike."

No detailed account can be given of the history of the Yukon Territory, that strange, rigorous, isolated law-abiding, cheerful producer of millions in gold dust. But from the records of the time one grim page may be quoted, to show why order reigned.

In the early winter of 1899 two poverty-stricken thieves, O'Brien and Graves, hung about Dawson. Wearied of petty rascali-

ties which only brought them imprisonment, the two formed a partnership to waylay, kill and rob people who were going "out," that is, up the Yukon and Lewes rivers to White Horse, and the passes. They laid their plans with diabolical cleverness. Selecting a point on the Lewes where an eddy kept the river open all winter, and where a wooded hillock looked down-stream, they arranged a "murder camp." On the high ground a lookout place was constructed, trees and branches being cut away so as to give a view whereby wayfarers from Dawson could be seen at a distance. A cabin was built in the bush about a mile from the river; a trail led from it to the look-out; a false trail was cut from the real trail at a point down stream to the cabin, having the appearance of a short-cut, and at the place of divergence one of the pair stood to scrutinize passers-by, to warn those who did not look worth robbing that the new trail led to a private camp, and to entice wealthier travellers into a trap.

On Christmas morning, 1899, a likely prey appeared, a telegraph lineman, and two young Americans. They were set upon and

murdered. A fourth murder probably followed immediately, for Graves never was seen again, and it was thought that O'Brien killed him as soon as his need for an accomplice passed. Next came the work of concealment. Such of the victims' property as seemed useful was appropriated, their outfits were burned, their smaller belongings were thrown away, and the corpses were cast into the open water of the eddy. Then O'Brien set off up the river to leave the country with his plunder.

Such were the facts as elucidated by the Police. To turn to their side of the case, it may first be noted that the disappearance of the victims was noticed on the day after the crime, so close was the watch kept on the travel along the river. Soon foul play was surmised, and it was remembered that O'Brien and Graves had been haunting the river, stealing food. Then came a telegram from the Police post at Tagish, near the passes, that O'Brien was there, trying to leave the country, and his arrest on a charge of theft was ordered. Thus he was held pending investigation. Meanwhile, a search of the river bank revealed the deserted cabin,

with its unusual appurtenances of trails and look-out. Fresh snow had fallen, but a detective and a constable swept the new snow off the surface of the old snow, and patches of blood appeared, the first positive tokens of murder. Discovering bullet marks on the trunks and branches of the trees, they ascertained the calibre of the rifles and the angles at which they had struck, proving that those from one rifle had been fired upward from the river bank, and those from the other from the upper ground, near the blood-pools. From the ashes of the huge fire which had burned in front of the cabin —itself a remarkable circumstance—they raked out buttons and similar articles, and by an ingenious device they found the small stuff which had been cast away into the bush. All this meant crawling over hundreds of square yards, sifting the snow with bare hands, in the cold of a Yukon winter. At the look-out place they noted that the axe which had felled the trees and slashed the boughs had a notch in it. By such discoveries they proved that men had been killed there, and that those men were the missing travellers.

The Police also proved, by questionings which ran all along the river, that O'Brien and his companion had inhabited the cabin at the time of the murder; scores of separate facts fitted together to prove this. O'Brien had money, whereas he had been destitute; he was in possession of sundry valuables belonging to the men who had vanished; his rifle was of the calibre of some of the bullet marks, and his axe had a notch which fitted exactly the marks in the timber cut at the camp; a convict was "borrowed" from a penitentiary in the United States to swear that O'Brien, when they had been fellow prisoners in Dawson, had proposed to him to kill and rob travellers. Then in June the bodies of two of the missing men were found in the river, bearing clear evidence of violence. The case against O'Brien was complete, and in due time he paid the penalty.

Let that suffice for the lot of the criminal, and let us turn one more page, to something more cheerful. The Mounted Police were a great part of the administration of the Territory. In the early days of the rush they not merely kept order at the White

Pass and Chilkoot summits, but collected the customs as well. They often acted as Mining Recorders. They escorted shipments of gold, which in less well-behaved mining regions would have been the objects of attacks by highwaymen. They often carried the mails, and in some places they were postmasters. They acted as magistrates, provided municipal police protection and conducted prisons and lunatic asylums. They inspected road houses, helped tax-collectors, acted as deputy-sheriffs and deputy-clerks of the court, assisted in timber inspection and the repairing of telegraph lines, and were receivers of claims. In their incessant patrols they visited the scattered prospectors, relieving cases of illness and destitution. Over the Yukon impended the red-coated Policeman, courteous, helpful and firm.

III. The Arctic

Let us open another volume of the record: the tale of the Control of the Arctic. Here is one page.

On a morning of March, 1929, Inspector Joy and Constable Taggart, together with an Eskimo dog-driver, were sleeping in

an igloo, on the south shore of Bathurst Island. A blizzard had been raging and had held them up for two days. The camp consisted of the little hut of snow, and two komatiks, or dog-sleds; the rifles outside leaned against the igloo, for in that climate they cannot be taken into the moist heat of indoors. Suddenly the camp was set upon by a huge white bear, mad with starvation, which fastened upon the Inspector's clothes bag and began to tear at it. Inside the igloo the two policemen shouted to divert the bear and made for the low doorway, only to find that the blizzard had packed hard the snow which had drifted against it. The bear, hearing their voices, rushed to the igloo, and then each party strove to clear the doorway, the bear to get in, the men to get out: the men, be it observed, having no weapons but a stick and a snow knife. They made an opening, and instantly through it into the igloo were thrust the head and fore paws of the bear. With stick and knife they fought him, and so furious was their attack that he gave back a space. The constable slipped forward to seize the rifle, but the bear, seeming to understand his purpose, dashed it

from his hands, placed his fore paws upon it, and stood snarling. A moment later he left the rifle, the policeman snatched it up, and then in a moment the contest was ended.

How came two Mounted Policemen to have this strange encounter? They had come from a Police detachment at Dundas Harbour on Devon Island, one of a chain of great islands—Baffin, Devon and Ellesmere—that lead from Ungava and Labrador up to the Frozen Ocean. Between them and Greenland is the lane of water—Davis Strait, Kane Basin, Robson Channel—up which, for four centuries, explorers have pressed in quest of the Pole. The two Policemen were on a patrol of a more or less routine nature, gathering topographical information about the Islands, and ascertaining the nature of their minerals and forms of wild life on them. In their explorations, incidentally, they came across a cache deposited in the winter of 1852-1853 by the party searching for Sir John Franklin. From Devon Island, Joy and his companion had marched westwards, along the shore, over the sea-ice, crossing straits and sounds and channels, visiting island after

island, to Bathurst Island. A routine police beat? Why Bathurst Island? The adventure of the bear put behind them, they pushed on to Melville Island, turned north, crossed that island, and travelled over the ocean-ice until within sight of Borden Island, discovered by Stefansson in 1913; then turned eastward to Edmund Walker Island, hitherto visited by no other white men than Stefansson and his party, and made their way by King Christian Island, Amund Ringnes Island, and Axel Heiberg Island to Ellesmere Island; then by fiord and glacier across Ellesmere to Bache Peninsula, the farthest north Mounted Police Post, only seven hundred miles from the Pole, the northernmost post office in the world. Over seventeen hundred miles they had travelled by dog-train in the twilight of an Arctic spring; eighty-one days had they been over the road.

Turn the page again. At the northeastern end of Baffin Island is Ponds Inlet, trading post and Mounted Police detachment. Three hundred miles southward from Ponds Inlet is Clyde River, where there is a Hudson's Bay Company post, and at Cape

Henry Kater, one hundred and fifty miles still farther south, a single fur-trader lived for several years, unvisited by the company which had placed him there. His health had given way, he had become deaf, his eyesight had failed, the Eskimos had withdrawn themselves from him, even his dogs had abandoned him in their search for food. "The loneliest man on earth," some journalist had called him, when his plight became known because of a Mounted Police report; but he obstinately remained in his hut and rejected offers of help. Then soon after New Year's Day of 1927 the end came. In the February following a constable was sent on a patrol from Ponds Inlet to Clyde River. It was intended that he should turn back there, but he heard reports from the natives that the fur-trader's house showed no signs of life, so he pushed on. He reached the hut, and found the occupant dead. He wrapped the body decently in blankets; he made up a packet of his papers and personal possessions, for the relatives in England; he made an inventory of the goods belonging to the dead man's employers; and then he set out on the grim journey to Ponds

Inlet, where, as he conceived it, an inquest should be held. At the post at Clyde River a coffin was made, and, with this sad freight on his dog-sled, the constable journeyed to the detachment. The frightful Arctic weather did very nearly its worst, with deep snow masking rough ice beneath, with storms that stopped them and thaws that made the snow all but impassable; supplies ran short, and the last stage of the journey was a desperate one, a staggering push of thirty-six hours, without rest or food, the Eskimo guide reeling and retching with fatigue beside the white man. But Ponds Inlet was reached, and in due time the brother across the sea received the dead man's diary, letters, papers and belongings, together with the word that Christian burial had been given to the hermit.

Another picture of Arctic travel. Near that same Cape Henry Kater, but somewhat to the south, is Home Bay, and there, in 1924, a settlement of Eskimos was visited by a scourge of insanity which took the form of religious mania. Frightful orgies issued in murders, and it was necessary for the Police to visit them, investigate, and

calm them. Our concern is with the journey there. The Police detachment is at Pangnirtung, a fiord in the north shore of Cumberland Gulf, a deep indentation on the south-east of Baffin Island, and the road to Home Bay lies up the fiord, across the mountain range, and on to the eastern coast. The fiord ends in a river, which with numerous falls cuts through a funnel-shaped gorge between cliffs, 3,000 feet high. When this journey was made the river with its waterfalls was frozen solid; huge boulders strewed the way; and down the gorge howled an incessant furious storm of wind. The snow was blown clear in patches, and the sandy ground exposed, so that where there was snow it was covered with a coating of sand, "like an emery cloth," while on the river itself there was glare ice. As the little party, with two dog-trains, fought their way up the pass in the teeth of the gale, the runners of the sleds would stick on the sand-covered snow and almost refuse to slide over it, and then a moment later on the smooth ice would be whirled about and sent backwards, the dogs unable to get a foothold. When, step by step, they had

surmounted these difficulties, the waterfalls had to be climbed—hills of wind-swept ice, up which the sleds had to be hauled by lines. In the midst of this wild turmoil of savage wind and treacherous footing, snow and sand flying on the gale so that they thought a snowstorm was raging, a constable happened to look up to the sky and behold it was clear, with the moon riding in calm triumph among slow-moving clouds above the local wind-currents of the mountain pass which were so sorely besetting the men below her.

Hurried glimpses, these, of the labours, the hazards, the adventures, of these men of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police—about a hundred out of a total of twelve hundred now in the Force—who do duty in the Arctic regions. Why are they in those frozen wastes?

Canada, of course, owns the Arctic coastline, from Cape Chidley to the 110th Meridian, which separates the Yukon from Alaska. But north of that is a great triangle of ocean and islands, between that 110th Meridian and Greenland, and extending to the North Pole; and that also is part

of Canada. The ocean usually is frozen, though for a month or two in the summer it can be navigated perilously, and the islands, most of them very large, though desolate, have vegetation enough to support musk-ox, caribou, and Arctic hares, as well as the bears, wolves and foxes which prey on them. The waters teem with whales, walrus, seals, and fish, and countless birds breed on the islands. Great deposits of coal have been found, and other mineral wealth may exist.

In this strange region live those remarkable people, the Eskimos, a fascinating people who in their struggle for existence display a practical ability, a resourcefulness, a courage, an endurance, a good humour and kindliness, and an artistic sense, which unite to constitute them one of the most interesting and estimable of primitive races. But there is one qualification to the pleasing picture they present. A race of hunters, perpetually killing wild creatures, they attach little value to human life, and the record of the last three decades is stained by a grisly series of slayings, promoted by jealousy, passion, anger, or even—though very seldom—by mere cupidity. Further,

primitive peoples also require protection when the trader, the vanguard of white civilization, comes with his strange new goods, and his still more strange new ideas, utterly upsetting their old habits, and often undermining their old virtues. Civilization has leaped upon the northlands, and Eskimos who ten years ago were in the stone age, killing bears and caribou with bows and arrows, to-day are using high-powered rifles as they work for fur-trading companies. White trappers are spreading into the land until it is necessary to set aside reserves for the natives. Power schooners of the whaler and fur-trader ply during the summer in waters hardly won to our knowledge by Franklin, Ross, McClintock, and their peers —often owned, manned and navigated by Eskimos who, born to the kayak, in a decade have learned to use the sail and to manage the internal combustion engine.

The Mounted Police entered the Arctic country as long ago as 1903 to protect the Eskimos against unscrupulous whalers who debauched them, even as the whiskey traders corrupted the Indians of the prairies thirty years before; and, as so often hap-

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pens, enterprises undertaken for motives far removed from gain are beginning to promise material reward, for to the lands of darkness and cold are turning the eyes of those who plan flying routes, the result of the conquest of the air which is just beginning; so that Farthest North becomes an important portion of our heritage.

Epilogue

Such is some of the romance of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, as the Force became in 1920. The northern service does not begin to exhaust the duties of the Force, which are so numerous and varied that no attempt will be made to enumerate them. No longer is it confined to the prairies, for now it performs services for the Government all over the Dominion—sometimes even beyond its boundaries. In the cities, in rural districts, among the fishermen of the coast, watching criminals, protecting government property, aiding government departments—from Halifax to Victoria, from the southernmost boundary to the Frozen Ocean, its members live up to their motto:

Maintiens le Droit—Uphold the Right.

4. STORIES OF HEROES

Maisonneuve—*Lorne Pierce*
Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville—*Norman McLeod Rogers*
Mascarene—*V. P. Seary*
Marquis de Montcalm—*J. C. Sutherland*
General James Wolfe—*J. C. Sutherland*
Sir Isaac Brock—*T. G. Marquis*
Brant—*T. G. Marquis*
Tecumseh—*Lloyd Roberts*
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5. STORIES OF HEROINES

Mother Marie of the Incarnation—*Blodwen Davies*
Madame La Tour—*Mabel Burkholder*
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