

FARQUHAR ALEXANDER EDGAR'S STORY — A MEMBER OF THE N.W.M.P. 1874-1880

As told by Les Edgar, in 1989

When I was in Passmore, B.C., in 1925, I used to visit with Uncle Alex in his cabin, most evenings. He told me some interesting stories about his trip across the plains and some of the adventures he had on the trip. (He was a member of the first contingent of N.W.M.P. to cross the Canadian prairies.)

One evening the stories kind of lagged and I said, "Uncle, did you ever shoot a man?" He said, "No, the only man I ever felt like shooting was another policeman." He went on to tell me the following story.

In 1879 a couple of Indians from a teepee encampment came to the police post and told the officer in charge that one of their party had eaten his mother-in-law, his wife, and their two children, and they wanted the police to do something about it.

My uncle and another policeman were sent out with orders to "bring the man in." They went out to the teepee encampment, where they were met by a member of the camp who pointed out the teepee the cannibal was in.

They had tied their horses to some brush, a couple of hundred yards away, and they went quietly up to the teepee, and peeked in the flap.

The Indian was a very big man. He was lying on a roll of hides, with a rifle lying across his leg and into the crook of his arm. He was sound asleep.

The two Mounties crept quietly away and made their plan of attack.

They both agreed that they would go quietly up to the teepee, Uncle ahead. He would go in first, throw the rifle to one side, and jump on the Indian. The other officer was to put the shackles on his feet and then the two of them would put the handcuffs on him, and then bring him in.

Uncle did his part and when he jumped on the Indian, to use his own words, "All hell broke loose!" He said he could throw the Indian, but he couldn't hold him down. He said he threw him three times, and he realized the big boy was too much for him and would wear him down, finally getting the best of Alex. So Uncle got his hand-cuffs and beat the Indian behind the ear until he knocked him out. Then he put the cuffs on him.

He picked up the rifle and went out to see what had happened to his partner.

He found his partner hiding over in the bushes where they had tied the horses. He said, "I felt like shooting that man!" I then asked if he turned him in? He said, "No, I just made sure I never went out with him again."

August 31, 1989. Kamloops, B.C.

OCTOBER 1962 MCLEAN'S MAGAZINE

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F.A. Edgar's Obituary (He apparently disliked "Farquhar" and went by several different names while in the west—see RCMP records below.)

The Nelson Daily News-Pg.10-Dec. 23, 1935

Frederick A. Edgar, One of the Originals of the Mounted Police and Pioneer of West, Passes On

Figured in the Riel Rebellion... Passed Away at Rossland Leaves Relatives in the District to Mourn Loss

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Culminating a long and eventful career, which was linked closely with the building of the Canadian west, Fredrick Alexander Edgar passed away at the home of his nephew, Edgar Jamieson of Rossland, at 2 o'clock, Sunday morning (Dec. 22, 1935).

Born at Lancaster, Glengarry County, Ontario, on June 1, 1846 of United Empire Loyalist stock, Mr. Edgar, at the age of 20, joined the ranks of volunteers organized to repel the Fenian raiders then menacing Canada. The following year, young Edgar traveled westward to Port Arthur, where he remained for several years, during which time he held the position of the first Chief of Police in that frontier town, and was acting in this capacity at the time of the Wolseley Expedition, sent to Fort Garry to quell the first Riel Rebellion. He often recalled when the 60th Rifles, after failing to meet the rebels, returned to Port Arthur, their fife-and-drum band echoing through the hills as it played "The British Grenadiers."

GOVERNMENT AGENT:

Following his term as Chief of Police at Port Arthur, he was appointed Government Agent among Ojibway Indians, and had charge of supplies going over the newly constructed "Dawson Trail" to Fort Garry, now Winnipeg.

The fall of 1873 found Mr. Edgar at Portage La Prairie, and later in the year at Fort Garry, where he spent the winter. "A" Troop of the recently organized Northwest Mounted Police had arrived at this point and here Mr. Edgar joined this force, which was under the command of the late Colonel Jarvis who passed away in Nelson in 1914.

When he donned the uniform of the Northwest Mounted Police, which he wore for six years, Mr. Edgar's adventures in the west really began. In that interval he took part in perilous marches across the plains, and had various experiences in his dealings with the Indians, and with the evaders of the law who exploited and preyed on them, whisky-traders, cattle and horse thieves and so on, and in later years could tell many thrilling days of the building of the Canadian west.

He was one of a party of six, under Major Belcher, who helped unload the Red River steamers, which brought additional Mounted Police and equipment, including horses, to Dufferin, Manitoba.

FAMOUS EXPEDITION:

In June 1874, the Mounted Police started on their famous expedition across the plains. At La Roche Percée, in Saskatchewan, "A" Troop, still under the command of the late Col. Jarvis, was detached from the main body and sent along the northern route to establish a police post at Fort Saskatchewan, now Edmonton. Mr. Edgar, however, was selected by the commanding officer, Colonel French, to accompany the main body of troops across the southern plains, traveling by way of Fort Qu'Appelle, Touchwood Hills, and Cypress Hills, as far west as the present city of Lethbridge. The eastern horses, with which they had been supplied, unaccustomed as they were to the changed environment, proved unfit for prairie travel, and the young Mr. Edgar often recalled the orders issued from headquarters at Ottawa, forbidding the killing of all horses. As a result of this order, they were often obliged to leave them, knowing that coyotes and wolves awaited to bring down and devour the exhausted animals. The story of this trip alone, of a monster heard of buffalo, estimated at 80,000, which they encountered, of storms, which twice almost wiped out the camp, would in itself make a saga of the Northwest Mounted Police.

POLICE POST NOW CALGARY:

Leaving what is now Lethbridge on their return trip, the force circled northward, passing the site of the present city of Calgary, where they established a Police Post under the command of an officer, named Brisebois. For a short period the post bore the name of this officer, but Colonel McLeod, whose name was written large in the annals of western Canada, changed it to Calgary, after his native home in Scotland.

Returning to Fort Garry at the close of this expedition, Mr. Edgar was placed in charge of the horses during the ensuing winter, and in the spring of '75, he was one of the twelve men chosen to escort General Smyth and his staff, who were on a tour of inspection of the prairies. Another member of the escort was the son of the novelist Charles Dickens.

Taking his discharge from the Mounted Police in 1880, Mr. Edgar returned to his old home in Ontario, via Fort Benton, down the Missouri River to St. Paul and Chicago, in which place signs of the great fire were still visible.

The call of the west, however, still proved too strong for his adventurous spirit and he soon returned, this time traveling through the United States to Butte, Montana, and making the last part of his journey by stagecoach. Here he worked as a carpenter for two years, earning the then princely wages of \$6.00 per day. This, however, did not continue as with the arrival of the railroad, wages dropped, and Mr. Edgar continued westward, working at various occupations until he arrived at Seattle, then a lumber camp, just growing to the status of a town. While here, he became a member of a U.S. Government crew engaged in installing a signal service line from Port Los Angeles to Seattle.

WORKED UNDER ONDERDONK:

The following years found him occupied in various capacities, working in a new dock at Victoria, employed on a construction crew under Onderdonk, who was rushing the far west link of the C.P.R. to the Burrard Inlet, and engaged in the first harbour survey at the new western port of Vancouver, then known as Gas Town. In connection with this latter project, he often remarked that he "threw the lead for every sounding we took."

He worked at various occupations on the C.P.R. with new experiences constantly building themselves into the pattern of his life, and at times taking part in perilous undertakings. In the '90s he was working along the Arrow Lakes with a party of engineers under "Sandy" Stewart, when orders were received to rush to Nelson and survey the C.P.R. line site before "Jim" Hill's Great Northern party arrived. They accomplished this, according to Mr. Edgar, and Hill's survey stopped just past what is known as Mountain Station.

SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE DIMINISHES:

As the years crept by, Mr. Edgar's adventures and his taste for them diminished. He spent his declining years at Passmore, in the Slocan Valley, at the home of his brother-in-law and sister, the late Mr. & Mrs. John Jamieson. Following the death of his brother-in-law in September of last, Mr. Edgar and his niece, Miss Ethel Jamieson, went to live with the former's nephew, Edgar Jamieson of Rossland, and it was there that he set foot on the road to the greatest adventure of all.

Mr. Edgar was unmarried. He is survived by his one sister, Mrs. Ellen McNaughton of Lancaster, Ont., and numerous nieces and nephews, among whom are Mrs. George A. Brown of Nelson, Miss Ethel Jamieson and Edgar Jamieson of Rossland, and Leslie Edgar of Chu Chua, B.C.

He was a member of the United Church.

Interment will take place Tuesday afternoon in the Jamieson family plot in the Nelson cemetery.

From the RCMP Historian, Jack White.

Thank you for your information on Fred (Farquhar Alexander) EDGAR.

You will first note difference in given names from my caption to those you gave. Often in early days, we find that persons joined the NWMP or RNWMP with one given name while their family insists on another and I have no real overall explanation. In any event, obviously the same person joined the NWMP as William Frederick Alexander EDGAR on March 24, 1874 and was given (Original Series) Regimental # 147. By 1878, the Regimental Numbers were so mixed up and so duplicated that the Force then renumbered all currently serving members over again from # 1 (New Series) and have carried on the new series to the present day. He was given New Series # 42. He was in the March West (1874) and served at Fort Brisebois (now Calgary) taking his discharge time served (on contract) on March 24, 1880. For his required good service of minimum three years he was granted Land Warrants 0192 & 0359. I do not know why he received two as each member was

to get one, so possibly the second was a replacement for lost document? In any event, the land warrant was good for 1/4 section of land. Some took up a farm and some sold their warrants to others. Additional to the foregoing, I know he was a volunteer in 1866 Fenian Raids, later Chief of Police at Port Arthur, Ontario, and then Indian Agent for the Ojibway. I had record that he died Dec. 22, 1935 at Rossland, B.C. Beyond the foregoing I can add nothing to what you have and the only variance I have is there is no record that he served in what is now Saskatchewan except for the time of the march through that area in 1874. Official record is that his western service was at what is now Calgary.

Thanks again for your information and interest.
Jack White