

Stories from the Rebellion
by Bob Steele

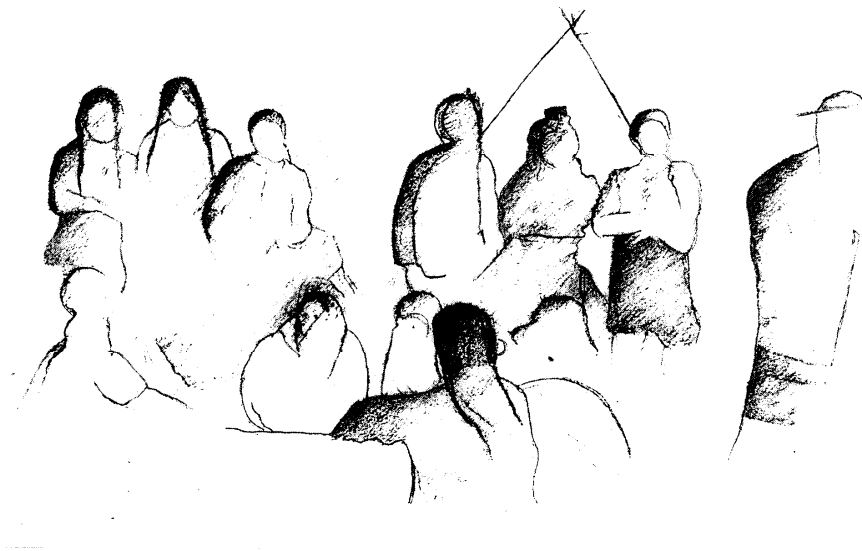
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Rebellion at Fort Battleford
A Letter from the Fort Battleford Infirmary

Stories from the Rebellion



Bob Steele

Drawing Network Publications

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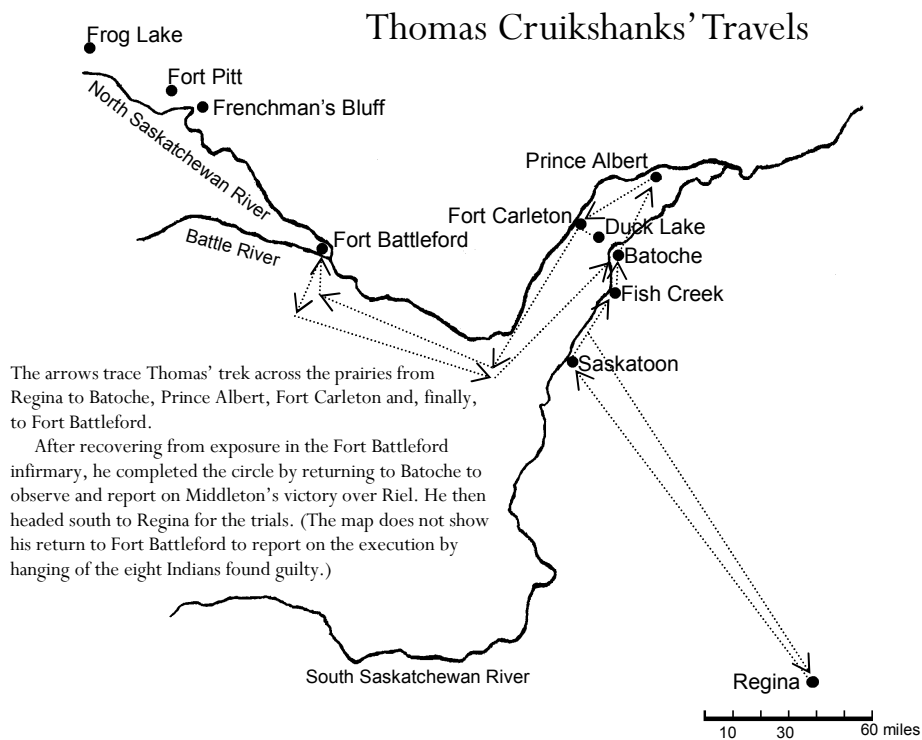
Cover art: *Poundmaker Cree in Battleford for a Hunger Strike, Bob Steele*

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Acknowledgments

It all started with my Uncle Alex Menzies who was Chief Engineer at the Battleford Mental Hospital when I was growing up thirty miles to the west in the village of Rockhaven. When we went on picnics to Atton's Lake - a gem on the edge of Poundmaker Reserve - we noted the historical marker on the rise of land to the west. We were told that it was a monument to commemorate the Battle of Cut Knife Hill. As it turned out, the marker was incorrectly placed, but that hardly mattered to us. One Sunday afternoon Uncle Alex took us to the battlefield and told us the story of Chiefs Poundmaker and Fine Day and the Cree men and boys in the camp who turned back a much larger and better armed invading force of Canadian militia. I wish to thank Alex Menzies who died in 1935.

It was serendipitous that I happened to hear an interview of Bill Waiser on the CBC just when I was starting to work on this project. He was the co-author of a newly published book (with Blair Stonechild) on the North-West Rebellion called *Loyal Till Death* (Fifth House Publishers, 1997). It has been a great source of information and inspiration. I am indebted to both authors.

Serendipity paid me another visit by sending a copy of *Footprints in the Dust* by Battleford historian Douglas Light. (It was given to me by my cousin Jessie Menzies Lundahl, daughter of the aforementioned Uncle Alex.) Light has deep personal roots in the history of Battleford and has conducted an enormous amount of research on the rebellion. I spoke to Mr. Light on the phone about my desire to write a book about the rebellion for young readers and he generously gave me permission to use his research and the photographs he had collected and published (Turner-Warwick Publications, North Battleford, 1987).

I also wish to thank Brock Silversides for his study of early First Nations photography, *The Face Pullers* (Fifth House Publishers, 1994). He too gave me permission to use the photographs in his book as source material for some of my drawings.

Finally, I would like to thank members of my family for their help in editing and publishing: Mary, my wife, my daughters Marne and Beth, my son, David, and my son-in-law Doug, who kept the machinery running and provided the important interface between writer and printer.

About the Format

It may be important to know that I am not a professional historian, rather, an enthusiastic amateur. I was introduced to local history early in life by my mother's eldest brother. Not only did Uncle Alex take our family to Cut Knife Hill to tell us about the events that happened there in 1885, he offered to trade me a lead shot he had found on the battle site for one of my best arrowheads, an artifact which had no provenance at all. This talisman, the lead shot, had perhaps been handled by Chief Fine Day himself, or so I imagined, certainly by an Indian brave defending his people and not by an invading militiaman who would have had a modern rifle and not an old blunderbuss requiring grapeshot! So said my uncle, who, I assume, much preferred the graceful carving of my arrowhead. I was of that mind myself, but the talisman won out, and I traded.

I started my university education expecting to be an English and Social Studies teacher but along the way I became captivated by art and art education. Teaching has always been at the heart of whatever I do professionally. On retirement, I had time to turn to my long-standing interest in the history of the prairies, especially the stories I had been introduced to by my uncle. With time on my hands, I discovered that writing was immensely rewarding - the *process* not necessarily the product - so much so that placing historical events in a fictional format seemed like an interesting challenge.

I found myself wanting to open the eyes of young Canadians to a history that, contrary to widespread belief, is filled with great adventure stories. I guessed that these stories would come to life if they could be personalized. (For example, I had great

fun imagining my young protagonist, Thomas Cruikshanks, walking from Prince Albert to Fort Battleford with his pony. I walked that walk with them!) I observed one guiding principle in my fiction: imagined events must seem to be possible, though not necessarily probable! Combining factual narrative and getting close to a period and a people through one's imagination became the goals of my writing.

The format was still eluding me when Douglas Light's book, *Footprints in the Dust*, came along. Light had assembled so much detail that he thought it best to organize his book chronologically. Reading it, I had a clearer sense of how events at Duck Lake related to what was going on in Batoche and what was going on at Fort Battleford at the same time. In my previous reading, events happening in different places had always tended to remain isolated as separate stories. In Light's book, events are set forth in temporal sequence, simultaneously. It made a lot of sense.

With a nod to Douglas Light, then, I have adopted and adapted his format to my book. Instead of integrating history and fiction as a seamless whole, in which history remains in the background and fiction confuses historical truth, I have written alternating sections, one outlining historical events followed by one describing my protagonist's experiences. I have tried to make both true to historical authenticity.

About the Author

Bob Steele is a retired Associate Professor of Art Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. He was born in Mervin, Saskatchewan near Loon Lake, scene of Big Bear's flight through muskeg country. His family moved to Rockhaven, fifteen miles from Cut Knife Hill, scene of a Native victory over the Canadian Militia. This was followed by a move to Hagen, a town located a few miles from Batoche, headquarters of the Metis insurgents. Although the area was rich with Canadian history, there was not a single mention of the

events described here in any of the schools he attended.

About twenty years ago the author founded the Drawing Network as an informal group of parents, teachers, academics and interested citizens working to spread the word that children use spontaneous drawing as a language medium. Drawing Network pamphlets are available on request at no cost. If interested, contact us at drawnet@shaw.ca.

In 1998, Bob Steele published **Draw Me a Story** (Portage & Main Press), an exploration of this topic. He is currently working on a book that promotes all the arts as essential elements in every child's schooling.

Introduction: An Overview of Conditions in 1885

The Politics of Land

In the spring of 1885 feelings in the Metis communities along the North and South Saskatchewan Rivers were running high against the central authority in Ottawa. Some years earlier Louis Riel had led another Metis community in armed uprising along the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. It had failed miserably. After a brief period of independence they were defeated by a military expedition from Eastern Canada. Now Riel was a man on the run wanted on a murder charge. He fled to the United States, eventually finding a new life as a rural school teacher in Montana. Many of his followers quietly moved west to join existing Metis settlements and carried on their lives as farmers, fur traders and buffalo hunters.

This was the problem: surveyors from Eastern Canada were running roughshod over the traditional Metis way of occupying the land. This had its origins in the early French settlements along the St. Lawrence where narrow strips gave each settler a close neighbor as well as access to the river. It had been like this along the St. Lawrence, again along the Red and Assiniboine, and now, along the North and South Saskatchewan. Ignoring this strongly imbedded tradition, and without consultation or permission, the Canadian government had authorized the rectangular blocks that had become standard surveying practice elsewhere in Canada. It was being superimposed on the socially organic approach of the Metis with ruthless insensitivity. To the Metis this was invasion. Their claims were being ignored, so a delegation was sent from Batoche to Montana to ask Riel to lead them once more in resistance. Perhaps the threat of rebellion would be enough to demonstrate their seriousness and just maybe lead to fruitful discussions. Riel agreed and returned with the petitioners and for the following year he would hold meetings, create a political structure and give stirring lectures.

The new Canada faced many challenges: divided linguistically and culturally, linked to an indifferent parent across the Atlantic, facing an aggressive and expansionist neighbor to the south, it had been granted a huge land mass stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific. There were two problems: the relative insecurity of the prairies and the Pacific colony of British Columbia which had agreed to join Confederation but only if a railroad was built to connect them to the rest of Canada. This project was underway.

A linguistic and cultural division was sharply defined. English-speaking and largely Protestant Upper Canada, now named Ontario, was loyal to Great Britain and the Empire, and French-speaking and largely Catholic Lower Canada, now named Quebec, divided in its loyalty and still smarting from defeat on the Plains of Abraham, was largely anti-British. This separation played into the rebellion. The Metis were French Catholics, while the political leaders in Ottawa, their civil servants out west, and the army that was eventually sent to put down rebellion were English-speaking Protestants.

Politicians in the United States kept their eyes on the Canadian prairies and acted as though parts of Canada were still up for grabs. There were pressure points: 1) the illegal incursions of bootleggers from Fort Benton in Montana who traded bad liquor for good furs and crossed the 49th “medicine line” with impunity 2) American settlers lured by the endless farmland to the north and to a more benign governance and a less hostile Native population 3) the political ‘jingoism’ of large sections of the American public who were easily persuaded to continue aggression against anything British 4) the gold rush in British Columbia which brought an invasion of American adventurers prone to mob rule.

The Canadian government responded by 1) building the transcontinental railroad to the Pacific which brought British Columbia into Confederation and secured Canadian sovereignty from Halifax to Victoria 2) creating the North-West Mounted Police and sending them west on a historic trek to establish law

and order 3) adopting a policy of filling the empty plains with farmers from Eastern Canada, Europe, and the United States.

Land was at the root of it, who would occupy it and under what conditions. Indians had roamed the prairies for thousands of years but white settlers were turning up as homesteaders in increasing numbers to settle legally and the buffalo had largely disappeared. Indians could no longer feed themselves and were experiencing hunger and starvation. Faced with changes that threatened their very existence, they had no choice: they had to sign the treaties that were presented to them. Unfortunately for the Indians, the best land was going to settlers, farmers, ranchers, and land speculators. The Native population had no experience or natural feeling for farming and ranching and little interest in acquiring it. They were restricted to land ill-suited to farming or ranching. For politicians and bureaucrats it was unthinkable that Indian bands should be free to roam the countryside. The change from nomadic to agrarian life resulted in Indian agents, farm instructors, and bureaucrats appointed by the central government. Some were conscientious and helpful, others were political appointees, opportunists and racist bullies.

In summary, in the years between signing the treaties and the rebellion, the Native peoples were faced with factors they could not ignore: the end of the buffalo, confinement to reservations, the sub-standard soil of their assigned reservations. Furthermore, in the early years when farming success was critically important, late rains held up planting, early frosts gave low yields, and broken promises resulted in disappointment and bitterness. Emergency supplies had been promised but were seldom available when needed and were usually inadequate. To top it off, "white" diseases tore Native populations to shreds. Local schools had been promised, but in the immediate reality and on into the future, children would be separated from their families and legally bound to residential schools featuring compulsory conversion to the sponsoring church. Generations of children would be removed from their homes to be installed in cold and dehumanizing institutions.

In spite of having plenty of reasons to join the Metis rebellion, the Native populations were divided. The chiefs pondered long before putting their 'X' on treaty documents but once they had signed they considered it a sacred duty to live up to their commitments. Moreover, they trusted the Queen who lived across the waters. The elders knew in their bones that rebellion would bring even greater hardships. Those who did join tended to be angry young men who had been children when the treaties were signed. They felt no loyalty to the new Canada and resentment to the politicians and bureaucrats who served Ottawa.

Some older Indian leaders began to realize that they had been sold a bill of goods in the first round of treaty-making and were drawing attention to the need for new treaties and a stricter observance of the originals. Alas, rebellion put an end to a united Indian leadership that might have impressed Ottawa. It was to have reached formal acceptance at a conference that very summer of 1885. In the years leading to rebellion and throughout its duration, tensions persisted between chiefs and elders on the one hand and angry youths on the other. Some chiefs, like Poundmaker, were swept into supporting the Metis against their better judgment.

The Metis had historic claims to their modest settlements by right of their connection through marriage to Native women and the many years they had occupied the land. Their cause was also strengthened by a strong sense of community, language, race, and religion. That the Canadian government did not respond positively and welcome them into Confederation under favorable terms must be considered an ethical and moral calamity. The Metis were half Native and had roamed the prairies for as long as any other existing Aboriginal group. Their French relatives had been in Canada for several hundred years, from the beginning of European exploration and the fur trade. Unlike their Indian cousins, the Metis had not been given the opportunity to sign treaties. In the end they were victims of a perceived need to impose standardization on a diverse population. Underneath it all, it seems to have been a policy of

white supremacy. Metis and Natives were viewed as problems, the sooner solved the better and by force if necessary. The land had to be cleared for new farming communities to bolster the country against American expansionism.

When rebellion broke out at Duck Lake the Canadian Militia was sent from the East once more. It was made up exclusively of units from Ontario, emotionally fueled by anti-Catholic sentiment. It should be mentioned again that Riel and his followers were not trying to take themselves out of Canada, but were using the threat of rebellion to draw attention to their political rights and to protest the lack of willingness on the part of Ottawa to address the issue. Of course, things got out of hand.

The Geography

As a child of the “dirty thirties”, I lived in the small Saskatchewan village of Rockhaven located at a place of transition. If you went north, you were in a parkland of lakes and streams, hills and coulees. If you went south, you were on the treeless plains. As a child, I was unaware of the vast drainage system of the North and South Saskatchewan Rivers, so important to understanding the Rebellion, and I think we were all ignorant that one of its sources was in Jim Brown’s pasture a couple of miles north of town, the headwaters of historic Cut Knife Creek. I remember swimming in its deep pools in mid-summer and skating on them in winter. In the spring run-off Cut Knife Creek wanders fifteen miles or so north-east and empties into the Battle River which flows, again mainly eastward, to join the North Saskatchewan near Battleford. The South Saskatchewan joins the North a few miles east of Prince Albert, a confluence I witnessed when our family moved to the even smaller village of Hagen. Again there was either ignorance of historical events or no interest in teaching local history to young learners. I would have been pleased to know that Hagen was only a few miles from Batoche, the epicenter of the Metis community and the location of critical events in the Rebellion. To complete the drainage system, the

Saskatchewan, now one mighty river, flows into Lake Winnipeg and, by way of the Nelson, into Hudson's Bay where it becomes part of the Atlantic Ocean.

Who Were the Cree?

Who were these people who had been swept into rebellion largely against their will but who were, nevertheless, fueled by a strong sense of betrayal? They had migrated over time from the northern muskeg country of Eastern Canada long before Confederation. One branch, the River Cree, made the coulees of the North Saskatchewan and Battle Rivers their winter quarters and home base. Conditions were ideal with abundant firewood, fresh water, and protection from winter blizzards. Another branch stayed in the northern forests and were known as Bush Cree or Woods Cree. In summer, the Cree along the Saskatchewan packed up and wandered the prairies in search of buffalo and other game. The Bush Cree, who had never acquired horses, stayed in the northern woodlands.

The Plains Cree had quickly adapted to the horses that had arrived with the Spanish invaders, using them to hunt game and wage war. The Bush Cree were hunters and trappers who had no use for horses in dense bush and forest. They traveled mostly on foot. The competition for food that motivated the Plains Cree didn't concern the Bush Cree. These cultural differences played into the Rebellion at Frog Lake where the contrast of Plains Cree and Bush Cree saved one white boy's life!

The tipi, domestic architecture of the Plains Indians, was modest but practical for a people who were constantly on the move. It could be transported by travois from place to place, taken down and erected in a matter of hours. The nomadic lifestyle also gave birth to a different kind of art - campfire storytelling, elaborate and evocative singing and dancing, a tradition of oratory, the crafting and decorating of useful objects, the use of beads, feathers, quills and tanned hides to create astonishingly beautiful costumes.

In winter, a small campfire was kept burning in the middle of the tipi. Animal skins and robes kept the occupants warm day

and night. As a child you crawled under your sleeping robes and listened to the murmuring talk of elders who would be sitting around the fire discussing events and telling stories. The coulee protected you from the winds and driving snow and even if the temperature dropped you were warm. Through the smoke hole you might catch a glimpse of a star or a patch of northern lights.

Before the treaties, there was no such thing as ownership but there was a strong feeling for territory. The attitude towards land was religious: the Great Mother/Father nurtured the People, provided land, space, fodder for buffalo, the many plants and animals that kept the People alive and well. You did not own the land: if anything, the land owned you - you were part of it!

And yet, the Plains Indians were fierce in establishing territory, not rigidly, but flexibly, depending on the ebb and flow of military power and where the buffalo happened to be. For generations the Cree and their allies the Assiniboine, fought the Blackfoot confederacy consisting of Blackfoot, Blood, Peigan, and Sarcee. You could hunt where you pleased but the closer you got to your enemy, the greater the likelihood of encountering fierce opposition. It was a response to a constantly changing balance of power fought as small scale engagements in a no-man's-land between recognized areas of occupancy. The land was like a 'community pasture' with shifting boundaries and no fences.

With the arrival of horses, Indian culture was dominated by a warrior class of dare-devil riders. 'Touching coup' was more important than killing your enemy although there was plenty of that. Returning to camp with enemy horses meant undivided attention around the campfire, a song, a dance, or a story in your honor and the adoration of youngsters who wanted to be like you.

Author's note: The Reservations as I Remember Them

With the end of the buffalo and the imposition of treaties, reservations were established with names that as a child stirred my imagination: Little Pine, Poundmaker, Sweetgrass, Grizzly Bear's Head, Mosquito,

Red Pheasant, Strike-Him-on-the-Back, Thunderchild, and Moosomin, each named for a chief and all within a Sunday 'car ride' from Rockhaven. On a hot Sunday afternoon driving through the convoluted trails of Poundmaker or Sweetgrass, the reservations would seem deserted as though everyone had gone elsewhere, perhaps to a pow-wow. The log cabins were small and scattered in a pattern that was neither like the ordered streets of our village nor the spacious distribution of farms. An old man might be sitting outside a cabin smoking his pipe. Children would stop their play and stare as we drove by. Yapping dogs saw in the appearance of a car a joyous occasion for protecting territory and horses in a slough bottom would be neck to neck, tails swishing to keep insects away. We kids in the car always waved, trying to make up for a separation we felt but didn't understand. The Indian boys and girls usually waved back. They, like us, only half understood.

Hundreds of Thousands of Buffalo

Historically, huge herds were part of the land, integrated into most aspects of Native life: without the buffalo the People would not have survived: food, clothing, tipis, robes, artifacts - the buffalo provided them all. They disappeared in the 1870s, hunted to near-extinction by all races but mostly by white adventurers south of the border who shot them for sport or commerce. Native leaders too acknowledged that they had been careless in their animal husbandry, at times taking only the best parts and leaving the rest for the carrion eaters.

The Buffalo Hunt

The buffalo hunt was an annual affair and it involved everyone. Men and older boys did the hunting while women set up a camp nearby and processed the meat - either by smoking or pounding - mixing it with berries to make pemmican. If the herd moved, camp was struck and relocated on the advice of scouts who kept pace with the animals and reported back. While the main hunt was going on, children could win praise for helping to feed the family by hunting smaller animals while, at the same time, practicing to be buffalo hunters. There was plenty of fish in the

lakes, but the Plains Cree wouldn't eat fish unless they were starving. The women and children picked berries, herbs and medicinal roots.

Insects

In the summer, there were plagues of insects - black flies first, and when the blackflies were finished, mosquitoes. At times, you would have to wrap yourself in a blanket or rub bear fat on your face and arms or build a smudge or find a high place where the breeze kept the numbers down. Horses would sometimes bolt in a frenzy. Grasshoppers appeared in huge clouds, eating every plant, and leaving nothing for the buffalo, the horses and other animals. If the herds moved in search of food, they would be that much harder to find.

Weather

The climate was one thing - there were severe winters and hot dry summers - but the weather was unpredictable, sudden and sometimes disastrous. In a book by Sam Steele, the famous Northwest Mounted Policeman describes a prairie storm in 1874 which took place just as the Police were launching their march across the southern prairies to Fort Macleod.

About ten in the evening a terrific thunderstorm burst upon us, the worst that I had seen in the west since 1870. I was riding near the large corral at the time, the incessant flashes of lightning making every object visible for a long distance. A thunderbolt fell in the midst of the horses. Terrified, they broke their fastenings and made for the side of the corral. The six men on guard were trampled underfoot as they tried to stop them. The maddened beasts overturned the huge wagons, dashed through a row of tents, scattered everything and made for the gate of the large field in which we were encamped. ... A majority of horses were between 30 and 50 miles into Dakota before they were forced by sheer exhaustion to halt.(1)

Quicksand

Quicksand was more common in those days, practically unknown in the mid-thirties, presumably because agriculture had used up most of the soggy slough land. If you found yourself in quicksand, the more you struggled the faster you sank. On one occasion Sam Steele almost lost his horse.

One morning I jumped a fine creek with grassy banks and found my horse up to the neck in a shaking bog with a tough sod on top and quicksand beneath...He took things easily and waited till I called him to come, which I lost no time in doing. I had as one should always do in quicksand thrown myself face downwards, and struggling as if swimming, took the lead. The horse when called made a plunge forward and, resting for a second, gathered himself for an heroic effort until we were extricated from our predicament. (2)

Prairie Fires

Prairie fires were common events because the land was covered with 'prairie wool' and grasses grew in some places so high that a man on foot could hide from an enemy. Fires were deliberately set by Metis and Native bands to control the migrations of buffalo or to encourage new grass to grow. Thunderstorms set it ablaze and if there was a stiff breeze it would travel faster than a man could run. The only safe place was a lake or large slough.

In my family history, a sudden prairie fire interrupted the building of a new log cabin. House and barn were saved by the builders, including my Uncle Arthur who was a teenager. Suddenly there was concern for the cattle who had been grazing near the building site and were no longer visible. Arthur ran to the barn and, sure enough, they were there. The fire was an obvious threat, so they headed for the open door of the barn where they felt safe.

Drinking Water

Another huge problem was the scarcity of safe drinking water, especially in summer when the River People were traveling across the prairies in search of game. Although critically

important as a food source, the buffalo in vast numbers polluted the lakes and made slough water unsafe.

Smallpox and Other Diseases

Native Indians who suffered from hunger and starvation were also especially susceptible to European diseases. Father Lacombe and other missionaries, (such as the Methodist minister, George McDougal and his son John), tended the sick and dying as best they could. The following is from a biography of Father Lacombe by James G. MacGregor:

Once more the dreaded killer swept the prairies much as it had done about 1833 and with comparable merciless mortality. This time it came from the American trading posts on the Missouri and swept north over the plains like a prairie fire lashing out at the lodges as it went and leaving bleaching skeletons and stark tepee poles as souvenirs. One after another the tribes fell before it - Piegans during the winter of 1869-70, Bloods the following spring, then the Blackfoot and Stonies and Sarcees, and finally, by midsummer, it clutched at the Cree camps. By August it was ravishing all the lodges along the Saskatchewan River (3)

A paragraph from the same source describes Lacombe at work helping the stricken, who were often abandoned by their terrified relatives:

Picking his way around the dead, bending over the sick and the dying, feeding them soup and carrying water to those parched with their final fever-thirst, he carried on. At sunrise each day he buried the victims and then for the rest of the long hours of sunlight comforted the stricken (4)

And finally, a paragraph summing up the devastation:
By the end of September the epidemic was over. According to an official report compiled by Chief Factor William Christie, almost one-half of Alberta's Indians had died of the disease. The official figures for the Saskatchewan District showed

that 2,686 of the plains Indians were swept away, while 485 Cree and 373 half-breeds died (5)

Author's note: *The preceding review of conditions on the prairies in 1885 sets that stage for the adventure story that follows, fiction blended with historical events that took place in the part of Canada where I spent my early years.*

Footnotes:

1: *Forty Years in Canada* by Sam Steele, Russell Lang and Co. Winnipeg and Herbert Jenkins Ltd, London, 1915

2: *ibid.*

3: *Father Lacombe* by James G. MacGregor, Hurtig Publishers 1975. The belief persists among Native historians that smallpox was contacted by Indians through trade items deliberately tainted with disease.

4: *ibid.*

5: *ibid.*

6: "Counting Coup" was an act of unusual daring and bravery. In war it might be taking a scalp or capturing something personal from an enemy camp. Taking a scalp is said to have been used first by early white settlers in colonial times.

7: *Forty Years in Canada* by Sam Steele.

Getting Ready To Go West

Throughout his high school years, Thomas Cruikshanks worked part time at his grandfather's newspaper, the "*Owen Sound Opinion*". He ran errands, swept floors, learned how to run presses, and picked the brains of reporters who were always friendly and pleased to pass on what they knew. Occasionally he was sent on assignment to weddings and funerals, less frequently to a fire or traffic accident. And yet he considered conversations with his grandfather to have been the most important part of his education in journalism. From his grandfather he learned the ethics of publishing, the value of newspapers to the health of communities, the politics of the day, the continuity of local history, and how to make sense of events as they unfolded on the world stage. Eventually, he would be the owner and editor of the *Opinion*.

Now, at twenty and home from a stint at a school of journalism in Toronto, he knows what he wants to do next. He has read stories in the Toronto papers that Louis Riel and his Metis followers are stirring up trouble again and this time several Indian bands seem poised to join them. It will be his first assignment as a practicing journalist!

He wants to travel and to write about his travels. He wants to put his training to the test, to see if he is cut out to be a reporter or even a journalist or columnist. He would like to combine serious writing with serious illustration, for he has been interested in both. Indeed, he has practiced both on school papers and yearbooks.

His grandfather has agreed to send him to the Saskatchewan River country to cover the second emergence of Louis Riel as a political force and the Native uprising that seems to be brewing there. If reports are correct, three prairie constituencies are on the edge of rebellion: the Metis, who are of mixed French-Canadian and Indian blood; English speaking whites, who have inter-married with Native Indians; and the Indian bands of the region, mostly Cree and Assiniboine, but possibly, if the trouble

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Rebellion at Fort Battleford

A Letter from the Fort Battleford Infirmary

Little Pine, is said to have danced but not for long. Poundmaker, who was younger and liked to put on a show, was always a hit. At the end of the day, merchants tended to be generous with the leftovers.

***Author's note:** When I was a boy, we were taken to the North Battleford Fair. It was a day of many wonders, not to be missed. The highlight for me was seeing and hearing the Indians who were given free passes if they would take part in the evening grandstand performance. My parents were keen to start the thirty mile drive home. It would take an hour! I was not a demanding child, but this was one time when I dug my heels in. My parents sensed that it was important for me, though it was an event they could take or leave. I refused to go anywhere until the Indian pow-wow was over.*

Rebellion at Fort Battleford

Outline of Events

March 20, 1885: Dispatches from Superintendent Crozier at Fort Carlton to Inspector Morris at Fort Battleford precipitate panic. Fort Battleford is seen as totally inadequate and repairs are made to withstand an Indian/Metis attack. The stockade is strengthened and a four foot high embankment is built on the inside wall. Crude bastions are constructed on the south-east and north-west corners to accommodate seven-pounder guns. Because the telegraph is not working - presumably cut by Metis agents - riders are sent to Swift Current with dispatches.

March 24: Responding to rumors of war, James Rae, Indian Agent, visits nearby reserves and distributes gifts in an effort to defuse the growing crisis. The Battleford Rifles is formed as an auxiliary to the North-West Mounted Police detachment.

March 26: Sergeant F.A. Bagley leaves Fort Battleford with a force of twenty-five Mounted Police. Their destination is Fort Carlton and their purpose is to bolster the garrison until Commissioner Irvine can arrive from Regina with reinforcements.

Cross reference: the Duck Lake skirmish begins open hostilities.

March 27: News of the Duck Lake incident reaches Battleford by way of a Mounted Police scout. With most of the police on the trail to Carlton, the community is left unprotected. A Home Guard of approximately 125 men is formed, which includes every male able to carry and use a gun.

Cross reference: Commissioner Irvine, when he arrives at Fort Carlton from Regina by way of Prince Albert, decides to abandon the fort and concentrate his forces elsewhere. Arsonists

burn the abandoned fort. Irvine sends word to Sergeant Bagley and his constables to return to Battleford. Before they turn back, they see the red glow of Fort Carlton burning.

Cross reference: Major-General Middleton, supreme commander of the Canadian Militia, arrives at Winnipeg after three days and nights of traveling by train. He and 260 men of the 90th Winnipeg Rifles continue west and leave for Fort Qu'Appelle.

March 28: James Rae, Indian Agent, visits the Stoney Reserve south of Battleford. Farm Instructor James Payne assures him that the Stonies will not cause trouble and will help if needed. Nevertheless, panic spreads in the Battleford countryside and many settlers leave their farms and flee to the relative safety of the fort. In their haste, they leave behind food supplies, cattle, chickens, and most critically, weapons and ammunition. Abandoned supplies will fall into rebel hands. Ironically, when the Battleford Rifles and the Home Guard are formed, they are short of rifles and ammunition

Cross reference: Major-General Middleton and his men arrive at Fort Qu'Appelle.

March 29: There are reports in Battleford that Indians are leaving their reserves and heading for Battleford, a violation of treaty regulations which require them to have permission of the local Indian Agent. It is falsely assumed that their intention is to attack the fort. A number of local farms are raided and stores are looted and burned to the ground, which strengthens the assumption. Poundmaker and his followers set up camp seven miles west of Battleford at Finlayson's farm. No one seems to notice that they are accompanied by women and children and are not dressed or painted as a war party. They are literally starving and have made the walk to Battleford to get rations from the Indian agent. Judge Rouleau and his party of friends and relatives leave Battleford and head south to Swift Current to escape what

they view as the coming storm. White homesteaders continue to seek safety within the Fort Battleford palisades.

March 30: Indians from Sweet Grass, Poundmaker, Little Pine and Lucky Man reserves are astonished to find that the white settlers have moved into the fort. Poundmaker tries to parlay with the authorities but no one from the Indian Department will talk to him and the band retreats in disgust. The cook at the Industrial School, Arthur Dobbs, becomes a hero to the Indians by staying at his post. He feeds as many as possible before his supplies run out. A telegraph report from Fort Battleford reads: "Men, women and children in barracks. Armed Indians within three miles. Expect engagement probably tonight." When night arrives, Indians steal hay for their horses and there is some looting but it is thought to be Metis, not Indians. Agent Rae in Battleford wires Commissioner Dewdney in Regina: "Indians 300 strong in possession of Indian School and mean war." In a personal grudge, Itka, a Stoney Indian, shoots Farm Instructor Payne. (Payne had caused the death of his tubercular daughter by striking her.) In the morning, William McKay and Peter Ballendine cross the Battle River to hold a conference with Chief Fine Day, Poundmaker's war chief, Yellow Mud Blanket, Poundmaker and Little Pine. Nothing comes of it.

Cross reference: Superintendent W.M. Herchmer with fifty Mounted Policemen are ordered to proceed from Regina to Battleford by way of Swift Current, but when they reach the South Saskatchewan they find that it is impossible to cross because of spring break-up.

Cross reference: The Winnipeg Field Battery of Artillery arrives at Qu'Appelle. and other units are on their way.

Cross reference: Inspector Francis Dickens at Fort Pitt receives word of Duck Lake. He sends word to the small detachment at Frog Lake, some thirty miles to the north, informing them.

March 31: At Red Pheasant Reserve, south of Battleford, Chief Red Pheasant and his brother knock on Farm Instructor George Applegarth's door at three in the morning to warn of hostile Indians in the area. Applegarth and family leave immediately for Swift Current in a farm wagon. They are pursued in the morning but escape. At Battleford, Indian agents William McKay and Peter Ballendine attempt to cross the Battle River from the fort. When they reach the north bank they are fired on by rebels and are forced to retreat.

Metis activists and Indian bands seem to be working at odds. It is believed that Metis agents are bent on spoiling a peaceful solution. The Indians are hungry and most do not wish armed conflict but the Metis are fully committed to rebellion. The majority of Indians leave the Battleford camp for their reserves but Chief Fine Day and the Rattler Society remain behind. Barney Tremont, a local rancher who refuses to leave his ranch, is greasing a wagon when five Assiniboine Indians ride up, ask for food and are refused. They kill Tremont. The Indians loot and burn several farm buildings in the Prongua district. A party of whites leaves for Battleford and, on the way, Stoney Indians stop them and empty their wagon before letting them go. They are not physically harmed.

April 2: Telegraph connections are disrupted, so Inspector Morris sends Constable John Storer and half-breed James Bird to Swift Current to inform the government of the serious state of affairs at Battleford and to urge authorities to send reinforcements. Indians and Metis are observed looting buildings in South Battleford. Morris orders the seven-pounder into action and after three shots the looters disappear, leaving behind a horse and buckboard.

Cross reference: At Frog Lake, a 'Warrior's Lodge' is set up by Chief Wandering Spirit and the events described in the next chapter begin to unfold.

April 3: Good Friday. A party of ten men from the fort cross the Battle River to get provisions and, while there, they arrest two Metis. Indians loot and burn the farm and ranch of two ex-policemen. Sergeant-major Kirk and a detachment of twelve men go on patrol and arrest eight Metis and their families who are suspected of looting. Some are detained, others are released. A few stay to serve the Mounties. 4000 Snider-Enfield rifles are sent west and 2000 more are ordered as well as one million rounds of ball ammunition.

April 4: Battleford receives news of the Frog Lake Massacre. Most of the victims have lived in Battleford and are well known.

April 5: Indians burn the stables at the Battleford Industrial School.

April 6: Indians burn the house of J.E. Stewart.

Cross reference: Major General Frederick Middleton is in Fort Qu'Appelle training his troops for a march north to Batoche. His contingent is made up of 402 men and 120 wagons. Lieutenant-Colonel William Dillon Otter arrives in the west with 500 troops. A two-pronged attack is planned, Otter marching on Batoche on the west side of the South Saskatchewan River, Middleton on the east side. Events at Frog Lake suggest that the rebellion may have spread to the western bands. The Cree leaders Big Bear and Wandering Spirit are at Frog Lake and have links to the Batoche Metis. The Blackfoot Federation under Chief Crowfoot have remained peaceful but Ottawa fears they might join the rebellion. Middleton changes his plan and sends Otter to Swift Current and from there he is to march to Battleford to relieve the siege. He recruits Major General Strange, an eccentric military man turned rancher, and orders him to Calgary where he is to raise a force and march to Fort Edmonton and then to Fort Pitt and Frog Lake. The goal is to apprehend Big Bear, Wandering Spirit and the others and to put down rebellion

in that region before it can spread. It is known that white hostages have been taken.

April 8: Looting is observed in Battleford from the Fort. Shots are exchanged, but from a distance and no fatalities are recorded.

April 9: Inspector Morris at Fort Battleford has adequate provisions for the time being but water has to be hauled from a spring outside the palisades. Riel is in great need of support from the Indian bands and sends agents to recruit.

April 10: Cross reference: Irvine and his force at Prince Albert hold themselves in readiness to assist Middleton but never get the call. Middleton criticizes the police for cowardliness and inactivity!

April 11: Cross reference: Middleton orders Major General Strange to proceed to Fort Edmonton as soon as he can recruit and equip a force in Calgary. From Edmonton he will proceed down river to Fort Pitt.

April 12: Lieutenant-Colonel Otter and his force arrive at Swift Current.

April 14: Otter arrives at Saskatchewan Landing where the steamer Northcote will ferry them across. Middleton receives news from Inspector Morris in Fort Battleford imploring him to come to his aid "for the sake of the women and children."

April 16: Metis and Indians go to Bresaylor, a small Metis community north-west of Battleford, take Father Louis Cochin hostage and order all Metis to the Poundmaker camp at Cut Knife. The Bresaylor community is not supporting the Batoche Metis under Riel.

April 18: Otter leaves Saskatchewan Landing for the march north to Fort Battleford. The weather is cold with wind and snow.

April 21: Rebels loot and burn the Hudson Bay Company buildings in South Battleford.

April 22: Three policemen and three civilians are on patrol southwest of the fort. Frank Smart, one of the civilians, and his horse are hit by gun fire from an unknown source and Smart is fatally wounded. Scouts from Otter's column exchange fire with a small group of Indians near the Bear Hills. The Indians flee and the scouts capture a wagon.

Cross reference: Inspector Francis Dickens (son of the English novelist) and a small contingent of Mounties stationed at Fort Pitt raft down the North Saskatchewan in full flood. Wandering Spirit has taken command of the Big Bear band. He allows the police contingent to escape down river to Battleford in exchange for civilian hostages. After a desperate journey, the raftsmen arrive in Battleford and are given a rousing welcome.

April 23: Otter's advance guard is fired upon by a few Indians. On the Stony Reserve south of Battleford, 101 bags of flour and 600 pounds of bacon are found abandoned by the rebel forces. Otter is now camped three miles south of the fort and the flames from Judge Rouleau's house can be seen. Just before dark Constable Burke climbs the stockade of Fort Battleford. A bugler from Otter's camp replies and the occupants of the fort know that relief has arrived.

April 24: Otter arrives at Battleford, the "Old Town", and a camp is made near Government House. He takes command of all military forces at Fort Battleford. All but a few of the remaining Indians leave the Battleford area for Cut Knife Hill in a grim mood. They improve their food supply by rounding up cattle from nearby ranches.

Cross reference: Metis fighters engage Middleton's forces at a small stream called Fish Creek which flows into the South Saskatchewan a few miles south of the Metis community of Batoche.

April 26: Otter expresses a wish to punish Poundmaker immediately but Middleton refuses to give him permission and orders him to stay in Battleford.

April 29: Police scouts report that the Poundmaker camp is on the east (Battleford) side of Cut Knife Creek which will make attack easier.

April 30: Middleton refuses Otter permission to attack Cut Knife a second time. Public opinion in Battleford strongly backs Otter and, disobeying his superior officer, he decides on a "reconnaissance in force". He is convinced that the Indians will flee at the first sign of the Canadian militia. In the Indian camp at Cut Knife, Poundmaker wants to avoid war and argues for a retreat to the west, to Manitou Lake or possibly further west to Blackfoot Crossing and his adoptive father Crow Foot. He is overruled by the war chief, Fine Day, and Metis operatives in the camp. He manages to effect a compromise, and the entire camp moves to the west side of Cut Knife Creek. This will come as a surprise to the Canadian forces when they arrive.

May 1: A column led by Colonel Otter leaves Battleford for Cut Knife at 4:00 p.m. The town gathers to cheer them on.

May 2: At Cut Knife, no guard is posted, but an old Indian who rises early to pray spots the advancing Canadian forces. The Battle of Cut Knife Creek begins.

A Letter from the Fort Battleford Infirmary

April 26, 1885

Dear Everyone Back Home,

(Note: Grandfather Editor, use all or parts or none of this as you see fit.)

I'm writing this from a hospital bed in the Fort Battleford infirmary but don't worry. I've been ill but I'm now over the worst of it and getting stronger every day. To reassure you, I'm not *in* the bed but fully dressed and sitting *on* the bed.

As forts go, this is not up to one's boyhood dreams. The police, and civilians who have found refuge here, are working hard to make it safe from an Indian or Metis attack which everyone expects. There is a sense of urgency and a good deal of confusion as authorities try to fit us in. Every day brings more ranchers and farmers and their families from the countryside around Battleford and everyone has a story to tell. No one is refused entry to the fort. To put the situation as simply as possible, the Rebellion is in full swing and we are expecting attacks from the west by Indians who are presently camped at Cut Knife Hill some thirty miles west of here, and from the east by Metis from Batoche. The fort was built for a relatively small detachment of mounted policemen and certainly not for five hundred civilians. As happens when people find themselves in a crisis, everyone is working hard at making it as easy as possible for neighbors and newcomers and for the police who have taken us in.

From the point of view of being a journalist, a short spell in the hospital turned out to be an unexpected goldmine. I'm in contact with a source of information that I would otherwise have missed. I'll come to this shortly.

And now to answer the question you must be asking, what am I doing in the Fort Battleford infirmary? Well, there's a story here.

My first glimpse of the fort's interior was from the floor of a hastily erected tent and through the distortions of a high fever. I had collapsed from almost total immersion in very cold water

and when the fort doctor was called he took my pulse, read my temperature, listened to my chest and then, somewhat alarmed, called for two constables to carry me to the infirmary where I've been for the past few days. I remember him muttering something about "risk of pneumonia", but that hasn't occurred. On the final day of my walk from Prince Albert, I took a plunge in the Battle River, not for the fun of it, I can assure you, or because I needed a bath, which I probably did, but because a little girl fell into the icy water and I jumped in after her. A spontaneous reaction as befits a former Scout. Don't think of me as a hero. Anyone would have done the same.

To get to the fort I had to cross the Battle River, as Old Angus told me back in Prince Albert. It's just a creek most of the year, but in spring runoff it's swollen, deep, and very cold from melting ice and snow. There's no bridge and no ferry, no alternative to fording the river if you want to get to the other side and there aren't too many places where you can do it, not this time of year. There have been incidents of violence on the part of Natives, which I will report in due course, but mostly it's the *anticipation* of violence. Who knows what lies ahead!

Having completed our walk from Prince Albert, Fanny and I were part of the group of refugees, if you could call us that, who had gathered on the west side. I made friends with a family from England, the Wentworths, Mr. and Mrs. and their three children - Peter, who is seventeen, Lily, thirteen and Rosie, eight. They have a small farm/ranch in the Eagle Hills somewhere southwest of Battleford. They had packed camping essentials and food and loaded everything into a shallow wagon hauled by two draft horses, Clydes, judging from the 'feathers' around their feet. The Wentworths offered to make room for me in the crossing and suggested that I tie Fanny to the rear of the wagon.

The team didn't like the cold water or the current and Fanny too couldn't be convinced that wading into this ice bath was necessary. She simply refused to go, but when I tied her to the Wentworth wagon, the Clydes literally pulled her into the water. It must have surprised her to find that she could touch bottom most of the way and swim when we got to deep bits.

Near the far side, and I'm only talking less than 100 feet,

there is a deep place where the lead horses have to swim for a few yards and the wagon floats like a boat. The horses get their footing on a partially submerged sandbar and, with a mighty heave, pull you up the slope to the trail leading to the fort which is less than a mile away. We knew the routine from watching other folks manage it. All went well at first, but then suddenly we were in trouble. The Clydes got their front feet on the gravel bar but in trying to get a purchase, one of them lost his balance and they both panicked and almost overturned the wagon. Rosie, the youngest girl, instead of hanging on to the wagon, tried to reach her mother's arms. She tripped and fell into the water. Not only was the water deep, but there was a current that would have swept her out of reach. I didn't have time to think. I jumped into the water behind her. The current caught Rosie, but she managed to keep afloat by thrashing her arms and, fortunately, Fanny was there to break the current and protect her. She came to rest against Fanny's flank and I was able to get her back to the wagon and into her mother's outstretched arms. The horses had regained their footing and with Mr. Wentworth standing in the front of the wagon and urging them on, we were soon safely across.

Rosie was now wrapped in a blanket and safely in the wagon and I pulled myself to shore and collapsed on solid ground. My teeth were chattering fiercely and I was close to a dead faint. The Wentworth men, father and son, got me into the wagon and under another blanket, and we galloped to the fort as fast as the horses would go.

Inside the fort, the Wentworths quickly put up their tent in an area they had been directed to. I was still shivering violently but they got me out of my wet clothes and into an improvised bed of buffalo robes. Later, when the crisis had subsided, Peter arrived back with the detachment doctor who said I must spend a few days in the infirmary.

I have made good friends with the Wentworths, who later told me that I had saved Rosie's life and they would like to adopt me, or at least have me stay with them as long as we were to remain in the fort. When it is safe to return to the ranch, they want me to come home with them for a prolonged visit. They

have been wonderful, and Mrs. Wentworth has been my nurse and acting mother, visiting me several times a day, usually with something nourishing to keep up my strength, as she says.

Now I'll tell you why it's been an advantage to be here in the infirmary. Adolphus Nault, a half-breed from a small community north-west of here called Bresaylor, is in the bed next to mine with a septic foot. (Actually there are only two beds!) These past few days we've become good friends. He's a storyteller if ever there was one and I'm a good listener and note-taker, an unbeatable combination if you happen to be a journalist. I get the news by way of Adolphus and his friends who are either in the camp or come to visit from somewhere outside the fort. Apparently, the Bresaylor Metis hold themselves somewhat aloof from Riel's cause. He also has stories about events leading to the rebellion which he is eager to tell anyone who will listen. I'm writing them up so I'll include one or two. (Grandfather, he says its okay to use them in the paper if you like.)

Here's how Adolphus happens to be in the Fort Battleford infirmary. The Metis from Bresaylor, as I say, are not keen on rebellion and have refused to fight on anyone's side. Some of Riel's agents visited the small community trying to change their minds, and when they were unsuccessful, forced the entire community, including their parish priest, Father Cochin, to trek to Cut Knife Hill. At Cut Knife, they became part of Poundmaker's camp which the Metis operatives have made their headquarters. They've sort of taken over the camp, I understand. Cut Knife Hill has become a magnet for Indians and Metis much as Fort Battleford has for local farmers and ranchers. Adolphus says the Riel Metis were at Cut Knife for one reason only, to recruit Indians to the cause. Without their support, the Metis don't stand a chance against the Militia, but with the Indians they hope to stall long enough to bring the government around to meeting them and getting some kind of settlement. Ottawa has refused even to answer their letters or to pay attention to their petitions.

On the trek to Cut Knife Hill from Bresaylor, Adolphus was limping badly from an axe wound he had given his foot a few days earlier. He gradually fell behind unnoticed and when he

could no longer keep up he crawled into a patch of Saskatoon bushes and waited until the rest had disappeared over the brow of a hill. Nobody missed him so he limped off in the direction of Battleford where he knew he would get medical help. He was picked up by a police patrol and brought to the fort doctor who said he needed to be immobilized in a hospital bed. The wound was festering and, if he didn't get treatment, he would lose his leg. He is now much recovered and, like me, impatient to get out of here. In the meantime, his stories keep us both occupied.

Adolphus's native language is French but he can also speak his wife's tongue, which is Cree, and his English is far better than my French. He was born in Portage La Prairie and took part in the Red River uprising of 69-70. When Riel fled and the rebellion collapsed, Adolphus moved his family to the Metis settlements along the Saskatchewan, first to Batoche and later to Bresaylor. He knows the Dumont family and has met Riel once. The Police don't consider that he is spying for the Metis, and he insists to his friends that he is not spying for the police. He is sympathetic to the Metis cause, but believes that rebellion will only make matters worse. He claims that it didn't work on the Red River fifteen years ago, and it won't work in the Saskatchewan country now. He says that many Indians feel the same way, notably Chief Poundmaker at Cut Knife.

Our friends from outside the fort tell us that Indians have arrived from Cut Knife Hill, which is about thirty miles west of here, and are camped on the west side of the Battle River. Everyone was certain that they were on the warpath but Adolphus says that no Indian war party would bring its women and children along and, besides, the men were not wearing war paint or singing war songs. He says the Indians had no intention of attacking the fort and wouldn't have the strength for it anyway. They were hungry and had one thing in mind, to persuade the Indian Agent to give them food.

The Agent is a politically appointed bureaucrat called John Rae. He refuses to leave the fort to talk to Poundmaker and Poundmaker has turned down an invitation to go to the fort for fear of being betrayed. Here's how Adolphus continues the story, but I will make no effort to replicate his colorful English.

He is well-educated and the words I attribute to him are fairly accurate.

“Indian Agent Rae finally did risk leaving the fort to meet Poundmaker half way, but just as he stepped outside the gates someone fired on the fort from the bushes that grow along the River. Rae, thinking that the bullets were meant for him, lost no time getting back behind the fort’s palisade and that was the end of it. The shot was probably fired by a Metis sharpshooter doing his best to prevent a meeting between Indians and Police. Hungry Indians are more likely to join rebellions, so keep Indians hungry.” That seems to be Metis policy.

After one or two meetings with police scouts that led nowhere, the Indians finally gave up and went home hungry, but not before a store was looted and buildings set ablaze. The looting of Battleford didn’t last long, as Poundmaker put a stop to it. After most of the Cut Knife Indians had gone home, some looting and burning continued by Indian and Metis war parties. The local judge, Judge Rouleau, lost his fancy house to arson, and supplies were taken from the Hudson’s Bay store which was then burned to the ground. All this caused considerable alarm within the fort and confirmed what everyone feared, that it truly was an Indian uprising. I don’t suppose anyone here even knew that most of the Cut Knife Hill Indians had gone home and the bad behavior was mostly the actions of a few renegades. And yet, some Indians were truly on the war path. In the days that followed, Poundmaker ordered riders to round up and slaughter ranch cattle to feed his crowded camp. “What else could he do?” Adolphus asked. “You’ll do anything if your people are really hungry.” There were other incidents in the surrounding countryside that made those who were within the fort’s palisades happy that they had come into the fort.

I’ll stop writing now as two of Adolphus’s friends have arrived and I’d better be prepared to listen.

Sincerely and love to all,
Thomas

A Thirst Dance Threatens Rebellion

Adolphus told me a story this morning about an incident on Little Pine Reservation that happened a year before rebellion broke out at Duck Lake. Little Pine is the most westerly of the Battleford reservations and shares a boundary with Poundmaker. Here is what he told me:

In the year before the rebellion, Indians came to Little Pine from all over the river country to be at a Thirst Dance organized by Chiefs Big Bear and Poundmaker. Big Bear was supposed to be on his own reservation by this time, a reservation which had been set aside for him at Frog Lake, but he insisted that before going there he would visit his friends along the North Saskatchewan in Battleford country. He was the last Cree chief to sign Treaty Six and he did so only after a final search for buffalo south of the 'medicine line' failed to produce significant numbers. Back in Canada, his people had been existing on small handouts at Fort Walsh in the Cypress Hills. The fort was closed as this was the only way to get Big Bear to go to his assigned reservation. His people were in no condition to walk, but they had no choice.

There were many Indians and only a few policemen, so wily old Big Bear steered them in the direction of Little Pine, not Fort Pitt, north-east instead of north-west. He was an Indian good at getting his own way. The mounted police kept protesting, but Big Bear just ignored them. It was a hugely challenging walk for a half-starved population of all ages, but eventually they arrived at Little Pine.

Many government bureaucrats hated the idea of a thirst dance because it would bring hundreds of Indians together from their various reservations. Under the treaty, this was not supposed to happen. Indians get excited when they starve themselves and go without water and dance themselves into a state of exhaustion. The officials were nervous but they were badly outnumbered and weren't about to break it up by force. I was living at Bresaylor then and heard about it from my wife's uncle, a Cree elder who was there in the thick of it.