

William Bleasdel Cameron

*A Life of Writing and Adventure*



By Robert W. Hendriks

A finding aid for the Robert and Shirley Hendriks collection  
of William Bleasdel Cameron at the Thomas A. Edge  
Archives & Special Collections, Athabasca University

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Athabasca University 

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Athabasca University, 1 University Drive, Athabasca, Alberta T9S 3A3, Canada  
www.athabascau.ca

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Hendriks, Robert W., 1939-  
William Bleasdel Cameron : a life of writing and  
adventure / Robert W. Hendriks.

Includes a finding aid of the Robert and Shirley Hendriks collection  
of William Bleasdel Cameron held in the Thomas A. Edge  
Archives and Special Collections, Athabasca University.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-897425-32-9

1. Cameron, William Bleasdel, 1862-1951. 2. Frontier and pioneer  
life--Northwest, Canadian. 3. Northwest, Canadian--History--1870-1905.  
4. Journalists--Northwest, Canadian--Biography. I. Thomas A. Edge  
Archives and Special Collections II. Title.

PN4913.C35H45 2008 971.2'02092 C2008-906111-X

The brief excerpts on pages 8, 17, 28, 68, 119 and 136 are from the contents of the Robert  
and Shirley Hendriks collection of William Bleasdel Cameron.

Printed and bound by Athabasca University

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**The finding aid (DVD) for the Robert and Shirley Hendriks collection of William Bleasdel Cameron can be found in the back cover sleeve.**



## *Preface*

MY WIFE made me do it.

This may seem like a silly statement from a mature man with a mind of his own but it's true: Shirley gave me the final push to begin writing this biography of William Bleasdel (WB) Cameron. Well into my research and exchanging notes with two fellow historians, the late Margaret Nelson and also Keith Davidson, I was delighted to learn that they had recently been in touch with one of Cameron's daughters-in-law living in British Columbia, namely Elsie Cameron, asking for permission to reprint portions of Cameron's material in a local history book. After the death of her husband, Douglas, Elsie became custodian of a precious collection of letters, photographs and other documents once belonging to Cameron that Douglas had gathered while tidying up the estate after his father's death in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, in 1951. Douglas had placed this material into his father's battered old steamer trunk and shipped it to Montreal, where he and Elsie lived at the time. Elsie later moved to Lantzville, BC, taking the trunk with her. She approached her family, asking them to go through the contents and take whatever was of interest to them in memory of Cameron. That done, she placed the trunk in her closet. However, as the years went by she found it increasingly difficult to properly manage the materials and to allow access to the growing number of curious outsiders who had learned of them.

I was one of those outsiders, but with some major distinctions. First, Shirley and I live only five miles (eight kilometres) away from where Elsie's father-in-law was witness to a horrifying event that would form the basis of his claim to fame, the uprising at Frog Lake during the North-West Rebellion of 1885. Second, Shirley herself had heard Cameron speak at the official opening of the Elk Point Bridge. She could recall his voice, pitched high either from excitement or nervousness. Third, Shirley's grandmother had bought Cameron's old drugstore in Heinsburg for her home. Fourth, Shirley's father, Chester, had helped Cameron carry freight from the railway station to this small drugstore. When the time came to demolish the building, Shirley and I helped to tear it down, carefully removing the fir tongue-and-groove floorboards. We thought that someday they might be reusable, and so it was that these same boards now cover two of our living room walls.

I approached Elsie personally to see if she might have anything that would help me with the biography. Upon learning of our strong interest in her father-in-law, our connections to him and of how much progress we had made, she graciously bequeathed to us what material was left. This collection herein referred to as the Cameron collection granted me a highly detailed and sometimes personal look into

Cameron's life and formed the foundation for this work. In late 2007, Shirley and I were pleased to gift this material to Athabasca University as part of the Thomas A. Edge Archives & Special Collections. It is now called the Robert and Shirley Hendriks collection of William Bleasdel Cameron.

I was introduced to William Bleasdel Cameron five decades ago by a young student of mine named Henry. "Hey, mister, you ever heard of the Frog Lake Massacre?" His polite question was refreshing and broke the afternoon classroom doldrums. "No, Henry, I'm sorry I haven't." I didn't know where this was going to lead, because Henry thrived on storytelling, often pushing credibility into incredibility. "You know what? We've been there. Close to where we lived. And my dad knows the guy who was right there when all those people were killed at Frog Lake and he didn't get shot so he wrote a book about it!" I learned later that the book he referred to was Cameron's *Blood Red the Sun*. Henry's father did indeed know him, and in 1937 had helped carry freight from the Heinsburg railroad station to Cameron's newly opened drugstore perched partway up a North Saskatchewan River hill to which this small hamlet of Heinsburg clings. I then read the book with great interest, especially now that it had more relevance. (Henry, Shirley's brother, had since become my brother-in-law).

In 1991 I began intensive research, preparing to write an interpretive guidebook about the site at which nine settlers (some historians argue that it may have been more than nine), including two Oblate priests, were killed at the tiny settlement of Frog Lake on April 2, 1885, by militants within the band of Plains Cree Chief Big Bear. Located within easy reach of our home, we regularly explored the site. At the same time, I reviewed as much literature as I could get my hands on. In time, Cameron's favourite Frog Lake haunts became mine and Shirley's, but after reading R.H. (Rusty) Macdonald's *Eyewitness to History: William Bleasdel Cameron, Frontier Journalist*, I began focusing on Cameron himself. I felt there was far more to him than existing literature revealed. I also realized that memories of this wonderful writer of the early Canadian West were slowly disappearing into the mists of time. My wish has been to thoroughly explore his life, delving deeper into his character than anyone has previously done. Calgary historian and writer Thomas Flanagan has said that "the scholar's task is to discover human beings, not to create, debunk, or venerate icons."<sup>1</sup> This philosophy I have adopted. I wanted to know Cameron's motives for doing things the way he did. I also wanted to learn more about the people and the world he interacted with, because in many instances it is his reaction to those individuals and what was taking place around him that provides clues to his character. For the most part I believe I have accomplished that.

In a life history he wrote in 1948, Cameron's philosophy of life is apparent. "I have

never made a pile, never wanted to or expected to: there are things I consider much more valuable than money. Friendships for instance.”<sup>2</sup> Who did he consider to be good friends? “Among my intimates have been many men and women, if not all famous, all at least notable—Sam Steele, former Inspector of the N.W.M.P. and later Major General Sir Sam; Owen Wister, famous author of *The Virginian*, book, stage and screen play; Pauline Johnson, the Canadian Indian poetess; Ernest Seton Thompson (or Thompson Seton if you prefer, famous naturalist and yarn spinner); Irvin S. Cobb; Charlie Russell, famous cowboy artist of Montana; Bob Davis, noted New York writer and world traveler; and many other I do not recall.”<sup>3</sup> I can fill in for him. There was one of his brothers-in-law married to Cameron’s oldest sister, Isabelle, writer and historian Sir John George Bourinot, who became chief clerk of the House of Commons in 1880. In 1884, his book *Bourinot’s Rules* was published and still remains the authority on how members of Parliament should conduct themselves while in session. There was Charles Dickens’ son Francis, the NWMP inspector in charge of Fort Pitt at the time of the uprising, Chief Big Bear, Fort Pitt Hudson’s Bay Company Factor W.J. Maclean and his family, and Dr. A.S. Morton, University of Saskatchewan history professor. Morton hired Cameron to interview as many as he could of those who took part in the Rebellion. Less noble acquaintances included George Godin, also known as Kiskawasis, eventually jailed but never hung for murder. There was Imasees, son of Big Bear and prime instigator of the Frog Lake murders in 1885, and his notorious cohort Wandering Spirit, who fired the first of many fatal shots on that infamous morning. WB did indeed have many notable friends.

A natural wanderer, Cameron led us a merry chase. Adventuresome, curious and intelligent with a gypsy lifestyle, WB never stayed at any one place or with any one thing for very long, so certain segments of his life are shadowy. When trying to fill in those blanks, I’ve used secondary references. A good example is his alleged employment as a range rider and cook with the huge Cochrane Rancho Company in the Calgary area sometime in the time period of 1883 to 1884. Nowhere in the ranch records, payroll list or personal diary of Frank White, general manager at the time, did I find any reference to him. However, based on his letters I have no doubt that he was there, if only for a short time. A similar thing happened when researching the many categories in the Hudson’s Bay Company Archives for reference to him: there was nothing. It was as if he never existed at all. However, in a signed deposition, taken at Fort Pitt on August 4, 1885, WB clearly stated that “in the months of March and April last I was a clerk in the store of the Hudson’s Bay Company at Frog Lake and had been there from the first of the year.” Taken at the same time was the deposition of his former boss, James K. Simpson, who attested that WB had been a Company employee, so I have no doubt he worked for them.

Fortunately, Cameron left clues elsewhere. Early newspapermen kept track of who was in town, and P.G. Laurie, editor of Battleford's *Saskatchewan Herald*, was one of them. Laurie noted Cameron's presence shortly after his Battleford arrival in 1881 and many times later on. After the Frog Lake troubles, Cameron was involved with American publications and now carried his own byline, so his name became very traceable. Then, after publishing *The War Trail of Big Bear* in 1926, he was better known yet. By now a bit of a celebrity and always a storyteller, his favourite pastime was to drop in on local newspaper offices around the country, visiting with and offering interviews to the editors, who were generally quite happy to take him up on his offer. Cameron also travelled around the West giving talks, many of them reviewed by the local papers, which he clipped out and pasted in a scrapbook that forms part of the collection. Then there are his letters, many of them also in the collection. Fortunately, he was in the habit of making carbon copies that helped tremendously. Thus, for the most part, his life has been revealed.

I find it distressing that such a remarkable man, William Bleasdell Cameron, spent his final years living in a cold, drafty room in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, in failing health, eating poorly, still hammering out what were now fading memories onto cheap newsprint with his battered typewriter, hoping that someone, anyone, would buy his stories. In March 1951, ill from pneumonia, he died nearly alone in the Meadow Lake Hospital, work unfinished, much of it still unpublished, with only the clothes on his back and \$62 in the local bank, truly a sad ending to a man who contributed so greatly to Canadian history.

William Bleasdell Cameron, this work is my salute.

## *Acknowledgements*

I'VE ATTEMPTED to acknowledge the many who contributed to this project. Please forgive me if I've overlooked anyone as it was unintentional.

To begin with, I would like to graciously thank the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation for its ample research grant, which enabled me to do things I would never otherwise have been able to do. I would also like to thank Athabasca University, its president, Dr. Frits Pannekoek, University Archivist Karen Langley, her summer student Dayna Kwasney and Heritage Resources Management Coordinator Joe Rosich for recognizing the historical significance of this biography and making it publicly available electronically and in print. Jennifer Luckay and the Communication & Creative Services department also deserve high praise for the layout and design of this book.

There is the late Elsie Cameron, with whom we spent many hours talking about WB, her family and things in general. Without her donation of the Cameron collection, this work would have been much more difficult and incomplete. Her wish, and mine, was to have the biography completed before her passing, but it was not to be so. At least she was able to peruse some of my preliminary work before her death.

There are four individuals who officially endorsed my project: Dr. Sarah Carter, at that time with the Department of History, University of Calgary; Dr. Bill Waiser, Department of History, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon; Doug Light, Calgary historian and past Supervisor of Collections, Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary; and, last but not least, Jim Cameron of Parksville, BC, a grandson of William Bleasdel Cameron. Jim and his wife, Ann, were wonderful, helping me so much while acting as gracious hosts on my research trip to Parksville. Each of you strongly believed that what I intended to do had historical value, making it all the more worthwhile.

Four historians interested in Cameron had previously written about him, their fine work providing me with guidance, useful information and inspiration to continue the search in greater depth. They are Hugh Dempsey for his foreword in *Blood Red the Sun*, published in 1977; the late R.H. (Rusty) Macdonald, senior writer for the *Western Producer*, who prepared *Eyewitness to History: William Bleasdel Cameron, Frontier Journalist* in 1985 (edited by Dempsey); Harry Prest of what is now Augustana College in Camrose, Alberta, for his article about Cameron in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography—Writers Before 1890*; and finally Doug Light, who wrote "A Summary of the Life of William Bleasdel Cameron," which appeared in Don Light, Ross Innes and Doug Light's *Now and Then*, produced in 1998 by the

Battlefords North West Historical Society. Each offered many details and tidbits, collectively providing me with innumerable facts and four different perspectives. Light and Macdonald personally knew WB and thereby were able to project a more intimate feeling about Cameron in their work. Macdonald had also contacted and interviewed many Cameron family members, while also having access to Elsie Cameron's collection, adding an additional touch of colour. Doug Light was also very gracious in providing me with many useful details, anecdotes and written material. Keith Davidson offered me selections from his extensive photographic collection. All this material was of great value to me.

I've hunted far and wide for information about Cameron. Most sources are listed in the bibliography, but these in turn led me further afield, sometimes to the most obscure people and places. As an example, a short note from Eileen Lacoursiere of Paynton, Saskatchewan, a John Pritchard descendent, told me a few things I had asked about, while also revealing the somewhat unflattering opinions the later generations of Pritchards have about Cameron, facts that I thought were important to the book. In another case, a connection of the someone-who-knew-someone-else category tipped me off about Cameron descendents unknown to the Cameron family in BC, facts based on highly accurate Roman Catholic parish records. But I'm afraid I collected little from First Nations sources; I had hoped that I would be able to obtain more insight about Cameron from their perspective. Most of the Elders who would have known him are gone now, and those who did know him added little to what I already knew. I also learned that their reluctance to talk about the troubles of 1885 at Frog Lake is based on fear and distrust of the government, a lingering, strong belief that what they say may be used against them someday.

For me it has been a pleasure to experience the hard work and attention to detail that the highly accomplished authors and historians mentioned above regard as everyday tasks. Even though I had already done some historical writing, during this undertaking I have grown to appreciate and respect the hard work involved in projects such as this.

I also wish to acknowledge Lorne Brown of the Heinsburg Community School, who did a fine job of reviewing this work while assisting me in smoothing out some rough spots. It has been wonderful and enlightening to work with Trish Morgan while she did the final edit of this manuscript. Trish patiently and most thoroughly worked her way through the document, skilfully leaving my voice intact while simultaneously fact checking and introducing numerous improvements. I'm truly grateful for her skill.

Finally, I cannot say enough about my wife, Shirley, who has worked side by side with me in many aspects of the research. She made notes from stacks of archival

material too great for me to handle, offered encouragement, suggestions, and sometimes insights into things that I either did not see or had just overlooked, and helped me with the flow of the text. Thank you, Shirley, for your kindness.

Individuals and institutions offering help are listed below in no particular order. To you I offer my sincere gratitude.

**British Columbia:** Don Klancher, Kamloops; and Marlie Wasson, Abbotsford.

**Alberta:** Monika McNabb (Alberta Historical Resources Foundation) and Alex Macdonald, both of Edmonton; Ross Innes, Medicine Hat; Donny White and David Stewart, Medicine Hat Museum (now called the Esplanade Museum); Keith Davidson and Rusty Williams, both of Lloydminster; Doug Light, Bill Warwick, Jim Nesbitt, Judy Hamill (then with *Daybreak Alberta*, CBC Calgary), Nancy Millar and RCMP Inspector (Ret.) Gordon Perry, all of Calgary; Lindsay Moore, Jim Bowman, Camille Owen and Barbara Greendale of the Glenbow Museum and Archives; Andrew Waller of the University of Calgary Library; Jean Inman, Fred Brimacombe, Todd Kuehn, Robert Maggs, Art Boggs, Donna Jones (Vermilion Public Library) and Terry Waldorf, all of Vermilion; Fred and Ethel Hicks and the Seal family of Vegreville; William Desjarlais of Fishing Lake; John Ibbotson of Drayton Valley; D.L. Cameron and Lena (Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies) and Estelle Guthro (Buffalo Nations Luxton Museum), all of Banff; Marvin Bjornstad, Daphne Schnurer (Elk Point Municipal Library), Ron Onushko, and Steve Andrishak, all of Elk Point; Bob Stiles, Tom MacPhail, Cliff MacLean, Elton Barlow, Carol Meidinger, and Joel and Kathy Bulger, all of Bassano; Michael Dawe and Garth Clarke, Red Deer and District Museum (now called the Red Deer Museum + Art Gallery), of Red Deer; Arthur and Annie Stanley, Dewey Dion and Carol Dion, all of Frog Lake; Jamie Nesbitt, Brooks; Linda Hagen, Alberta College of Pharmacists, Edmonton; Marilyn Mol, Athabasca Archives, Athabasca; the Stockmen's Memorial Foundation, Cochrane; and Greg Ellis (Galt Museum & Archives) of Lethbridge.

**Saskatchewan:** Tracey Kyrylchuk, Fillmore; Eileen Lacoursiere, Paynton; Carmen Harry and Bill Mackay, RCMP Museum (now called the RCMP Heritage Centre), Debbie Unger and Lynette Evans (Saskatchewan Wheat Pool), all of Regina; Rose and Ernest Fleury, Lawrence and Darlene Mullis, and Celine Perillat (Duck Lake Interpretive Centre), all of Duck Lake; Nadine Charabin, Reference Archivist, Saskatchewan Archives Board, Saskatoon; Catherine Holmes, Saskatchewan Archives Board, Regina; Cheryl Dodds, Grace Bowerman, Jacqueline Lazar, Howard Brown, Marlene and Tom Miller, Russ Nelson and Ron Tetz, all of Meadow Lake; Willy Bobier of Rapid View; and Ed Stennett of Loon Lake.

**Manitoba:** Pat Cormack and Yvonne Snider-Nighswander (Hudson's Bay Company Archives), Winnipeg; and Warren Cariou, University of Manitoba.

**Ontario:** The late Marion Baker, the Trent Port Historical Society, and the Reverend Paul Kompass, St. George's Anglican Church, both of Trenton; Betty Savich, Toronto; Doug Sumner, Orillia; Thelma Coulter (7th Town Historical Society), Ameliasburgh; Michael MacDonald (Library and Archives Canada) and Margaret Evans (RCMP Historical Division), both of Ottawa; Ken Johnson of Rainy River; and Vaughan Smith of Kincardine.

**Quebec:** Nora Hague (Chief Archivist, McCord Museum, McGill University) of Montreal.

## *Author's Notes*

IT SEEMED best to present this venturesome fellow's life as a continuum of events, large and small, significant and insignificant, in chronological order. Except for the occasional diversion, this has been achieved.

William Bleasdel Cameron was his given name, and he used it for a brief time in earlier writing. Occasionally, historians have also referred to him as Bleasdel. However, his close family used different terms of address for him. His wife, Minnie, called him Willie; his sisters and mother used Billie; some friends called him Bill; and his daughters-in-law, Elsie and Jessie, among others, consistently called him Mr. Cameron. But the name most of the present Cameron family prefer is WB, the form I chose for this book.

Folklore about the Frog Lake troubles and about WB himself often surfaces. How much is true and how much is not is often hard to judge, but something passed on to me by a very meticulous Edmonton historian and writer, Allen Ronaghan, provided guidance. He stated that folklore about some event or person is often based on an element of truth, however trivial it might seem, and is not to be overlooked. I have adopted that philosophy in dealing with some of the more murky elements of WB's life.

Occasionally in the pages that follow, I have provided rough currency conversions to provide readers with an idea of historical dollar values. The Bank of Canada provides such information beginning in 1914; for dollar figures prior to that date, I offer currency conversions based on the American dollar.<sup>1</sup> Thus, here are some baseline dollar values:

- One dollar in 1880 is now worth approximately \$22.
- One dollar in 1940 is now worth approximately \$14.

For example, readers will note that Sir Cecil Denny's estate paid WB \$700 in 1939 to edit and arrange *The Law Marches West*. Today's equivalent would be over \$10,000.

In the coming pages (see *In Search of WB*), Jim Cameron states that "the search is complete" in discovering his grandfather. While I have presented a very comprehensive picture of WB, there are still questions yet unanswered, along with a few mysteries that I was unable to solve. My hope is that an inquisitive family member or even another outsider like me will attempt to close the remaining gaps.

In the Cameron collection are about 140 stories<sup>2</sup> written by WB over a sixty-year time period, some short, some long, but all very interesting. About half were published from about 1892 to 1950, but except for the twenty-five stories included

in Rusty Macdonald's *Eyewitness to History: William Bleasdel Cameron, Frontier Journalist*, the remainder have never been to print. My next goal is to make sure they are.

And now perhaps a note about the author is in order. Home for me during my school years was cowboy country in eastern Alberta, notably Amisk, Hughenden and Czar. But in the five decades that have passed after graduation from Central High School in Hughenden, home has been in many other places dictated by my work. My main occupation was thirty years in public school education within Alberta as a teacher, school administrator and, prior to my retirement in 1991, a member of the central office staff in what was then the Wainwright School Division, helping develop the Central East Distance Education Consortium (CEDEC) in central east Alberta. Within the larger time span I obtained a bachelor's degree in education (B.Ed.) and later took postgraduate studies at San Diego State University in California. Also squeezed into those fifty years were basic RCAF aircrew training, an amateur radio licence (my station call letters are VE6AGT) and a private pilot's licence, which I used to accumulate about five hundred hours of flying time. I also have owned and operated a small senior's newspaper, the *Silver Trumpet*; written, produced and hosted a radio show focusing on seniors' issues, broadcast from CKEY (Key 83) in Wainwright; and I continue volunteer work with the Heinsburg Community Club. I have authored a number of short historical papers, some of them published. My writing includes another published biography (co-authored with my wife, Shirley Hendriks, and Frank Squires), about one of Lloydminster's first jewellers titled *This Is My Story, This Is My Song* (Ross Lake Publishing, 1996, ISBN 0-9698577-1-3).

My earlier years spent within view of the Neutral Hills, an area of big farms and bigger ranches but once home to numerous buffalo herds and dotted with campsites as First Peoples trailed their food supply, led me to an informal study of local history. Exciting were the times when I joined thirsty local ranchers, some of them pioneers, gathered at their favourite watering holes. They spun fascinating tales of Aboriginal teepee rings and mysterious graves up in the hills on their land, of buried guns and of tin cans full of money, the bank for old-timers who lived far from such institutions. As an evening wore on, their voices rising, their cheeks reddening, their eyes getting wider, the number of graves "in them hills" multiplied and the tin can bank simply would not hold any more precious coins and began to overflow. These same roughshod men and kindly women became my teachers of historical archaeology and anthropology, introducing me to early Aboriginal culture on pleasant Sunday "arrowhead hunts" in the numerous cactus-peppered sandy blowouts on hilly pastureland around Sounding Lake, a hobby now curtailed by today's necessary but restrictive heritage protection laws. They also showed me organized rock piles on hilltops and rock piles in a line, where such unnatural

anomalies should not be and which were obviously created by the hand of early humans. Also interested in the North-West Rebellion, my cowboy-booted partners and I drove for hours over dusty, gravelled roads to see where the Battle of Cut Knife Hill took place in 1885. On our spring afternoon jaunt over rocky hill and through muddy dale, we never did see any rifle pits or find any guns or bullets, but we left the area satisfied. It was not until forty years later that I found out that the directions one of the friendly local Cree, perhaps a member of the Tootoosis or Yellow Mud Blanket family, had given to us “strangers from the south” in fact had sent us a good distance away in the wrong direction, in a small British-built Vauxhall sedan on trails over which he would not even run a wagon. So it’s not surprising that among my many hobbies is that of investigating sites related to the 1885 North-West Rebellion, while promoting further development of some of them. I am also learning to use watercolours to paint my interpretation of what these places might have looked like in times past, recreating scenes painted by Paul Kane, among other early artists. Meanwhile, I try my hand at stone toolmaking (lithic technology) practised by the early peoples, who crafted superb projectile points such as arrows and hammerheads. And, for a change, I go metal detecting, always on the lookout for that elusive precious coin or gold ring, or delve into ethnic cooking, favouring East Indian, Chinese, and Malaysian fare, filling the kitchen with exotic and wonderful smells.

Shirley (née Botting), my wife for forty-six years, and I call the Lakeland part of Alberta home, living next door to Whitney Lakes Provincial Park, five miles (eight kilometres) north of Heinsburg. With all these activities and hobbies, plus sharing in the lives of our two children, Deanna and Rob, four grandchildren and one great-grandchild, life is anything but boring.



## *In Search of WB*

HOW DO you find and know a grandfather who has been dead for over fifty years, and was born before the Fathers of Confederation sat down to draft the British North America Act for the Dominion of Canada in 1867?

My grandfather, William Bleasdell Cameron, visited our family home on Sixth Avenue in Squamish, BC, twice, once in 1946 and again two years later in 1948. My older brother, Ross, and I were the only children of our family to have met him. My brother Gordon and sister, Elaine, were not yet born. Two fading black and white photographs remain from the 1948 visit. In one, at two years old I am cradled in his aging arms. In the other, he poses with my father, Owen. For most of their lives their likeness of character prevented the closeness that is essential between father and son. However, my mother later told me that they had talked well into the night. It was the last time any of my family saw him alive.

He was better known to the family of his second son, Douglas, who was with him when he died a lonely death in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, in the late winter of 1951. The affection of the father was bestowed on Douglas, who WB likely saw as the stable family man that WB could never be. My grandmother, Mary Maude, was also cared for in her late years by Douglas' family in Montreal.

While most of my grandfather's belongings were lost in a fire prior to his death, Douglas' family kept what remained of WB's effects in an old steamer trunk. It was not until 1974, after the family moved west to Vancouver Island, that members of my family were able to view the contents of the trunk and begin to understand the history and western Canadian lore that WB took to his grave. The trunk was full of letters to friends such as Owen Wister and Charles M. Russell, short stories and photographs of majestic, granite-faced Aboriginal peoples of the Prairies.

My personal search for WB had begun in my teens when I first read *Blood Red the Sun*, the gripping account of his survival of the massacre of the white settlers at Frog Lake, Alberta, on April 2, 1885, but once the contents of the trunk were revealed, my interest in his life and times was set.

In 1985, I had the opportunity to travel to his birthplace when I was working in Ottawa. My wife, Ann, and I set off to Trenton, Ontario, where he spent his youth. Ann, although born in England, had lived in Trenton in the 1960s as her father was stationed there in the RCAF.

In one of those circumstances that make you understand fate, we discovered that Ann had lived across the street from the church and beside the rectory where WB was born, and had played on the same grassy lawn as WB had a century earlier.

Later that year, more information about WB was revealed in a book of my grandfather's short stories, *Eyewitness to History*, published by Rusty Macdonald, the noted western Canadian historian and author. My sister, Elaine, who also had a keen interest in WB's life, acted on behalf of the family and assisted Rusty in the legal work for the publication. The material Macdonald wrote in this book to accompany the short stories provided more fascinating detail of his life in Canada's West. With this publication, the shadow that was WB began to take more shape.

In 1994, my Aunt Elsie was approached by Robert W. Hendriks, a retired educator with a passion for western Canadian history. Bob was interested in writing a biography of WB, and he inquired about obtaining access to the items contained in the trunk. Elsie had always felt that something meaningful should be done with the material, so she made the decision to turn the information over to Bob so he could tell WB's story.

In September 2001, Ann and I decided it was time to continue the search for WB, so we planned a trip to Saskatchewan and Alberta to trace his steps that had grown cold over many winters. We toured the RCMP Museum (now called the RCMP Heritage Centre) in Regina, where he was curator for a time, and viewed some materials donated to the museum, but we met no one who knew him. North of Fort Qu'Appelle, we stopped beside the road north at a historic site, and walked the hundred-yard (roughly ninety-metre) rutted remnant of the Red River ox cart trail that led him northwest in 1881.

From there we drove on to Batoche, which was the centre of the North-West Rebellion of 1885. We wandered over the remains of the Metis settlement and followed the wagon trail down to the ford of the South Saskatchewan River where WB may have rafted during his trading days. The Metis at Batoche were led in the Rebellion by Gabriel Dumont.

In another twist of fate, in the late 1970s my brother Gordon and I, while working as partners in a logging camp on the remote coast of British Columbia, met and became good friends with one of the loggers, Ambrose Dumont. Ambrose's great-grandfather was Isodore Dumont, brother of Gabriel and the first Metis to fall during the Battle at Duck Lake. Ambrose was married to Cecile Marie, granddaughter of Francois Dufresne, who was captured at Fort Pitt and held captive in Chief Big Bear's camp with WB. He joined WB in the escape at Frenchman's Butte. Mary was also related to Chief Poundmaker, the war chief of the Plains Cree band that would play such a large role in my grandfather's life.

Our trail led us to, but grew cold at, Meadow Lake, where we visited WB's grave. The granite headstone is inscribed with the words "G. Scout, William B. Cameron." We searched unsuccessfully for someone who might have known him, or could

guide us to his final place of lodging. A clerk at the town hall told us that her father was buried beside WB, but could add little of any new information. She referred us to a local historian who was curator of the Meadow Lake Museum. Although the museum was closed for the season, she was kind enough to allow us a tour, but we found no evidence of WB's presence in the area.

At an impasse, we called my Aunt Elsie to find out where Bob Hendriks lived. We were surprised and delighted to learn that Bob lived near Frog Lake, and knew that it was time to visit him and complete our journey.

The next morning we met Bob and his wife, Shirley, at the site of the Frog Lake uprising. Bob is an open and friendly man who quickly made us feel welcome as we toured the scene of the crucible of my grandfather's life. Under Bob's expert guidance, the site came alive on the bright, sunny morning. An iron cross on a small hill, erected in memory of the two Oblate priests killed, stood near the spot where the first victim, sub-Indian agent Thomas Quinn, "the Sioux Speaker," dropped dead from a shot fired at him point blank by Wandering Spirit.

Bob led us to a dugout grown over with weeds and prairie grass that was all that remained of WB's small Hudson's Bay post. WB was in the post tending to the request of Miserable Man for a blanket when the first shots rang out in the clearing nearby. Bob led us to the trail that WB, protected by two Cree women, used to escape the terror that was unfolding in the settlement. The women led him to the village a mile (a kilometre and a half) away. He was held captive in the camp for two months, protected by Metis friends and Woods Cree band members.

Through our visit and subsequent meetings with Bob and Shirley, our confidence grew that WB's materials were in good hands as Bob shared his obvious love and passion for his subject with us. A treasure given to us by Bob and Shirley is a scratchy CBC radio recording from 1950 of an elderly WB speaking at the opening a new bridge at Elk Creek in northern Alberta. His disembodied voice is high-pitched and frail, but the words are spoken with the simple eloquence of a natural storyteller.

And now, for me, and I hope for my family, the search is complete, the shadow has taken form and colour. The story is well told, and my family and our children will know more about and better understand the man we never knew. The family is grateful to Robert and Shirley Hendriks for bringing life to my grandfather and providing us with a full and complete picture of a complex and interesting man.

—Jim Cameron, grandson of William Bleasdel Cameron  
Parksville, BC, March 2004



1

*Youthful Dreams, Liver Pills  
and a Pipe Bag  
1862–1881*

*THE EVOLUTION of Trenton: 1813-1913*, published in 1913 by Thomas Jarrett, notes that a bad flu epidemic was rampant in Trenton, Canada West, at the time William Bleasdell (WB) Cameron was born, July 26, 1862. Fortunately, the Cameron family seems to have escaped its ravages. It was a home birth as there was no hospital in Trenton at the time, likely attended by Dr. H.W. Day, one of the town's earliest doctors with wide-ranging responsibilities in the area. His advertisement in the *Trenton Courier* of February 18, 1869, reads "Dr. H.W. Day, MD, Physician Surgeon and Accoucheur—also Coroner for [counties of] Northumberland Durham Hastings." The word *accoucheur* was a term then used for an obstetrician.

The Trenton that WB was born into was old even then, settled as early as 1790. About 100 miles (160 kilometres) east of Toronto, squeezed in between the mainland (Quinte West) and a peninsula projecting into Lake Ontario called Prince Edward County, is the Bay of Quinte. Flowing into the bay from the north is the Trent River. WB's grandfather, the Reverend Canon William Bleasdell, himself quite a historian, wrote in 1879 that "the spot from whence Samuel de Champlain first beheld the Bay of Quinte with its beautiful shores and indentation is now the site of the thriving village of Trenton, incorporated in 1853, also as a port of entry, and situated . . . at the confluence of the River Trent with the aforesaid bay, and shortly to be incorporated in to a town."<sup>1</sup> At first the main inhabitants were the Mississauga Indians but soon after the American Revolution, the area began filling up with Loyalist settlers from the south, among them ex-soldiers, ex-slaves and Aborigines loyal to the Crown,

including Joseph Brant, the controversial Mohawk chief who had just fought with the British, and his cousin Isaac Brant. Following them were the British and other European immigrants seeking a new life in a new land. Thus, WB would have grown up amid considerable diversity among the Trenton-area population. He would have become accustomed to diversity in industry as well. Lumbering was a huge business in which many, including WB's father, were involved. Vast quantities of white pine, oak and elm logged out from the forests around the Moira River and Moira Lake north of Trenton were floated down the Trent River to mills located near its mouth to be boomed as saw logs, or squared up in the mills, then floated out of the bay and into the St. Lawrence River on their way to Quebec markets. Not far from WB's home, down on the bay, was the giant Gilmour Door and Woodworking Factory established in 1852. Early photographs show wood smoke rising from its two tall stacks, while inside one can imagine hearing the mill's saws and planers howling as they shaped door sashes and window frames. To the east, up the bay, heavy barges filled with iron ore and locally manufactured furniture bound for the United States were usually scattered across the horizon.

In early Trenton wood was a cheap and abundant building material, so much of the town was built with it. But it was flammable, causing a number of fires, bad enough that the town council encouraged builders to use brick or stone. A survey taken by the town in 1866 showed that there were only three brick houses in Trenton, one of them being that of WB's grandfather, Reverend William Bleasdel, but before long many of the town's new structures used brick or stone in at least part of the construction. Today's visitors to Ontario are impressed with the number of vintage brick buildings still remaining, fully restored and still in use, such as Trenton's Town Hall.

Being close to Lake Ontario, Trenton exhibited a maritime flavour, a lifestyle that WB in time would abandon. One photograph in *The Evolution of Trenton* shows expensive yachts and white sailboats navigating back and forth on the Bay of Quinte. The annual summer regatta engaged countless boats from Trenton and also from neighbouring counties in their race for the grand prize. Among my numerous references for this biography were several of Trenton's earliest newspapers on microfilm, full of interesting items and advertisements. The *Trenton Courier* frequently carried advertising for Armstrong's Store and the Palace Restaurant promoting "fresh oysters." An 1867 *Courier* notice announces "a moonlight excursion . . . There will be a band and also a quadrille band. The steamer leaves Austin's Wharf at 6 o'clock sharp."<sup>2</sup> This would be one of the little steamers that puffed back and forth between Trenton's docks to nearby Twelve O'clock Point Park, carrying happy holiday-makers.

As cultured as Trenton might have been in WB's time, it still had a backwoods tinge as revealed in a column of the *Trenton Courier*. William Hinde, inspector for the Board of Health, declared that "there were too many pigs being raised within the town limits." Hinde also reported that "there were 45 dirty privies and 60 dirty yards. All have been ordered to clean them up."<sup>3</sup>

It seems unlikely that WB's Victorian brick home located on Byron Street in east Trenton would have been included in Hinde's list. Extant photographs show it to be a very impressive two-storey brick house, gabled front and back with a number of windows.<sup>4</sup> Locally it was known as the old Gill house, built in the mid-1860s and once belonging to the Gill family, who numbered among Trenton's earliest residents.<sup>5</sup> Directly across the street was St. George's Anglican Church, in the pastoral charge of WB's grandfather Bleasdel.<sup>6</sup>

Not much is known about WB's father, John Cameron, a Belleville lumberman. He was a forty-year-old widower when he married Agnes Emma Bleasdel, considered a spinster then in her late twenties, in Trenton on September 19, 1861, in her father's Anglican Church. John is a shadowy figure, leaving few clues, but it seems that his relationship with WB may have been strained. If appearances are indicative, John could have been a tough taskmaster. The single cabinet photograph of John in the collection, taken by Photographer to the Queen William Notman in Montreal in 1863, portrays a tall, stern-looking fellow with full mutton chop whiskers fashionably dressed in a black frock coat and holding a top hat in his right hand. His pale eyes are set close together and his wide mouth is turned down at the corners. One has to be cautious in making judgements based on a single photograph, of course, and also about father-son relationships in Victorian times. The patriarch was the absolute authority in the household, free to use whatever disciplinary means he thought fitting to mould his children. Today, many of these methods would be considered child abuse. In all of WB's available correspondence, he mentions his father only once, in a letter to his friend Norman K. Luxton.<sup>7</sup> While discussing guns and hunting, WB notes that he used to be a good shot even in his younger days in Ontario, "but I would be late [getting home] sometimes. I was scared of my dad, a six foot Glengarry lumberman who used to tan my hide with a horsewhip which took the edge off my enjoyment."<sup>8</sup> WB reveals that his father died when he was just a boy,<sup>9</sup> possibly as early as 1875.<sup>10</sup> Trenton census information tells us that Agnes Emma was a widow by 1881. There are suggestions that things did not go well for John's business and that it was destroyed by fire. R.H. (Rusty) Macdonald hints that John may have committed suicide, perhaps because of this tragedy.<sup>11</sup> Something did happen to the family fortune, because Agnes Emma and WB's three sisters, Isabelle, Agnes and Maude, relocated to Toronto in the early 1880s. We also find WB's younger brother, Charles, had moved west by 1883 to be with WB.

More is known about WB's mother, Agnes Emma Bleasdell, because her father, the Reverend, was very well known in Trenton as the Deacon of St. George's Anglican Church. Agnes Emma, the first to be born into the Bleasdell family, is portrayed in a beautiful photograph taken by J.H. Brown in Trenton when she was in her thirties, about the time WB started school. The photograph shows a demure, thin-lipped woman with a long nose like her mother. Her dark hair is braided and loosely piled high upon her small head. From her ears dangle long earrings, and a ruffled white collar is visible above a dark dress. Records tell us that she was resourceful, well educated and persuasive. Apparently Toronto did not work out, because in 1890 she and the two younger girls headed for the wilderness of the North-West Territories (NWT), living for a short time with WB on his homestead at Duck Lake, now part of Saskatchewan, while trying to re-establish her life.

WB's parents must have been very concerned when WB lost an eye at age three. Many people did not even know that WB had only one good eye, his left one, and had been wearing a glass eye for most of his life. That is a credit to prosthesis makers of the time. He confides to Norman Luxton: "You know I've only had one eye all these years. I was hit by a dart shot by another young imp. Mother never forgave that guy. I was very small then . . . I fought against the chloroform the specialists used [to sedate me] to try to save the eye but with no luck."<sup>12</sup> Not much is known about who attended WB after this unfortunate accident in 1865. However, early Trenton records tell us that Dr. H.W. Day<sup>13</sup> still had a medical practice at that time, holding clinics in his home on Ford Street.<sup>14</sup> It is highly likely that he was at least one of the doctors who tried to save the little fellow's sight. Although I have found nothing about fitting WB with an artificial eye, Day probably referred the Camerons to specialists in a larger centre, likely Toronto. The prosthetic eye would have been expensive.

Lack of one eye bothered WB into his later years. In a letter to his son Douglas he apologizes for not writing sooner. "As a matter of fact I haven't the capacity to turn out work like I used to years ago. I can't put in the hours at the typewriter or with a pen, work[ing] untiringly all night very often and seldom quit[ting] before three or four in the morning as of yore. I get tired and sleepy after time but it is due I believe in great part to my eyes. Of course I've never had but one (since I was about three) but it has served me pretty well. But while my sight for distance is good enough, for reading and writing it is not so good. However, if it doesn't bother me any more than it has so far, I shouldn't complain."<sup>15</sup> Given WB's often poor working conditions, readers may wonder how that one eye lasted as long as it did.<sup>16</sup> There is evidence of his sight handicap in photographs taken with his collapsible Kodak camera—he frequently aimed the camera high, snapping lots of sky but often little of the subject.

WB was very close to his maternal grandfather, William Bleasdel, admiring him greatly. I think that Bleasdel was a powerful guiding light to young Cameron, offering not only spiritual guidance but a near perfect role model with his words of encouragement, his zest for life and his strong motivation. He was British, a Lancashireman, whose father was a descendent of Sir Thomas Tyldesley, a gallant commander in the service of both Kings Charles I and Charles II. A nicely vignettted photo taken of him in later years portrays a kindly looking man wearing oval-shaped glasses and sporting long greying chin whiskers, his black coat buttoned up to the neck. Born into the cotton manufacturing industry of northwest England, he knew wealth but also the hard work that went into obtaining it, therefore choosing to be a teacher and eventually an ordained Anglican priest, a graduate of the esteemed Trinity College Dublin. Reverend Bleasdel was so exemplary in his work that he was called by the Diocese of Toronto to serve in Canada. Arriving in 1848, he was soon Rector of St. George's Church in the newly formed parish of Port Trent, later becoming Trenton.

His accomplishments in the forty-one years he served the overwhelmingly English parishioners around Trenton are too numerous to cover here, but a few need mentioning as they are relevant to his grandson William Bleasdel. According to Trenton historian Thomas Jarrett, "for some years St. George's Church was the only sacred edifice where religious services were held, and its old and pretty burying ground around the building itself contains the remains of most of the old inhabitants and of those who fell victim to the [flu] epidemic of 1862."<sup>17</sup> He was also an examiner for public school teachers in the County of Hastings and a member of the Trenton School Board, ensuring that quality education would be provided to the children in his area. Bleasdel, a Mason, appeared on the honour roll of Trent Lodge #38. In time his grandson would also become a member. A most suitable quote concerning the Reverend appears in a book published in 1903 called *Pioneer Life on the Bay of Quinte*, demonstrating that he adopted a much broader view of the world than most of his colleagues, who were very rigid in their thinking. "His mind was stored with geology, botany, entomology, conchology and astronomy; and when, from time to time, he took a furlough from ministerial work, it was only to search for specimens of interest to the Geological Society of England. His papers were always well received and read with the greatest interest by that Society, and his lectures, which many remember, always displayed a thorough knowledge of and acquaintance with the subject he had in hand. He was a man of wonderful knowledge, and considered an authority in every department of learning."<sup>18</sup> I'm certain that many of his philosophies rubbed off on WB. Sad was the day when the Reverend Canon William Bleasdel died, on August 11, 1889.<sup>19</sup> His cremated remains were placed in a vault under the chancel. The Reverend Paul Kompass,

pastor of St. George's Anglican Church until his retirement in 2002, described the vault. "It is simply in the crawl space beneath the floor of the church encased in a concrete vault. We affectionately refer to the area in the cellar as Canon Bleasdel's office. The lounge area under the church where a lot of small group ministry takes place is called the Bleasdel Lounge."<sup>20</sup>

St. George's Church, built in 1846, deserves special mention as it was so much a part of Reverend Bleasdel's life, and a spiritual home to WB for the first nineteen years of his life. Gothic in design and constructed of local rough-hewn limestone, the church resembles many of the classic cathedrals of Europe, soaring high with five buttresses on each of its outer walls and with tall narrow arched windows filled with stained glass separating each buttress. This design allowed vaulted ceilings to be constructed. Above the arched vestibule is the tall square bell tower, each corner topped with a pinnacle. The wall of the chapel at the back also has three narrow but tall arched windows, also containing stained glass designs. The entire site has a distinctly English look to it, the church being surrounded by tombstones of all sizes and shapes. Large oaks and elms rise above the main structure.

Until 1887, the building was unheated. Being so close to Lake Ontario, which was open water for much of the year, it was damp during the long winter services. But relief was on the way, although it would come too late for WB to enjoy. A tongue-in-cheek article in the *Trenton Courier* announced that "St. George's Church has been provided with stoves to be used for the winter months. Those who [were] kept from attending by cold drafts have no excuse now."<sup>21</sup> The same issue states that "service in St. George's Cathedral was conducted by electric light providing great satisfaction." Electric lights were a convenience that WB would not enjoy until two or three decades later in the NWT.

WB's grandfather used to take him on scientific discovery excursions around the area, with one of his favourite places being the huge erratic glacial rock once called the Glen Miller Boulder located just north of Trenton. Bleasdel had done considerable scientific study of the rock and had published his work. The year WB was born, 1862, Reverend Bleasdel and a Queen's University professor named George Lawson had climbed upon this huge stone, at which time Lawson declared, "From this day forward, this rock shall be known as the Bleasdel Rock," but it wasn't until October 18, 1998, that it was officially dedicated with that name. Bleasdel described the rock: "There is evidence of glacial action in the shape of an immense boulder 22 feet [6.7 metres] high at its highest point, and whose longitudinal circumference is about 114 feet [34.7 metres], lateral circumference 77 feet [23.4 metres], whole length 42 feet [12.8 metres] and breadth 24 feet [7.3 metres]."<sup>22</sup>

In Ontario, the Common School Act passed in the 1840s made primary education free and compulsory. Trenton's schools, its teachers and the quality of education steadily improved throughout the mid-1800s because of this legislation, helped along by the strong interest shown in school matters by leading citizens such as Reverend Bleasdel and A.W. Hawley. WB benefited from these positive changes and received a sound education in what we call today the "basics."

By the time WB reached school age, Trenton schools had grown from log shacks to fairly substantial and well-planned facilities. He received his elementary education from 1869 to 1877 at Crown Street Common (also referred to as East Ward Common School or Trenton No. 1), located on Crown Street and Campbell Street about four blocks north of his Byron Street home.<sup>23</sup> The headmaster, who may also have been his teacher, was Mr. T.S. Gillon.

Although there were two common schools in Trenton in WB's early years, they were becoming badly overcrowded. For example, an article concerning Trenton school examinations and marks awarded to students appeared in the *Courier* in 1870, noting how well pupils did on their final examinations at Mr. James Young's school (No. 2 Common or the West Ward School, Young its first headmaster).<sup>24</sup> But the article also mentions that there was only one teacher in one room for an average of 108 students in that year, declaring that the school "is in dire need of an assistant."<sup>25</sup> The average teacher's salary was \$400 a year (about \$6,000 today), and class sizes of 140 were not uncommon.

Lack of schools forced classes to be taught in places not meant for that purpose. For example, there was a fire in January 1870 in Miss Price's "school room" above G.A. Smith's Dry Goods Store. The second-floor space was heated with a wood stove, and sometime during a cold night a fire started, its cause unknown. Hearty attempts were made to save the building, but these were hampered by the town's single fire engine being broken down. All the books and a rented piano were thrown out the window. The books survived but the piano was smashed. In all it was a \$12,000 loss because all of Smith's goods were destroyed and he had no insurance.<sup>26</sup>

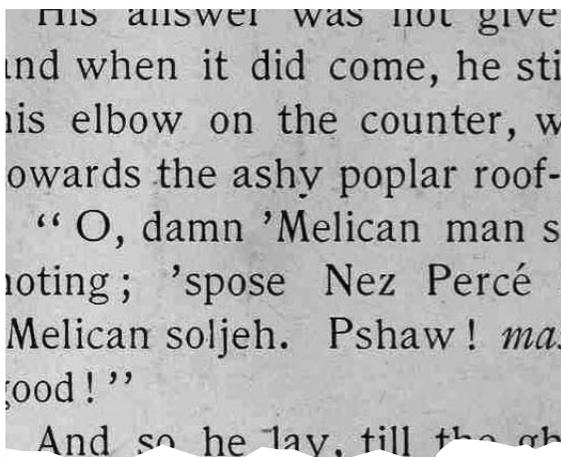
Because of the abundance of pupils, a two-storey building called Union School was built in 1873 about four blocks northwest of WB's Byron Street home, on College Street. A photo of the Union School shows a large brick building with a double-scalloped facade. Rows of windows are on the first floor and taller windows in the second storey.

Here is where WB spent his high school years, from 1877 to 1879. The school was given the name "Union" because it housed all the grades then taught in Ontario. On the first floor were the common school classes while the second floor, called the grammar school, with three classrooms and a laboratory, accommodated the older

students. School laboratories and chemicals have always spawned diabolical actions among students and one particular event occurring during WB's time there caught the *Courier's* attention. One unnamed young fellow on a cold winter day added a chemical, possibly sulphur, to the coal already nicely glowing in the big stove heating the lab. In short order the entire school was filled with choking fumes. Pupils young and old stampeded for the exits and doors in a panic, evacuating the entire building. Because the pungent smell persisted, the students had to be sent home until the odour cleared.

Not just anyone could teach now, as standards for teacher qualifications were being tightened. As previously mentioned, WB's grandfather Bleasdel sat on the Teacher's Examining Board, which was responsible for determining whether or not a teacher was proficient and qualified enough to be in a classroom. The *Trenton Courier* carried an announcement in February 1870 that shows more teacher training was being offered. It also tells us what courses were being taught. The article reads, "There will be a Quarterly Convention of Teachers for the East Riding of Northumberland to be held in School #2 in Trenton, starting at 2 PM, for two days. The main topics will be—best methods of teaching, simple rules of arithmetic, teaching spelling and reading to pupils in 1, 2 and 3 books and vocal music." Although rules for teachers were slowly relaxing, the school trustees were still very stringent. For example, Miss Price and all her female colleagues could not date, and a male teacher such as T.S. Gillon could not drink alcoholic beverages or be seen leaving a tavern. Improprieties such as these resulted in instant dismissal.

It would have been interesting to see WB's report cards, but none seem to have survived. He is not mentioned in any of the school examination results commonly reported in those days by the local newspapers, leading us to assume his marks may



his answer was not give  
and when it did come, he sti  
his elbow on the counter, w  
owards the ashy poplar roof-  
" O, damn 'Melican man s  
oting; 'spose Nez Percé  
Melican soljeh. Pshaw! ma  
ood!"  
And so he lay, till the gh

not have been exemplary. The only guide we have as to how well he did in school is to observe his later achievements. To have become a pharmaceutical apprentice, he must have had a scientific aptitude, probably bolstered by his grandfather's tutoring. WB also must have obtained a sound basic knowledge of arithmetic since the HBC later hired him for clerical

duties. Finally, he must have developed strong writing skills, clearly demonstrated in the hundreds of stories he wrote, many of them only a decade after leaving school.<sup>27</sup> WB graduated in 1879 at age seventeen, soon to begin his first career. Upon graduating, he began training as a pharmacist in Trenton under the direction of A.W. Hawley, who took over the business from his father, A.D.C. Hawley, Trenton's first druggist. A *Courier* ad reminds people to "Go to A.W. Hawley's New Drugstore in Trenton for Fresh Garden Seeds," indicating that drugstores had diversified by then.<sup>28</sup>

In the 1930s, when WB briefly returned to the pharmacy business, he admitted to a temporary employee that "at first I was just a runner," meaning that he delivered prescriptions around town.<sup>29</sup> In fact, retired pharmacist and historian Doug Sumner describes this as typical. "The early [apothecary] . . . was trained by an extended indenture or apprenticeship that invariably began with a mop and broom, but eventually advanced to instruction in the collection, storage and eventual manufacture of 'drug' products—all under the supervision of his preceptor [instructor]."<sup>30</sup> This tells us that WB began his pharmaceutical training by doing menial tasks.

We can only speculate upon his motives for choosing this career. Intelligent and a fast learner, he would have been an ideal candidate for a profession that was pulling away from the snake-oil salesmen of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Pharmacy was growing in medical importance and increasing its depth of knowledge. Kidney pills, liver pills and the like were accepted cures, so it was said, for all ailments. But pharmacy was beginning to adopt standardized qualifications and training in as little as six months, under the direction of the Ontario College of Pharmacy (O.C.P.). WB must have completed the program, because he later qualified for an Alberta licence (see Chapter 7). Another factor that may have led WB into pharmacy was that his grandfather Bleasdel was scientifically inclined,<sup>31</sup> and a third was that A.W. Hawley was very active in St. George's Anglican Church and interested in educating the youth. Young WB was likely influenced by all these things. He also would have become familiar with the ever-popular elixir called Perry Davis' Painkiller, a medication that was to have special significance to him in Frog Lake.

WB would have been influenced by other factors as well, and these ultimately led him away from the local pharmacy. A notice appeared in one local Trenton newspaper directed at the young men in the community in the late 1800s, urging these bright, ambitious fellows to "go abroad, join the Army, be a sailor or go out west to be a cowboy." However, in a picture of WB posing in a Trenton studio not long before he left home, he appears to be a most unlikely candidate for the rugged

lifestyle associated with the army, navy or early West, where life was tough and at times perilous. About average height and slightly built, dressed as a gentleman in a fashionable manner and wearing a high collar, he is perched on a stool and posed against a backdrop of pillars and wreaths. He has a cane in hand as a prop, his dark hair is slicked down and parted in the middle, and the beginnings of a moustache are barely apparent. By all appearances, WB was a proper young man and future pillar of his community, rather than the wandering adventurer he was to become.

But he was about to meet an experienced “man of the West” who would provide him with just the role model he needed. The *Trenton Courier* reports that “Mr. Joseph Woods, former NWMP officer, has returned from Carrot River, NWT,<sup>32</sup> to visit the Cameron family and other relatives in Trenton.”<sup>33</sup> Joseph Woods had come to Trenton in the fall of 1878 on business and to visit relatives, especially the John Cameron family, because Agnes Emma Cameron was his cousin.<sup>34</sup> (It is unknown if John was alive at that time.) Agnes Emma likely realized that WB would be interested in meeting her cousins Joe and William Woods. From her, WB had learned that these two men had been among the first members of the North West Mounted Police (NWMP) and part of the famous March West in 1874, from Dufferin in Canada’s fifth province, Manitoba, to Fort Macleod in the NWT, and that they would be filled with tales of adventure.

We will never know what transpired during that visit except that Joe Woods presented WB with a pipe bag. Joe may have known about WB’s interest in the West and thought it to be an appropriate gift. Those who have studied Aboriginal ways will know that the pipe bag, often called a fire bag, held the sacred pipe, so vital in First Nations peoples’ spirituality. We know from WB’s writings that he later observed and participated in many sacred pipe ceremonies, gaining a better understanding of this precious gift he had been given. WB has described pipe ceremonies in which he was included, and so have I been honoured to participate in a ceremony that never changes.<sup>35</sup>

I was excited to learn from Doug Light, former director of collections at the Glenbow Museum, that there was once a pipe bag belonging to WB held at the Glenbow Archives in their Ethnology collection. He said there was also a letter inside the bag from WB explaining how he got it. Hopeful inquiries to the Glenbow produced the results hoped for—the bag was still there. At the Glenbow, my wife, Shirley, and I watched the collections technician return from the storage vault’s back recesses with a box from which she removed the fire bag, carefully preparing it for display on the lab table. Fascinated by what I was seeing, I found it difficult to be objective, to be scientifically sharp. Here lay before me the original fire bag made of tanned deerskin given to WB by Joe Woods, ready for me to inspect and measure and

photograph. Oh, what stories it could tell if it could talk. But where was the letter? The technician could find no sign or record of it. Not giving up, we kept searching until we found it, somehow separated from the bag and placed in another file.

WB's letter was written to his friend Norman Luxton. "First, I want to send you a firebag that has quite a history, although I'm not prepared to swear that it's all true."<sup>36</sup> From the letter and the inventory sheet we learned that the bag was Cree in origin, the floral patterns commonly used by the Cree dominant in the beadwork. It had found its way into Sioux hands, notably those of Chief Rain-In-The-Face, while they were camped at Fort Walsh. Since the Cree and the Sioux were frequently at war, did Chief Rain-In-The-Face tear it from some beaten Cree warrior as a prize, a war coup during a fight? WB did not mention anything about this nor does he state how Joe Woods acquired it from the Sioux, but what we do know about the ownership is that it passed from this unknown Cree to Chief Rain-In-The-Face, then to Woods, who "got to know him [the chief] well," according to WB. Then Luxton had received the bag from WB for reasons best described by this frontiersman, who writes, "Although you have been so generous as to say that I don't owe you anything, I cannot look at the matter in that way and until I have made some money again and am able to repay your loan, I shall always feel that I have fallen down on my obligations and shall blame myself."<sup>37</sup> This arrangement suited both parties, as similar agreements between them had taken place often. Luxton must have felt that he now owned the bag because when he turned over his collection to the Glenbow in February 1948, the bag was included.

In 1876, Chief Sitting Bull and his Sioux slipped over the line after the Battle of Little Bighorn against General Custer and his men and set up camp close to Fort Walsh, located on the eastern slope of the Cypress Hills. Chief Rain-In-The-Face was among them, claiming to be the one who killed Custer as well as Custer's brother Tom. They were a rough lot and running scared from General Miles of the US Cavalry, who wanted to shoot them all for what they had done to Custer. From the same letter we learn that Chief Rain-In-The-Face had no love for the flamboyant Custer. WB mentions that the Chief had been imprisoned at one time by Custer, "and that it was known that the redman [*sic*] had an undying grudge against the American officer."<sup>38</sup> From other sources it was discovered that Chief Rain-In-The-Face was a Hunkpapa Sioux, forty-one years old when Woods met him and noted as a frontier "terror." The word "rain" in his name is symbolic for blood spilled on him during battle. Later he became a tribal policeman, a job he kept until death at his North Dakota home in 1905. WB was correct in being cautious to Luxton when he mentioned that the Chief was responsible for Custer's death because others among the Sioux present at the battle had also made the same claim, Chief Joseph White Bull being among them.<sup>39</sup>

A description of this beautiful object is appropriate. T.E. Mails writes that “among the finest items made by Indians is the pipe bag, often beaded and quilted. Tobacco is carried in the bottom and the pipe bowl is carried separately in the bag in a pocket.”<sup>40</sup> A long pocket carries the stem. This bag was no exception. Made of what the Glenbow cataloguing worksheet describes as “thin unsmoked buckskin,” the bag measures the length of an adult’s arm and is a hand’s width wide (about thirty-three inches by seven inches, or eighty-five centimetres by eighteen centimetres). It is constructed in three sections. The top is a long pouch twenty-four inches (sixty-one centimetres) long separated into two compartments. The middle section is a square panel measuring six inches (fifteen centimetres) on a side, beaded both front and back but with different patterns, and the bottom piece measuring nine inches (twenty-three centimetres) long consists of seventeen separate fringes, each of them under half an inch (one centimetre) wide. Fastened along the edge of the pouch flap are many tiny white beads. Shirley and I are proud to have in our possession an almost exact replica of this fire bag, even down to the tiny glass beads on the flap, made by a Frog Lake Cree woman named Mabel Abraham, whose beadwork is exemplary. Mabel patterned the bag from the photos we took at the Glenbow Archives.

It is my feeling that Woods’ tales of adventure and the gift of the fire bag may have motivated this nineteen-year-old, perhaps bored with filling bottles and running errands, to bid friends and family goodbye, exchanging a comfortable life, a promising career in pharmacy and a very acceptable social position in Trenton for the perilous unknowns and challenges of living in the NWT. Here is what WB remarked on his move from comfort to adventure: “[I] left my birthplace, Trenton, Ont., in July, 1881, and traveled west in search of adventure and life in the open. I had no wish to spend my years cooped up behind a desk in an office.”<sup>41</sup> WB would spend the rest of his life roaming, and was already interested in journalism and storytelling before heading to the West. While rambling about in the East he often dropped in to visit newspaper editors and reporters, perhaps opening his conversation with “Would you care to hear a good story?” It certainly happened in Port Huron, Michigan, while WB was working in the lumberyards, operating a planer in the door and sash factory. WB writes, “I told the yarn [about the fire bag] to one of the newspapers [in Port Huron] and they published it. I remember one phrase in the story. It went something like this: ‘On the upper part of the bag are some dark stains, the blood of the gallant Custer, and the whole is a genuine relic of one of the darkest happenings in American frontier history.’”<sup>42</sup> I don’t know if he planned on being an “Indian trader,” but in time he did just that, beginning a frontier lifestyle totally strange to him but all the while acquiring the knowledge and experiences that would enliven the stories of the West that he was about to write.<sup>43</sup>

Thus we see the beginnings of young WB's unlikely transformation from eastern gentleman to western adventurer. This was his Trenton and these were the times he knew as a youth, but a big change was soon to come. Except for the brief stint in the rough-and-tumble lumberyards of Port Huron, Michigan, he was now on his own for the first time. In late July 1881 we find him tramping the muddy streets and boardwalks of Winnipeg, eager to be on his way farther west as an Indian trader. But could he saddle a horse properly? Could he load a packhorse so the load was carried safely? Could he harness and handle a yoke of oxen or a team of horses? Was he able to cook on the trail? Put up with hordes of black flies and mosquitoes? Fight prairie fires? Could he handle a rifle, or hunt? And live off the land if he had to? As far as I am concerned, his life in Trenton did not prepare him for this challenge and he was walking into this new way of life totally unprepared. However, WB possessed a determination and a quality of character soon to prove that appearances can be very deceiving.



2

*Red River Carts, Pile Drivers  
and Pack Trains  
1881–1884*

IN THE Cameron material that I have, only once does WB mention his trip from Trenton to Winnipeg, simply pointing out that his route was via Chicago and St. Paul, “there being no C.P.R. in those days.” Based on what popular east-to-west transportation was available in 1881, and from comments he made later about how NWMP Constable Robert C. Mackay travelled to the West from Ottawa,<sup>1</sup> we can assume it was by train. The CPR, officially launched on February 16, 1881, was just getting its western division organized, with only short sections completed here and there in the area north of the Great Lakes and on the Prairies. Thus, he would have boarded a Pullman of the Grand Trunk Railway (GTR) at Trenton’s new north-side terminal, which would have carried him over the settled lands of southern Ontario through Toronto, London and finally ending at Sarnia. From there he could use the American-operated Northern Pacific Line not yet connected to the Pacific Northwest. Then, partway through Minnesota in the Red Lake area, his best choice was a new branch line called the St. Paul and Manitoba Railroad, where he transferred one last time onto the Canadian-built Emerson Line<sup>2</sup> completed in 1878, following the Red River north over rich but low-lying farmland often flooded by the Red River. Tiny villages named after French and Mennonite settlers were getting established along the route, St. Norbert being one of them.<sup>3</sup>

WB, now in no particular rush, wandered around Winnipeg for many weeks, getting to know it well. Its name was Cree in origin, meaning murky water. With a population of over six thousand, it was the largest Canadian settlement between the

Great Lakes and the Rockies, a metropolis.<sup>4</sup> Thomas Flanagan, the noted Calgary historian, explains that after the merger of the North West Company (NWC) and the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) in 1821, many employees were redundant, but encouraged to settle in what became the community of Selkirk. In time, the area along the Red River north of its junction with the Assiniboine River became populated with what were known as English half-breeds, while farther south and along the Assiniboine to the west were the French Metis. Flanagan provides an incisive explanation of early Winnipeg. "Thus arose something unique in North America: a settled agricultural community of whites and Metis living in the heart of the continent, hundreds or thousands of miles from other projections of European civilization."<sup>5</sup> This is the Winnipeg that WB was about to explore, and it would have been an interesting place indeed. Winnipeg was in a land boom, lasting well into the following spring, where overnight fortunes were made by tradesmen, citizens and prominent politicians alike. The *Free Press* announced that "Mr. Wm. J. Twigg of Thompson, Twigg & Co., Real Estate has retired from business after making one hundred thousand dollars" and included notices of "land selling for \$1000 a foot."

Winnipeg was 150 years old when WB got there, its beginnings under fur trader La Vérendrye's Fort Rouge, which was constructed at the confluence of the Assiniboine and Red rivers called The Forks. Renamed Upper Fort Garry in 1835, it had become headquarters in 1878 for the HBC.<sup>6</sup> The historic Red River flowing south to north split Winnipeg into east and west. Main Street more or less paralleled the Red River, its extreme south ending at Fort Garry, near The Forks and just a short distance west of Union Station. Demolition of the dilapidated old fort and HBC warehouses was then taking place.<sup>7</sup>

It was a city of strong contrasts. Dogs rambled freely, barking at every squeaking Red River cart that passed. Men spat brown tobacco juice on the wooden sidewalks, and women had to daintily lift long skirts as they skittered over muddy streets littered with horse manure. The blanketed Aboriginals commonly seen about wearing beaded leggings were Swampy Cree, one tribe of several living in the area, the others Ojibway or Saulteaux.<sup>8</sup> Another common group to be seen were short, dark men with pipes in their mouths who wore floppy hats and checkered shirts, their waists encircled with colourful sashes. These were the "half-breeds," the freighters and boatmen, the ancestors of today's Metis. And then there was the mud. WB's journey from Winnipeg to Battleford that fall of 1881 is well covered in a piece he wrote much later called "The Trail of 1881."<sup>9</sup> He describes the mud. "Those were the days when the future Manitoban metropolis was a raw border town, famed chiefly for the glutinous quality of its mud, and [the] crossing of one of its thoroughfares after a rain was an achievement and possibly front page news for the *Free Press*."

But roughness was being tempered with refinement. There were new stores laden with all the clothes one needed, along with fine furniture and sundries ranging from boat anchors to lacy handkerchiefs. The wide Main Street was lined on both sides with saloons, shops, hotels and boarding houses, some still with plank walls covered with canvas. There were several banks, a new town hall and the new CPR building, square and white. The Anglican Holy Trinity Church had record attendance. On the east side across the Red River, in the important French and Metis settlement of St. Boniface, the birthplace of Louis Riel, there were building materials scattered about the site of the new St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral that was one year into construction, eventually home to the St. Boniface Basilica. Nearby St. Boniface College had been in operation since 1844. Within the same district were the offices of the West's first newspaper, the *Nor'Wester*, seized in 1870 by Riel in the Red River Rebellion.<sup>10</sup>

Among the several routes—they could hardly be called roads—leading in and out of the town was a primitive muddy trail called Portage Road (today's Portage Avenue), pointed westward from Main Street and roughly following the Assiniboine River, eventually passing through St. James on its way to Portage la Prairie and Brandon.<sup>11</sup> It is here, at a freighter camp on Colony Creek,<sup>12</sup> that WB began his first journey into the untamed and largely uncharted NWT.

During his sojourns about town, WB had kept an eye open for a ride farther west. He learned that a local grocery merchant, Alex (Sandy) Macdonald, had store interests in Battleford and Edmonton, often hiring the renowned Metis freighters to haul stock to these places. Impressed with what he had heard about Macdonald, who, as the story goes, arrived in Winnipeg a few years back nearly destitute but through sound business judgement and daring built up a thriving trading

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I said no more, though I felt in my

business, WB dropped in to see him. Macdonald was impressed with this young fellow from the East, hiring him on the spot to work at his Battleford store, WB's first job in the West.

In "The Trail of 1881," WB ably describes his first experiences with these wagon trains of the Prairies that sometimes numbered one hundred or more. In a second article, "Cart Transportation in the Early West,"<sup>13</sup> he paints a clear picture of the famed Red River carts, the two-wheeled carriers of choice capable of carrying up to 700 pounds (nearly 320 kilograms), built primarily by Metis at White Horse Plains, located just west of Winnipeg around what is now St. François Xavier. Simply put, they were nothing more than a five-foot (one-and-a-half-metre) square box, floored and sided, fastened to an oak axle on which were mounted two five-foot (one-and-a-half-metre) diameter wheels, each with a pronounced dish. The boxes were sometimes covered depending on what the cargo was. The rims were made of six to eight oak sections formed into a circle, each segment being spoked twice to the oak hub. Rims were bound tightly with wet tough rawhide, called babiche or shaganappi. When it dried, shrinking, it created a binding as hard and tough as fibreglass. Two thick, heavy oak shafts extended the assembly to ten to twelve feet (between three and three and a half metres). A technicality often overlooked but clearly defined by WB was the use of an iron thole pin with an eye in it inserted vertically into each shaft about where the harness went over the animal's back, thonged to the harness. The purpose was to help the animal hold back the cart when going downhill. Seldom are these seen in reproductions.<sup>14</sup> Earlier versions of these contrivances were noted for their noise, as old-timers attest: the wagons could be heard long before they could be seen because their wooden wheel hubs turned on wooden axles with no lubrication at all, thus producing an endless high-pitched squeal.<sup>15</sup> Made mostly from Manitoba oak common to this area, with no nails, they were extremely sturdy and so simple they could be repaired easily on the road.

These carts were usually pulled by horses or oxen, but at Colony Creek these creatures were in short supply. Here WB introduces us to Ad McPherson, wagon master, the man responsible for organizing and running the operation. In my research I often ran across McPherson's name; he was apparently involved in anything and everything dealing with trade in the early West.<sup>16</sup> WB later noted that "we first met in a Winnipeg restaurant in July, 1881, and from that time on until his death at the age of 80 we were firm and intimate friends."<sup>17</sup> Apparently, this tough frontiersman had found a solution. "McPherson was occupied in familiarizing a couple of dozen steers fresh off the range with the rules of the road," WB writes. "A steer is roped, brought up and secured—objections summarily overruled—between the shafts of a cart packed to the brim with sheet tin. Unheeded, the steer, under the delusion that he was once more free, and smarting from the indignities heaped upon him, with

an outraged bawl started off. The cart, lunging after, brought him to a halt.” The article further describes how the heavy cart catches up with the steer every time he stops and thumps him, so the steer takes off again. “Away he streaked with the cart, shedding bundled tin at every spring, bounding and rattling behind him, and with McPherson, mounted, whip in hand and yelling like an Apache, hot on his heels.” After two or three rounds, McPherson now has the steer “road ready.”<sup>18</sup>

A rough, tough Virginian, WB noted that this blue-eyed, red-haired stocky fellow was about thirty when he joined the wagon train at Colony Creek. Full of stories, he kept WB entertained as the carts slowly squealed their way westward, stretched out across the vast expanse of prairie in a huge train, roughly following today’s Yellowhead Highway, passing through new settlements like Portage la Prairie. Here WB was given a nifty little team and new buckboard to drive through Brandon, where they swung northwesterly, headed for Fort Ellice.<sup>19</sup> WB dropped out for a short time at Macdonald’s request, while McPherson continued on to Battleford, not making great progress we find out. “Ad McPherson is reported to be somewhere in the Touchwood Hills area with a large brigade of carts. He is making slow progress on account of having all young oxen [steers].”<sup>20</sup>

WB was adjusting to the tempo and routine of a cart brigade. Many years later, he colourfully describes their operation. “Freighting was largely in the hands of the French halfbreeds, for whom the roving life of the open trail held an irresistible lure, and the native owner of fifty or a hundred carts, with the animals to pull them, was accounted a man of wealth and social eminence.”<sup>21</sup> These trains plodded along over the Prairies, the pace set by the fastest oxen, none of which was in any great hurry. A good day could see twenty miles (thirty-two kilometres) put behind them, but more typically it was closer to ten miles (sixteen kilometres). In the time that WB was with them, he witnessed many cart brigade peculiarities, but two in particular deal with the trail. The prairie is far from flat. It’s filled with all sorts of irregularities, ups and downs, ridges, hillocks, cuts and coulees, small lakes (sloughs) and thousands of soft spots with no way around them. Extra animals were part of the brigade, used to lend a hand with uphill pulls, called “doubling up.” WB describes it. “A halfbreed, mounted, placed himself in front of the horse in a loaded cart. A rope, half-hitched to a thole pin of the cart at one end and to a loop in the tail of the pony under him at the other, was the only doubling up connection. At the word ‘go’ the ponies started off together with a rush and up the hill or through the sludge sailed the cart, with the cayuse<sup>22</sup> ahead, the rider drumming a tattoo on his ribs with his moccasined heels, buckling into the drag as wholeheartedly as his partner in the rear. The first time I witnessed this proceeding—one horse extending its tail as a helping hand to brothers in distress—it struck me as fiendishly cruel. Later I concluded I must be mistaken. The animal seemingly—to me—so inhumanely ill treated took to the job

like a physical culture enthusiast to his daily dozen, nor could I discover that it did him any injury.”<sup>23</sup>

WB also witnessed a new use for bacon, often called sowbelly, which was second only to flour as provender. “It came in great slabs or sides and in great jute sacks. Nor was it the delectable product that, superbly crisped, tempts us at the daily breakfast table. Sowbelly was cured in brine and was so salty that it invariably called for parboiling before it could be eaten.” He goes on to explain a novel use for these slabs. “When a bad spot in the trail halted the caravan, the bacon loads were rushed to the front, the heavy sacks lifted out and laid side by side across the treacherous ground, and thus corduroyed . . . the carts passed safely over instead of sinking to their axles[. The] extemporized bridge was [then] picked up, stowed and the brigade moved on.”<sup>24</sup> WB explains that the soaking in mud and water did not do any harm to the customers who would later buy it to eat.

Now about two-fifths of the way into the five-hundred-mile (eight-hundred-kilometre) trip, WB awaited Metis freighters from the Saskatchewan Valley who were to pick up supplies delivered by steamboats coming from Winnipeg up the Assiniboine River to Fort Ellice. A smile must have been on WB’s face when he later penned the part about hearing a steamboat whistle early one morning as they approached, coming from the east on the Assiniboine. “Down [the Assiniboine] valley was a thin plume of smoke.” Of course everyone rushed down to the bank to see her in but the river was so crooked that “when we first sighted her, [she] could not have been more than five miles [eight kilometres] away, but she must have steamed fifteen miles [twenty-four kilometres] to get here.”<sup>25</sup> WB took the opportunity to explore this old place, too, which had rusty cannon still poking out from the corner bastions. Fort Ellice dated from 1831, built where the Qu’Appelle River joined the Assiniboine as an HBC post and headquarters for the Swan River District. He hunted ducks and prairie chickens. He also spotted another bird. “I saw for the last time those beautiful game birds that as a small boy I had hunted in the East, where they were then to be found in flocks of thousands, but which...for thirty years or so [have] been extinct—passenger pigeons.”<sup>26</sup>

It was here that WB was really able to study the “noble red man of the plains before contact with the effete paleface had robbed him of his picturesqueness.”<sup>27</sup> He was referring to a band of Sioux camped not far from Fort Ellice, fugitives from the US Cavalry. “Gorgeous in paint, feathers and many-hued blankets, they strutted about, silent spectators of that strange creature, the white man, and his amazing activities.”

In time, Metis freighter Solomon Venne<sup>28</sup> arrived with his brigade of carts and soon all goods stored in the Company warehouse were loaded. On October 13, now with

snow on the ground and unpleasant weather, the loaded cart train headed north to Battleford, WB in among them. Within a decade or so, WB would revive his memories of Fort Ellice in a story, winning first place and a cash prize, the launching of what would become a brilliant writing career.<sup>29</sup> Their route was now westerly, still on “the old trail,” generally following the Qu’Appelle River, the rolling land dotted with small ponds or sloughs surrounded by willows. The routine was simple. Up at dawn, “awakened by the bawling of the cook to a frying pan accompaniment,” eat, bring in the animals from the night camp, harness up and head out. About eleven o’clock, they stopped for their noon meal of “wild duck or prairie chicken stew” often seasoned with wild onions, and possibly a wild fruit pie, baked frontier style in a cast iron pot. Two hours later they were off again until about four or five o’clock, stopping where there was ample feed, water and wood. WB enjoyed this time at the end of the day when the Metis traditions began to appear after the chores had been done. Gathering around the fire, “the men sat yarning and smoking, or gambling for tobacco. Perhaps a halfbreed had brought his fiddle along and flung melody on the night breeze with ‘Drops of Brandy,’ the ‘Red River Jig,’ the ‘Duck Dance,’ and the ‘Reel de huit’ or ‘Reel of Eight.’<sup>30</sup> But weariness soon claimed them and by nine o’clock silence, broken only by the sound of a horse clearing its nostrils, the bellow of a bullfrog, the shrill yapping of a coyote, the hum of mosquitoes, and snores from the sleeping men, reigned.”<sup>31</sup>

They dropped down into the Qu’Appelle Valley about twenty-five miles (forty kilometres) east of Fort Qu’Appelle, somewhere north of today’s Grenfell. “The trail, descending from the upland to the flat benches at the bottom, wound along the north side of the lakes up to the fort. This descent was steep. The oxen and the ponies drawing the Red River carts were not always well broken. They were not driven, but followed loosely, one behind the other, and descending a hill was always something of a problem.”<sup>32</sup> WB describes how some homesteaders who had descended a few days before the brigade had had their oxen get away on them, upsetting the load on a turn. “When we arrived, the family was engaged in retrieving anything retrievable out of the wreck, while the ox, with a jaundiced air, contemplatively eyed the proceedings.”<sup>33</sup> They must have passed through Leuret in the valley, and the Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church rebuilt in 1870 alongside the Sacred Heart Rectory, in continual use since 1866, but WB does not note it in the story. Fort Qu’Appelle soon appeared, the post itself established in 1864, located at the north end of what is now called Echo Lake, with a large NWMP post and old HBC store.<sup>34</sup> A brief stopover, then up and out of the valley northwest through a parkland area, a few hours later settling in at the fourth and last Touchwood Hills Post<sup>35</sup> between today’s Lestock and Punnichy. Built on sandy land with scrub poplar, this post was then only two years old and under the management of Angus McBeath, whom WB

doesn't mention, favouring free trader Heubach's Store managed by W. Muirhead for refreshments and rest. Four years later this remote settlement would resound with General Frederick Middleton's trumpeter sounding reveille as his column camped close by on their way north to trounce the Metis at Batoche. Still travelling northwestward, they passed Humboldt, a main Dominion Telegraph station on the Winnipeg–Edmonton line. Before long, during the North-West Rebellion, the station's telegrapher J.S. Macdonald among others would be receiving and sending coded government telegrams hour after hour, war messages between General Middleton and Minister of Defence Adolphe Caron in Ottawa.<sup>36</sup>

The days were now shortening, with frost in the air and ice on the sloughs. Passing by the northbound branch that led to Batoche, the brigade carefully dropped down to Clarke's Crossing, located on the South Saskatchewan River north of Saskatoon, crossing the river by ferry. This location in a few short years would be busy during the 1885 Metis uprising. Now up on higher ground, continuing to follow the rutted trail westward, commonly called the Fort Edmonton trail and still closely following the Yellowhead Highway, they could see the North Saskatchewan Valley below them to their left. Ahead on the western horizon lay the Eagle Hills, among which WB would soon be heading a trading expedition. Table Mountain appeared, west of Battleford. Venne declared they would soon be in Battleford, and so they were, on October 29, 1881, the carts moaning and screeching their way from the south along the old Duck Lake/Carlton trail and down the hill closely following today's Highway 4, into the cluster of log buildings on the flats of the Battle River named Battleford. Nearly two months on the trail, the slow-moving brigade took WB the farthest west he had ever been. In his narrative in "The Trail of 1881," WB compared this trip to another: "Thirty years later I stepped aboard a sleeper in the magnificent Canadian National station in Winnipeg and in a little over twenty-four hours, covering practically the same route, stepped off again in the new town of North Battleford."<sup>37</sup>

At the time WB rumbled into Battleford, the settlement was just a diminutive collection of log shacks loosely organized on the south bank of the Battle River, west of its outflow into the North Saskatchewan River. Scattered among the shacks, Indian lodges and corrals were general stores and warehouses, a log Roman Catholic church, the log house of T.T. Quinn (who would become closely associated with WB in a few years) and the first newspaper office between Winnipeg and Edmonton, the *Saskatchewan Herald*, established in 1878 under P.G. Laurie. Originally a Dominion Telegraph camp set up on what became known as Telegraph Flats, Battleford was declared capital of the NWT in 1875. By 1877–1878, a crew from the Department of Public Works had constructed a series of buildings on the ridge to the south and west overlooking the Battle River Valley, soon to be called Government Ridge.

Among the impressive buildings was the large Government House<sup>38</sup> in which the NWT Legislative Assembly held its meetings under the direction of Lieutenant-Governor David Laird. Here, on August 30–31, 1881, Laird proudly hosted the Governor General, the Marquess of Lorne, coming in on the small steamboat, *The Lily*, from Fort Carlton. This dignitary spent two days touring about the area.

Unfortunately, there was a flooding problem on the lowland and the Battle River overflowed its banks in 1881, forcing some to move north across the river onto higher ground. It was a natural progression anyway because about a mile (one and a half kilometres) north, on high sandy land, was Fort Battleford, established in 1876, a cluster of Victorian-style buildings intended to impress as well as provide housing for the recently created NWMP, this particular post placed under the command of Superintendent W.M. Herchmer.<sup>39</sup> This was the Battleford that WB quickly became absorbed by and the place he would call home for the rest of his life. Thankfully for future historians and researchers, WB was an interesting newcomer, soon attracting the attention of the *Saskatchewan Herald's* editor P.G. Laurie, his activities duly reported in this growing frontier newspaper.

WB's job was to assist Alex Macdonald's Battleford store manager, Bob Young, in the store on the flats. Macdonald was in partnership with a Mr. Mahoney, another trader like himself. Macdonald, soon to take over the business due to Mahoney's failing health, was aggressive in business, recognizing the trade potential this area offered, not only to provide goods and services to several new Indian reserves nearby but also to the growing number of settlers arriving daily. Macdonald sold general goods and also bought furs of all kinds, buffalo hides and the staple food item of pemmican. WB went to work immediately. It was here that he learned the rudimentary details of Indian trade, soon speaking rough Cree and Saukteaux and using trade sign language. Macdonald also established a bank, so WB, well educated, was a valuable employee. As time went on, he became very skilled at trading, so skilled in fact that Macdonald occasionally sent him out on his own to trade on the reserves, a heavy responsibility for a young easterner.

WB continued working for Macdonald through the early part of the winter but his ever-present restlessness overtook him again and he left Macdonald's service. With his education, he became a prime teacher candidate in Battleford's only school, starting after Christmas 1882,<sup>40</sup> taking over from J.S. Macdonald, but he soon got bored tending children. By mid-March he left for Prince Albert,<sup>41</sup> probably just curious about the place, but he was back in Battleford again by April 1882.<sup>42</sup> In his newspaper, Laurie, ever a Battleford promoter, commented that WB seemed more impressed with Battleford than Prince Albert. By all indications, WB was having a good time in the frontier. He entered what was reported to be a thrilling billiard

contest in the new restaurant and billiard hall owned by Charles Chassis, late of the NWMP, up against some of the best in the area, placing first and winning \$20. His close friend Stanley Simpson took fourth place.<sup>43</sup> By this time WB has squirrelled away \$200 (worth over \$4,000 today). About June 10, 1882, WB filed for a homestead in the Battleford area under the 1872 Dominion Lands Act, giving him title to a full 160 acres (nearly 65 hectares) if he met the conditions spelled out in the Act. His land, near the North Saskatchewan River,<sup>44</sup> was next to that of William Laurie, a son of P.G. Laurie, and that of T.T. Quinn, then federal Indian agent at Battleford. Ross Innes, a Battleford historian, thinks that it was southeast of Fort Battleford, close to both the Battle and North Saskatchewan rivers, near today's Saskatchewan Hospital.<sup>45</sup>

Farming was not for WB. He held on for a little over a year, then sold his claim for \$40 (\$850), but his land dealings in Battleford were far from over. Fortunately for him, neither WB nor his family were involved in the Prince Albert Colonization Company formed in his hometown of Trenton, but he may have followed the news about the company that appeared occasionally in the *Saskatchewan Herald*. He would have learned that Henry Bleecker, Edmonton barrister, and C. Ashley, agent for the company, went on an inspection tour of the land owned by the company south of Prince Albert in the fall of 1882.<sup>46</sup>

As the leaves began to show their fall colours, WB hired on as assistant to Robert Paton, lineman for the section of Dominion Telegraph west of Battleford.<sup>47</sup> On a line inspection trip, they passed near the spot where in three years the Battle of Cut Knife Hill would take place. Going as far west as Grizzly Bear Coulee<sup>48</sup> south of present-day Vermilion, at the end of Paton's section, they were back in Battleford on October 23.<sup>49</sup> It would have been a pleasant trip through rolling, wooded country. During the inspection, they discovered that the poles of local tamarack and spruce were rotting, the wire was too light, the brackets were splitting and the insulators were of poor quality.

News about Frog Lake, a new settlement, was never far from the ears of P.G. Laurie and WB. Laurie published portions of government reports, including the 1882 fall Home Farm report of John Delaney, farming instructor at Frog Lake, indicating that there were forty-three acres (seventeen hectares) then under cultivation that had been seeded to wheat, oats, barley, potatoes, turnips and carrots. As well, an equal area had been fenced.

Occasionally, WB revealed that he missed home and his people, and that he was paying a price for his adventure. He wrote a piece for the Boston-based *Waverley Magazine* entitled "The Tale of a Shirt" that describes a trading trip into the Eagle Hills, south of Battleford, in October 1882, where he was accompanied by Turner,

a tall Irishman, and Jack, a small Nez Percé Aboriginal man with a hunched back, who was their guide. It was annuity time and the local bands had just been paid.

Picture to yourself a lonely, grass-grown cart trail, which seems to make for nowhere especially, but twists and winds and curves over prairies, through and around poplar, and willow bluffs, miry alkali swamps, and sedge-girt lakes, up and down steep, slippery hills and in and out of other impossible holes and places, with a plain disregard for the entirely modern idea of annihilating space. Note also a raw, wet afternoon—one of those cheerless, foreboding days in the early fall, when the mind of the youngster “roughing it” amid the wild scenes and dangers of life in the far West, who happens to be plodding slowly and dispiritedly through slush and mud, against rain and sleet, over such a trail, turns longingly and sadly—while perchance (shall I say it?) a salt drop mingles with the melting snow upon his cheek—to thoughts and memories of a cozy sitting room, the ruddy hearth and the kind, loving and beloved faces, warm hearts and fading eyes—the faint, broken “goodbye, God bless you, my boy!” of the old folks at home.<sup>50</sup>

It appears that WB occupied himself with trading and exploring about the area while taking part in some of the more cultural activities introduced by members of the government and NWMP. Penny Readings were popular.<sup>51</sup> In a final performance for the year at Battleford, WB and his friend Stanley Simpson gave a character sketch of “When I Played Baseball,” which the *Saskatchewan Herald* reported “afforded much amusement.” Their encore was “Tread on the Tail of My Coat.”<sup>52</sup>

In the spring of 1883, WB, looking for adventure once again, joined an expedition to open up a new trail from Battleford to Swift Current, about 160 miles (260 kilometres) south. This project was driven by local merchants such as Alex Macdonald who wanted a closer railhead for goods being delivered by the CPR, its line now beyond Swift Current. WB was awarded the job. How he qualified is unknown as he had been around for less than two years, unknown yet as a trailblazer, but he was clever enough to hire Chief Poundmaker’s son Sakamataynew,<sup>53</sup> a young Cree very familiar with that vast open prairie. Heading south with one hundred carts, more or less following today’s Highway 4 over the Eagle Hills, they travelled through the Red Pheasant and Grizzly Bear’s Head Reserves, past today’s Cando and the NWMP post Sixty Mile Bush, continuing south over beautiful rolling prairie, over the Bear Hills, Bad Hills and the western part of the Couteau Hills. By now they were south of modern Rosetown. WB mentioned seeing many antelope, black-tailed deer and a herd of two hundred buffalo, the latter by now nearly extinct. Before long they dropped into the South Saskatchewan River Valley. Part of their brigade was a scow that they used to ferry the brigade over the wide but shallow South Saskatchewan River near today’s Saskatchewan Landing. Sakamataynew took them up out of the river valley to high ground, then proceeded south. WB was proud that this young man led them to within one hundred yards (ninety metres) of the single boxcar

then comprising Swift Current.<sup>54</sup> I discovered that there was a rudimentary but effective road map in existence detailing this 202-mile (325-kilometre) trail between Battleford and Swift Current that relied on landmarks.<sup>55</sup>

His job for the Battleford merchants now complete, his work with Alex Macdonald over, and with no particular need to return to Battleford, WB decided to try out the railroad construction business. New track had passed Maple Creek by now, rapidly moving towards Medicine Hat. Hired by the bridge construction crew, WB would soon be helping to build the long wooden trestle bridge for the fast-approaching CPR over the South Saskatchewan River at Medicine Hat.

Once the CPR construction crews broke out of the Canadian Shield and gazed upon the vast prairies stretching out before them, the engineers and workers must have breathed a collective sigh of relief. Instead of having to painstakingly blast their way through stubborn granite and shale, cutting right-of-ways through thick forest and detouring deep lakes, what lay before them now was flat land, speared here and there with coulees reaching out into the South Saskatchewan River Valley all the way to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.

Leaving Swift Current, WB rode west. In January 1883, the CPR track-laying crews were somewhere east of Maple Creek, making good time on their way to Calgary. When WB arrived at Swift Current in the spring, they were just north of the Cypress Hills. WB rode past these crews, looking for a new challenge, heading for a tiny settlement less than a year old on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River named Medicine Hat, about 180 miles (290 kilometres) southeast of Calgary. He soon found work with the CPR bridge crew working ahead of the roadbed and track-laying construction crews who were expected to arrive in June. Medicine Hat was translated from the Blackfoot word *saamis*, meaning headdress of a medicine man.<sup>56</sup> The bridge crew was run by a hard-nosed contractor named Donald Grant, one of sixty different contractors hired by the CPR to build the western stretch.<sup>57</sup> Like WB, Grant was also from Glengarry County, but it's uncertain whether they knew each other or not. Grant's challenge was to quickly construct a temporary wooden trestle, Medicine Hat's first bridge, across the wide river so that rails, ties, steam shovels, ploughs, wagons, scrapers and food for the "army of workers" could be transported to the west side and up the grade in order to continue westward.<sup>58</sup> Engineers decided to cross the river shallows by an old ford near what is now Police Point Park, east of the settlement. Paid \$30 a month (the equivalent of about \$630 today) like most of the other labourers, WB drove a team pulling a pile driver. His job was to jockey the heavy, steam-powered brute into position to pound thick fir posts through the sandy river bottom onto firm bedrock, forming the trestle supports. It was not easy work and the scorching summer heat would not have helped. But later

on in the cool evenings back in camp, he had a chance to swap tales with fellows like the Weeks, the Cousins and two of the riveters, Jim and Bob Porter. WB also likely wandered about the tents and covered wagons of the early settlers, about two hundred of them. A terrible wind blew through in July 1883, knocking down tents, the makeshift homes and even toppling a boxcar. WB probably would have watched the first train carefully crossing the new wooden trestle, its cars piled high with supplies.<sup>59</sup> Upon the trestle bridge's completion, WB left the bridge crew. Among his later recollections of Medicine Hat were the rattlesnakes, bull snakes and a bout of pneumonia, a malady that would plague him for the rest of his life.<sup>60</sup>

Prairie railroad construction involved dry weather and flat terrain, translating into six miles (close to ten kilometres) or more of track being laid down daily, so the temporary work camps such as the one WB was in for the Medicine Hat trestle bridge were out of the question. Evolving from this were the unique two-storey boarding cars that could be quickly moved to where they were needed.

Late in the summer WB joined another contractor doing railroad grade work in east Calgary, struggling with a horse-drawn wheel scraper until mid-August 1883. This time he was working for W.H. Cushing, an aggressive fellow who had just arrived full of fire. WB reluctantly admired Cushing. In a brief autobiography, WB discusses the man. "He worked on the grade himself, in a gingham shirt, suspenders, overalls, and what was then known as a 'cowbreakfast,' otherwise a five cent straw hat."<sup>61</sup> WB goes on to say that Cushing (a Liberal) had gone into politics, eventually becoming the provincial minister of public works. "We sat down to a banquet together in Vermilion, where I ran a newspaper. I recalled the fact that we had had many banquets previously, though these had been in a dilapidated tent on a large table without a table cloth." WB was referring to the grading crew's cook tent at Calgary. "I'm not sure he liked to be reminded of those days. The last time I saw the honorable gentleman was in the C.P.R. Hotel at Banff [Banff Springs Hotel]. He was wearing tails and a black string bowtie and had his new wife hanging on his arm." He concludes by saying, "There sure are ups and downs in this here world!"<sup>62</sup> WB doesn't mention that Cushing dropped his portfolio in 1909, "alleging impropriety by other members of the [Rutherford] government in matters related to the Alberta and Great Waterways Company."<sup>63</sup> He did briefly mention it in his later weekly newspaper the *Vermilion Signal*.

Towards the tail end of 1883, WB was with the railroad again, working briefly as a labourer with a mountain crew. WB mentions little about this except that he nearly drowned in the Columbia River above Golden, the first of two close calls that year by drowning. Two decades later, WB's brother-in-law Colonel J.A. Macdonnell, his youngest sister Maude's husband, would help extend the CPR westward

with Macdonnell, Gzowski and Company by building a tunnel, a portion of the well-known spiral tunnels through the Rogers Pass, and also the Merritt-Brookmere line, nearly thirty miles (forty-eight kilometres) of British Columbia's Kettle Valley Railway.<sup>64</sup>

It seems that by now WB had had enough of railroad construction. Perhaps it was because of the near-drowning experience, and also because mountain railroad work itself was dangerous. Whatever the reason, he headed back towards Calgary to try something a little less hazardous, like cooking. After railroad work, WB spent some time as a ranch hand in what is now southwestern Alberta. "I took my turn as cook on a horse ranch at Calgary in the '80's."<sup>65</sup> He fondly recalls frying speckled trout freshly caught in the Bow River, presumably for the ranch hands, and that he narrowly missed drowning in the same river, "west of Calgary," his second close call with rivers that year as we know.

There is no doubt that WB "rode the range" for the large Cochrane Rancho Company, which, after the bad winter of 1882-1883, had relocated its huge cattle herd to the south, near Fort Macleod, in 1883. But lesser known is the fact that the company kept the original massive lease of over one hundred thousand acres (over forty thousand hectares) west of Calgary to the end of 1883 and beyond on which to raise horses, a fact that WB was never clear on. In fact, by June 1883, the company was pasturing 490 horses, mostly purchased from Montana ranchers who had supplied the company with cattle. This was the ranch at which WB worked, its headquarters just west of present-day Cochrane, and those 490 horses were the ones he tended. His boss was W.D. Kerfoot, another Virginian and experienced rancher who in 1884 took over the horse ranch, replacing Major James Walker,<sup>66</sup> the

d holding his hands outstretched over the bla  
his eyes from the coals as he replied doggedl  
ce:

"The storm is wild. It is very cold and  
re is no trail. It is not safe."

"But you, Gladieu?—Ah, you also are afraid  
He sunk his face in the robes with a despairi  
of his violent seizures of asthma. They occ  
heat, but rarely in winter; so that he had not

manager appointed in 1881.<sup>67</sup> For some reason WB doesn't show up on company records. My attempts to track him down among the ranch's numerous papers at the Glenbow Archives were in vain. He does not appear on the payroll, nor was he noted in the detailed diaries written by ranch treasurer at that time, Frank White, kept at the Glenbow. To overlook an employee would be a very unusual oversight on White's part. It's possible that the horse ranch might have had its own records of which I am unaware.

His pay was about \$30 or \$40 a month (roughly \$630 to \$850 today), the going rate for greenhorns. Although WB's ranch-hand time was short, from after Christmas 1883 to late February 1884, WB learned much about ranching on the Prairies. He also heard from the boys in the bunkhouse the story of how the Cochrane Rancho lost eight thousand head of cattle, or about seventy percent of their herd, in the previous year, the aftermath of a terrible winter snowstorm. It was said that the coulees were filled with dead animals piled so thick a man could walk the length of a whole coulee on the carcasses.

With the days getting longer, the weather moderating and his feet itchy again, WB left the ranch. During that time, he had become very knowledgeable about the care and handling of range horses, which would prove to be a valuable asset in the trading days about to come. Soon, another chapter in his life would open up, and his desire to be an Indian trader was about to become a reality.<sup>68</sup>

Now with a few dollars in his pocket, WB drifted south to Fort Macleod, final destination of the first contingent of the NWMP during the famous March West in 1874. Although he wasn't there long, he got to know characters like police scout Jerry Potts<sup>69</sup> and Kamoose Taylor, owner of the infamous Fort Macleod Hotel and source of the incredible Macleod Hotel Rules and Regulations,<sup>70</sup> along with many of the NWMP officers posted to the detachment. But WB left without meeting NWMP Inspector Joseph Howe, who joined the staff in October 1884.<sup>71</sup> Eight years later, his sister Agnes would marry Howe, soon to become Commanding Officer of Fort Macleod.

In the mid-1890s, WB developed a fictional character called Jim Vue. In a thrilling piece of fiction called "Under the Snow,"<sup>72</sup> written while he was with *Field & Stream* magazine, WB bases the tale on a deadly encounter with winter on the plains, something he undoubtedly experienced and lived to write about. WB, Vue and two others, after a dinner at Old Kamoose's hotel, set off on a sunny day for Fort Calgary, normally a three- to four-day trip by horse. "We clattered down the one street of old Ft. Macleod in a brown veil of dust." Obviously, there is little snow yet and the day was mild. WB, following the Greek myth, refers to north cold winds as Boreas, which had been held back by a warm spell, the well-known chinook. Vue advises

that since there are many stopping places, there's no use taking any "grub." But as they get farther out on the high plains, Vue becomes uneasy, sending out little warning signals about what could happen. "See them mountains, now. Peaceable as a dozy infant . . . Yet I've seen 'em swoop down an' strike a man so stiff an' hard he'd break, like a Chinar cup, if y'u let him drop." They talk about how a storm swooped down on another party travelling from Pincher Creek to a dance, and all perished. The mood was set. The hours sped by, but WB noted how dark it has become. "I looked at the mountains. The sun rested just over their tops and appeared like a bloodshot eye. It was snowing up there. The wind had freshened, too, and angry gusts now and then swept across the trail. Soon the snow began to sift through the air, stinging like coarse salt." His characters survived, but real people in real times did die in that country, surprised by sudden winter blizzards.

Late February or early March found WB at a small but growing settlement neatly tucked up to the foothills called Pincher Creek,<sup>73</sup> about twenty-eight miles (forty-five kilometres) southwest of Fort Macleod. "Mr. Cochrane (of the Cochrane Ranche Company) said Pincher Creek is greatly improved, with two nice stores, a blacksmith shop, a saloon, a school and so on."<sup>74</sup> Sheep were being introduced to the area and were not welcomed. (The *Macleod Gazette* reported that they should be fenced.) Schofield and Hyde's General Store and Miss Ruby's Restaurant were two popular businesses then. In early April 1884, WB began outfitting for his first try at Indian trading on his own, planning to work his way north, then east towards Battleford, an area he was so familiar with, trading with the Cree, Saulteaux and Assiniboine. He planned a trading trip north to Fort Edmonton, Frog Lake and Fort Pitt. His time in Battleford behind the counter and on the trail for the Mahoney/Macdonald enterprise gave him the necessary confidence and experience he needed for this risky business. Trailing eleven horses bought in Pincher Creek at about \$50 each (worth over \$1,000 today), he journeyed to Calgary. Once there, he outfitted himself with supplies of the more popular trade items such as blankets, traps, ammunition, bacon, tea, flour, and tobacco, totalling about \$1,000 (over \$20,000 today), a significant sum. All this he bundled up on his packhorses and into four or five carts. This was his first and only big trading venture, financed by means he never revealed.<sup>75</sup>

Of interest is the fact that in 1888, his uncle A.W. Bleasdel<sup>76</sup> opened the People's Drug Store in Pincher Creek. We know WB was his nephew because a sharp newspaper reporter uncovered this tidbit while reporting on WB's visit to Cranbrook, BC,<sup>77</sup> when he visited Clarence Loasby, one of "The Three Scouts."<sup>78</sup>

WB headed north towards Fort Edmonton, a long trip taking him about a week. Through much of it he was warily riding through Blackfoot (Siksika)<sup>79</sup> country

where strangers were not generally welcome. In fact, WB noted that “there’s nothing subdued about them [the Blackfoot people].” An additional handicap was that he did not speak their language. Apparently this part of the long journey north was uneventful, even though WB had hired a Metis helper named George Godin, also known as Kiskawasis, in Calgary, a fellow with a reputation for being nasty and who was in fact a man on the run. WB’s northerly trek and his experience with Kiskawasis are referred to in his story “Law and Kiskawasis.”<sup>80</sup> An interesting twist to this journey is that his party included a third member. Only once in his available written recollections does he reveal that his younger brother, Charles, was with him. “He was just a boy, then.”<sup>81</sup> It was true. Charles was only sixteen and why he was out west at that young age, in wild and dangerous country, remains a mystery.<sup>82</sup>

Weather this time of year is unpredictable but it gave WB and his party no problems. Arriving at Maclelland’s Stopping House at the Red Deer Crossing, upstream from today’s city of Red Deer where historic Fort Normandeau is located, he likely splashed through runoff water on top of the river ice to the north side, continuing on through Treaty Six reserves in what is now the Hobbema area. It is unknown whether or not he traded there. After a short rest in Fort Edmonton, he headed east towards Fort Pitt by the southerly, shorter route, again following what is now the Yellowhead Highway before swinging north towards the North Saskatchewan River, arriving safely at Frog Lake, NWT, on about April 6, 1884. It was on this leg that Kiskawasis got nasty.

Kiskawasis was his Cree name, George Godin his Christian name. WB describes him as the colour of walnut, with black eyes; his mother was an Indian, his father a French Metis.<sup>83</sup> WB, with no one to help but young brother, Charles, hired Godin to come along with them, unaware that a few years earlier, around 1876, Godin had mercilessly killed his wife,<sup>84</sup> as well as an old Frenchman, in northern Montana. He had finally been picked up and jailed in Fort Saskatchewan, but to receive a proper trial and sentencing he had to be transferred to Fort Macleod, then to Regina. NWMP Inspector Cecil Denny was given this job, and kept a sharp eye on Kiskawasis for six days, even though he was handcuffed and shackled each night, until they reached the Bow River.<sup>85</sup> There, another detachment of NWMP members took over. “He was a sullen brute.”<sup>86</sup> He was tried, sentenced to hang and sent on to Stoney Mountain Penitentiary in Manitoba, but the Roman Catholic Church interceded and he was released, finding his way back to Edmonton. Once again he was soon stealing horses and incarcerated, later escaping. He was then arrested for the murder of the old Frenchman, escaped again, was recaptured near Edmonton and then returned to Montana. The exact sequence of captures and escapes is confusing, but it was sometime while Kiskawasis was in the Calgary area on the loose that he hired on with WB. Kiskawasis’ job was to handle the free horses and

keep the four jumpers (or sleighs) trailing WB and his jumper. But not far east of Edmonton, he abandoned WB, taking a horse and WB's shotgun, leaving only WB and Charles to get the five loaded sleighs the next 250 miles (400 kilometres) to Battleford. Kiskawasis disappeared, but he was eventually recaptured and jailed again in the Deer Lodge Penitentiary, Montana. Due to a legal technicality, Kiskawasis did not hang, instead serving time until he died. Old Felix, Godin's father, lived in fear that his son might return, and kept a lantern lit to frighten away his son's spirit. Kiskawasis scared WB, too. "George never appears to me, day or night, but I sometimes think of him and just now am wondering if I am not lucky to be writing this."<sup>87</sup>

We know they travelled the shorter, southerly route by a comment WB made in June 1950. He was asked to speak at the official opening of the new highway bridge over the North Saskatchewan River south of Elk Point, Alberta, about thirty miles (fifty kilometres) west of Frog Lake. During his short speech,<sup>88</sup> he revealed that in 1883,<sup>89</sup> he had driven his trading outfit down into this very spot on the river where there was a well-known ford,<sup>90</sup> choosing to cross to the north side here, rather than downstream, closer to Frog Lake, where there was another ford near the mouth of Frog Creek. He recounted that one of his wagons had broken down on the hill just behind him.

We can piece together WB's trading experiences by combining his statements with those appearing in the *Saskatchewan Herald*. In April 1884, WB began trading in and around Frog Lake and Fort Pitt with the Cree and Saulteaux bands that he was familiar with, including Chief Big Bear, who was then camped near Fort Pitt. WB was not the only trader there. John Pritchard, soon to become an interpreter at Frog Lake, had been trading in that area for some time. The free traders now moving in, including WB, would have been unwelcome competition. This tiny settlement bordering two Indian reserves would soon grow in importance. The *Saskatchewan Herald* reported that the "headquarters of the Frog Lake Indian Agency is to be moved from Pitt to Frog Lake. Indians are now getting out timber for buildings."<sup>91</sup> The federally run Home Farm program<sup>92</sup> was well underway, beginning to produce food for the reserves. It was a busy place, just what WB liked.

There is some evidence that young Charles may have parted company with WB by now. The *Herald* notes that "L.C. Baker and C. Cameron are in from Pitt on Tues.,"<sup>93</sup> suggesting that he may have been working for free trader Baker now. "W.B. Cameron will be down in a few days [from Frog Lake and Fort Pitt]."<sup>94</sup> It was not long after this that WB and another free trader, George Dill, teamed up to trade. "George Dill and W.B. Cameron left on July 25 with goods for Onion Lake<sup>95</sup> where they will open a trading station."<sup>96</sup> This would have been in preparation for

the September 1884 treaty payments at Frog Lake and Fort Pitt.<sup>97</sup> Apparently they were outfitted, at least in part, by Battleford merchants Thomas Edward Mahaffy and James Clinkskill. There are no further references to Charles. "W.B. Cameron left last week for Pitt on a trading expedition."<sup>98</sup> Dill and WB were still together, as sometime in the fall they built a small trading shop at Frog Lake in competition with the HBC. Of interest is that in that year, Dill was taken to court in Battleford by Henry Sayer in an act to recover a stolen horse found in Dill's possession, a serious charge. Five witnesses said the horse belonged to Sayers, but Dill said he had bought it at Medicine Hat. Judge Rouleau ruled in favour of Sayers, but what penalty Dill was given is unknown.<sup>99</sup> WB doesn't seem to have mentioned Dill's brush with the law, but shortly after this, WB left the partnership to work in Battleford for Mahaffy and Clinkskill, while Dill continued to operate the store at Frog Lake on his own. "There was no room for two men in business there," WB stated, "so I agreed to drop out and take a position elsewhere."<sup>100</sup> WB finally decided to make his future with the HBC. "W.B. Cameron has entered the HBC service and has gone to Frog Lake."<sup>101</sup> He signed on as an apprentice clerk and later as postmaster,<sup>102</sup> now very much in opposition to his old partner Dill. WB remarks on how he felt at that time, and also indicates why he might have been spared his life just a few months later. "I was looking for adventure. I was rather wishing the other whites [at Frog Lake] would go down to Pitt. I had plenty of friends among the Indians and felt I would not be hurt."<sup>103</sup>

Of note is that WB's mother's cousin, Joseph Woods, was out west, too, now working in the lumbering and construction business. "Joseph Woods with Colridge and Company mill will return to Winnipeg,"<sup>104</sup> returning in the spring. "Joseph Woods is back in [to Battleford] from Winnipeg as foreman for J.G. Oliver. He has brought carpenters with him."<sup>105</sup> WB does not appear to have made mention of Woods being in the area.

WB was now firmly planted at Frog Lake, beginning the first of two terms of service with the Company, pleased to be once more behind the trading counter among old friends. But in just three months, he would be reeling from the dramatic turn his life had taken.



*Company Man, War Paint  
and a Medal  
1885–1892*

WB'S HOME for a year, what would become known as the massacre site at Frog Lake, is on wild, undeveloped land, off the beaten track and difficult to find by visitors. Years ago, the Alberta Department of Public Works, in collaboration with the Alberta Historic Sites Service (both now under the umbrella of the Department of Alberta Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture), placed signs on major highways in the surrounding area announcing "The Frog Lake Massacre" with directions on how to get there. However, as the Frog Lake First Nation became more politically involved and interested in accurately portraying its past, the band requested that these signs be removed. Band members felt that they did not wish the two reserves<sup>1</sup> to be associated with this tragedy.

Today, confused visitors are pointed in the right direction by the help of the two general stores located in the vicinity, finally reaching their destination a couple of miles (a few kilometres) east of the most southerly Frog Lake General Store. What they find when they arrive is a graveyard dominated by a tall fieldstone cairn,<sup>2</sup> the site neatly fenced with page wire stapled to white wooden posts. This tiny area is federal property, administered by Parks Canada staff at the Fort Battleford National Historic Site. Near the graveyard's eastern boundary, perhaps eleven yards (ten metres) beyond the cairn, right on the fenceline, are six square pedestals belonging to the province on which are mounted signs suffering badly from weathering, displaying brief details about the site. According to Alberta Community Development, Historic Sites Services, these signs are about to be updated.

Many people leave after reading the names on the eight grave markers and the inscription cast into the original brass plaque installed on the cairn in 1925. More adventuresome types wander south of the monument across the road named on an old map drawn in 1922 as “Massacre Street,” following a narrow trail cut through the brush, hunting for the cellars of the church and rectory. This property, eighty acres (over thirty-two hectares) in all, is also owned by the province. Some people, more curious yet, venture farther east down the “street,” trying to spot other cultural features, eventually reaching a small ridge with a black metal cross rooted into the south slope.<sup>3</sup> There they gaze into a few overgrown cellars filled with willow and poplar trees and then leave, their visit to the Frog Lake National Historic Site over.

Unfortunately, they miss many less obvious details. As well, they do not realize that the settlement was as large as it was. Over the last eighteen years, I have wandered all over this place on what I like to call discovery walks, becoming very familiar with known features. Moreover, after grass fires have cleaned out the underbrush, yet more undiscovered features such as basement holes and mounds<sup>4</sup> have been revealed. I hereby offer a special tour of the frontier village approaching that with which WB would have been very familiar.

This small settlement located at the south end of Unipouheos Reserve #121, “at the foot of Frog Lake,” WB relates,<sup>5</sup> actually sprawled east and west in a rough rectangle about six city blocks long and two blocks wide. It was about two miles (three kilometres) south of the foot of the lake. We begin the tour at the cairn and cemetery, the most obvious landmarks. Three hundred feet (roughly one hundred metres) or so west of here is what might be best described as mission hill, the highest place in the settlement and once the site of Our Lady of Good Counsel Mission and its outbuildings. A few hundred yards (roughly three hundred metres) south of the cairn, on a knoll upon which scattered artifacts have been found dating to WB’s times, is the likely spot of Dill’s store, partly owned by WB for a short time. Immediately east of the cemetery on the north side of “Massacre Street,” just a bush trail in WB’s time, was the HBC property with more than five buildings. Here was where WB lived. Road construction in the 1960s carved off part of the hill fronting the property but there are still cultural features to be seen. Apparently, a box of square nails was recovered there during construction. I have tripped over a stovepipe jack poking up through the grass just north of the HBC property. Judging by the rust, this artifact may well have been used in one of these buildings. Travelling easterly across a shallow draw with a trail running through it is what I call agency ridge, where several government structures were located. First there was interpreter John Pritchard’s boarding house, and then almost immediately north was the root cellar, the old folk’s home, and a whipsaw pit. It was here that the first two victims of the massacre fell, T.T. Quinn and Charles Gouin. Just east of Pritchard’s home

was a storehouse, eventually becoming the NWMP detachment headquarters. Farther on was farm instructor John Delaney's house with his garden to the north (where furrows can still be seen today) and other buildings. Between the NWMP and Delaney's stood a tall tamarack pole, the Union Jack fluttering at the top.<sup>6</sup> The NWMP flag would also have flown nearby. Government horse stables were next to the east, two of them cut into the east side of the ridge, overlooking a small flat on which fine crops of oats and barley were raised. Plow furrows, untouched since the fall of 1884, are still visible here as well.<sup>7</sup> Finally, on a small rise east of the field at the far end of the settlement was the home of sub-Indian agent T.T. Quinn. He had several buildings. In addition, scattered in and about the settlement were homes of several Metis families.<sup>8</sup> Isabelle Little Bear John, who was a child at the time of the troubles, states that one large camp lay just to the north of the mission cemetery.<sup>9</sup> There were also the permanent houses of the two Indian bands living about a mile (a kilometre and a half) north across Frog Creek. And off by itself and sometimes overlooked was the new grist and sawmill on Frog Creek, about three miles (five kilometres) west of the settlement, its machinery in place, ready to grind locally produced grain and to saw logs of spruce and poplar that grew abundantly in the area. Although there were not more than sixteen people living and working there at its peak, it nevertheless was an extension to the settlement. The remains of the millpond dam are still visible. Thus ends our tour. Much of what I have described here is what visitors miss unless guided.

By the fall of 1884, the Frog Creek settlement had become a small town, the population swelling to include the five hundred or so members of Chief Big Bear's band who had just relocated from Fort Pitt, camping nearby.<sup>10</sup> By Christmas 1884, there were more than eight hundred souls of Aboriginal and European descent living here, making it a sizeable settlement. Though just a small village, it must have been a hubbub of noisy activity. Wagons would have been clattering about, horses snorting, dogs barking, free-roaming cattle bellowing, red-coated policemen riding in and out on patrols, children shouting as they played in the trees, the silver mission bell tolling upon occasion from the hill, men shouting as they argued with stubborn oxen, and amid it all would have been the pounding of Charlie Gouin's blacksmith hammer. Clusters of blanketed local Cree customarily would have gathered in front of the HBC store, anxious to trade or visit. WB remembered happy times and recalled much of it in his story "Christmas at Frog Lake, 1884." Although fictional, it was based on fact. "We had a very pleasant evening indeed. The ball was held in Johnny Pritchard's log house, the ground floor of which constituted a single living room with a door in the rear opening into the kitchen. The refreshments consisted of Armour's Canned Corn Beef,<sup>11</sup> fruit biscuits, Hudson's Bay black tea, raisins and white lump sugar."<sup>12</sup> WB continues. "No, there was nothing slow about the

Saskatchewan dance of '84 or '85. The programme would read like this—only there wasn't any programme—you just grabbed your partner and made for the centre of the floor, where the crush was thickest." The tunes played by fiddle, of course, were old familiar Metis favourites (see Chapter Two). "When the music stopped, everybody shouted 'Apeeta' which is Cree for 'Half' and means just the same as 'Encore' in English—or French if you prefer." Always an observer of Aboriginal female beauty, WB described three of the ladies present that night: "The Broncho, a charming Indian maiden in a pink calico gown, The Grenadier, a tall and stately daughter of the Crees . . . [and] Genevieve, coquette, the belle of the Settlement."

But below the frivolity, the music and dancing, there was increasing tension. The Cree, once free to roam the forests and the plains but now forced into a restrictive reserve system, were confused and in turmoil. Big Bear, last holdout in accepting treaty, had a highly militant group of young warriors in his midst, one of them his own son, Imasees.<sup>13</sup> Creating more stress was the fact that the band was sharing its territory and the limited food it provided during a cold winter with the other two Frog Lake bands. In addition, over the past two years there had been protests among other bands accepting treaty against poor and unfair treatment by the federal government and ration cutbacks. A final factor was the threat of a second Metis uprising, this time in the Saskatchewan Valley to the east, with "invitations" by the Metis rebels for the various bands to join in. Thus, by early 1885, settlement life around WB was quickly souring and was soon to turn violent. But even though he sensed there might be trouble coming, for WB business was as usual at Frog Lake with the Company.

WB's employment as an HBC servant will be of interest to readers. Hard evidence of his HBC employment either at Frog Lake or later at Fort Alexander proved elusive, in spite of my efforts and those of HBC archivists in Winnipeg, and of Edmonton historian and writer Bob Beal<sup>14</sup> in scouring the huge number of files, numbering in the thousands, that the HBC kept.<sup>15</sup> However, WB is mentioned in the HBC file *Post History: Post Managers of 1885*.<sup>16</sup> He is also named in a statement from his boss, James K. Simpson, who in a deposition made shortly after the uprising stated that WB had been a clerk for him.<sup>17</sup> Therefore there is scarcely any doubt that he had been employed by the HBC.

It is probable that WB got a jump on others seeking Bay employment because of his education and social background, thus becoming a gentleman of the Company much earlier than many employees and placed into the upper echelon of their social structure. He still began his career as an apprentice clerk, however, a position allowing him and all those above him to be addressed as "Mister," at a wage of between \$25 and \$50 (\$550 to \$1,100 in today's dollars). This wage was not momentous but as

it was supplemented with free board and room, a small pension at the end of his career, a few perks,<sup>18</sup> and the distinction of working for such an eminent firm, it was acceptable for WB. As readers will see later, WB served once more as a servant with the HBC, at Fort Alexander,<sup>19</sup> this time able to fulfill the full five-year agreement.

But as a Bay man living on the frontier, living conditions were another matter. Records show that at Frog Lake, WB's superior, Simpson, and his wife, Catherine, lived in a one-and-one-half storey hewed log house with whitewashed walls, a kitchen later added on. The entire structure was roofed with cedar shingles nailed on top of locally whipsawed lumber. WB lodged with them and ate in that same kitchen, but lived upstairs in what was called the half-storey. It had little headroom, and the ceiling was often covered in frost during the winter and dripped when the thaws came along.<sup>20</sup> I was excited to learn that close to the store was the familiar HBC flag flying from a tall lodgepole pine, selected because of its slender height. Very interesting evidence was presented in the last report given of three professional studies done at the site between 1982 and 1985. Investigator Sheila Minnie excavated several test pits around the HBC complex and at one of them, between what would have been the dwelling and the store, she discovered the remains of a wooden post seven inches (eighteen centimetres) in diameter, likely the flagpole upon which flew the respected HBC flag.<sup>21</sup>

Posts like Frog Lake and Fort Alexander were isolated and lonely, with little outside entertainment. However, the former, being an outpost of and provisioned by Fort Pitt and with at least two local Indian bands with which to trade, was bustling and colourful. A ride of a few hours would put WB at Fort Pitt itself, thirty-two miles (about fifty kilometres) southeast, one of the largest and busiest posts on the North Saskatchewan River, where entertainment and a change of menu could be found. Because of the isolation, all-night dances fuelled by the fiddle music were very special. They were so special to WB, in fact, that they were brought to light in colourful stories he wrote about Christmas and New Years parties at several posts.<sup>22</sup>

Fort Alexander was much more isolated. Although only about 75 miles (120 kilometres) directly northeast of Winnipeg, WB had to travel by canoe or boat down the Red River to Lake Winnipeg, north along its eastern shore to the mouth of the Winnipeg River, then east up the river over treacherous water to reach the fort. Not a Sunday outing to say the least.<sup>23</sup> Fort Alexander was an old trading post, established in 1792 on the main trade route linking Montreal with Norway House. It had earlier been regarded as a "large and cultivated farm," but by WB's time, the post now under the management of James Flett, its importance had been reduced substantially. It was here while serving out his contract that he began to write.<sup>24</sup>

WB's primary responsibility as district clerk was keeping the many sets of records the HBC required, using a straight pen and ink to do so. It would have been a great privilege to browse through records that he had created (even though his handwriting was atrocious), but this was not to be the case since the books at Frog Lake had been scattered or burned during the 1885 troubles, while those that are available for Fort Alexander may not have been his work. The Company had a policy for some time that a stove could not be kept in the same room as trade goods that included gunpowder, for fear of explosions and fire, but whether or not this was the case when WB was trading is not known. If it was true, he must have spent some very cold days in the HBC shops. The cold would not have helped WB's handwriting.

At Frog Lake and Fort Alexander WB also spent time behind the counter trading in the accepted ways, becoming very adept in using sign language.<sup>25</sup> The goods included black alpaca cloth, awls, tobacco (either Canada roll or carrot twist), trousers of all kinds, the very popular stovepipe hats, cloth sold by the yard, vermilion, candy, tea, sugar and jams, all placed well back behind him. Chinaware was also sold, the common pattern being Grecian transferware, in either green or blue.<sup>26</sup> Out in the yard for sale were wagons and other country-produced items, including the old standby, the Red River cart. WB became skilled at judging fur quality and determining a trade value, at first using the trade unit of the skin, represented by stick of wood called the "made beaver,"<sup>27</sup> but in later years changing to a dollar figure. Of all the types of fur, the silver fox brought the highest value.

We turn now from the quotidian business concerns of everyday trading life to that terrible spring day in April 1885. WB's feeling there would be trouble was proven when he was roused from his bed in the early morning hours of April 2, warned of the danger by HBC employee Walking Horse. Soon he saw threatening Aboriginal warriors, many with war paint smeared on faces full of hate and malice. With guns waving and death on their minds, they must have been a forbidding sight. This had to be the most overwhelming and most frightening time of his life, a judgement echoed by several historians. Hugh Dempsey, in the fifth edition of *Blood Red the Sun*, declares that "the ugly incident at Frog Lake was crucial to William Bleasdel Cameron's long career."<sup>28</sup> According to Harry Prest, "that William Bleasdel Cameron should be included in a collection such as this is largely the result of a strange trick of fate, a classic instance of someone being in the wrong place at the right time," referring to the fact that WB had been an HBC clerk at Frog Lake, and witness to "one of the most bloodiest incidents of the North-West Insurrection."<sup>29</sup> Rusty Macdonald agrees, while adding that "the dramatic impact of Cameron's Frog Lake account [*The War Trail of Big Bear*] has tended to draw attention away from his shorter pieces."<sup>30</sup>

Since known details of the Frog Lake Massacre, or the Frog Lake Troubles as Frog Lake First Nations prefer to call it, have been well documented in many previous works (please refer to the Bibliography), most have been excluded here. However, here is a brief explanation for those unfamiliar with this tragedy. A highly volatile and angry group of warriors led by Imasees, a son of Big Bear, and Wandering Spirit,<sup>31</sup> all belonging to the secret Rattler Society,<sup>32</sup> killed nine Frog Lake settlers including two Oblate missionaries in cold blood, after hours of intimidating the settlement's inhabitants. In the following days they smashed stoves and furniture, farm equipment and the sawmill, pillaged or destroyed HBC records and settlers' personal effects, and torched many of the buildings, ending whatever future this community might have had. Sensing the unrest, WB had had the foresight to hide the Company's supply of the alcohol-based Perry Davis' Painkiller behind the chimney in Simpson's house.

Reacting to news of trouble in the West, eastern-based newspaper correspondents swarmed about, gathering as much news as they could. A *Mail* reporter from Toronto filed a story from Fort Qu'Appelle on April 10 about the victims of the massacre but was unsure of WB's fate. "Mr. Cameron, the Hudson's Bay officer referred to, is a bright young fellow who was sure of promotion. His experience as a traveler and trader for the Hudson's Bay Company, and his knowledge of the Cree language rendered his services valuable at all times. His friends feel that he is safe but are anxious for news about him."<sup>33</sup>

WB's account in *The War Trail of Big Bear* (later retitled *Blood Red the Sun*) continues to remain one of the most authoritative references on the troubles and the events of that day. Readers should know, however, that while he was certainly one of the threatened parties, he did not personally witness all the killings. WB was deeply involved in something else at that moment as we shall see, and thus his narrative heavily relies on what others told him and on what he later saw. What follows are selected, lesser-known aspects involving WB on and after April 2, 1885, some of which have never before been made public.

Killing WB may not have been in the orders of the day on April 2, although such an end may have seemed assured to him at the time. Many factors influenced his fate, well explained by WB in *War Trail*, satisfying all but the most inquiring readers. WB being a Bay man was one of them. He explained how the HBC outfitted trappers with supplies on a yearly credit, with the understanding their year's catch would be traded to the HBC and the debt cleared. This worked well. In addition, the Company provided medicine and food should a trapper become ill. "It was this policy of liberality that created a bond of friendship that existed between the redmen and the Company for more than 200 years of which they were not forgetful

even in their moment of savage vengeance.”<sup>34</sup> But he stated that being a Company employee was not the only factor maintaining his existence. “I cannot conclude this story of the massacre without recording here the sense of deep gratitude I shall always feel for life preserved under such circumstances I can never cease to regard as anything but miraculous.”<sup>35</sup> What he was referring to is that he had been spotted leaving the HBC post on his way to Big Bear’s camp by “the half-crazy fella” riding Louis Goulet’s horse, who had stopped Goulet earlier, by then protected by his friend Waychun, then waved through. This same person stopped WB, too. “Instead, as I anticipated, of shooting me, to my unutterable gratitude, [he] told me to ‘Go on.’”<sup>36</sup> WB was also given protection upon entering Big Bear’s camp by local Frog Lake chief Unipouheos<sup>37</sup> who warned Wandering Spirit, sometimes called Traveling Spirit, to leave him alone.<sup>38</sup> The war chief grudgingly acknowledged that WB had done him “favours.” Exactly what these were is not known, but they were probably simple things like handing out a bit of extra food, a little more tobacco than usual, or handing out a “long” yard of calico. I should include at this point a better-known fact that helped save WB. He was about to leave the HBC trading post for Delaney’s place, a short distance east, when Miserable Man showed up with the now famous pencilled note that said, “Dear Cameron, Please give Miserable Man one blanket, [Signed] T.T.Q.,” written by sub-Indian agent T.T. Quinn. Although WB had no blankets to give, Miserable Man took time picking over what was left and during this time, only one hundred yards (roughly ninety metres) away from the store, Wandering Spirit shot Quinn, an act marking the beginning of the killing spree.<sup>39</sup> However, there still remains a very significant reason why he lived and others did not, a fact that WB chose not to reveal.

One claim in the folklore surrounding the massacre, its origins obscure, is that WB escaped death by “hiding under some women’s skirts.” This is a myth, repeated even today by locals and serious but ill-informed “tour guides.” Unfortunately, because of this falsehood, WB has been handed a “white feather” by some, signifying an act of cowardice. The truth is that during the troubles of April 2, amid the carnage taking place on the ridge across the ravine east of him, WB was being rescued, hastily hidden in an HBC storehouse by two Indian women who had great respect for this twenty-three-year-old white man. Timing it just right, they hauled this terrified fellow out the door and in an intelligent and quick move, tossed a red blanket or shawl over WB, spiriting him off to the far side of Frog Creek to Big Bear’s second camp, now relocated about a mile (a kilometre and a half) north of the settlement, under their protection. It was at this time that the “crazy fella” on Goulet’s horse let him pass. The two Indian women were Catherine Simpson,<sup>40</sup> wife of James K. Simpson,<sup>41</sup> WB’s boss, and Margaret Kechino, a local Cree lady. This act of kindness was underpinned by a tradition that could be called the sanctity of the blanket.<sup>42</sup>

In many older North American Aboriginal cultures, the blanket or robe provided far more than warmth. This is concisely explained in the valuable book *The Mystic Warriors of the Plains*.<sup>43</sup> The author, Thomas E. Mails, states that the blanket had a language all its own depending on the way it was worn. Arranged in a certain manner, it could signal meditation, anger, a change of attitude or request attention to the wearer. It was also used to hide or disguise one's feelings or intentions from others.<sup>44</sup>

WB was well aware of this social practice among Aboriginal groups. While in captivity, he talks about becoming confident enough to wander about the camp wearing moccasins and a blanket. "And as I became more familiar with the life and customs of the Indians, [I] stalked in the evenings among the bucks, a blanket wrapped closely about me, indistinguishable from one of themselves. It is against etiquette for one Indian to intercept another strolling through the camp at night with a blanket trailing to his heels and hooded about his head so that only an eye is visible."<sup>45</sup> WB explains that the wearer is often on a mission of some sorts and may resent someone "looking in" to see who is there. It just wasn't done.<sup>46</sup> WB's reputation still suffers the indignity and unfairness of "hiding under women's skirts" simply because he never did publicly acknowledge the help these two Indian women gave him when he needed it the most.

WB could be self-aggrandizing if it was to his advantage. A case in point is how history has recorded that he was the only white man to escape the massacre. To have been the "sole white male survivor of the 1885 Frog Lake Massacre," a note he wrote on the back of one of his photographs, made WB special and newsworthy and he perpetuated this idea. Press releases and articles written about him invariably mention this fact. But was he really the only white male survivor?

In 1987, noted Battleford historian Doug Light added a new perspective to WB's claim in *Footprints in the Dust*,<sup>47</sup> a very detailed and accurate account of the people and events leading up to and including the North-West Rebellion, by introducing Edward Francois Dufresne (Dufrene). This name with its assorted spellings was commonly used by many Metis in the West, including a few who lived in and around Fort Pitt and some of them witness to the events at Frog Lake and Fort Pitt during the troubles. Edward was not Metis, but rather as French-Canadian as could be, born in 1806 on the south shore of the St. Lawrence Seaway at La Prairie, Quebec, across from Verdun. Dufresne stands in the often-printed staged picture taken by D.J. Soule at Fort Pitt in 1884, showing Big Bear with a stovepipe hat jammed onto his large head and an HBC blanket provided by the Company draped over his shoulder for the sitting. A cook for the HBC, often called Otto, Dufresne is seventh from the left, unmistakable with his long flowing white beard

and hair, short in stature, squeezed in between Angus Mackay and Louis Goulet.<sup>48</sup> According to Light and also Goulet, Dufresne was indeed taken prisoner along with the others at Frog Lake. WB himself noted that Dufresne was among the prisoners that travelled on the pillaging trip from Frog Lake to Fort Pitt with Big Bear. So does C.P. Mulvaney in his 1885 publication, *The History of the North-West Rebellion of 1885*.<sup>49</sup> In fact, while prisoner in Big Bear's camp on the hill above Fort Pitt before the pillage took place, "Old Man Dufresne" delivered the well-documented letter from Big Bear to NWMP Sergeant John Martin and another to Inspector Francis Dickens<sup>50</sup> suggesting that the police should vacate Fort Pitt while they still can. This makes him the second white male massacre survivor, directly conflicting with WB's enduring claim. Alive until 1895, Dufresne must have been aware of WB's claim to fame as the only white male survivor on April 2, but neither he nor his family ever publicly refuted WB's self-glorifying statement.<sup>51</sup> And there were other white captives such as John Perry, a woodcutter with Goulet, and another French Canadian. Did WB forget them, or was it a wilful omission? Based on what I've learned about him, I favour the latter.

Among many of the local Aboriginal Elders today is a feeling tinged with hostility that WB didn't tell the whole truth about those times and about what happened that day. Todd Kuehn, a retired barber<sup>52</sup> currently living in Vermilion, talked about something he observed in 1923 when, as a child, he visited the site with his parents. At that time, there were a few stores located just west of the present-day Frog Lake store on Highway 897. In front of these was a wooden sidewalk and benches where the locals gathered, many of them local Cree. According to Kuehn, his family's visit coincided with the first time WB had been back in the area since the uprising. The Kuehns watched WB ambling along the short street, which was simply the main trail, really, with bystanders staring at him and whispering among themselves. Kuehn noticed that WB gave the people, some of whom he would have known, a wide berth, walking down the middle of the street instead of in front of them.<sup>53</sup> This was not the custom for him with his Aboriginal friends, with whom handshaking was a common gesture of courtesy. In another instance, WB returned to unveil the plaque on the recently built cairn dedicated in 1925 in the memory of the Frog Lake Massacre. Many local Cree from Frog Lake were present and numerous pictures were taken of this notable event. These photographs show that WB often remained to the side, not joining in with the Cree. Another strange incident, perhaps related to what the Elders feel, occurred in 1936 at his drugstore in Heinsburg, a small town not far from Frog Lake. Roads were poor, the Depression was on and since there was regular CNR train service, many local people travelled that way. Being a small community, the identity of passengers getting on and off the train was public business. On one incoming train "three dark men" got off and were seen hurrying

up main street to WB's drugstore. How long they stayed is not known as no one saw them leave, but everyone knew that WB had then hastily left town by the next train, his drugstore locked up, stock intact, not to return for some time. It seems that these men had spooked WB into leaving, but why can only be speculated on. One possibility is that it had something to do with stolen furs and Frog Lake as we shall soon see.<sup>54</sup> But there is another factor seldom mentioned. WB noted more than once the beauty and attractiveness of the Cree women. In a recently uncovered document written in 1925 by F.O. Seward, the man who gave WB a ride from Kitscoty, Alberta, to the cairn unveiling, the writer reveals that the "young bloods" at Frog Lake in 1885 were quite aggressive and angry at the white men for "buying favours" from their women with cheap trinkets. WB was apparently included. Seward adds that even forty years later, WB would not go on the reserve at all unless accompanied by local land agent Harry Bowtell, who knew many of the band members. Unfortunately, the Elders have been very close-mouthed about it all.<sup>55</sup>

Something about WB that I find incredible was his rapid recovery from the past trauma of death and destruction around him. I don't question the fact that he was terrified by what was happening around him. A gentle person by nature and raised in a civilized manner, he admits he had been in shock.<sup>56</sup> "For months afterward the unexpected report of a gun put my heart in my mouth. In my dreams painted savages raced yelling after me at early dawn through belts of dark firs, over knolls, across valleys; bullets sang in my ears or buried themselves in my flesh; I awoke gasping and unable in the first seconds of consciousness to convince myself that it was not all a horrible reality. Even after all these years I do not often care to dwell in memory upon that dreadful time."<sup>57</sup>

Comments by another, Metis Louis Goulet, confirm his fright. Goulet was doing some lumbering on Moose Creek near today's Lindbergh, about nine miles (fifteen kilometres) west of the settlement, and happened to visit Johnny Gowanlock at the nearby mill site and then ride into the settlement when the trouble took place. Goulet witnessed WB's actions, and discusses WB's escape while the shooting was going on nearby. "I saw Mrs. Simpson going by with Cameron under one arm," more or less dragging him or carrying him. He continues, "Cameron could hardly keep on his feet, every step a stagger. I thought he was wounded, but, no, it was fear [that] made him that way."<sup>58</sup> Like the skirt story, this is hardly a flattering statement but likely accurate considering what was taking place at the time.

More proof of his trauma was recently revealed by Eileen Lacoursiere, related to her research on the Pritchards.<sup>59</sup> She comments that stories told among the Pritchards include the fact that WB had been hidden under the blankets by John and Rose Pritchard in their tent when the Rebellion leaders came to talk to John shortly after

the uprising. Rose is said to have breastfed four-month-old Margaret during that visit while sitting on these blankets. There is no record of WB ever mentioning this to anyone, probably for good reason. There exists among the Pritchard family a feeling similar to that of the Elders just mentioned, that “what WB talked about in his book about certain things taking place during this event was all based on hearsay.”<sup>60</sup> It is unfortunate no specific details countering WB’s version of events have been uncovered.<sup>61</sup>

Now in captivity, WB must have been intimidated when surrounded by angry young men proud of the killings, parading about wearing clothing stolen from the dead settlers, including the priests’ vestments.<sup>62</sup> Even though the angry warriors had left him alone, he still remained a witness to what they had done, and a threat. The feasting on slaughtered cattle, the wild dancing and the squabbles among themselves went on while the war drums pounded long into the night. After a week of this frenetic activity, still looking for more vengeance, Imasees and Wandering Spirit ordered the camp packed up and then headed to Fort Pitt, which they would soon loot and burn. For some reason never explained they left behind WB, Jim Simpson, and a few others: “Simpson, Fitzpatrick and myself might easily have escaped in their absence, but there were two white women in the camp; we might yet be able to do them some service.”<sup>63</sup> Wandering Spirit and his retinue eventually returned from Pitt with prisoners, including WB’s very close friend, Stanley Simpson. The camp was again relocated, this time nearly two miles (three kilometres) farther east into heavy spruce south of the ridge locally called the hogback.<sup>64</sup> By this time WB had begun his amazingly rapid recovery from what most people would consider horrible times.<sup>65</sup> As the days went on, WB and Simpson were given greater freedom, allowed to carry guns and go on small hunts. It seems to me, from what he said later, that he began to enjoy himself. In the month that the camp was in the spruce, WB became less fearful, more closely observing what was going on around him. What he garnered provided him with the rich and colourful material he later used in *War Trail* and many other stories. Still in camp, along with Louis Patenaude and Stanley Simpson, WB pensively ventured down to what remained of the once promising settlement, slowly wandering about the blackened ruins after passing by the bodies of two unburied men sprawled on the side of the trail, one of them with his dead dog lying by him.<sup>66</sup> Their identities he never mentions in the book, despite the fact that he should have known them, one of those inexplicable omissions of detail I find in his writing, but the victims would have been George Dill and William Gilchrist, shot down north of the settlement. Amongst the rubble of the stables WB and Simpson found a couple of farm tools that they soon put to good use—they went fishing. Returning to the lake where it empties into Frog Creek, they rammed the pitchforks into the swirling masses of spawning jackfish now running: “My chum

Stanley Simpson and I stood to our waists in the ice running on Frog Creek and threw 40 pike out on the bank in an hour with a couple of forks.”<sup>67</sup> I find that his actions are not typical of a person yet in trauma. In fact, Henry Halpin, WB’s HBC colleague from Cold Lake, mentioned while Big Bear’s prisoner shortly after the troubles that “Mr. Cameron seemed in his usual good health and spirits and had evidently made up his mind to live if possible.”<sup>68</sup>

Imasees and Wandering Spirit, now very frightened of the Militia on its way to punish them, began yet another exodus, this time taking the group easterly, towards Fort Pitt, then on to Frenchman’s (Frenchman) Butte. The Militia was hot on their trail, very stirred up and angry by highly inflammatory remarks that made it to the press by a member of the Militia<sup>69</sup> declaring how badly the two Therasas were being treated by Big Bear’s warriors. WB was there at the non-decisive Battle of Frenchman’s Butte on May 27, 1885, protected in one of the numerous rifle pits, avoiding Militia fire coming at them from across a deep ravine to the south. During the fight distracting their captors, the camp began to break up and its prisoners scattered, WB among them, the smell of freedom heavy in the air. WB found a change of trousers somewhere and hastily changed, hanging the old pair in a tree, forgetting that in a pocket was the heavy brass door key of the HBC store at Frog Lake. “One day I hoped to return to that wild and lonely spot and endeavor to find it, but I never did.”<sup>70</sup> In the 1930s, a construction crew building a road in that area came across what was left of the trousers, and to their delight, discovered the key.<sup>71</sup> The remainder of the escape story is nicely recorded in *War Trail*.

By June 1, 1885, WB was a free man, safe now in Fort Pitt, apparently fully recovered. With time to reflect, his storytelling instinct kicked in. Knowing that his frightening yet exhilarating times in the last two months were newsworthy, he was soon eagerly giving interviews to the many reporters covering the Rebellion, providing them with many details that had yet to be corroborated. I find this quite amazing but typical of WB. Continuing to capitalize on his position, within days he hired on with General Thomas B. Strange, commanding the Alberta Field Force now in pursuit of Big Bear. Donning the uniform of a government scout and guide, a slouch hat, fringed buckskin jacket and moccasins, armed with a government-issued Winchester and riding a fresh government horse, WB guided them north to the Beaver River in an attempt to cut off the chief’s retreat. It was on this chase that he and a few others began to note the abundance of stolen goods abandoned in the bush. WB and a few others, all government employees, strongly instructed by General Middleton not to pillage, “recovered” a number of furs apparently belonging to Abraham Montour, a Metis rebel who had been part of Big Bear’s camp. These they loaded up, the bearskins spooking the horses. “But at length we all got safely aboard [our horses] and rode away, to hide our plunder in the woods.”<sup>72</sup> Within miles, they discovered

a cache of furs likely stolen from the HBC store on the Beaver River, dividing these as well among themselves as war booty. The next day they found more furs on the Chipewyan reserve, appropriating these too. He tried to justify his actions. "But, lest it be thought that I made a fortune out of all the plunder, I may mention that the total value of all the furs I obtained, apart from what I gave away, was at that time one hundred and fifty dollars."<sup>73</sup> How he managed to sell these hot items, worth over \$3,000 in today's currency, will be explained shortly.

Again, at Fort Pitt, always a trader, WB took advantage of the circumstances. "No sooner was I well out of the clutches of the savages, vowing I never again wanted to see an Indian, than I was ready to go back out among them."<sup>74</sup> He admitted they had charmed him. "There were dollars and furs, bead, silk and feather work, among the Indians who had come in and surrendered at Pitt and I wanted a share of it all." He knew what they liked from his earlier trading. Within four days, he and Henry Quinn, government scout and nephew of the deceased T.T. Quinn, had travelled to Battleford and back, hiring a Metis man named Poirier as a freighter, the wagon now overflowing with "blankets and print, syrup, tobacco, vermilion in little deerskin bags, likely cut five to one with flour as was the trade practice then, butter, canned fruits, many other articles dear to the aboriginal heart, including gingerale and cigars."<sup>75</sup> I do not know where he got the cash to buy these goods. WB traded for several days up on the hill above Fort Pitt gathering in furs, beadwork, even paper money, some of it pilfered from Pitt and Frog Lake. It was a prosperous time for WB and that he could pull it off after what he'd just been through seems astonishing.<sup>76</sup>

And WB wasn't done just yet. He decided to pay a visit to Wandering Spirit, now a prisoner, of all things wanting to trade with the recalcitrant war chief. Wandering Spirit was lying on a blanket in the shade outside his tent at Fort Pitt, his curly black hair damp with sweat, recovering from a self-inflicted stab wound to the chest, an attempt at suicide on June 19, 1885.<sup>77</sup> "The war chief was a very sick man," notes WB, yet asks if Wandering Spirit wishes to trade. "No," he answered wearily in his characteristic high-pitched and penetrating voice. "I want nothing. Anyway, I have nothing with which to buy."<sup>78</sup> But determined to deal with the fellow, knowing what he needed to survive, WB offered him food, sending it back from his tent with Wandering Spirit's daughter. For his little favour to a killer who a few weeks ago was ready to slit his throat, he asked for and was given the knife that Wandering Spirit had plunged into his own chest. Not commonly known either is that he talked the wounded warrior out of the valuable and beautiful five-plumed lynx war bonnet that he had worn while on his killing spree during the Frog Lake troubles. At the same time, he also got his hands on Wandering Spirit's flint and steel!<sup>79</sup> Formidable powers of persuasion were clearly included in WB's many talents.<sup>80</sup>

WB's family was naturally concerned about his welfare all this time. His mother, Agnes Emma, widowed of course and living in Toronto, wrote to WB sometime in April. WB's oldest sister, Isabelle, very concerned as well, also wrote at this time: "I was at the photographers when I saw your name as one of the missing ones. I didn't wait there very long. I rushed home and found there all in tears, Agnes, crying over a pot of potatoes she was getting for supper."<sup>81</sup> She continued. "Every one has been exceedingly kind. You don't know how many friends you have."<sup>82</sup> Isabelle remembered to send a photo to WB.

Sister Agnes wrote the same day, alarmed by the telegram sent by the Militia that WB had been taken prisoner, reminding him that his many friends had been inquiring about him. "I hope the Indians are very good to you and that you have enough food and clothing. Mamma has just gone out to see what she can buy to send to you. This parcel she will send along with one going to Mr. Edgar who is with the Queen's Owns [*sic*]."<sup>83</sup> She remains optimistic, however. "How long the time must seem to you, but we feel sure we will see you soon in Toronto."<sup>84</sup>

Youngest sister, Maude, also wrote an affectionate, amusing, letter. "Dearest Willie. I did write once or twice to you during your imprisonment with Big Bear."<sup>85</sup> Above the words Big Bear she drew a tiny caricature of what she thought he might have looked like. "You do not know how we should like you to be at home, you have been away from home long enough, you bad boy." It's clear that she wants him home for Christmas. Before closing, she says that she wants to write to Charlie as well. She closed, "Kiss yourself a 100 times for me and come home soon[. From] your loving and affectionate sister, Maude."<sup>86</sup>

WB's grandfather, Reverend William Bleasdel, was also very concerned, writing to none other than Sir John A. Macdonald, who in turn, requested that the NWMP investigate and report. Fred White, NWMP Comptroller, replied, "Inquiries were duly made and Inspector Dickens, who was in command of the Police at Fort Pitt, reported three white men as being prisoners in Big Bear's camp, and gave the name of one of them as Cameron." White was able to confirm the facts by telegraph. "W.B. Cameron was taken prisoner at Frog Lake and is in Big Bear's camp."<sup>87</sup>

WB's mother wrote again on June 14, 1885: "Dear Willie. It is just a week tonight since we heard of your escape from 'Big Bear.' Since that we have seen an account of the Frog Lake massacre telegraphed to the Mail by their correspondent."<sup>88</sup> She confided that she had had a difficult time with the ordeal. "What you must have suffered and gone through that is dreadful to think of but you have been spared throughout it all for which I can ever be thankful." Agnes Emma strongly suggested that WB and Charlie come home "through the military or government free with the troops."<sup>89</sup> This is further proof, of course, that WB's younger brother, Charles, was

in the area at that time. In this letter she says that Charlie had written to her twice. Charles was a private serving in the Ambulance Corp, 2nd Battalion Queen's Own Rifles (Q.O.R.), in the area during the Rebellion.<sup>90</sup> To their frustration, General Middleton did not allow the Q.O.R. to pursue Big Bear, but against orders, Charles, otherwise known as John, Cameron, Q.O.R., in his search for his brother, WB, managed to sneak aboard the steamer *Northwest* bound for Frog Lake Landing<sup>91</sup> and followed the other troops for some time in their search for Big Bear.<sup>92</sup> WB never publicly acknowledged his brother's attempts, another one of his inexplicable omissions. (Like WB, Charles was later awarded a North West Canada Medal.) Interestingly, Agnes Emma's next sentence read, "It is a long experience you had and of course you have no money."<sup>93</sup> Little did she know that she was about to receive several thousand dollars worth of "appropriated" furs from her son. She closed the letter in a motherly manner: "Bless you, my own dear boy. Signed, Mother."<sup>94</sup> In reply, three weeks later, WB wrote from Battleford in a letter obviously penned in a hurry.

Dear Mother: Mr. Mackenzie, the bearer, is the gentleman who "interviewed" me on my arrival in General Strange's camp and has taken a good deal of interest in me. He kindly offered to carry some furs which I captured for me to Toronto and to call on you and deliver it, so I took advantage of the opportunity and I know you will be glad to see them. I received your parcel and letter sent in April yesterday at the barracks [in Battleford] but did not meet Mr. Edgar. Many thanks for your kindnesses, but do not send anything more as I am able from my wages to fit myself out again. Your affectionate son, W.B. Cameron.<sup>95</sup>

But another person wrote to Agnes Emma before WB did, Charles Whitcombe. His identity is unknown but he was from Ontario, apparently with the Militia. In part he says, "My dear Mrs. Cameron: I write to tell you that I had a long talk with your son yesterday. I write to assure you that he is very well and quite restored from the fatigue, hardships and anxiety of his long detention." Whitcombe then promises that he will visit her when he returns to Toronto.<sup>96</sup>

The Rebellion and its aftermath over, the trials began. WB willingly testified, apparently with a lengthy speech, unprompted by the defence lawyer, in support of Big Bear. While in Regina he again demonstrated that he was enjoying his Rebellion experiences mixed in with a bit of theatrics, rounding up Horse Child<sup>97</sup> and hustling him off to a Regina photo studio, posing for the classic photo of Horse Child and himself.<sup>98</sup> In the meantime, the HBC had not forgotten about WB, offering him a position at their Green Lake post north of Battleford, which he declined, saying that it was "too isolated." If WB thought Green Lake was isolated, one can only wonder how he found his later posting at Fort Alexander. In October, *Saskatchewan Herald* editor P.G. Laurie notes that "W.B. Cameron has returned [to Battleford,] back from the trials in Regina."<sup>99</sup>

November 27, 1885, cold and miserable, was the day that WB as part of the coroner's committee witnessed the mass hanging of eight Aboriginal men within the stockade of Fort Battleford. Earlier he had visited with some of the men in the cells, where several of them, including Wandering Spirit, were in chains. Six had been convicted of crimes at Frog Lake and two for murder in the Battleford area.<sup>100</sup> What were his motives for these visits? Was WB feeling any sympathy towards them? Or could it be that he was simply collecting material?<sup>101</sup> This may seem a harsh statement, but we must remember that WB was an opportunist.

He caught the attention of P.G. Laurie. "W.B. Cameron who has made Battleford his home on and off for the last 5–6 years went east Thursday hoping to reach his [Toronto] home in time for Christmas," adding that he expects him back in the spring.<sup>102</sup> Now a bit of a hero, WB returned East. He is likely to have done considerable visiting and travelling while he was in Ontario. Some of his time was spent at his mother's Toronto home, where he no doubt regaled the family with wild stories about the last four and a half years in the West. There WB remained while reorganizing his life, preparing himself for his next challenge. Among other tasks, he had some important paperwork to catch up on involving money. It is possible to track some of his activities at this time.

In March 1886, he strolled in to the *Trenton Advocate* office, where he created enough interest to be interviewed about his times during the Rebellion. This was a great opportunity for the *Advocate*. It had been covering the Rebellion since some of the local boys had been out West with the Militia, but the paper seldom got a chance for a live interview with a real participant. It could be that WB not only wanted to tell his side of the story as he was a bit famous by now, but also to correct what had been previously published by the *Trenton Courier*. Earlier, the *Courier* had reported that an HBC clerk named McDonald was being held captive. Then on July 30, 1885, they stated that "McDonald [*sic*] was hidden for three hours under some furs by a couple of squaws."<sup>103</sup> The newspaper had the right details but the wrong man. WB's interview was successful and soon the *Advocate* published his story in several parts under the title "North-West Incidents—An Interview with W.B. Cameron."<sup>104</sup> Why WB did not go to the *Courier* to make these corrections is a mystery.

WB was pursuing gratuities for his government service, short as it was, and personally applied to the Department of Interior on June 14, 1886, in Ottawa, for a land grant of 320 acres (130 hectares). Two days later, military warrant No. 0583 was delivered to WB. It read in part, "This warrant entitles William Bleasdel Cameron, who was actively engaged and bore arms in the suppression of the Indian and Half-breed outbreak of 1885, as a scout and guide, attached to Major General Strange's column, to enter at any agency of Dominion Lands a homestead of two

adjoining quarter sections, comprising an area of 320 acres, et al.”<sup>105</sup> But he did not claim the land, choosing instead to redeem the grant for scrip (that is, cash). On September 7, 1886, he was issued the standard scrip of \$80 (worth about \$1,800 today).<sup>106</sup> About the same time, he applied for the North West Canada Medal.<sup>107</sup> This he also duly received.

While in Ottawa, he wrote the Qualifying Examination for the Civil Service of Canada, soon to be issued a Certificate of Proficiency by the Board of Civil Service Examiners on July 12, 1886, and WB personally signed it in Ottawa on August 10, 1886. Eldest sister Belle met with him in Ottawa and was concerned about his health. “You looked pale and tired out the last time I saw you.”<sup>108</sup> But he had not finished his claims just yet. The North West Rebellion War Losses Commission had been formed to evaluate and settle war claims. Meeting in Prince Albert in 1886, to their astonishment they discovered among the claims, including those of widows Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney, that of brassy young WB, boldly asking \$2,500 for lost wages. Although the two Therasas were eventually given awards, it is not known whether or not WB received any settlement.<sup>109</sup>

WB returned to the West. By fall 1886 he was a land agent in Edmonton. “W. B. Cameron has been appointed assistant land agent in the Dominion Lands office in Edmonton.”<sup>110</sup> He worked in the Edmonton area until late summer of 1888. “W.B. Cameron, late of Edmonton land office has been removed from Brandon to Regina.”<sup>111</sup> Records indicate that he worked in Regina for the Dominion Lands Office from 1888 until 1890. Exactly what he did is unknown but it would have been clerical in nature, and typically a desk job. He seems to have never mentioned why he left the employ of Regina’s land department, but based on his lifestyle, it’s safe to say he tired of town life and was longing for the frontier once again, despite the fact that buffalo still grazed in front of Regina’s new territorial capital building. By 1890 he was at Duck Lake, NWT, as clerk for the Indian Agency under Mr. McNeil. The year he moved there, the town was being relocated to its present spot next to the new railroad.<sup>112</sup>

WB was happily employed here. The community was about to enjoy twenty years of growth and prosperity, a climate in which he thrived. His work now involved the affairs of the Beardy #97 and Okemasis #96 Reserves and as will be seen, he became quite familiar with band members. WB did not mind all the attention he was getting, especially from the ladies daintily grasping colourful parasols, as he wheeled his velocipede<sup>113</sup> in and out among the hundreds gathered on a sunny early afternoon at Stobart on grassy fairgrounds hugging the eastern shore of Duck Lake.<sup>114</sup> Sportily dressed in a white suit and white tie, wearing a white cloth cap tipped to one side, he had an official’s ribbon pinned to his shirt. Comfortably perched high on the

leather seat, a slight smile on his face, he was heading straight into the photographer's lens for what we call today a photo op.<sup>115</sup> He had a good reason to appear so jauntily. It was the big Third Annual Duck Lake Sports Day, July 13, 1891, and he was the secretary.

The small town looked forward to this annual event as a chance to dress up, get together and sometimes host dignitaries.<sup>116</sup> For example, in 1889, a dry year with poor crops, horse races were held in honour of Joseph Royal, then lieutenant-governor.<sup>117</sup> The 1891 program, likely typical of them all, included many kinds of horse races, long jumps, foot races and water events such as tub and canoe races. The event poster also announced a hundred-yard (ninety-metre) "squaw race," which was a foot race.<sup>118</sup> A little later in the day, wearing the same white suit but now topped with a white boater hat, WB proudly posed with Beardy warriors with names like Joe Good Day, still a familiar name in the area, Yellow Blanket, Little Big Head, The Toad and Poor Man, who were performing the grass dance.<sup>119</sup>

It can be understood why he liked it here. It was still remote, with a strong Aboriginal atmosphere, and was new, established only sixteen years before. A mere six years earlier, Louis Riel formed his provisional government just across the South Saskatchewan River at Batoche. In addition, the first shots of the Rebellion were fired only a couple of miles (three kilometres) west of here at the famed Battle of Duck Lake.<sup>120</sup> In fact, WB liked it so well that he applied for a homestead, close to the old townsite where he was photographed riding the velocipede, about a mile (a kilometre or two) straight north on the grid road. Flat and a bit sandy, it would be productive with sufficient rain.<sup>121</sup> Just south of the old fairgrounds by the lake and across the present-day road, the Roman Catholic Church had established the St. Michael Mission, with beautiful grounds, flowers and stonework, and a school.<sup>122</sup> This mission would soon have a special connection to WB's name.

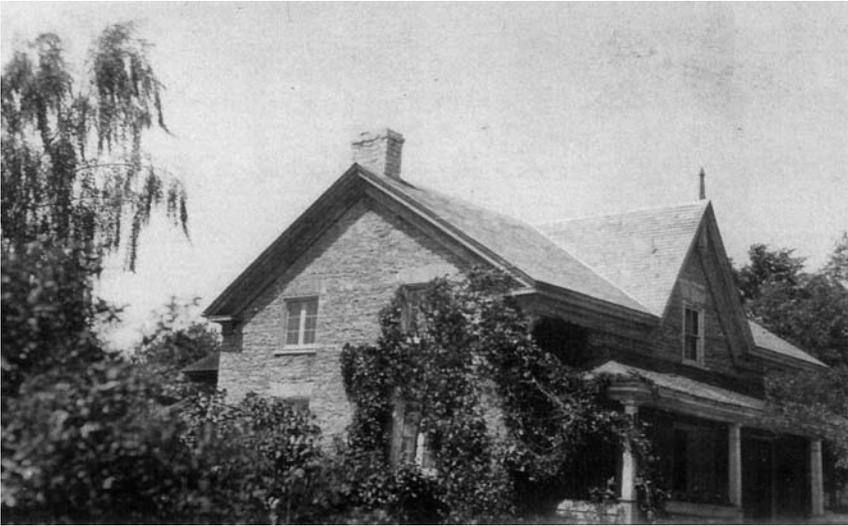
It may have been the white suit. WB's dalliance with a Metis woman from either the Beardy or Okemasis Reserve, her name withheld from this writer, resulted in her bearing a son in the spring of 1892. WB was gone by then. The boy was Jean Baptiste, the name chosen by his mother. I learned from a kind woman in Duck Lake that at age seventeen, this young man married Mary Rose Ayasew,<sup>123</sup> a girl from Beardy, on January 19, 1909, at the St. Michael Mission. From this marriage four children were born. Recent Duck Lake telephone directories have had at least sixteen Camerons listed, apparently all from WB's lineage.<sup>124</sup> As already noted in Chapter 1, WB's mother and two of his sisters came to Duck Lake to live with him for a short time. Later in 1890, WB's mother, Agnes Emma, was hired as Matron of the Battleford Indian Industrial School, replacing the previous matron.<sup>125</sup>

By the summer of 1891, WB was off again, first to Winnipeg and then finding himself

once more employed by the HBC, this time in Manitoba, at Fort Alexander. This was certainly more isolated than the Green Lake post he had been earlier offered, and it was here where his writing career began in earnest. WB would return to this country four decades later, collecting Rebellion stories from many of the participants and settlers, among them Henry John Moberly,<sup>126</sup> but whether or not he visited with his son Jean Baptiste is unknown. About this time he wrote the tragic story of Almighty Voice, a local Cree who killed a stray cow for his wedding feast.<sup>127</sup>

WB is not mentioned in the local Duck Lake history book called *The Voice of the People: Reminiscences of the Prince Albert Settlement's Early Citizens* published by the Prince Albert Historical Society, nor does he appear in *Their Dreams, Our Memories: A History of Duck Lake and District*.<sup>128</sup> However, WB is noted in the archives of the recently constructed Duck Lake Interpretive Centre,<sup>129</sup> a project well done.

Fort Alexander was not as busy as many of the other Hudson's Bay Company's posts but WB, now being a district clerk, had more paperwork to keep up on. However, with short workdays and long winter nights, with no place to go and with few outside attractions, he settled down to write. It was here that he began to put his thoughts together about his days in captivity that would eventually become *The War Trail of Big Bear*, but he was also writing shorter pieces. These included his prize-winning "A Reconnaissance At Fort Ellice" and "The North-West Mounted Police of Canada," both published in *Toronto Saturday Night* in December 1895 and May 1896 respectively.



*2008.008/44—The stone house on Byron Street in Trenton where WB grew up. It is located close to St. George's Anglican Church where WB's grandfather ministered for many years.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



*2008.008/34—WB's maternal grandfather, the Reverend Canon William Bleasdel, Trenton, Ontario. Bleasdel likely provided motivation and guidance to the young WB.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.

*2008.008/35—Agnes Bleasdel, WB's grandmother, who was also a strong supporter of her flock. She was involved in many things concerning her church and community.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



*2008.008/36—Agnes Emma Cameron (née Bleasdel) in her earlier years. She was a caring, well-educated and resourceful woman who spent some time in the West while WB was there.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.





*2008.008/37—Belleville lumberman John Cameron, WB's father, whom WB never got to know well and who was a stern taskmaster.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



*2008.008/39—Isabelle Cameron, WB's oldest sister. She married John George Bourinot, who was later knighted to become Sir John George Bourinot, who in 1880 became chief clerk of the House of Commons in Ottawa.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



*2008.008/41—WB's second sister, Agnes Cameron. She married NWMP Inspector Joseph Howe, who was wounded in the North-West Rebellion's first battle at Duck Lake in March 1885.*

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE RCMP QUARTERLY VOL. II, NO. 4.



*2008.008/40—Maude Cameron, youngest sister of WB, holding an infant. She married Colonel James A. Macdonnell, a BC railroad contractor, whose company built the well-known Kettle Valley Railway in BC's interior.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



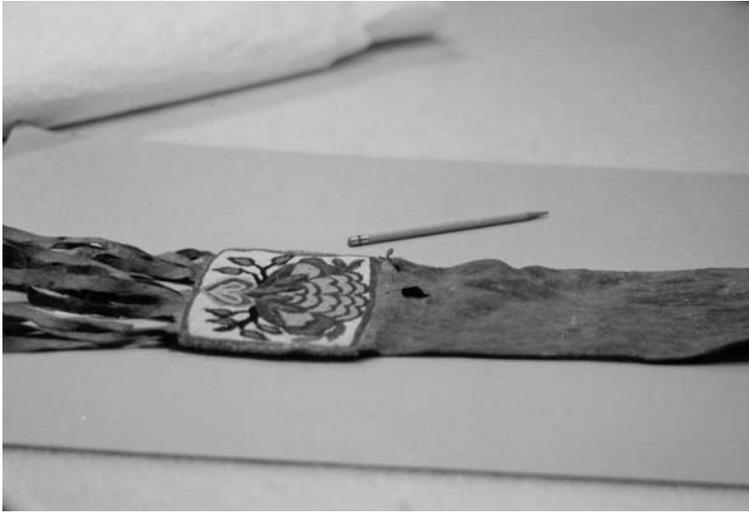
*2008.008/42—Charles (John) Cameron, only brother of WB. He was also an adventurer, believed to be out west with WB trading prior to the Rebellion. Charles also attempted to locate his brother while WB was held captive. WB never acknowledged either of these facts.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



*2008.008/43—The Bleasdel family cemetery plot in the Trenton, Ontario, area. It is not known whether WB ever visited the site.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



*2008.008/52—The Sioux pipe bag allegedly once owned by Chief Rain-In-The-Face, given to WB by his cousin Joe Woods. This artifact is held by the Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary, Alberta.*

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ROBERT HENDRIKS.



*2008.008/7—A typical early pack train from about 1879 along the St. Mary's River not far from Fort Whoop-Up, near today's Lethbridge. This train was likely based out of Fort Benton, Montana.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



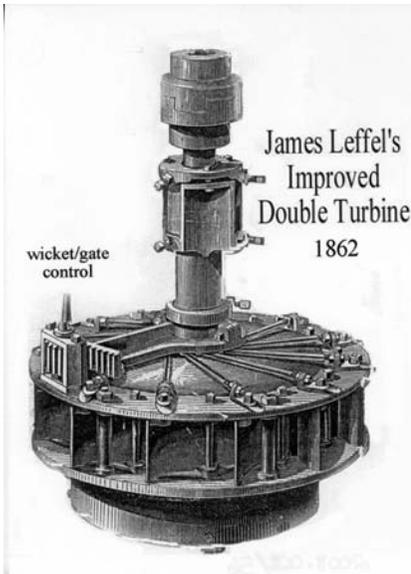
*2008.008/2—Ad McPherson, early friend of WB and often mentioned in various historical documents, who became famous as a trader, freighter and businessman.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



*2008.008/53—The first CPR trestle, made of timber, built across the South Saskatchewan River at Medicine Hat, Alberta, ca. 1883–1884. WB worked on this bridge, driving a team of horses hitched to a pile driver.*

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF PHILIP PYPE, ESPLANADE ARCHIVES, MEDICINE HAT, ALBERTA (12.2).



2008.008/56—*The Leffel Improved Double Turbine installed by John Gowanlock and Dick Laurie in Frog Creek during the winter of 1884–1885 to power the proposed grist and sawmill. This turbine, salvaged ca. 1950, is on display at the Vermilion Heritage Museum.*

DRAWING COURTESY OF THE JAMES LEFFEL & CO., SPRINGFIELD, OHIO.



2008.008/63—*F. Stanley Simpson, a very close friend of WB, who drowned in a canoeing accident on the Nelson River system in the early 1890s.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.

4

*Ink, Copy and Deadlines*  
1892–1905

DURING HIS five years at Fort Alexander, WB got a taste of writing success. For example, his story “Many Brave Feathers Takes a Ride” was published in *Harper’s Weekly* (June 15, 1895, issue) and “The Tale of a Shirt” in *Waverly Magazine* (December 1, 1894, issue). Other stories (see Chapter 3) had been published in *Toronto Saturday Night*. This successful writing now proved by acceptance to large publications was enough for him to leave the Company early in 1896, exchanging the quiet and solitude of Fort Alexander for the crowds and traffic of a new adventure, journalism.<sup>1</sup> We find him that summer beginning his newspaper career in Minnesota with the *Duluth News Tribune*, “a daily, Sunday, weekly” publication, according to its masthead. As a rookie, WB began as a proofreader but was in a short time promoted to telegraph editor<sup>2</sup> and editorial writer. He left the *Tribune* in late fall of 1896 with a fine letter of recommendation from managing editor Ray F. Durham, who said that WB showed “faithfulness and satisfaction” in all jobs.<sup>3</sup> “He leaves the paper of his own accord and with the best wishes of his associates. Mr. Cameron is a graceful writer.”<sup>4</sup>

Making the change from the *Tribune* to the fledgling *Western Field & Stream*<sup>5</sup> magazine must have been an easy transition. This publication, established in the spring of 1896 in St. Paul, Minnesota, with branches in Minneapolis and New York, suited WB as it targeted sports enthusiasts taking pleasure in the outdoors, a subject WB greatly enjoyed. It was a classy magazine with a large format (9½ × 12 in., or 24 × 30 cm) and usually about eighty pages. It was printed on glossy paper and very well illustrated. Its publishing intent was clearly pointed out on the front cover of one of the first issues: “The conservation of the game, fish and forests of America;

the promotion of sportsmanlike gunning and angling and of a higher realization of the worth of outdoor recreative life; the diffusion of pure fiction and the literature of travel and adventure.”<sup>6</sup> A pricy publication, *Western Field & Stream* cost US\$1.00 (the equivalent of US\$24 today) per issue or US\$1.50 (US\$37) foreign.

WB began as a staff writer, and his appointment was well publicized. For me, this short introduction sounds much like something WB may have written: “Mr. William Bleasdel Cameron, who contributes the stirring tale of love and adventure in the Hudson’s Bay Territory which opens this issue, is one of the newest writers to enter the western field, and his work in *Harper’s Weekly*, *Outing*, *New York Sun*, *San Francisco Argonaut*, *Overland Monthly*, *The Youth’s Companion*, *Canadian Magazine* and other high class periodicals, has been received with marked appreciation. Last year a story by Mr. Cameron, out of one hundred and forty submitted in a prize competition, captured the place of honor in the Christmas edition of *Toronto Saturday Night*, the most pretentious holiday publication issued in the Canadian Dominion. Mr. Cameron, while still a young man, has had wide experience in the far Northwest and during an outbreak of Indians in the year 1885 was for some months a prisoner in the hostile redskin camp. He is rapidly earning for himself a name and place among the prominent writers of today. Mr. Cameron has accepted a staff position with *Western Field and Stream* and other stories by him will appear in early numbers of the magazine.”<sup>7</sup>

Soon he began working his way up. A December 1897 masthead notes the associate editors as William Bleasdel Cameron and H.W. Wack (Mark Biff). It’s interesting to note that WB later often portrayed himself as the sole associate editor, and I have no record of him ever mentioning in later years that he shared responsibilities and prestige equally with another person. This was a foible of his as we’ve discovered. Under John Burkhard,<sup>8</sup> the original publisher, Charles Hallock was editor but when he resigned WB took over. In December 1897, WB was responsible for moving the magazine’s operations to New York City. At this point, the masthead records WB as editor, the first for the New York operation. WB convinced Burkhard that New York was the only place where the magazine could really succeed. The primary reason was that the magazine was growing and popular all over Canada and the United States, not just in the West. It had become a North American publication.

WB shortened the magazine’s name to *Field & Stream* to reflect the widespread readership in February 1898. In that issue is an explanation. “There are several reasons for this change. One is that the name was unnecessarily long and cumbersome. But the main reason for the abbreviation is the growth of the magazine. There is really no more reason why it should be called western than northern, southern or eastern.”<sup>9</sup> Burkhard did not object. Sometime later the

magazine's publishing philosophy, as displayed on the cover, was changed to simply read "A Magazine of Sport and Adventure." WB stayed on until September 1898 and then quit, apparently over an argument about a capital loan.<sup>10</sup> *Field & Stream* was later sold by Burkhard's widow at good price, purportedly US\$24,000.<sup>11</sup>

The magazine published a total of nineteen pieces by WB over the two years or so that he was there. His first article in December 1896 was "How Promotion Came to Fred Stanson," based on his close friend Stanley Simpson, who had drowned in a canoeing accident in October 1892. The final story was "Loud Voice's Adopted Son" published in September 1898. Although WB thought the magazine had no future, it is still in production today, continuing its success in appealing to sportspeople and outdoor enthusiasts.<sup>12</sup> In the Cameron collection is a narrow lined piece of newsprint now very brown with age, entitled "Indian Names" by WB, which was a list or library of Aboriginal names that he could choose from for his stories. Many of these, traditionally based on nature, animals or an event that had personally happened to or had been witnessed by that person, are factual. Among them are Bull Long Ago, Killing Two, Many Wounds, Three Marks, The Owl, Little Moccasin, Crow Shield, and Fox Tail.

While WB was with *Field & Stream* he met Charles M. Russell, a Montana cowboy who later became famous as a painter of western life as it was in the late 1800s. In fact, WB claimed that he helped make Russell famous. It's been well established that WB was constantly on the lookout for promising opportunities and fresh challenges, so when he viewed some of Charlie Russell's paintings, which were similar to those of another contemporary artist of western life, Frederic Remington,<sup>13</sup> he knew they could do business.

In the late spring and summer of 1897, WB had gone west on a four-month promotional tour for *Western Field & Stream* through the northwestern United States and British Columbia, looking for material for himself and the magazine. While staying in a Butte, Montana, hotel, he had his first glimpse of Russell's work. WB tracked the artist down in Cascade (not far south of Great Falls), where Russell then made his home. By this time, Russell's fame was beginning to spread, and WB knew a good thing when he saw it. Backed by the magazine, he made a deal to have Russell prepare twenty pen sketches and paint the same number of oils, all depicting the West that Russell knew so well, paying him \$50 for the sketches and \$15 each for the paintings.<sup>14</sup> Russell was an unpretentious man, not searching for fame, and must have felt the deal was fine so he agreed to it. "Wm. B. Cameron, Friend I send by today's express another picture [number] 184 on Lewis and Clark meeting the Mandan Indians. I received the \$15 and am much obliged. [Also, in] this month's Western Field and Stream the picture<sup>16</sup> looked good and your article

was fine. [With] best wishes your friend C.M. Russell.”<sup>17</sup> Russell continued to paint and *Western Field & Stream* continued to publish them. However, it is likely that this contract was only partially fulfilled, as WB left the magazine before all the work was completed.

WB’s claim that it was he who was responsible for Russell’s fame is true to a degree. Unknown to many historians, WB managed to get a Cascade merchant, Ben Roberts, to back Russell on publishing a book of his paintings. Roberts agreed to finance the enterprise to a maximum of US\$500 (now the equivalent of over US\$12,000). Russell would share in the profits. “I think the idea of giving Russell an interest in the books a good one it will inspire him to do better work. . .”<sup>18</sup> It is unclear from the letter exactly what the plan was except that three volumes were involved, with pen sketches first. Roberts would be paid back from the profits of the book sales, hoping this would help “pay the way of the other [ones].” It is not known if WB profited from this proposal, but it is certain that Russell died far better off financially than WB.

There was an unexpected downside to this arrangement with WB for Russell, however. The artist’s son Austin said later in his biography, *Charles Marion Russell, Cowboy Artist*,<sup>19</sup> that sometimes small successes lead to large failures. Russell was thrilled and flattered that a real New York editor of a large magazine like *Western Field & Stream* wanted his work. He was pleased that he had broken into the magazine game and was going to be paid well to do it. Readers liked his work and wrote letters to the magazine saying so, and Russell began to get illustration orders from other magazine editors as well. This rise in popularity, however, caused his artistic reputation to suffer. When his wife, Nancy, held his first exhibition in St. Louis, the art museum refused to buy any of his paintings because they cruelly deemed Russell only a magazine illustrator, not an artist.<sup>20</sup> In time, though, Russell overcame this problem, receiving large sums for his work.<sup>21</sup>

In later letters written by WB, mostly to his close friend and supporter Norman Luxton, the Banff entrepreneur, he revealed he had kept some Russell originals and prints for himself that were by this time valuable. He sold them one by one when he needed cash. Luxton learned that WB had a Russell drawing, the smallest of them all, measuring  $9\frac{3}{4} \times 16$  in. ( $24\frac{3}{4} \times 40\frac{1}{2}$  cm; the rest measured  $10\frac{1}{2}$  sq. in., or  $26\frac{3}{4}$  cm<sup>2</sup>), of an old homestead. WB alluded to more Russell work in his possession, saying he had kept them flat in his trunk.<sup>22</sup> Luxton bought the homestead picture for an undisclosed amount. Three years later, WB revealed to Luxton that he had two more Russell works.<sup>23</sup> In another letter, he told Luxton that he had commissioned Russell to do twelve paintings at \$15 each for *Field & Stream*.<sup>24</sup> This contradicts the contract record of twenty paintings having been requested. It is likely that Russell

only completed twelve paintings before WB left the magazine. He told Luxton that he valued the Russell drawings the most (as opposed to the paintings).<sup>25</sup> There is some evidence that Luxton eventually wound up with most, perhaps all, of the Russell works, which had been in WB's possession for years.

In the lonely world of writing, WB often reached out to others by letter, especially successful writers, drawing upon their successes and their failures, and receiving advice and support. One of them was Owen Wister, author of *The Virginian*, who had among his close acquaintances Theodore Roosevelt, Henry James and, in the 1930s, Ernest Hemingway. The impact of Wister's writing has been the subject of many books over the years. Beginning in 1896 they became close, as is clear from a collection of twenty-six letters to WB from Wister that spans forty years, in which Wister shares ideas freely while offering WB moral support.<sup>26</sup>

WB and Wister both had two abiding interests. The first was a passion for writing. The second was reflected in their intimate knowledge about the old West and the characters who had made it what it was. In fact, Wister is credited with developing the image and mythology of the American cowboy, his genre continued by writers like Zane Grey, Louis L'Amour and Max Brand. Wister was a Philadelphia lawyer, a Harvard graduate from an old-money family. His letters to WB are often quite philosophical and profound. While it is not certain how their relationship began, it was likely triggered by a story Wister wrote called "Hank's Woman," which had been published in the well-known New York magazine *Harper's Weekly*. At this time WB was about to embark on his career with *Western Field & Stream* and was getting familiar with the eastern writing market. One of his stories had been published by *Harper's Weekly*,<sup>27</sup> placing him in same market that Wister enjoyed. Before long, the two writers felt comfortable enough to share their thoughts. In one of his letters, Wister discloses that he has married<sup>28</sup> but equally important is that he reveals to WB conflict he is having with the two main characters in his upcoming book, *The Virginian*.<sup>29</sup> He is not sure whether the main male character, forever known only as the Virginian, should marry his sweetheart, Mary, or not. "I see the thing in two ways: and in the adventure that will make the last chapter, two outcomes are generally possible; and I don't believe I'll decide until the time comes. Chuck a penny, perhaps!"<sup>30</sup>

Wister was pleased to hear from WB, writing from Duluth, who complimented Wister and compared him to Bret Harte.<sup>31</sup> He also sent one of his stories, "The Stony Arrow."<sup>32</sup> "It will be very interesting to read the work of a fellow-tradesman, and I hope there are more 'prize stories' in existence or in prospect."<sup>33</sup> Within a short time, Wister began advising WB not to overload the public with stories. "We entertainers of the public must be [more] careful of wearing our welcome out than any other

mortals.”<sup>34</sup> He also warns WB in a frank statement about fatigue and how it can affect a writer. “To put it brutally: a night with a woman does not equal the drain of a day with art; and physiologically, deep down, both tax the innermost mainspring.”<sup>35</sup> WB introduced his fictional character of Jim Vue to Wister, who asked about him and later remarked, “Jim Vue is your person. At least, so in my humble opinion it seems.”<sup>36</sup> Wister was also aware that WB had written what would become *The War Trail of Big Bear*. “The ‘Big Bear’ book sounds as it will find a publisher without any trouble.”<sup>37</sup> WB finally asked Wister to criticize a story he had sent. Wister did so, under protest, “You asked me to criticize it—something I hate,” in a long four-page letter.<sup>38</sup>

After a three-year lapse, Wister tried to track down WB to send a complimentary copy of *The Virginian* to him.<sup>39</sup> They made contact again in 1908, with WB now in the newspaper business in Vermilion. He sent Wister some Vermilion photographs, including one of Owen, his first-born son. “I am very much touched and interested to see his face, the charming and apparently robust face, of Owen Cameron. I hope you will get much joy from him.”<sup>40</sup> Wister asked about one of the other photographs: “Are you one of the figures on the station platform?”<sup>41</sup> We learn that in 1909, WB had been to Philadelphia to visit Wister, only to find him seriously ill. In an apologetic letter, Wister says, “You will remember that when you came to see me in January, two years ago, you found me up-stairs unwell and the next day you came again I was more unwell and could not see you.”<sup>42</sup> During one of these visits, Wister gave WB a large autographed cabinet photo of himself, and Mrs. Wister presented WB with some of her children’s toys. She later mailed a lovely silver art porringer as a gift to Owen, WB’s first child.<sup>43</sup> In the next four decades, WB built up a close relationship with the Wister family. And in 1929, Wister favoured WB by writing the foreword to the first edition of *Blood Red the Sun*.<sup>44</sup>

Incidentally, WB travelled two hundred miles (over three hundred kilometres)

past midnight—out of  
 sat in the grass and v  
 dreadful doings we h  
 when Big Bear’s men  
 leaving I rejoiced his w  
 a pound of tea and anc  
 stood mumbling his tha  
 the gray dawn, back

to see the stage play of *The Virginian* that was being performed in Winnipeg, proudly announcing that he had had dinner with silent screen actor Dustin Farnum, who played the Virginian, and Frank Campean, who was the character Trampas.<sup>45</sup> While the play date is unknown, Farnum later starred in the 1914 Cecil B. DeMille silent

movie of *The Virginian*, the first screen treatment of the book.

The paradox is that during their long friendship, while Wister was enjoying great success writing for the American market, WB was struggling to get published in Great Britain, not bothering with the American publishers any more. This was sadly evident in 1949, a couple of years before WB's death. Ever vigilant in trying to make a dollar, WB, then in his late eighties, made an inquiry to the Macmillan Company in New York, which first published *The Virginian*. He informed the publisher of his close relationship to Wister and asked if they would be interested in publishing his collection of fifty letters from Wister.<sup>46</sup> Macmillan turned him down. "Unfortunately, collections of letters seldom sell well and the present time happens to be an extremely difficult one in the publishing business."<sup>47</sup> Wister had died on July 27, 1938, predeceased by his wife in 1914.

Knowledge of WB's activities after he left New York is sparse but we do know that he headed from there to Toronto, and in the winter of 1898–1899 he wrote that he was going "to write himself into oblivion." Except for a short time back west in 1899, WB settled in Fort Frances, Ontario, where he met the woman he would marry. While there he was apparently looking for work as a writer because on December 3, 1900, he was offered a job as reporter for the News Publishing Company in Rat Portage (now Kenora), Ontario, at a wage of \$10 a week (about \$250 today).<sup>48</sup> It appears he did not accept this offer since in the time period of 1902–1903, now married<sup>49</sup> to Minnie (Mary Maude Wilson Atkins) with one son, Owen, we find that WB moved his family to Spokane, Washington, working for a newspaper there. For some reason this was not to his liking, or perhaps Minnie was not happy there. A letter from WB's sister Agnes confirms his move. "I was glad to hear from you and very sorry that you are not going to remain in Spokane."<sup>50</sup> Moving back to Fort Frances, Ontario, once again near his wife's relatives, WB set up the *Rainy Lake Press* around 1904–1905,<sup>51</sup> going head to head with well-known newspaperman J.A. Osbourne, who not only published the *Fort Frances Times* and the *Rainy River Gazette* but also the *Brandon Daily Sun*. It's likely that WB could not compete and his *Rainy Lake Press* folded.<sup>52</sup> Showing his typical pluck and pulling up stakes again, he headed west, starting up the *Vermilion Signal*, the town's first newspaper. Things went well here for WB, and Vermilion was a place where he and his family nicely settled down, WB running the newspaper while continuing to write stories and letters with what little time he had left in his day. But his focus on his business and his writing was to take a heavy toll on his marriage.



## *Chickens, Politics and Irrigation 1906–1910*

HISTORICAL FICTION can sometimes better bridge time and space than can the dry recitation of facts. Thus, I now offer my interpretation of WB's first edition of Vermilion's first newspaper:

*The snappy March morning air mingled with smoke from coal softly burning in the E&C Gurney Company heater standing solidly in one corner of the small building on Alberta Avenue. A yellow sign propped up on a window ledge read The Vermilion Signal—Editor, W.B. Cameron. Est. 1906. Inside the two-room structure were five people, all busy, two wearing ink-stained smocks. One was WB, slightly built, his hair parted in the middle. Carefully peeling a large sheet off the flatbed letterpress the printer had just run, he closely inspected it with his one good eye. WB was searching for signs of “the printer’s devil”—a pesky demon who in the darkness of an empty pressroom would sneak in and invert letters in the type set the day before, mizspell a word or maybe even remove an entire blank. Although large printing plants used the linotype, a modern, faster way of setting type since 1884, WB preferred movable type because of economy. His typesetter had to carefully place every tiny lead letter from the job case, their faces in reverse, in correct order into a composing stick, creating a word, a sentence, a paragraph, all aligned, locking the whole into a form called a chase. Mistakes happened and the printer’s devil took the blame. WB was publishing Vermilion’s very first newspaper and he wanted it to be perfect.*

Setting up the *Vermilion Signal* was a landmark event for WB. By now, readers know well WB's itinerant nature. However, he persisted with this new challenge for longer than anything in his career, and it thus merits some examination.

I can relate numerous reasons why WB picked this part of the recently formed province of Alberta at which to re-establish himself. For one thing, he tended to choose new settlements bustling with activity because they offered fresh challenges. The area, with its scenic Vermilion River valley running through it, was also familiar to him as it was only a short day's travel by buckboard northeast to Frog Lake. The railroad had just arrived, surveys were completed and settlers, many from the United States, Great Britain and eastern Canada, were quickly claiming the abundant parcels of rich farmland. But there were other reasons as well. While scouting the town, he befriended several enterprising men, among them Matt Brimacombe, the first postmaster, and W.C. (Chum) Craig, a local businessman who became a very close friend. Both men were highly adventuresome, ambitious and optimistic, and thus were a powerful and positive influence on WB and the community.

Within the first few days of arriving, WB was getting a feel for this new place by talking to other local businessmen over coffee in the Alberta Hotel in Vermilion. The subject arose of a need for a local newspaper. By now these fellows knew that WB was an experienced newspaperman and felt he was the ideal individual to set it up. WB agreed. There was little competition, only the fledgling *Lloydminster Times* in the new Barr Colony of Lloydminster established in 1903. Lloydminster straddled the Alberta-Saskatchewan border a long twenty-five miles (forty kilometres) east, so it was little threat to a Vermilion advertising base. Sensing what a wonderful opportunity he had in a trade he knew well, WB soon created the Signal Publishing Company<sup>1</sup> and the town's first newspaper, the *Vermilion Signal*.

As with most of his ventures, WB remained tight-lipped about where his starting capital came from, but I discovered that in the Rainy River, Rat Portage (Kenora) and Fort Frances area there were suggestions that he had "lumber interests." Further, in February 1903 a huge fire had wiped out much of Fort Frances, resulting in substantial insurance settlements. I can only speculate that WB, his wife or both may have received cash from those settlements. He also may have made some money from the sale of his first newspaper there, the *Rainy Lake Press*. In any event, wherever his funds came from he had enough to get the press running.

WB had arrived after Vermilion's "big move" of 1905, which was still underway. The original settlement, named Breage (pronounced BREEG), was loosely organized on flat prairie owned by Harry Bowtell about three miles (five kilometres) east of where Vermilion is today, close to where the proposed Canadian Northern Railway (CNR) line was to run. However, in an unexpected move the railroad survey completely bypassed busy little Breage, creating a new townsite. Not to be thwarted by the whims of railroad tycoons, the local businessmen jacked their buildings up onto wagon wheels and rolled them west onto the new location, favouring the north side

of where the tracks would be set. Since most of the site had not yet been surveyed, they dropped their buildings where they wished. WB had that choice, too, choosing open ground three blocks north of the proposed CNR station, with only the odd scattered building around him, such as John Gano's Photographic Studio and, later, a large house belonging to Norman Atkinson, a CNR employee. WB had someone build a small two-room structure for a newspaper office.<sup>2</sup> No trace of the building now exists, nor do any photographs as far as I know, but if built in the manner commonly used then in Vermilion, it was likely wooden-framed and cedar-sided with a shingled gable roof.<sup>3</sup>

Perusing old microfilmed editions of the *Vermilion Signal* in the town's library is interesting and informative. Early issues informed the readers that the paper was to be published every Thursday from the *Signal* office on First Street North by the Signal Publishing Company. WB mentioned in the March 6, 1906, edition that he was equipped to do all kinds of printing. This was a brave statement, as the equipment was very limited. However, in the four years that WB and later his partner produced the newspaper, it grew in content, size and complexity. His trial run on February 24, 1906, in which he announced the construction of St. Saviour's Church of England, was warmly accepted by the Vermilion townspeople. The March 1 issue, now commonly regarded as the first, a broadsheet that was printed on a flatbed press, was a single, full-sized sheet arranged in six columns and printed on both sides, then folded, making four pages. More equipment was added later, so by May 27, 1909, the paper was expanded to eight pages. A cylinder press became part of the line, a Babcock Reliance. This press, modern for the day, was built around 1900 exclusively for newspaper production and printed one sheet per revolution. It could spit out two thousand pages an hour, smoothly and almost noiselessly. Unfortunately it was big, weighing seven thousand pounds (over three thousand kilograms) and needing forty square feet (over twelve square metres) of floor space. The main floor did not have this kind of space, but in the August 15 edition, readers learned that workers were excavating under the *Signal* building to make room for the press, and it was put into operation September 12.<sup>4</sup>

I have learned that staff turnover was a problem at times. While in operation, WB had five or more people working for him at different times, practising the "black art" as printers liked to refer to their craft. Members of the Maggs family were his mainstay employees. Newly arrived from England in 1905, Alf Maggs<sup>5</sup> hired on in 1906, already a trained printer. Working in the office over the next four years were May Maggs, Annie Maggs, Mabel Souder and Charlie Atkinson. Their tasks were varied, but Alf Maggs and Charlie Atkinson were the printers and Mabel Souder typeset in the time she worked there. Always needing help, WB ran an ad in the August 22, 1907, edition reading "Wanted—Boy to learn printing business—apply at

Signal office.” WB was looking for “a printer’s devil,” this time with the expression meaning someone to help run errands, do chores and what no one else wanted to do, swabbing dense black ink from the press rollers.<sup>6</sup>

Initially, WB’s subscription rates were \$4.00 per year, or about \$90 at current rates. This is interesting, as Terry Waldorf, present secretary of the *Vermilion Standard*, pointed out that a year’s subscription at today’s rates within a forty-mile (sixty-five-kilometre) radius was about \$28, increasing to about \$54 outside that radius. This made the *Vermilion Signal* a very expensive local paper.

WB got off to a fine start. Jim McClements of the King Edward Hotel placed his first order for the March 1 issue. Craig Brother’s Store on Bulyea Avenue (now 50th Street) and Main Street (now 50th Avenue) carried a large ad. Stephens Brothers Business House, general merchants, welcomed the paper as a highly useful new business. In total WB had some three dozen ads in this edition, enough to pay the bills, which was quite an accomplishment for a new business. In this issue WB included a lengthy and positive piece called “Short Retrospect of Vermilion,” a history of the origins of settlement at Breage and Vermilion, essentially stating that business owners, speculators, farmers, in short, all classes of people, have waited for something to happen in this rich area. In a bold, prophetic comment he wrote, “As the Wise Men of the East watched the star that was leading them on, so did the wise men of both East and West and of the South too follow the course of the Canadian Northern Railway to see where the town of Vermilion would be born so that they might be there at its birth and grow up with it.” Later in the same article he was critical of Territorial Ordinances because the settlement couldn’t jump to town status immediately but had to be a village first “as a man is first a boy,” declaring that the “village machinery will soon be inadequate” for Vermilion’s needs and before the year is out it will be a real town, with its own mayor and town council.” How right he was on both counts.

When WB first began publishing, the interesting motto he chose for the paper was “Alberta first and last and non-partisan.” As we shall see, he kept this philosophy until September 1908, when his fortunes began to change during a newspaper war initiated by politics. Study of the newspaper reveals how the town grew during the time WB was publishing, but it was also revealing in other ways. After WB teamed up with a partner with different political views than his, his editorials and comments allude to his rising anxiety and his desperate attempts to keep the newspaper alive.

WB was not the only one who thought Vermilion had something to offer. About the time WB got the *Signal* in production, another newspaperman was having a look at the town. He was S.R.P. Cooper, raised in northwestern Ontario in territory very familiar to WB. Cooper had established the *Baldur Gazette* in Manitoba in 1898

as owner and editor. He must have liked what he saw in the Vermilion area as he returned in May 1907 with his family, creating a partnership with WB while taking out a homestead.<sup>7</sup> “Mr. S.R.P. Cooper became a partner in the Vermilion Signal publishing enterprise.”<sup>8</sup> Exactly what the business terms were that transpired between WB and Cooper is unknown, but WB seemed quite proud to have him as a partner.<sup>9</sup> The timing was right for WB. Always short of funds and needing more capital to expand the printing operation, he knew that Cooper would be an asset with money to invest, and would be able to offer considerable publishing experience as well. But after Cooper came on, WB’s position in the business changed dramatically. The masthead containing pertinent publishing information shows that WB is not the editor or publisher anymore but is simply a manager. Around this time Cooper also became Secretary-Treasurer of the Vermilion Conservative Association. He must have known that WB, his partner, was staunchly Liberal. This political mismatch proved to be too much. Within eight months, the following appeared in the *Signal*: “The partnership heretofore existing between W.B. Cameron and S.R.P. Cooper carried on under the firm name and style of the Vermilion Signal Publishing Company has this day (Feb. 1) been dissolved by mutual consent.”<sup>10</sup> WB asked that all outstanding accounts both payable and receivable be looked after at the *Signal* office.

On February 6, 1908, WB defended the stand taken by Edmonton Liberal Frank Oliver, now federal Minister of the Interior. Oliver had taken over from Sir Clifford Sifton, whose policy of immigration was unambiguous and directly stated: “I think a stalwart peasant in a sheep-skin coat, born on the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and a half-dozen children, is good quality.”<sup>11</sup> Sifton was referring to eastern Europeans, but this turned out to be a very controversial and biased policy. Oliver, in contrast, favoured immigrants from the United States and Britain.<sup>12</sup>

WB was now promoting package deals for subscriptions, apparently to improve cash flow, while at the same time warning subscribers that due to the printing of fourteen thousand copies of the *Signal* for its anniversary issue of February 27, 1908, the regular *Signal* might be late, an announcement not pleasing to his local advertisers. Even with frustrations and dwindling revenue, WB still came up with good ideas. He introduced the Bull’s Eye concept in the anniversary issue, Vermilion being named the “bull’s eye” of the famous Saskatchewan Valley.<sup>13</sup> He later began creating stationery in this theme. He also had not lost his poetic touch, as can be seen in an item describing the terrible grass fires so common on the Prairies. “On the low range of hills, north, south, east, west of town on Monday night the long dancing lines of prairie fires were everywhere visible, while the reflection overspread the sky with a dull glow.”<sup>14</sup>

Cash flow continued to be a problem. On March 5, 1908, WB warned people to “get orders in early and not to expect immediate results.” In the same issue he publicly mentioned that customers were not paying their bills and that he had too much money out “on the books,” an alarming admission that was undoubtedly bad for public relations. Two weeks later he sent out another alarm about more money problems with ad accounts, saying that if asked to pay customers were simply dropping the ad. Advertisers did not like to hear things like this and were beginning to lose confidence in the paper. WB soon lost his typesetter. “Miss Mabel Souder of Signal staff is leaving to return to Nebraska,”<sup>15</sup> but somehow by April 30 he managed to get five thousand copies printed for the Board of Trade. This was a boost for the *Signal*.

On May 21, 1908, WB revealed that some printing business was being taken out of town, and clearly indicated his opinion on the matter. Edmonton printers, charging excessive rates, were hinted at, and WB asked people to keep their business in Vermilion. On June 11, 1908, he covered some Liberal activity while announcing that on September 3, subscription rates were to increase. This measure was obviously an attempt to generate cash flow.

By September, things heated up politically. In the September 24 issue, WB published a long and heavily partisan editorial entitled “A Matter of Politics.” A federal election was looming and some subscribers were reacting to his earlier political pro-Liberal campaign comments, wanting the *Signal* to remain independent, but WB was quick to point out those popular, so-called independent newspapers like the *Camrose Press*, *Daysland Herald* and, nationally, the *Toronto News* supported Conservative federal candidates. Always loyal to the welfare of Vermilion, he states, “I will support any government that is good for Vermilion,” but for the first time he pointedly defended the *Signal's* right to take a stand on political matters. “The editor is entitled to his opinion.” He knew that the ice was now thin and in fact publicly admitted that the Vermilion Conservatives had been the *Signal's* heaviest advertisers. This is when he changed the *Signal's* motto from “Alberta first and last and non-partisan” to “Alberta first, last and all the time.” He closed the article by declaring that “building up the town is of first importance and politics is a secondary matter but an editor still needs to say what he feels.”<sup>16</sup> On October 29, 1908, after the election, he discussed the “splendid majority” of Liberal Frank Oliver under Sir Wilfrid Laurier, whose Liberals had just won their fourth consecutive majority. At the same time WB defended Oliver’s terms of advocating generous scrip, the land grants given to volunteers during the 1885 Rebellion and the South African campaign, essentially arguing that the present Liberal government was more generous than the Conservatives had been.<sup>17</sup>

On November 12, WB delayed the paper again, stating there was too much material, yet still calling for more ads. He also hinted that he may be selling his homestead. In a move to bolster the public's interest, WB then headed east for a few weeks, leaving on December 31, 1908, to procure more type and machinery for the *Signal*, with promises that his will be one of the best equipped newspaper offices in Alberta. In his absence, it was of course Cooper who managed the *Signal*.<sup>18</sup>

On May 6, 1909, WB took a stand on the sale of the *Mannville Telegraph* to the Vermilion Conservative Party. Mannville was a small community not far west of Vermilion. By this time there was also the *Wainwright Star*, a weekly that published thirty-seven miles (sixty kilometres) to the south. In all likelihood the intent was to launch a second newspaper in Vermilion, as the local Conservatives were not pleased with the stand taken by the *Signal* in the federal elections the previous year. Once again, WB repeated that the paper had done a very credible job of advancing the town and promoting it, pointing out that "the *Signal* has been one of the few employers of high priced labor in the town and almost all of the money paid out as wages has found its way into the cash drawers of the merchants. It has brought more outside capital into the town than anybody apart from the publishers had any idea of. In fact, if outside capital had not been available it [would have been] questionable and impossible at times in the past two years to keep the paper alive." He said that last fall the *Signal* was almost threatened with a boycott by the Conservatives, looking like an attempt would be made by a few disgruntled individuals who apparently "take their politics more seriously than their religion" to put the *Signal* out of business. "The game of putting a newspaper out of business is an old one, so old that is rarely attempted these days except by amateurs."<sup>19</sup> He strongly suggested that Liberals and Conservatives should work together, shoulder to shoulder, in the best interests of the town, with the same kind of spirit that helped Saskatoon grow from a town to a city that now supported a university. WB stated that there was no room for a second newspaper in Vermilion, but noted that he was clearly being goaded into a political battle between two newspapers in which one must succumb.<sup>20</sup> He declared that the local Liberals will not let the *Signal* die; the *Signal* was here to stay. WB's stand was supported on May 13 by the *Vegreville Observer*: "There is no room in towns the size of Vermilion for two newspapers and he [the editor of the *Signal*] has no intentions of allowing the *Signal* to go to the wall."<sup>21</sup>

In an attempt to woo back customers, the *Signal* acquired the large Babcock Reliance cylinder press. On May 6, 1909, WB proudly announced that "the *Signal* has just added to its plant an entirely new series of handsome job type faces suitable for all kinds of artistic and attractive job works such as cards and invitations, programs and menus." He went on to say the equipment of the advertising line has been added to with "a monoline typesetting machine (used)" and he had hired

a competent all-round printer (no name was mentioned), thus assuring the public that they could get as good a job at the *Signal* as anywhere.

However, a message tinged with defeat was published on May 20. "Another good Conservative ad gone pop this week. Almost enough to pay the postage on the week's issue. Thus are the cords that bind us to the car of plutocracy ruthlessly snapped, one by one. We see our finish." A week later he thanked all the old patrons and new ones for their continued support of the *Signal*. Vermilion's second newspaper, the *Vermilion Standard*, was launched May 19, 1909, by his old partner, S.R.P. Cooper. In July 1909, WB was in Calgary and southern Alberta on undisclosed business, but we know now that he had given up on the *Signal* and was scouting out a new location, readying himself to relocate again. In August 1909, WB was still printing Bull's Eye stationery, but on September 23, 1909, he slipped up with an embarrassing printing error. He wrongly published the dates of town bylaws, forcing the town council to change voting from September 25 to October 15. Town council was not impressed.

By February 24, 1910, it was all over, and the last edition of the *Signal* with WB at the helm was published. C.V. Caesar was to assume the job. Graciously and with pride, WB announced this was the fourth year of the *Signal* with but one editor while other papers have had more. "The Connection [*sic*] of the present editor with the practical work of publishing the *Signal* practically ceases with this issue . . . In resigning his desk, the editor desires to express his grateful appreciation to those whose loyalty and friendship have made his task at most times a genuine pleasure and wishes his successor Mr. C.V. Caesar the same generous treatment as he received."<sup>22</sup> Perhaps in a bid to keep the paper in town, the *Signal* was asked to tender on municipal printing for the town, something unheard of before now. WB recognized that towns "blessed with two newspapers" often shared the printing but did not have to tender. He did not do so, and was angry when he learned that it had been awarded to the new paper in town at a quarter of the normal rates. "The Signal is glad it did not tender." This was the end of WB's newspaper enterprise in Vermilion.

In early March, WB packed up his family and headed for Bassano, in southern Alberta. His whereabouts were disclosed in the new *Vermilion Standard*. On April 20, 1910, the *Standard* included a cut from the April 14, 1910, *Vermilion Signal* under C.V. Caesar. "The Signal has disposed of its good will subscription list to the Vermilion Printing and Publishing Company Ltd. and ceases publication with the next issue [April 21]. Subscribers [who have] paid in advance will thereafter receive the Vermilion Standard instead of the Vermilion Signal but those already receiving the former will get the Bassano News, a new paper established in the

southern part of the province by the former editor of the *Signal*." Subscribers could also get a refund. In effect the interests of both newspapers were now combined in "an amiable spirit and with mutual satisfaction." The article carries on to say that "the *Standard* wishes Mr. Cameron a large measure of success and prosperity at Bassano,"<sup>23</sup> while in the same sentence it calls for past *Signal* patrons to support the *Standard*.

Something I have not yet discussed is WB's home life and his contributions to the development of early Vermilion. I shall elaborate a bit on that now.<sup>25</sup> Wanting land to settle on, WB had applied for a quarter section near a prominent hill about two miles (three kilometres) north of Vermilion in the fall of 1905. This was his third time applying under the Dominion Lands Act (Homestead Act).<sup>26</sup> How did he fare with homesteading? Not too well, as old homestead records reveal. His entry for the homestead was on October 3, 1905, five months before he started the *Signal*. By May 1, 1906, he had built a tiny frame house measuring less than two hundred square feet (sixty square metres), smaller than many of today's living rooms. Costing him \$150, it met the requirements but it must have been very difficult for his wife, Minnie, and his first-born son, Owen, to live there. In the Cameron collection there is an old photograph believed to be the homestead house showing a small clapboard shack surrounded by nothing but prairie out in the open, with little protection from wintry blasts. It was likely not insulated, either. At best, it may have had walls filled with wood shavings. WB had dug a well and broke some land, claiming five acres (two hectares) in each of the following three years with a bit of crop. However, the land he chose was light and gravelly, producing only when it rained and when it was properly farmed. He eventually owned three horses and built a half mile (one kilometre) of fence, a stable and corrals. Without a doubt, his age was against him. At forty-five, a slight man, he would have struggled with a breaking plow. The newspaper was demanding, too, taking up so much of his time he had to have his land "protected" by the Dominion Lands Board to May 1, 1908. "I wish to apply for land protection due to special circumstances, having a hard time proving up because of publishing commitments, meetings, etc."<sup>27</sup> The board approved his request so forfeiture was dropped. By late 1908, Harry Bowtell, the local Dominion Lands commissioner, homestead inspector and an old friend, recommended that WB be granted full title. That being obtained he sold out,<sup>28</sup> moving near Indian Lake northwest of Vermilion. Little is known about this part of his rural life, but A.W. Roseborough, another of WB's friends and the local Massey Harris farm implement dealer, owned land west of town where he raised fine Shorthorn cattle. WB may have invested money in Roseborough's cattle operation, but no details are known.<sup>29</sup> WB and his family remained here between one and a half and two years until leaving for southern Alberta. Today his land is a subdivision

of the county of Vermilion River called Cloverview Acres, with nice homes and cars and kids scattered over the land he once farmed.

In an uncharacteristic move, WB began chicken ranching. I find this strange because neither farming nor livestock interested him. It was a reactive thing it seems, stemming from his appointment as Honorary Director of the Vermilion Agricultural Society in December 1907, a group that organized the popular fall agricultural fair. WB probably figured that since he had a farm, he should show off something related to agriculture. His choice was to begin raising chickens for show, selecting the popular Wyandotte breed, as their rose combs did not freeze as easily in unheated chicken coops as did many other breeds. In addition, their curvy shape, especially that of the hens, provided great models for the multitude of ceramic cookie jars lined up in the kitchens of prairie homes. Deciding that a quick way to get a chicken coop would be to tear off the porch of his printing shop in town, WB did so. He skidded it down into the broad Vermilion River valley and up the other side, eventually dragging it onto his homestead. He did well for a man who didn't have his heart in raising chickens. In the annual fall fair held October 8, 1908, he won first and second places for his white Wyandotte hen while also showing a pullet and a cockerel. Meanwhile, his son Owen, now four years old, had developed a strong dislike for chickens. In a later letter to Rusty Macdonald (the publisher of *Eyewitness to History: William Bleasdel Cameron, Frontier Journalist*), Owen's wife, Jessie Cameron, jokingly says, "Did you know that Owen hated chickens?"<sup>30</sup> Family members occasionally mention it today when WB's name comes up. Neither Jessie nor her mother-in-law, Minnie, ever divulged the reason for Owen's dislike, but in one of his frequent letters to Douglas, WB revealed at least one reason that I'll note later. Apparently, however, WB's chicken enterprise lost its appeal, which likely wasn't too strong to begin with, because an ad appears in the paper—"Wyandottes for sale—2-3 purebred cockerels. Contact the Signal office."<sup>31</sup>

In the four years that he lived in the Vermilion area, a number of notable things took place involving WB in one way or another, truly too many to be covered here. Frog Lake remembrances were never far away, of course, with notices appearing occasionally in the *Signal*. One singular event occurred that was truly notable. In the April 2, 1908, issue, the following birth announcement appeared: "At Vermilion, on Thursday, April 2, 1908, the wife of W.B. Cameron, of a son."<sup>32</sup> No name was mentioned, as was the manner of reporting then, but the son was Douglas, WB's second and last child in his marriage to Minnie. He was born at the homestead, as Vermilion did not have a hospital yet, and attended by either Dr. Burris or Dr. Ryan. WB's mother-in-law, who had been visiting, was very likely still there. What was stunning was the date. For one of WB's sons to be born exactly on the twenty-third anniversary of the Frog Lake uprising was, to say the least, stupendous.

Becoming well known and respected by many, WB established a solid profile in Vermilion. He likely knew he should get involved in town business as much as he could. The busier the town, of course, the better it would be for his publishing company. He was elected to town council and in September 1906, sat in on his first town council meeting, with his friend Matt Brimacombe as mayor. A photo taken in 1906 or 1907 shows him comfortably seated with seven other members including the mayor, with his black patent leather boots shiny and laced to the top. As councillor he was involved in many decisions affecting the town. For example, WB was very attentive to fire protection, knowing what serious problems prairie winds and hot stoves can create. At their October 1906 meeting, WB reported that on a trip to Winnipeg, he had seen fire protection systems. He recommended that the town purchase one thousand feet (three hundred metres) of hose and have two water hydrants installed on the water pipe used by the CNR. Not long afterwards, the railroad approved this recommendation. In November 1906, WB was also asked to submit a design for the town's crest, which was later adopted. Later, at a special meeting, the town council decided to purchase "a double cylinder chemical engine" and some hand fire extinguishers. The *Edmonton Bulletin* often picked up Vermilion news and noted that town council had passed a bylaw on March 1, 1907, strongly declaring that "house owners in Vermilion must put brick or stone chimneys on their dwellings before April 1 or be prosecuted." Tin stovepipes in town were now a thing of the past. Partly due to WB's attentiveness in fire protection, a fire in March 1908 that destroyed Bert Woods' livery stable and feed barn was soon contained because of an organized and decently equipped fire brigade.<sup>33</sup> Of interest is that in November 1908, at a special town council meeting with WB in attendance, the town's auditor complained about the poor bookkeeping practices of the past year and recommended they be improved. Council agreed that something needed to be done and tightened up their accounting practices. WB was on the finance committee but how he reacted I do not know. In 1907 the intrepid *Signal* reporter may have used one of the four new telephones in town, and he was still there when the first electric light bulbs lit up in 1909.

WB served on the local Board of Trade along with Chum Craig, later acting for a term as Secretary Treasurer. The board's main function was to promote Vermilion. As mentioned earlier, WB had come up with the bull's eye concept early in 1908 promoting Vermilion as "The Bull's Eye of the Famous Saskatchewan Valley and the Vermilion District." His idea had been to promote Vermilion as the centre of trade for a large area all around the town. The Board of Trade put together a travelling promotional display that appeared at the Calgary Exhibition in July 1908, and later that year in the Edmonton Exhibition.<sup>34</sup>

On paper the Bull's Eye promotion was impressive, but in everyday terms it was

totally impractical, not only because of distance but also because other lively towns were springing up within the greater bull's-eye area with their own promotional plans. However, enough noise was made to attract the curious and the seekers of fortune. Milk production in the area was on the rise because of increasing numbers of local dairy cattle, but since cream was being shipped by rail out of town, building a local creamery became a strong concern. In June 1907, WB was selected to be on the building committee of the proposed creamery, which began operation in July 1908 as a very profitable venture.

Never forgotten after his departure, WB was invited back to Vermilion several times over the years to speak. He was also recognized by Vermilion upon his death in 1951 in a very special fraternal manner. WB was a Mason (as his grandfather Bleasdehl had been before him), first joining Granite Lodge #447 (since renumbered 446) in Fort Frances, Ontario, then becoming a member of Vermilion Lodge #24 that had been granted a dispensation or charter on October 11, 1906. WB, his friend Matt Brimacombe and J.A. Roseborough all proudly served in the Vermilion lodge, working their way up through the various appointments or chairs. However, by January 1910 WB was not in office at all, not having taken a position because he knew he would be leaving Vermilion before too long. Readers will be interested to learn that one of the lodge's annual picnics was held on August 27, 1909, at Gap Lake, "fronting the homestead of W.B. Cameron."<sup>35</sup> In March 1951, WB was buried in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, with full Masonic honours. In short order recognition was paid to this charter member by Vermilion Lodge #24. A letter written to Vermilion's lodge secretary on March 10, 1951, by the secretary of Meadow Lake Lodge reads, in part,

We wish to sincerely thank you and your Bro members for your special interest and expression of sympathy for the late Bro Breasdale [sic] Cameron. He was a grand old man and [I] am certain you share with the members of Meadow Lake Lodge the loss of [such] an outstanding Canadian and Mason. The funeral services of Bro Cameron [were] conducted under the auspices of the Rotary club of our town. We feel that you will be pleased to know that four of the pallbearers were members of our lodge here. As per your request we are enclosing the bill for the flowers that helped adorn his bier at the services.

Fraternally yours,  
Signed J.A. Davis, Secretary  
Meadow Lake Lodge #203.

WB also contributed to conserving our past. In *Vermilion Memories II*, volume one, there is a section devoted to WB and his wife, Mary (Minnie) Maude, written by historian Allen Ronaghan, who pointed out that WB editorially supported "a strong provincial archives policy" to properly care for personal and private papers. In time the government of Alberta created such a board, which became responsible for

collecting and preserving a multitude of said items. These are now housed in the Provincial Archives of Alberta in Edmonton, a resource that is of immense value to researchers.

Early in 1910, a voice from the past came back to haunt WB. This was about the time he was getting himself established in Bassano. It was a mysterious letter, with few punctuation marks scrawled in ink on a small ledger sheet punched with two holes, from Sam Johnson, in Edmonton. WB wasn't sure who this fellow was until he finished reading the letter. Sam Johnson was also called Lone Man, and WB had known him well in his Frog Lake days. In his letter, he was asking WB for money in a manner that permitted little room for refusal: "Dear Sir, I am letting you know that I am still alive. You remember the rebellion. If you remember . . . I saved the life of you and Simpson . . . I am dead broke. I wish you would help me out if you remember how I helped you."<sup>36</sup>

Lone Man was an interesting western character and important in WB's life, so I would like to relate a few details about him. He was one of Big Bear's sons-in-law and also T.T. Quinn's wife's uncle. He was present at Frog Lake during the troubles, and tried to help protect the Quinns from Wandering Spirit's war party. While still camped there, he rode to Cold Lake and captured HBC clerk Henry Halpin, bringing him back to Frog Lake. Lone Man was in the camp holding WB and many others as prisoner and WB mentioned him several times in *War Trail*. WB seems to have no grievances towards Lone Man as he did many of the other captors, even saying at one point, that "he [Lone Man] was perhaps the bravest redskin I ever knew."<sup>37</sup> WB's friend Stanley Simpson, referred to in the letter, lived with Lone Man while in camp. WB had found it amusing that Lone Man kept trying to get Simpson to marry one of his daughters.<sup>38</sup> However Lone Man had his darker side, too, which WB tended to gloss over. Riding a white racing horse stolen from Montana, he overtook and shot NWMP Constable Clarence Loasby at Fort Pitt, wounding him during the same fracas at which Constable David Cowan was killed.<sup>39</sup> WB recounts this story nicely in "The Three Scouts."<sup>40</sup> Lone Man was captured at Loon Lake, by NWMP Superintendent Sam Steele's Scouts, where he had been wounded. After the troubles he found his way to the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation in northern Montana, which is where he was before coming to Edmonton. However, he was a horse thief. "Lone Man was caught [and jailed] at Fort Saskatchewan. He showed up to reclaim or recover some horses he had stolen during the Rebellion."<sup>41</sup>

Two years after writing the letter to WB from Edmonton, the following is noted in the *Saskatchewan Herald*: "Lone Man was recently tried at Regina for the shooting of Const. Loasby at Fort Pitt, 1885. He was found guilty and sentenced to 5 years in the Manitoba Penitentiary."<sup>42</sup> I have found information indicating that he did try

to protect Halpin, Simpson and likely WB as well while they were prisoners in Big Bear's camp.<sup>43</sup> I was not able to determine whether or not WB returned the favour by sending Lone Man some financial assistance as requested.

As readers will recall, WB had realized by mid-1909 that as soon as Vermilion's second newspaper began competing for advertising, while being politically opposite to his views, the time had come to consider other options. We know he had already done some scouting in southern Alberta under the guise of "other business," discovering that a boom was on in the Calgary area. He even mentioned this in the *Signal*. His plans were uncertain until he met an old friend, Colonel John Stoughton Dennis Jr., head of the CPR's Natural Resources Department in Calgary. He was a Canadian government land surveyor like his father, who had been a key person involved in the Red River Colony surveying fracas of 1869, tangling with Louis Riel and halting the survey of Metis land by the government.<sup>44</sup> Later, as the federal Department of Interior's Chief Inspector of Surveys, Dennis and William Pearce, another federal employee of the interior, had been the major players in developing the North West Irrigation Act of 1894 that removed the landowners' riparian rights to water. Put another way, those who had land on rivers and lakes lost their water rights to the Crown. From Dennis, WB learned about the new huge irrigation project about to take place around Bassano.<sup>45</sup>

When Captain John Palliser had passed through this region in the 1850s on a routine investigation studying farming potential, he was unimpressed. His report on the famed Palliser Triangle declared that this region was totally unfit for agriculture. From his point of view, based on British standards, he was correct. Settlers arriving later, with visions of the Garden of Eden, found the land generally inhospitable and often pulled out. They were unfamiliar with and unable to cope with dry land farming techniques. What partly offset the area's dry conditions, with its blazing summer heat followed in season by periods of cold winter winds and blizzards, were the strange weather anomalies that commonly occur in the region. Breaking the wintry blast are the sudden winds out of the southwest that become chinooks, weather phenomena WB had vividly described in his story "Under the Snow" published in 1897 (as noted in Chapter 2). This freakish weather pattern brings with it warm winds, which often melt the sparse snow down to the grass. Water then runs and big puddles form in the low spots. But just as suddenly the chinook is gone, and winter returns with a vengeance. Meltwater then turns into ice. Vegetation once protected by snow now lies exposed; the roots freeze, killing them. A local newspaper noted the weather-related exasperation. "But Sunday was the plumb limit for January weather. Following a chinook which lasted all day Saturday, Sunday dawned upon a perfect Spring day, and at one time the temperature rose to as high as 80 degrees [27 degrees Celsius]. About eleven o'clock at night it began to rain and continued

for nearly half an hour.”<sup>46</sup>

Since successful crop growing was so difficult in this region, it was ranching that was king. George Lane, one of the Big Four group of men synonymous with start of the fabled Calgary Stampede, had his fall roundup south of Bassano. A cloud of dust signalled the town that Lane’s herd was soon to noisily arrive, to be loaded into cattle cars spotted on a spur south of town, often without holding pens, and then shipped to markets in Winnipeg and Chicago. WB mentioned that Pat Burns of Burns Meat Packers and another of the Big Four visited the town in 1911 and was duly impressed with Bassano country.

But the CPR had plans as well. A substantial land grant had been given to the railroad as an incentive to run a line through here as part of the coast-to-coast link. The CPR encouraged settlers to buy their land and start a farm, using the railroad system to move their produce. Without water, however, there wouldn’t be any produce to ship, so the railroad giant thought it would be to their advantage to provide water to this region. A massive irrigation system scheme was developed, becoming one of the largest in North America. In the same years that WB was busy trying to save the *Vermilion Signal*, the CPR sent its surveyors out 100 miles (160 kilometres) southeast of Calgary to Bassano, under Dennis’ direction, beginning preliminary work on what would be called the CPR Irrigation Colonization Company. Covering 440,000 acres (180,000 hectares), fanning easterly from Bassano, the rapidly flowing Bow River would be the main source of water. WB’s timing to begin a newspaper here could not have been better because it was the beginning of prosperous times for this small settlement of less than five hundred.

But first he somehow had to transport his printing equipment over 250 miles (400 kilometres) south. Shipping by CNR and paying by the pound was an option but because of excessive weight, with cast-iron presses and quantities of lead type, the cost was too high. How he accomplished this feat is a tale of brave endurance because WB chose the cheapest mode of all, the iron-tired freight wagon. Perched on the driver’s seat was none other than Alf Maggs, WB’s faithful printer, only seventeen years old. Into Maggs’ wagon was loaded WB’s “printing plant”: the old Washington hand press, cases of type, the Gordon job press, paper presses and cutters. WB also slid in the heavy yet delicate Babcock Reliance cylinder press, which did not like the bumpy journey. “When I came on the scene [in 1911] the cylinder press would not operate for some ungodly reason and the paper was printed on the Washington press. Anyone who has operated a Washington press, which was a strictly manpower effort, deserves a place in the printer’s Hall of Fame.”<sup>47</sup> The cylinder press was likely damaged en route, never to be operated again, at least in Bassano. Although WB tossed in the kerosene-based cleaning solvents, his inks he must have brought

in from Calgary since they would have frozen solid during the journey.

Maggs left Vermilion in late February or early March 1910. The ground would have been still frozen in the first part of the trip, rough and rocky, then changing to goeey gumbo as he got south into warmer climes. Maggs was a brave young man to take on this journey of more than 250 miles (400 kilometres) over unimproved roads and settler's trails through territory still yet in the grip of winter. On a research trip to Bassano, Shirley and I retraced this route as closely as possible, our drive loosely based on the few details available, roughly paralleling today's Highways 41 and 36. We passed west of Wainwright, then went on to Hardisty, Coronation, Hanna and Finnegan near the Red Deer River. Maggs likely crossed the Battle River at Fabyan or Hardisty on the ice, following paths of the local settlers. Nearing Hanna, Maggs would have bumped over flat, treeless country with numerous alkali flats, with the antelope and white-tailed deer gathered in the willows gazing curiously as he passed. Crossing the Red Deer River at a popular ford near the mouth of Bullpound Creek, a few miles (several kilometres) downstream from what would become the Finnegan Ferry, he would have climbed to higher ground, soon catching a glimpse of Bassano on the land below, while to the southwest the sharp banks of the Bow River would have been visible. Beyond the river on open high ground still brown from the winter would lie the territory of the mighty Blackfoot (Siksika). After this amazing trek taking a week or more, bouncing over frozen ground and skirting steep hillsides strewn with rocks, with blizzards sometimes blanking out his trail, young Maggs and his team finally pulled into Bassano, exhausted but elated because they had made it.

Bassano welcomed its first newspaper. Because of the irrigation project, growth was rapid, real estate was booming and new businesses were springing up to serve the workers and the settlers arriving daily, who were buying land soon to be irrigated. But WB found out to his dismay that an enterprising man from British Columbia was thinking along the same lines. In the Alberta Hotel in Calgary,<sup>48</sup> WB stumbled upon W.K. Esling, who had just arrived from Rossland in southern BC, where he had a newspaper, the *Miner*, and was now planning a second one in Bassano. One jump ahead of WB, Esling had done his homework. He had scouted out the place in 1909, signing one-year advertising deals with the local merchants, putting up what he described as a "cheap building" to house the business, and arranging to bring in his own man, Colonel Egan, to run the newspaper. It must have shocked WB to hear of Esling's plans. From experience, both would have known that there was no room for two newspapers. Someone had to back out. WB somehow struck a deal with Esling, smoothed a little by Joe Seagram's whiskey in Bassano's Berkeley Hotel. For \$500, WB bought Esling's advertising contracts, rented the new building for a year, and hired Colonel Egan to help run it. Whether or not this arrangement was

financially sound is not known, but within a short time, WB began producing the *Bassano News* and in a shrewd move, he also managed to get his \$500 back.

Land was becoming more valuable so Esling had bought a tract about thirty miles (fifty kilometres) north of Bassano, not far south of today's Dorothy, in the Seiu Lake area.<sup>49</sup> This was good land sprawled along the Red Deer River. Earlier Esling had sold several quarter sections to friends in Trail, BC, for them to speculate with, but apparently he still had some left. These listings he gave to WB, perhaps for WB to try to sell at a commission. About to launch the *News*, he met three land speculators in town one evening, likely at the Berkeley Hotel, who took an interest. WB later wrote about this in a letter to journalist Leonard D. Nesbitt. "Incidentally, I may add that I recovered most of the money I had paid him within a month. I had a good little team and Democrat at Bassano and one evening at the hotel bar I met three acquaintances who had been out north of the town looking for land without finding anything to suit them."<sup>50</sup> Not one to miss an opportunity, WB offered to help them in their search. In short order he had sold them a section. In that sale he made \$480; fine wages for a short night's work.<sup>51</sup>

WB set up the *Bassano News* in the new, sizeable building sporting the common style of a squared-off false front with the newspaper's name painted in large letters across its east wall. This original location, not far from the old Berkeley Hotel, was slightly west of the corner on Second Avenue and Second Street on the south side of the street.<sup>52</sup> WB had good staff working for him. Colonel Egan must have faded out of this operation since WB does not seem to have mentioned him, but Nesbitt noted that there were two typesetters and a printer.<sup>53</sup> The former were the Hennesy sisters, Dolores and Toots, and the printer was Arthur Vaux, known about town as "Dirty Arthur," not because of his lifestyle but because his hands were always seamed with printer's ink.

Other publishers noted the new fellow in town. The *Gleichen Call* west of Bassano announced that "W.B. Cameron, the editor and proprietor of the *Vermilion Signal*," was now publishing the *Bassano News*. The notice referred to WB as a gentleman. In the April 1, 1910, edition of the *Bassano News*, officially the first, a column entitled "As Others See Us" carried the customary welcomes and favourable comments about WB's paper written by other southern Alberta weeklies. For some reason only the *Nanton News* mentioned that he was one of the West's early settlers and "took part in the Indian wars."

In Bassano as elsewhere, the question arises of where WB got his money from to start another new business. Some funds must have come from the sale of the *Vermilion Signal* and his land at Vermilion and here, but there are strong suggestions

that he was backed by others as well. This was another one of those things that WB doesn't appear to have mentioned. Based on information about Bassano found in *Henderson's Gazetteer and Directory*<sup>54</sup> of 1911, WB was listed but only as manager of the *Bassano News*. The paper is listed as being published by a partnership of Hobbins, McLean and Fergus. The directory lists the first two men as being in the town's livery business, a thriving enterprise in those years, while the identity of Fergus remains a mystery.

In the year that WB was in town, from April 1910 to April 1911, Bassano was booming. It continued to do so until the dam was completed in 1914. Nesbitt talks about the town "being wide open," resembling the touted Wild West found just south across the border.<sup>55</sup> The place certainly was lively because by 1909, a nine o'clock curfew was in place. Joe King owned the poolroom. After evening closing, he quickly headed for home with his pocket full of cash, fondling the loaded revolver in his trouser pocket. Dam workers and homesteaders were flooding in, the former desperate for food and lodging, the latter for land, supplies and farm equipment. Business lots were selling for as much as \$15,000. Farmland close to town brought \$200 an acre (roughly \$100 a hectare). A bit later, a man who would later become prime minister of Canada, R.B. Bennett, who was then a Calgary lawyer, spent \$30,000 on land southwest of town, possibly on the proposed spur railroad line. Bennett also had money invested in one of the local hotels. Nesbitt writes that "poker and blackjack games for high stakes were in operation and I saw betting as high as \$500 on the turn of a card." Large construction camps were set about three miles (five kilometres) south of Bassano to accommodate the more than eight hundred men starting work on the Bassano Dam, the largest "floating dam" in existence then. The payroll was substantial, and much of it was spent locally. Had WB remained in town, he would have noted the rise in transient worker population, many of them tough customers, and a rise in the crime rate. In fact, by 1912, a year after WB had gone, things around town became bad enough that a seven o'clock curfew was placed on the town, whereby women and children were not allowed to go outside their home turf, for their protection. The town constable reported an average of sixteen arrests daily. At least two "sporting houses" were in business about halfway between town and the dam site. People even disappeared, seldom to be found again. Trains stopping at Bassano had to be inspected for itinerants and hoboes looking for a free ride. There was even a high-profile murder where a Royal North West Mounted Police (RNWMP) member was gunned down.

But in WB's time, Bassano was just becoming very colourful. Four-horse freighters were endlessly hauling supplies north of Bassano to the Red Deer River and beyond. There were also true western characters like the stagecoach drivers high up on their wooden seats, hanging on for dear life as they swayed and rocked over rough

trails. Old-timers recall a “Deadwood Coach” from Idaho operated by Colonel Felix Warren, a real frontiersman with long flowing white hair and small white goatee, who closely resembled his friend Buffalo Bill.

WB’s commercial printing got off to a rocky start when he began business. At a town council meeting in June 1910, a decision was made to approach the Herald Western Printing Co. in Calgary about printing the new town bylaws. A month later the town ordered one hundred copies from that company. It is not known why WB did not get the contract. However, he must have been making a suitable impression in town because on February 8, 1911, he had better luck, offering to print one thousand copies of a special edition about Bassano as he had done for Vermilion, asking \$50. This was accepted. At this same meeting, WB was elected onto town council.<sup>56</sup>

Few historians are aware of the fact that WB published a preliminary edition of the *Bassano News* considerably earlier than the official April 1910 one. His little-known trial edition of January 5, 1910,<sup>57</sup> extolled the virtues of Bassano with its abundance of natural gas, coal deposits and rich agricultural resources, as a divisional point for the CPR and of course the \$8 million irrigation project about ready to start. WB used the term “red romance and mystery.” We are tipped off that on one of his “business trips” from Vermilion, he had been nosing about the Bassano area. A note in the *Bassano News* says that he had been invited to Christmas dinner at Billy Caldwell’s old ranch in the Finnegan area, now run by Thomas Evans, “who spared no trouble in preparations.”<sup>58</sup> He had picked up some advertising customers, too, among them Ira Shoop who was selling real estate, insurance, Deere and Moline farm equipment, Winona and Mandt wagons, and Gray buggies. Joe Stiles, the town’s first druggist, was just getting established. A \$10 reward was being offered by J.W. Burr of Gleichen for the recovery of two bay horses, which each had a swastika symbol branded on the right shoulder.<sup>59</sup> Lots 19/20 in Block 12 were offered at \$1,000 for the pair. An interesting ad reads “Keystone Barbershop, pool room, bowling alleys, Hot and Cold baths with music all the time—Fred Wheatley—Prop.”<sup>60</sup>

It’s interesting to study the way WB handled local news. Editorially, he promoted building a hospital and finding teachers for the school. “We now have a new school but no teachers or students,”<sup>61</sup> referring to the main floor single room used for a school in Prince’s Hall. Children had to be turned away as there was not enough room for them all. It would not be until May 11, 1911, that a new three-storey school would be started.<sup>62</sup> He reported on the construction of Bassano’s first church, the Knox Presbyterian Church with an odd heading on August 19, 1910: “Presbyterians Are Engaged in Rearing One of God’s Temples.” In the same issue, in an article called “Bassano Gets Its Second Wind,” WB discusses how the local residents have been discouraged about no moisture for farming and that many have found

work on the dam project to help out. Then it rained and rained some more. “The fall promises to be lively,” he writes, “the winter active, and Bassano having got its ‘second wind’ will in the early spring have we believe its second boom which promises to be larger and more substantial than the first one.”<sup>63</sup> He also seemed sympathetic to “poor Irene White,” a well-known bootlegger, for selling liquor without a licence. And appearing in the June 24, 1910, edition is a piece about the first wedding in Bassano. “Monday last [June 20], George Coutts married Miss Fanny Robertson, both of Aloyne, Scotland. Mr. Coutts had left Scotland to make his fortune in 1890 in America. He wrote to Miss Robertson 20 years later to marry him and she accepted.”<sup>64</sup>

WB also liked to use news generated by the large Blackfoot (Siksika) Indian Reserve #146 west of town because those living on the reserve naturally interacted with Bassano residents in many ways and still do today. For example, WB met One Gun, described by a Piegan tribal member of the Blackfoot Nation as being a “real Indian,” very proud of his prowess at horse stealing. His name shows up in the register at the Treaty Seven signing by noted Chief Crowfoot in 1877. WB may not have been able to talk with him without the assistance of an Elder, as One Gun spoke only the old Blackfoot language, poorly understood by many of the younger Blackfoot. On April 22, 1910, he noted that the Blackfoot were now ruled by Yellow Horse, Running Rabbit and Iron Shield, taking over from Crowfoot. It was Iron Shield who raced into Bassano in 1910, warning the town of a fast-moving prairie fire coming from the west. Even though the fire licked at buildings on the west end, townspeople managed to control the fire, thanks to this advance notice from Iron Shield. WB was not surprisingly a man of his times, however, and was not immune to bigotry. For example, apparently the Blackfoot were an annoyance as well. “The Indian war dance at Prince’s Hall gave me a headache.”<sup>65</sup> On March 24, 1911, he also referred to the Crowfoot Indians as “duskie.”<sup>66</sup>

For unknown reasons, WB decided to pull up stakes again in 1911, this time headed for Calgary. WB’s wife, Minnie, was not happy in Bassano but how much this influenced his decision has not been determined. Leonard Nesbitt, then a reporter for the *Calgary Herald*, had heard that WB wished to sell out, so he and a friend, J.R. (Jimmy) Sharp, both originally from Toronto and seeking a newspaper to buy, dropped in to see him. Sharp was writing for the *Calgary Albertan* at the time, a paper struggling to stay alive. For \$3,000, they purchased the *Bassano News*. They operated it as a team for over a year. Sometime during this year WB and Sharp also partnered up, heading for Calgary, throwing their hats into the real estate ring.<sup>67</sup> Nesbitt retained the help of the same News staff that WB had hired.<sup>68</sup> Later, WB’s old Washington hand press was used for Nesbitt’s Langdon, Alberta, newspaper, the *Langdon Leader*.<sup>69</sup> Nesbitt did a lot of writing and was active in politics. He was

pro-Liberal, a position of which WB would have approved.

Two unsolved mysteries surround WB's transition time from Vermilion to Bassano. WB's last day as editor of the *Signal* was February 24, 1910, as noted in the paper. But was he actually there? The second mystery is that the first edition of the *Bassano News* is shown by records from Library and Archives Canada to be published on April 1, 1910. However, the *Bassano News* on microfilm showed that a single issue was published on January 5, 1910, with W.B. Cameron's name printed on the masthead as editor and manager, over a month before he left Vermilion, with no more issues until April 1. In an amazing feat, it appears that WB may have published this trial edition while still in Vermilion publishing the *Signal*, using *Signal* equipment. Or did the date April 1 have anything to do with it? I have never found out.

Soon we find WB and his family in Calgary, and learn of his relationship with a "painted lady."



*A Second Taste of Fame and Glory*  
1911–1932

SHORTLY AFTER the April 28, 1911, printing of the *Bassano News*, the last issue he was involved in, WB, Minnie and the two young boys, Owen and Douglas, along with what few effects they had, were on the CPR local steaming west to Calgary. Leonard Nesbitt was now in charge of the newspaper, the only tangible clue to WB's departure being a change in the editor's name in the masthead and an editorial shift in tone. As we learned previously, WB had partnered up with Jimmy Sharp, Nesbitt's business partner in the *News*, and they had dipped their toes into the Calgary real estate market. *Henderson's Directory*, 1911, for Calgary verifies that WB was in real estate but was also job printing.<sup>1</sup> WB's house was nearby, owned at that time by James O'Brien, manager of the Riverside Lumber Company. This tells us that WB rented the house or that he shared it with O'Brien or someone else. It's an interesting structure. Jim Bowman, Glenbow archivist, had this to say: "The house is still there, and is subdivided into small apartments and/or housekeeping rooms. It is one of a group of Edwardian rooming houses in the Cliff Bungalow district which were decorated with Victorian bric-a-brac and painted brilliant colors by their owner 15 years ago. They are known as the 'Painted Ladies.'" This house may have been one of the nicest WB and his family had ever lived in.<sup>2</sup>

WB didn't leave many clues behind about his Calgary ventures, but the fact that he was advertising services as a printer, too, indicates that he couldn't make it on real estate sales alone. Moreover, since he sold the printing business less than a year later, this must not have been his greatest triumph either. Did he and Sharp split up? There was big money being invested in Calgary at that time and they may not have had enough capital to carry them through. Jimmy Sharp also did not remain in real

estate for long, soon joining the Canadian Expeditionary Force heading overseas during the Great War.<sup>3</sup>

WB still had strong ties to Battleford from his time spent there as a young man. Gathering information from his friends living there and from news in the *Saskatchewan Herald*, especially from the January 20, 1912, edition,<sup>4</sup> he became enthusiastic about the predicted Battleford land boom, and decided to give it a try. At first it looked very promising, with early starters including the Battleford Realty Company, with their town lots, F.W. Smart, and the White Land Company all experiencing great success. Apparently WB wanted in on the action so by April 1912, he had packed his family up in their eighth move in their short married life and was now living in Battleford, his old stamping grounds: "Mr. W.B. Cameron, a pioneer of Battleford, but who has spent several years in the real estate business in Calgary, returned last week and will open up an office here. Mr. Cameron owns a valuable subdivision on the Battle River and is preparing to place it on the market."<sup>5</sup> How much land he had and how he obtained it is unknown. However, we do know that he partnered with Harry Adams, local rancher and secretary treasurer of Battleford's town council. "H.C. Adams brought in his cattle from Meadow Lake which he is moving to his ranch south of Eagle Hills."<sup>6</sup>

Original copies of the *Saskatchewan Herald* can be found in the Saskatchewan Archives in Regina, where Shirley and I were able to root out scant but relevant information about WB and the growing community. In 1912, at the beginning of the boom, Battleford had a population nearing two thousand. By May of that year, Hunter & Company and Cameron & Company (no relation to WB) were also in the real estate business. W.B. Tuck was busy at his photographic studio, and train service was about to begin now that the Grand Trunk Pacific (GTP) bridges were nearly ready. Dick Laurie, WB's old friend from his Frog Lake days and now a government surveyor, was rushed off his feet surveying lots for North Battleford's Riverside subdivision. Robert Jefferson, another friend and Poundmaker's son-in-law, had left teaching on the reserve to become a notary public as well as a commission agent, insurance salesman, and Massey Harris Implement and Rumely Oil Pull tractor dealer. Some pavement was being laid, a new high school started and the telephone line was expanding towards Lloydminster. The new Gaiety Theatre was being built; "The Best West of Winnipeg" as the local newspaper ad proclaimed. Homesteads were still available at very little expense.<sup>7</sup> However, by the end of 1912, the boom was over.

Although WB and his family were now settled in town, WB still had things to clear up in Calgary. The *Saskatchewan Herald* reports that "W.B. Cameron left for a business trip to Calgary,"<sup>8</sup> but returned by May 17. He apparently also had business

in Winnipeg: "W.B. Cameron has returned from Winnipeg after a lengthy business trip."<sup>9</sup> A mysterious announcement about Minnie also appeared in the newspaper, indicating that she was ill or had left town, at least for the time being. "Mrs. W.B. Cameron will not be receiving until the first Friday in January [1913]."<sup>10</sup> Son Owen was doing well in school, as shown in the Public School Report for term end, 1912, passing from Grade 2 to Grade 3. He received 498 points out of a possible 690 for his work in drawing, language, music, reading, writing, number work, spelling and handwork, translating into a 72 percent average.<sup>11</sup>

Investigating WB's real estate ventures in Battleford is confusing because there were two Camerons in real estate during this time period, but thankfully both *Herald* editors, P.G. Laurie, and, after his death in 1903, his son Richard, usually referred to WB as W.B. Cameron, which was most helpful. Cameron and Company (Frank G. Cameron) carried the most *Herald* advertising among the growing number of real estate agents. WB, in contrast, never seemed to advertise, even though he must have been fully aware of its power. This makes it difficult to trace his transactions. There are hints that he may have been involved with the new Battle River subdivision but so was Frank Cameron. Nothing has been uncovered about how Harry Adams fared in real estate either. The 1913 edition of *Henderson's Directory* does not list WB at all, so we can assume that his real estate business had folded by then. But was he still in Battleford?

At this point I shall reintroduce an observation about WB's lifestyle alluded to many times earlier. This is, of course, his inability to settle down, his nomadic nature. His friends often referred to him as a "Wandering Jew." Jim Buller, grandson of Four Sky Thunder,<sup>12</sup> is believed to be the first to use this term. The term Wandering Jew is, on the one hand, horticultural in nature, referring to specific vine-like plants that grow in unpredictable directions. However, this term comes from the Christian legend of a Jew who has been doomed to walk the earth forever because at the Crucifixion he mocked Jesus. However, anthropologists use it to describe people who wander. Historian Rusty Macdonald strongly believed that WB was a "compulsive wanderer."<sup>13</sup> His theory is based on an idea proposed in Anthony Storr's review of a book on English author George Borrow.<sup>14</sup> The premise is that wanderers fear close relationships because intimacy will disclose the fact that they are unloveable and that being always on the move was a defence mechanism. While the theory is interesting, it's a bit strong as applied to WB because he certainly didn't seem to reveal many depressive tendencies.<sup>15</sup>

But wander he did. It is important to keep in mind, however, that this was somewhat exaggerated by WB's propensity for writing letters, and habitually noting in them where he was at the time. This often gave the erroneous impression of his

having lived in even more places than he actually did. Excerpts from some of his correspondents indicate that others were much aware of his roaming lifestyle. Allan Tibbits of Fort Frances, Ontario, knew WB (and called him Uncle Willie), stating that “WB wasn’t popular with his wife and sons as he took off and left them here [Fort Frances],” giving us a clue about the tenuous relationship between WB and Minnie.<sup>16</sup> Andrew Miller of Miller Service Ltd. in Toronto, acting as an agent for WB, pressured him for a more permanent address so he could keep in touch.<sup>17</sup> Friend Jim Buller expressed his hope that his letter would get to WB. “You are more or less like the proverbial Wandering Jew. Here, there and everywhere at once. You keep on guessing to know your whereabouts.”<sup>18</sup> Writer John Beamer says, “Going into the drug business, eh? That’s a new one on me. Where in the course of your nomadic existence did you find time to pick up pharmacy? I didn’t think you ever stayed long enough in one place.”<sup>19</sup> And Buller later wrote that he “received your very kind and welcome letter the other day. Needless to say, I was glad to hear from you again. I have been wondering where you were these past few years. We remembered you on Christmas but were not sure where to send a card, as a matter of fact, on account of your propensity to move about. It’s quite a problem to keep up with you. Isn’t it about time you were retiring to some congenial place and weather?”<sup>20</sup> Even a Regina reporter, in a May 1928 article covering WB’s speaking tours, noted that “he is a hard man to locate. But it is known that he may be found somewhere in the northwest at certain seasons of the year. He is still writing and on occasion he renews his acquaintance with his family in Vancouver.”

Details of exactly when WB left Battleford, to where he went and if he took his family with him are unrecorded, creating a decade during which there are only hints of his activities. Nevertheless, one clue is contained in a letter Owen Wister wrote to WB in 1914 after a lengthy break in correspondence, replying to what must have been a letter of condolence from WB on the death of Wister’s wife. “Are you no longer in Vermilion? Or is it Winnipeg during the winter only? Gracious! The pictures of Winnipeg today don’t resemble it as far as I saw it in 1887.”<sup>21</sup> From this letter, and an August 12, 1912, note about his Winnipeg visit recorded in the *Saskatchewan Herald*, we can assume he headed there after leaving Battleford. Macdonald discovered from a note in WB’s collection that he had worked for the Winnipeg Exhibition Board, although I could not locate any confirmation of this. Minnie and the boys ended up in North Vancouver, but exactly when they arrived is not known. A photograph recently surfaced showing a stern-faced Minnie and the two boys sitting on the shingled veranda of a North Vancouver home, Minnie with a small black dog on her lap. Owen, with light hair, is wearing a sailor suit and appears to be about nine while Douglas, with dark hair, looks to be about five. If the ages are correct, the year would be about 1913, coinciding with Minnie’s departure

from Battleford.<sup>22</sup> However, WB usually based his short stories on hard facts. Interestingly, details in a story called “Thirst Dance and A Fin-flash” published in 1926 suggest that WB and his family were still in Battleford in 1916. To date, this conflict has yet to be resolved. By this time, however, we can safely assume that Minnie was pretty much out of WB’s life.

By using annual editions of the very helpful *Henderson’s Directory*, Macdonald uncovered the fact that in 1917, WB was in North Vancouver too, listing his occupation as a journalist, traveller and salesman. There is no indication, however, that he was living with his family. After that his name does not appear while Minnie’s name does, so WB had left, but where to is not known.<sup>23</sup> Vermilion barber Todd Kuehn reports that WB had been back at Frog Lake in 1923 so he was likely touring about his old stomping grounds in the Saskatchewan Valley, writing and schmoozing. We also know that in the same year he was in Swift Current, Saskatchewan, entertaining the local newspaper editor with his tales but not getting ahead it seems. In a scant two years, however, WB would once again be the focus of attention in a monumental five-year run of fame.

Alex Peterson, a teacher on the Frog Lake Reserve school<sup>24</sup> and a local historian, had long recognized the importance of the 1885 uprising and had worked diligently to bring public recognition to this highly significant event in Canada’s history at a location as yet unmarked and overgrown with brush. In time, working with the federal Historic Sites and Monuments Board, Peterson arranged to have a stone cairn constructed and a brass plaque prepared, inscribed with a brief description of the event along with the names of the victims and some of the survivors. The cairn created in 1925 is beautiful stonework crafted by local residents Floyd Fry and his son Gordon from uncut fieldstones, gathered and delivered on a steel-wheeled wagon by local Metis Pierre Gadwa. Planted firmly on a concrete and stone base about two feet (just over half a metre) thick and about seven feet (two metres) square, it rises nine feet (nearly three metres) high, tapering to eighteen inches (forty-six centimetres) at the top. From the way the stones had been selected, arranged and set, maintaining a uniform taper, it is obvious that the Frys knew what they were doing. Not only had Peterson worked hard to have the new cairn and plaque made, he also organized an official unveiling, inviting many dignitaries such as Judge Frederick W. Howay of New Westminster, BC, who was chairman of the federal Historic Sites and Monuments Board; Reverend Edward Ahenakew, a fully ordained Cree representing the Anglican Church; several local Cree chiefs; and residents of the two nearby reserves to attend. WB was not only invited to attend but also asked to do the unveiling.

Based on detailed background documents describing what took place,<sup>25</sup> my

historical narrative as follows is very close to what really took place. It was early afternoon on June 8, 1925, sunny and pleasant compared to what days previous had been like, when black clouds had dumped heavy rain over a large area. But it was also a day of confusion and frustration for the event organizers because Mother Nature still remained boss. Judge Howay had arrived at Kitscoty by train on time, but was informed by hotel-keeper Henry Busby that the roads were impassable to Frog Lake and that the event may have been cancelled. Howay understandably holed up for the day. However, Kitscoty resident F.O. Seward crammed WB into his already full car that same day, delivering him over what must have been terrible roads.<sup>26</sup> With the dignitaries now unavailable until the following day, ceremony organizer Peterson<sup>27</sup> now scrambled to have some kind of presentation to the many who had come long distances over muddy trails winding through the bush. With the help of local entrepreneur and land agent Harry Bowtell, himself a notorious character and worth a story or two, Peterson approached WB with a request for help.

WB, who was happy to oblige, stood before the tall stone cairn, neatly dressed in his well-worn three-piece suit with a white shirt and tie. He was hatless and his hair was thinning on top. His back was to the large dark-coloured flag draped over the brass plaque, whose inscription was unknown to WB but would soon astound him. He would have studied the large crowd moving towards him from the knoll at the west side of the settlement near the overgrown basements of the burnt-out Roman Catholic mission. Even though there were an estimated three hundred people in attendance, he probably felt at ease. After all, he was about to deliver a talk that he had given many times before about familiar things of which he had been part, the troubled times of March and April 1885 at Frog Lake, NWT. He waited for the crowd to settle down and then began to speak. After an admirable address, WB drew the crowd's attention to the marked graves immediately north of the monument,<sup>28</sup> speaking briefly about the victims, and then guided everyone along the muddy trail about a thousand feet (a few hundred metres) farther east to the main settlement, continuing to relate numerous details of that horrible day. The day ended successfully but not in the manner the organizers had hoped, since the official unveiling, of course, had to be postponed to the next day. With no accommodation or food available, most of those in attendance left for home. Surprisingly, a good number returned again the next day, June 9, to witness the official unveiling and listen to more speeches. Once again, WB took his place (he did not make a speech today) and at the appropriate moment swept the dark-coloured flag from the brass plaque, which was shining in the sun and resplendent with fine details around its edge. The following is a description of the unveiling in WB's own words: "I stood before the cairn and close beside me were the eight graves marked by simple iron crosses bearing the names familiar to me since youth. I drew the cord—the flag

'The Canadian Ensign' fluttered down. [There was the] cairn, its bronze inscription glowing in the warm sunlight. The government of our country had paid tribute to these stalwart pioneers of 1885."<sup>29</sup> Measuring nearly twenty by thirty inches (about fifty by seventy-five centimetres), the plaque listed the names of the victims and also the wives of two of the victims, white survivors Theresa Delaney and Theresa Gowanlock. But noticeably absent was WB's name. He was shocked and of course let down when he did not see his name on the plaque. He was visibly upset, but keeping his composure he carried on as though nothing was wrong. No doubt he was hurt by this omission, never to forget it.<sup>30</sup> But his disappointment was mitigated by his discovery that among the crowd was journalist Howard Kennedy, who was there to cover the unveiling for the *Montreal Star*. He was a fellow with journalistic clout whom WB had met in 1885 at Fort Pitt. Kennedy was about to give WB's spirits a tremendous boost, helping elevate him to a new status as writer of western historical material.

Readers often asked why WB waited four decades to write his story of captivity in the hands of Big Bear's renegades in the spring of 1885 and how he could have remembered the rich details that he included in his book. In fact, WB wrote the preliminary version of *The War Trail of Big Bear* in 1897–1898 when living in New York and with *Western Field & Stream*. While some of the story was based upon memory, much was drawn from volumes of notes he had made in the years since the troubles of 1885.<sup>31</sup> By the early 1920s he had also interviewed many Rebellion participants and had taken photographs<sup>32</sup> of places and people relevant to his story. By the time a publisher was found, the manuscript had been updated and finely tuned.

There were people who knew he had written this book, such as his wife, Minnie, and his sons, Owen Wister, who encouraged him to have it published, along with S.R. Moore, editor of the *Swift Current Sun*. While touring about southern Saskatchewan and Alberta in the fall of 1923, WB spent a day or two in this southwestern Saskatchewan town that he knew from his early days, taking a room at the old Healey Hotel. The local newspaper office was his next stop. This was becoming a custom with him. He'd stop in to see if he could stir up any interest in his tales of the Rebellion and his book, the manuscript of which he "just happened to have with him." Editor Moore was very impressed with WB's visit, his tales of adventure, and of course, his manuscript of *War Trail*. Moore was so impressed, in fact, that he wrote to Dr. A.S. Morton, a well-known professor of history at the University of Saskatchewan, telling him about WB and about WB's sixty-thousand-word manuscript. "He's a modest fellow, but a real one," wrote Moore. He hinted to WB that Morton might be able to help get it published.<sup>33</sup>

But little came of it until journalist Howard Kennedy, in the crowd at the Frog Lake unveiling, offered his help. At one time editor and writer for the *Times* in England, Kennedy had ably covered the Rebellion for the *Montreal Star* as a war correspondent and had been present at Fort Pitt when WB, now out of the clutches of his captors, was brought in on June 1, 1885, a freed man. At the unveiling, WB showed Kennedy his manuscript, stirring up considerable interest in this veteran journalist, who asked if he could take it with him back to Winnipeg,<sup>34</sup> to read it and try to promote it. True to his word, Kennedy did just that. “I held up that MS. of yours before the Author’s Convention at Winnipeg the other day—postscripting my report for the Montreal branch—and told them it was immense—I did not know any book published in or on Canada in the last twenty years that had so thrilled me.”<sup>35</sup> WB must have been delighted. With this kind of endorsement, a publisher was sure to be found.

Ryerson Press in Toronto started the ball rolling. Not widely known, however, is the fact that Lorne Pierce, Ryerson’s editor in the 1920s, was the person who took the manuscript to London, coaxing Duckworth in west London to print it. Duckworth agreed to do so, printing the first edition of 2,500 copies in October 1926 for Ryerson Press.<sup>36</sup> The book was immensely popular, and they quickly sold two thousand copies at \$2.00 each, some bearing the Ryerson Press name, some with Duckworth. An agreement between WB and Ryerson Press showed that he was to receive 10 percent royalties, similar to what is paid to today’s authors.<sup>37</sup> By March 1927, a second revised edition of 1,500 copies was printed, all bearing the Ryerson Press logo. This edition was better bound and contained twice as many illustrations, a map showing the field of events, a dedication and a new jacket with artwork done by John Innes, a renowned Vancouver artist and illustrator. At about the same time, Duckworth printed an American edition of one thousand unbound copies for Small, Maynard and Company of Boston, but this small firm collapsed while the material was en route to Boston by ship. The shipment was purchased at fire-sale rates by a man only known as Willie, bound and resold. Neither Duckworth nor WB ever received a penny from this clandestine transaction.<sup>38</sup> These became the three editions bearing the name of *The War Trail of Big Bear*.<sup>39</sup> Copies of these editions can still be found among family members and in private collections, some of them autographed by WB in his illegible scrawl. The autographed copy given to his brother-in-law Sir John George Bourinot is now kept at Library and Archives Canada. WB gave many copies away as gifts, even sending one of the first editions to Inspector Francis Dickens’ brother, Henry, in London, who wrote, “Realizing now for the first time that the story is one which so closely concerns my brother Frank, I shall read it with the greatest interest.”<sup>40</sup> Many copies can be also found in used bookstores and online sellers, some of them bringing as much as \$100. WB would

be proud of this since in 1949 he thought that the price of \$3.50 “was ridiculous.”

Things were now rapidly picking up for WB. Sales of *War Trail* were far above what was expected. WB was pleased. He personally sold five hundred copies to the Departments of Education in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The University of Saskatchewan bought over one hundred copies, authorized by its president, W.C. Murray, who was nudged a bit by Morton.<sup>41</sup> “Today, Professor Morton gave me a copy of your new book, ‘The War Trail of Big Bear.’ I sat down to read it at noon and could not get back to the office until I had gone through it.”<sup>42</sup> It is interesting to note that numerous important historical accomplishments are credited to this gentleman, Dr. A.S. Morton, among them locating, marking and directing many government attempts at preserving lost and forgotten fur trade posts in the Saskatchewan Valley. A notable photograph shows Morton tramping through heavy willows and hazel bushes in the summer heat, dressed in a three-piece suit and tie, on the hunt for Sturgeon Fort near Prince Albert. Morton felt that WB would be an asset in garnering historical information, so he hired him to interview and photograph past participants of the Rebellion and early settlers. WB was given a list of assignments. For example, in July 1926 he was to interview NWMP Scout Joseph McKay, NWMP Major Crozier, Patrice Fleury, Charles Laviolette, Harry Ross, and Captain Owen E. Hughes. He was also to prepare notes on the NWMP Rifles, 1879–1884. How formal an arrangement Morton and WB had is not certain,<sup>43</sup> but letters exchanged between them have proved to be illuminating.

WB’s letters have revealed much about his work with Morton: “I have received your cheque for \$25. I have been busy getting photographs, now having one of [NWMP] Const. Loasby in uniform,” adding a few historical details about the man.<sup>44</sup> In the same letter he revealed that a print of Imasees (a son of Big Bear) was from a Mrs. Charmbury, and that he had seen a painting of Big Bear in the Legislative Building, Regina, saying it bore no likeness to the man. Early in 1927 he mentioned he wanted to get back to writing a manuscript he was doing in partnership with Henry John Moberly. He asked Morton if the university would pay for a stenographer in Vancouver, where WB was then living, to do the typing.<sup>45</sup> By February he still had not heard from Morton and was “quite disappointed.”<sup>46</sup> By September WB was back in Saskatchewan on a speaking tour, and wanted Morton to buy some stories at not less than one cent a word. “Can’t make it on less,” he declares.<sup>47</sup> He also asked for an advance of \$25 or \$50: “It’s been a lean winter with slow sales.”<sup>48</sup> A bit later he gave a nudge to Morton, suggesting that the University of British Columbia might want the manuscript to *War Trail*.<sup>49</sup> In April he wrote to Morton, asking for payment on his “Taming Sitting Bull” story<sup>50</sup> that he had sent to Morton. He discovered that since he had moved again, his mail had been forwarded to Edmonton. Correspondence

began to die out. WB sent one last letter to Morton: “Dear Professor Morton, I have been expecting to hear at least that the material sent you lately was received, but so far I’m in the dark.”<sup>51</sup> WB’s work for Morton thus ended.<sup>52</sup> The University of Saskatchewan treated him fairly it seems, with WB’s receipts showing that the university paid him \$555 for his work. Indeed, much of WB’s work is held by the University of Saskatchewan Libraries and the Saskatchewan Archives Board in Saskatoon.<sup>53</sup>

A.S. Morton was not the only person to note WB’s work; Henry John Moberly was another. They were old friends from years ago, first meeting sometime between 1899 and 1902 during one of WB’s frequent trips throughout the West. They met once more in 1926 while WB was travelling along the North Saskatchewan, for his own benefit but also in cooperation with Dr. Morton, collecting stories from “the few remaining pioneers, red, white and of mixed blood.” Recognizing that Moberly, a long-time Company employee, had to be among them, WB paid this tall, thin man a visit at his Macdowell, Saskatchewan, farm. Moberly and his wife had retired and settled near this tiny hamlet on the CPR line twenty miles (roughly thirty kilometres) south of Prince Albert in 1894, even though the Company had offered him a land grant at Banff. Since his wife did not like the mountains, this place had been their choice.

Moberly, well educated, was from Ontario and began his career around 1848 with the large insurance firm Lloyd’s of London at their St. Petersburg office in Russia. Tiring of that, he returned to Canada, soon employed by the HBC, working his way up until his retirement forty years later.<sup>54</sup> Over the course of several days at Moberly’s log house, WB discovered that at the request of friends a few years earlier, Moberly had “set down the story of his active life in the Great Company’s service,” but that it had never been published. As an old newspaperman and writer, this was all WB needed. He made an agreement of collaboration with Moberly, who was to change publishers and send the manuscript to him. WB would “put it in shape” for publishing, while adding a good map of Moberly’s travels and five of his own fact-based stories about Indian warfare between the Blackfoot and Cree peoples. For this they agreed to share the royalties and expenses equally. WB worked hard whipping the book into shape and getting a publisher interested in it. *When Fur Was King* was published in 1929 by J.M. Dent and Sons in Toronto, illustrated by noted artist John Innes (who had illustrated the jacket of the second edition of *War Trail*). The book became very popular, read even by Queen Mary, who intended to hand it over to the King for him to read as well.<sup>55</sup> Through Miller Services, WB also arranged to have the book published as a serial.

But something went wrong between Moberly and WB. Apparently, Moberly lodged

a complaint with the publisher against WB, accusing WB of holding back royalties owed to him. In a letter to Moberly, WB showed that he was very perplexed and upset at that which Moberly had accused him.<sup>56</sup> “There was no excuse for such intemperate language or the ugly and libelous statements you have made about me.” WB noted that he willing to let the courts settle this issue if necessary. WB gave Moberly a lengthy explanation of how the proceeds were distributed, something he had already done earlier and that Moberly had acknowledged.<sup>57</sup> Serial rights had been purchased for \$350, with Miller Services directly paying Moberly his half. In addition, Dent and Sons published *When Fur Was King* in book form, to which royalties applied, and had made royalty payments twice (split two ways), the first being \$260.38, the second only \$51.40, totalling \$311.78. Whether there were any further royalty payments is unknown. Both men had received books totalling \$109.43, and later WB owed for more books, which he accounted for in his letter to Moberly. It is not known how the two men finally settled up, if there was any settling to do. WB never mentioned it again in any of his numerous letters. Now ninety-five years old, was it a memory lapse or confusion on Moberly’s part that he simply forgot their earlier correspondence? Or was he bitter about something else? Later book reviews and press clippings often give credit to WB as the author, reviews to which Moberly would have had access. Book reviewer J. Lewis Milligan states that “Mr. Cameron is to be congratulated in rescuing it from the obscurity of the family album of derelict manuscripts and giving it the final touches for publication.”<sup>58</sup> Moberly may have felt that WB had cut him out of the picture, taking credit for a story that he had not written but only tidied up while arranging publishing. It seems that this conflict was never resolved. Moberly later moved to Duck Lake, where he died in 1931. He lies buried in the Anglican cemetery in a plot surrounded with an iron fence.<sup>59</sup>

To raise cash and promote his books, WB embarked on a speaking tour across the West. He appeared as an invited guest for many organizations, and the tour lasted a full three years. Since WB had theatrical blood in him and a flair for dramatic storytelling, speaking on stage to a group of people was something he enjoyed. In his day, of course, a public evening of readings, recitations, monologues, plays and music were part of Victorian life, so he made good use of these skills. He kept a scrapbook of reviews written about his talks by various newspaper reporters that reveal how well he was received and a look through these clippings is very interesting.<sup>60</sup> Later, he also prepared a detailed summary of his tours. Several articles in the scrapbook begin with “Only Living White Survivor of Frog Lake 1885 Massacre Gives Lecture,”<sup>61</sup> or similar titles. This was, of course, a point on which WB liked to capitalize. All the reviews he saved are very favourable. While each differs slightly depending on what angle of interview was used, most depict WB

as having hero-like qualities. The *Swift Current Sun* even referred to him as Dr. Cameron.<sup>62</sup>

WB also peddled his books on his speaking tours and in towns through which his train travelled. In addition, he sold serial rights to magazines such as the *Grain Grower's Guide*, a western Canadian farming publication. This netted him \$172. Even young people appreciated his stories, as illustrated by an interesting handwritten letter, contained in a tiny envelope bearing a green two-cent George V stamp, in WB's collection. It is from Norman Calkins. "Dear Mr. Cameron, I am a boy seven years old, four feet high, [I] am in grade four and wear glasses. I enjoyed your article [*sic*] a lot and thought I would thank you." Norman says he feels sorry for Wandering Spirit, Big Bear and Poundmaker and that Big Bear should not have been put in jail.<sup>63</sup>

It is not clear how at first WB began to promote these tours, which began on January 20, 1928, in Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta, but once he had done a few, word got out that he was touring and many invitations were received from people he knew all across Alberta and Saskatchewan. A number of talks were town hall gatherings but some were for colleges, such as one at Saskatoon's Nutana Collegiate Institute on April 26, 1928, and again on March 7, 1929. WB was paid \$25 for each talk. Other academic institutions included Regina College, Regina Collegiate, Edmonton Normal School on September 13, 1929, and again on February 7, 1930, and Camrose Normal School. The latter two were teacher training facilities. He also spoke to other groups, such as Royal Canadian Legions, Rotary Clubs and historical societies. The tours did raise funds for him but varied from a low of \$4.40 (Regina College) to a high of \$58.15 (Edmonton Normal School), the reason being that in some places he charged or was given a flat fee while others were based on voluntary contributions. Overall he spoke eighty-seven times in a period spanning over three years. He spoke forty-nine times in 1928, twenty-seven times in 1929, five times in 1930, only three times in 1931, and then nothing until 1936, when he spoke only three times. His total receipts for that whole time period were \$1,830.15 (about \$20,000 in today's currency). This was not bad considering how nasty the Depression had become.<sup>64</sup> It is not clear from his summary how much he made from the sale of books at these talks because that information is not included.

WB's presentations, often illustrated with "lantern slides,"<sup>65</sup> were, of course, about his experiences in the West and during the Rebellion as a prisoner. He loved to demonstrate the universal sign language of the Plains Indians that he had learned in his trading days, and also entertained audiences by singing the Cree war song and whooping his way around the stage. The collection includes a series of photographs of WB using sign language to portray the sun, rain and buffalo, among many other

things. Annie Stanley of Frog Lake has commented that some of these signs also had early trade connotations.

It should be noted that at least one talk was given in his home town of Trenton, Ontario, as reported by the local newspaper, the *Quinte Sun*, in July 1928. "The troop was lucky last meeting in having Mr. Wm. Bleasdel Cameron to talk on his experiences in the west."<sup>66</sup> The article identifies who he is and it is through it, in fact, that we learn of exactly where he lived while growing up in Trenton. The article notes "that he was born in the old Gill house on Byron St," and this is the only reference that we have of that fact. As for WB's presentation, the article notes that "his talk to the Scouts was chiefly on the Indian sign language and was much enjoyed."<sup>67</sup>

Of interest is that on February 25, 1929, WB spoke at Kindersley, Saskatchewan. Eldon Johnson was a child then, living on a farm not far from Kindersley, and remembers riding into town with his father on a horse-drawn stoneboat to hear WB speak.<sup>68</sup> A publication called *Rotary Whizz* published by the Winnipeg Rotarians advertised a luncheon to be held at the elegant Fort Garry Hotel, with music by Walter Faulkner. WB was the speaker.<sup>69</sup> This downtown hotel was and still is a prestigious property in Winnipeg and WB must have been delighted to be there. His topic was "Sketches of Indian Life and Character." It should be noted that the advertisement credits him as not only being the author of *War Trail* but also *When Fur Was King*, which he was not.

In 1929, WB was living in Edmonton, with talks scheduled in October at St. Paul, Bonnyville, Smoky Lake and Camrose Normal School. This was when his writing and speaking engagement fortunes began to fail, due to circumstances beyond his control. In late October, Wall Street stocks plummeted, triggering a series of events that led to the onset of the Great Depression. His speaking tours dwindled to only a few, and so did his book and story sales. This was the beginning of a tough struggle in the writer's market, from which WB never fully recovered.

WB made many pitches to popularize his work even more, writing to the international publishing firm Curtis Brown in New York that worked closely with the *Saturday Evening Post* and the Crowell Publishing Company. None of them were interested. Thus, while *War Trail* did well in sales until the Depression, the rejections from publishers grew after that point. He tried using Miller Services of Toronto as an agent to move his material, but only met with minor success. It was Miller who complained about the poor photographs that WB took: "I must say they are a very disappointing lot of photographs both in the aspect of the photographs and the subjects."<sup>70</sup> With the Depression now taking a heavy economic toll across the country, his markets all but gone and book sales plummeting, WB returned once more to a trade for which he had been earlier trained. Another adventure was about to begin.



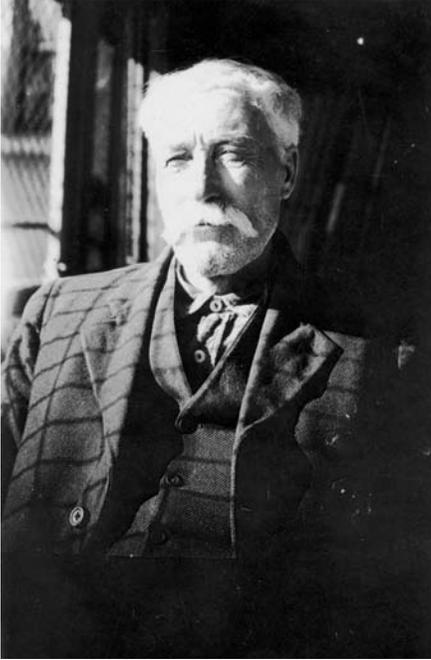
2008.008/33—George Dill, briefly WB's trading partner at Frog Lake in the latter part of 1884. Dill originally came from Muskoka, Ontario.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF DON LIGHT, BATTLEFORD, SASKATCHEWAN.



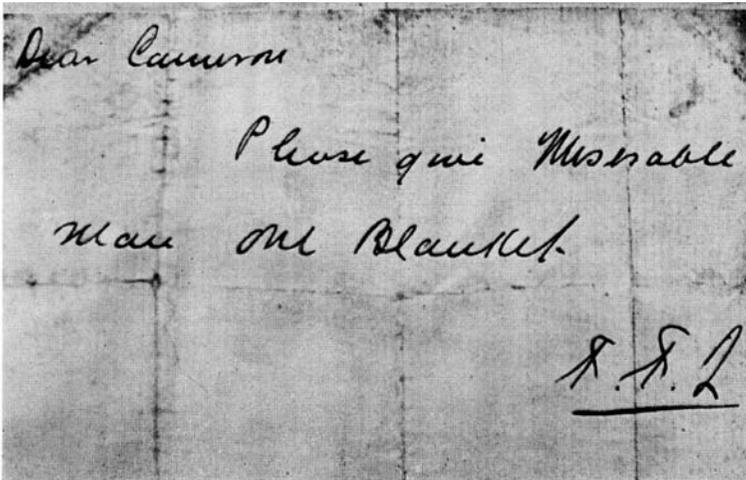
2008.008./1—Thomas Trueman Quinn ("the Sioux Speaker"), sub-Indian agent at Frog Lake, the first person to die in the April 2, 1885, uprising. This photograph was taken at Fort Pitt in 1884.

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



2008.008/57—Louis Goulet, frontiersman and woodcutter, who was visiting Frog Lake during the uprising and taken prisoner along with the others. Goulet was witness to WB's escape from the settlement to Big Bear's camp nearby, accompanied by at least two Aboriginal women, the basis of the myth that he hid under one of their skirts.

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



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QUINN'S LAST WRITING: APRIL 12, 1885.

2008.008/177—A copy of the last note written by Thomas Trueman Quinn on the morning of April 2, 1885, to WB, who was at that moment still in the Hudson's Bay Company store at Frog Lake, to give Miserable Man one blanket. Note the incorrect date at the bottom, likely a typesetting error.

FROM AN ORIGINAL COPY OF *THE WAR TRAIL OF BIG BEAR* WRITTEN BY WB.



2008.008/32—An original bottle of Perry Davis' Painkiller, a popular medicine in WB's times, from a collection at the Glaslyn and District Museum in Glaslyn, Saskatchewan. At first heavily laced with alcohol and opium, its contents in later years were modified to contain less harmful ingredients. WB hid a case of this medicine minutes prior to the shootings at Frog Lake.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ROBERT HENDRIKS.



2008.008/26—An 1885 staged photograph, well-known among Canadian historians and often printed, of WB dressed in scouting garb beside one of Big Bear's sons, Horse Child. In a bold, perhaps presumptuous move, WB convinced Horse Child, then attending the trial of his father, to pose with him in a Regina photography studio for this picture.

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



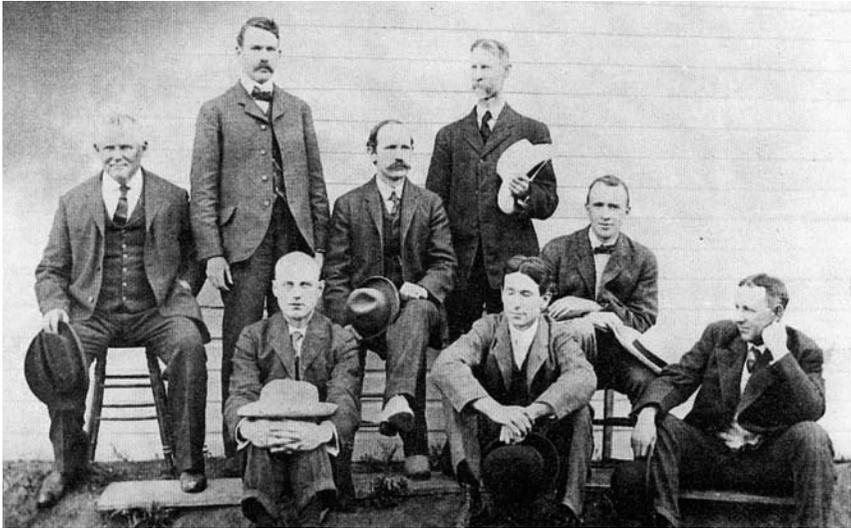
*2008.008/5—WB, on the far right, dressed in a white suit and posing with Chief Beardy's warriors at the Third Annual Duck Lake Sports Day on July 13, 1891. Beardy had been regarded as disloyal to the Queen during the Rebellion and suffered consequences because of his stand.*

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE DUCK LAKE HISTORICAL MUSEUM SOCIETY INC., DUCK LAKE, SASKATCHEWAN.



*2008.008/55—This cup, or one very similar to it, was presented to the town of Vermilion by the Edmonton Board of Trade in recognition of Vermilion having participated in a trade show in the early 1900s.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



2008.008/61—In this photograph of the Vermilion town council in 1906, WB is shown seated on the far right. While on council, he was credited with several accomplishments as noted in the text.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF JEAN INMAN, VERMILION HERITAGE MUSEUM, VERMILION, ALBERTA.



2008.008/60—WB loved to give tours of the Frog Lake site. Here he is with some new friends from Vermilion, posing on what is likely the ridge where Quinn was killed.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF JEAN INMAN, VERMILION HERITAGE MUSEUM, VERMILION, ALBERTA.



2008.008/27—Henry John Moberly and “Gentleman Joe” McKay shown beside a hunting shelter, probably in the Macdowall area of Saskatchewan. Note the dog and the shotgun.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ROBERT HENDRIKS.



2008.008/64—Kaneepotaytayo, member of Big Bear’s band and head dancer, whom WB knew well, shown here with his wife and family at Onion Lake, Saskatchewan. Photograph taken October 8, 1923. His wife was the daughter of Apischiscoose, hanged at Battleford for the murder of Oblate Father Fafard.

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



*2008.008/21—WB at the 1925 unveiling of the Frog Lake cairn that had been recently built. The original brass plaque shown will soon be replaced with a new one by Parks Canada, its innocuous text including no names at all this time.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



*2008.008/62—Frog Lake chiefs whom WB knew present at the 1925 unveiling of the cairn at Frog Lake, left to right: Chief Fryingpan, Chief Napaweaw and Chief George Stanley. The latter chief, in his late teens and close by when the uprising took place, asked to speak at the end of the unveiling ceremonies. He said little, but later related to F.O. Seward some of the causes of the troubles as he saw them.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



*2008.008/19—WB in 1928, posing beside the water turbine pulled up on shore.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



*2008.008/59—The Reverend Edward Ahenakew, BA, one of the first ordained Aboriginal Anglican ministers in the West. Here he is seen on top of Frenchman's Butte, ca. 1928.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



*2008.008/54—WB's Gap Lake homestead about two miles (three kilometres) north of Vermilion, Alberta. Land location was the SE 1/4 Sec. 16, Twp. 51, R 6, W 4. He sold it in 1908 and moved to another location in the Indian Lake district northwest of Vermilion.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.

*Beef-Wine Tonic and the Movies*  
1932–1940

THE DEPRESSION hit everyone hard, including writers like WB. From 1925 to late 1929 he was riding a roller coaster of successes, but by 1930 things had gone sour through no fault of his own. He wrote to many people about his situation but one letter in particular explained it very well:

Up to 1930 and the depression I never had much difficulty in disposing of what I wrote and at fairly good prices. But then for about ten years I stopped writing practically altogether. The depression had killed the writers' markets and those who did sell an occasional story or article went in the hole and had to go on relief. I avoided this by going into the business for which I was qualified and had an Alberta diploma. As you know, money was scarce as hen's teeth and the druggist had to compete with the general stores for what little business there was, because they could—and did—sell patent medicines, etc; and could give credit whereas the druggist couldn't.<sup>1</sup>

Around 1932 WB had menial employment in Bonnyville, east of Edmonton, but he did not last long. His friend John Beamer stated that WB would have been like “a bush wolf on a chain.”<sup>2</sup>

What he really desired was a quiet location with a part-time job, not too demanding, that would make a few extra dollars to tide him over between story sales. So, after a hiatus of five decades, WB went back into the trade he had been initially trained for in Ontario: pharmacy. He told a lawyer friend in Prince Albert, Harry Ross, what he intended to do, mentioning the Derwent Drugstore. “If I pay \$50 to register as a druggist in the Pharmaceutical Association of Alberta and receive my diploma I can raise enough money to open the Derwent store.”<sup>3</sup> Somehow, he scrounged up the money, about \$750 at current rates, and applied for a licence.

In due time, the Pharmaceutical Association of Alberta (now called the Alberta College of Pharmacists) in Edmonton issued him Licence No. 717 on November 7, 1932, making it legal for him to practise pharmacy in Alberta.<sup>4</sup> According to the pharmaceutical association regulations, WB had to write an exam to qualify for an Alberta diploma. How WB managed to qualify after a lull of fifty years is remarkable, but somehow but he did it.<sup>5</sup> Of interest is a comment taken from *The History of Pharmacy in Alberta: The First One Hundred Years*, which reads, “The first names in the register of the Alberta Pharmaceutical Association showed, as the authority to register, such initials as N.W.T. meaning the ‘North West Territories,’ or perhaps O.C.P. meaning the ‘Ontario College of Pharmacy.’” The reason for this was at first there was “no educational route for an Albertan to join his own association.”<sup>6</sup> By applying, WB had joined these other early Alberta pharmacists, many with the initials O.C.P. attached to their applications for practising pharmacy in Alberta.

Now legally able to practise pharmacy in Alberta, WB still needed a building and some stock in order to open a drugstore. It’s interesting to note the basic chemicals and other sundries that WB would have kept. A fascinating patent medicine seen on his shelves would have been the popular Perry Davis’ Painkiller, a concoction primarily made of alcohol that was liberally laced with opiates, camphor and menthol. Readers will recall that upon hearing of trouble at Frog Lake, WB had hid the Company’s entire stock of this medicine behind a chimney. Dodd’s Kidney Pills, Dodd’s Little Liver Pills and tonics would have joined the painkillers. Most tonics would have been a mixture of iron and fortified port wine (beef-wine tonic). WB also would have had nitrates, including Sweet Spirits of Nitre, an assortment of bromides and sulphates, some quinine, methyl and ethyl alcohol, glycerine, camphor, menthol, peppermint, alum, mineral oil, Epsom salts, petroleum jelly, eucalyptus oil and wintergreen. With these basic chemicals, he would have prepared medications prescribed by the local physician or, in some cases, on his own. WB never offered miracle cures in his drugstores to make a fast buck, although there were shadier types who did. In the years WB was in pharmacy, one entrepreneur made big profits selling diet pills and guaranteeing fast weight loss. The pills apparently accomplished this quite well, but there were serious side effects from the pills, even deaths. Because of the fatalities, authorities got involved and had the pills analyzed. To their horror, the analysis revealed that the pills contained tapeworm eggs.

WB seldom if ever divulged the names of kind souls who occasionally had given him a boost. Perhaps it was his pride that prompted him to withhold this information, but contained within the multitude of letters he wrote were some clues. Sometimes specific details eventually disclosed who they were. It appeared a friend of WB helped him set up the Derwent Drugstore, a local frontier doctor named F. (Fred) G. Miller. WB used to spend time in the Elk Point area, often staying at Miller’s home

or at the Caskey Hotel. Being a superb storyteller was part of the reason why WB and Miller had become quite close friends. The doctor would relax after a tiring day, listening to WB's stories about Frog Lake. At the official Elk Point bridge opening in 1950, WB was one of the speakers. He closed his talk with the following comment to introduce his friend: "A very old friend of mine I've known since 1906 as a close friend and one of the best pioneers of this country north of the Saskatchewan: It is Dr. F.G. Miller." WB pointed out that Miller had been greatly responsible for the progress of the Elk Point area. Stories beyond the scope of this book abound in northeastern Alberta about the medical marvels that had been performed by Dr. Miller. This was particularly true of the early years of remote, primitive medical facilities, terrible roads and transportation problems in this huge territory served by only one physician, Miller. Although living in Elk Point, Miller's work also took him south nearly twenty miles (about thirty kilometres) to Derwent and about the same distance east to Heinsburg, another small town recently serviced by the CNR. Stretched to the limit and often beyond, Miller was desperate for assistance. He had likely encouraged WB to apply for a druggist's licence since he knew that WB had some pharmaceutical training, and perhaps even supplied him with the \$50 needed for the licence. Even though WB's knowledge would have been dated, Miller felt confident enough to hire him to help with tasks such as dispensing medication under his direction and making appointments. WB was happy that he was able to earn a few dollars while able to continue his writing. He kept his expenses low by living in the building, a practice he kept up all through his drugstore years. However, since WB could not give credit,<sup>7</sup> his sales were low and he was still short of funds. However, he was able to make a little extra through other means, as we shall see.

Fred Hicks and his wife, Ethel, of Vegreville, Alberta, personally knew WB. In fact, while still a young man, Hicks had worked in WB's Derwent Drugstore. WB rented a building on the west side of Main Street, up the hill from the Derwent Hotel. Hicks states that the "building used to be the Derwent post office back in 1928," and then goes on to describe the interior. "It had three rooms. The front part was the biggest and had lots of big windows. I could see right down the main street. That's where the drugstore part was."<sup>8</sup> Dr. Miller usually spent one day a week there, using one of the two small rooms at the rear as his clinic; the other became Cameron's bedroom. An old photo shows WB casually leaning against a door jamb in the open doorway. Nailed to the wall above the door is a small sign. The writing is too faint to read but probably announced to passersby that here was the Derwent Drugstore. As Hicks reports, the front on either side of the door was all glass, with six large panes on each side. The street side of the building, tight to the wooden sidewalk, had been constructed with the prevalent high false front and was painted

in a light colour with dark trim. Parked in front was a canvas-topped four-door Buick with solid wheels.<sup>9</sup>

Hicks remarks that “Cameron used to leave in the fall to go audit books somewhere so he asked my dad Louis about who might look after the store while he was gone.” Young Hicks’ name came up. “I was 19 then,” he recalls. WB liked this young fellow and hired him right away. Although Hicks didn’t know why WB would mysteriously leave for a few weeks or so by train in the fall, a letter WB wrote to his friend Norman Luxton explained what he was up to. “I know the Cold Lake-Chipewyan territory real well and George Hill, an old friend, is the police magistrate [who] lives there. I used to go up there to prepare financial statements and audits for the hospital and the school district.” Unknown to young Hicks until well after his employment at WB’s drugstore, this was how WB made his extra money.<sup>10</sup>

Hicks talked about his work at the Derwent Drugstore. “Oh, I used to cut wood, keep the fire going and mix things up for people coming in. And sell stuff in the store, like magazines, candy, patent medicines, that kind of stuff. ” When asked about the wood, Hicks chuckled. “I asked about wood. Cameron said it was all out back behind the store. I found out that it was all logs. He never told me that I had to cut it all up, too!”<sup>11</sup>

To Hicks, WB was an enigma. Although he found WB to be quiet and friendly, with a sense of humour, Hicks never really learned a lot about him or about his experiences. For example, he mentioned that WB would often come out of the back rubbing his eyes. “He had one eye that was always red and sore looking in the morning.” Hicks didn’t know that WB had only one eye, the other being glass. This is a credit to prosthesis makers of the 1860s. That would explain the redness of WB’s good eye. It’s now common knowledge that he used to stay up late writing stories, letters to friends and replies to those who had written him.<sup>12</sup> There were some items from the old days that WB used to show Hicks, such as Aboriginal artifacts and objects from Frog Lake, such as a wooden pail. Hicks proudly displayed to me a copy of *The War Trail of Big Bear*, signed by WB on November 3, 1934. This was given to Hicks when WB’s young assistant left his employ.

In 1933, WB bought himself a new writing tool, a typewriter, for \$90. Other than when working in offices, WB had not previously had use of this tool. This had forced him to scratch out his tales in pencil. Typewriters had become an increasingly important office production tool during WB’s preteen years, but he had never had much of a chance to pound the keys until he became a clerk at the Duck Lake Indian Agency in 1891, where typed documents had become the standard format. WB may not have known it at the time but Samuel L. Clemens, better known as Mark Twain, had already produced one of the first typewritten manuscripts on what Clemens

described as this “newfangled contraption” for his publisher. WB had become proficient at typing while working in the mid-1890s for the Minnesota-based *Duluth News Tribune*. Along with the other writers in the smoky copy room, with their plain-tip cigarettes dangling from loose lower lips, WB soon kept pace, his fingers dancing about the QWERTY keyboard of a black, bulky Remington or Underwood, hammering out his daily stories.<sup>13</sup>

WB selected the very popular Remington Noiseless Portable (likely a Number 7). This machine was low in profile and based on an Underwood noiseless design that Remington had bought the rights to in 1924. An ad in the November 1932 edition of *Fortune* magazine may be where WB first learned about it. The ad promoted this typewriter by saying that “this new Remington Noiseless makes it possible to turn off, by the mere touch of a button, the staccato, nerve-wracking clatter of typewriting, to subdue it to a murmur, no more than a kitten’s contented purr.” WB would have preferred this model because much of his work was done at night when “normal” people nearby were sleeping, and its portability and light weight were perfect for his lifestyle.<sup>14</sup>

As with most things technical, the Remington was not without its faults. Common complaints from users concerned the fact that it sometimes skipped spaces and blurred the type. WB’s unit stuttered once in a while, too.<sup>15</sup> In several parts of his letters, the typing overlaps what he had just finished writing. In a letter to his son Douglas, he says, “You’ll notice from the above that my machine appears to have gone somewhat haywire. I expect I’ll have to have it overhauled. The roller seems to have lost its grip.”

At the drugstore, aside from the usual patent medicines like cough syrup, there apparently were only the very basic chemicals from which to mix prescriptions. Hicks professes that he did not know anything about the chemicals, and simply

“There was no one like ‘im, ‘Oss or Foot,  
Or any o’ the Guns I knew;  
An’ because it was so, why, o’ course ‘e w  
W’ich is just what the best men do.’

“Where’s ‘Nipahow,’ I wonder?”  
Soft Hair looked up, as he spoke. I  
stood. Vermilion and yellow ochre c  
face, except where the tears had  
courses down it, through which s  
smooth, tawny skin.

“It was me that killed Ohskatask,  
simply “I did it for —”

followed what WB or Miller told him to do. “A little of this, a little of that,” Hicks confides. He did note, however, that Miller, as a highly responsible physician, was extremely precise in all his instructions. He recalls mixing one salve in particular. Although Hicks doesn’t

remember exactly what he did, he recalls Miller's instructions as something like this: "Over low heat melt four tablespoons of petroleum jelly. Stir in one teaspoon each of camphor and eucalyptus oil. Apply to infected area twice a day."<sup>16</sup>

Apparently the Derwent Drugstore, a business offering local people basic medical care and limited drug dispensing, only operated for about two years under WB's direction. The Dirty Thirties was unfortunately a time when there was simply too little money to circulate. Hicks humorously recalls how tight money was back then. "One day I went home and by accident had kept the days' sales in my pocket—one dime. Which I took back!" WB closed the doors and left town.

In 1935 WB opened another drugstore, this time in Lac La Biche, an interesting town northeast of Edmonton. The settlement's roots were in the fur trade of the late 1700s, something quite familiar to WB. It is interesting to note that Henry John Moberly had been in charge of the HBC post there in 1856. Also worth noting is the fact that WB's old Vermilion friend Harry Bowtell, a strong Liberal who was now living near Frog Lake, had been involved in a ballot box stuffing scandal there and had to leave until things cooled off for him.<sup>17</sup> The posh Lac La Biche Inn built above the lake in 1916 by the Alberta and Great Waterways Railway was still there at that time as well. However, there was nothing fancy about the drugstore WB had. An old photograph in the collection shows a simple sign reading "DRUGS" hung out over the sidewalk, while above the door was "Lac La Biche Drugs." The store was not as big as the Derwent one, and was squeezed in between the Lac La Biche Garage and the A. Ladouceur General Merchant store. It sported large front windows and a square false front.

How the business fared has not been recorded, but from all indications it failed because by 1936, WB had closed the doors and moved again to open his third drugstore, this time in Heinsburg.<sup>18</sup> This tiny settlement near Frog Lake, clinging to a steep hillside above the majestic North Saskatchewan River, was once a colourful place and a beehive of activity, eventually sporting a school, church, Royal Canadian Legion, stores, grain elevators, livery barn, garages and restaurants. It was the terminus for the CNR Coronado subdivision, and trains could turn around at Heinsburg's wye section of track east of town. The CNR also built a sixty-thousand-gallon (over two-hundred-thousand-litre) water tank on railroad flats to service the thirsty Consolidated steam engines.<sup>19</sup> The place was jumping, with lots of people around to swap stories with, suiting WB nicely. His Frog Lake days were never far away, he discovered. A fellow named H.C. Graham and his wife lived about two miles (three kilometres) east of Heinsburg down on the river flats. Graham was with the 7th Battalion Fusiliers<sup>20</sup> called up from London, Ontario, to serve in the

West during the 1885 North-West Rebellion. Although arriving too late for action, it has been said that Graham was part of the group that helped rescue WB while a prisoner of Big Bear, although there is no record of WB ever mentioning it.<sup>21</sup> Heinsburg was also near the two (contiguous) Frog Lake Indian Reserves where many of his old Aboriginal friends from trading days still lived. In 1936, WB had a store built halfway up the hill on Main Street. Details are very sketchy, but it's likely that it was funded and stocked by Dr. Miller. As with the Lac La Biche store, it was smaller than the Derwent building, but it still served the purpose—that of a tiny drugstore and place for WB to hang his hat, when he was home, that is. A photograph taken in late spring clearly displays a building very similar in size and shape to the one in Lac La Biche but with fewer windows, with a rolled asphalt roof and a brick chimney, and a ladder propped up next to the chimney on the north wall. The familiar drugstore sign hangs on the front. It was not over the sidewalk, for there wasn't one, but rather was above a boxed-off pile of fresh dirt, perhaps the beginnings of a small garden or flower bed. Across the street was the theatre and dance hall. From his front doorstep WB had a sweeping view of the valley and of the mighty river as it proudly displayed its many moods. But he was not here for long either.<sup>22</sup>

Bob Davis was a highly successful roving writer and reporter for the *New York Sun* in the first few decades of the 1900s. He and WB had met thirty years before in New York when WB was editing *Field & Stream*. At that time Davis was just getting started. "He, William Blaesdell [*sic*] Cameron was editor; I a penny-a-liner hawking wares at so much a thousand words."<sup>23</sup> They occasionally corresponded when WB was in the West. Davis was very supportive of WB and compassionate. While Davis was becoming somewhat of a celebrity with his stories, WB was still struggling, even though his work was comparable to or even better on some topics than was that of Davis. That was because WB had lived what he wrote about. For example, Davis was on assignment in Saskatoon in 1928, and while in the CNR station, he ran across WB coming out of the waiting room. As they reminisced, Davis was pleased to learn of WB's experiences during the Rebellion and learned that WB's resulting book (*War Trail*) had been published. WB also told him the story about Dickens' gold watch. Shortly after the uprising, for \$15, WB could have purchased Inspector Dickens' gold watch that had been pilfered at Fort Pitt. Fascinated with this tale, Davis wrote about it, receiving wide acclaim.<sup>24</sup> However, WB wrote about the same topic later on, and although this resulted in a finely written first-hand account, he did not enjoy the same amount of success as Davis.

WB had asked Davis more than once to drop in for a visit during his western Canadian journeys but he never made it. "Dear Bill: Well, dod blast it, I did not make Lac La Biche."<sup>25</sup> It seems his buddies spirited him away to a much more

attractive and interesting location, Maligne Lake, in the Rockies. But he advised WB about *War Trail*. "If anybody wants to do business, 'The War Trail of Big Bear' makes 'em pay."<sup>26</sup> The same thing happened later: "Dear Bill: Dod gash it I won't be able to hook into Heinsburg this trip."<sup>27</sup> Davis apparently had broadcast the story of Dickens' watch, originally WB's material, on CBC radio from Vancouver a week earlier. An innocent postscript says that "the enclosed seems to have gotten into my envelope by mistake," but we know from other correspondence that Davis sent WB a cheque for the use of the story, a very fair thing to do. It appears that this was the last contact they had.

That was the end of WB's drugstore days in Heinsburg. When he did return later for a brief time, he disposed of the remaining goods, selling them at reduced prices to Gregor's Store located just down the hill from him. Gregor's daughter Alice, who worked in the store in its final days, told me that "Dad [Rudolph] bought what Cameron had left. Things like patent medicines, gum, razor blades, stuff that hadn't spoiled or frozen. I'm not sure but I think there might be some old bottles with Cameron's labels on them still in the store." To my knowledge, the bottles yet remain in the basement of the abandoned store.<sup>28</sup>

WB's final foray into pharmacy was in Athabasca, sixty miles (about one hundred kilometres) west of Lac La Biche, where he opened the town's second drugstore. One might wonder why he chose this remote centre in which to relocate, but after examining this community's history, it's easy to see why. First, while the Depression hit many towns hard, including Athabasca, the nearby discovery of natural gas and a new influx of immigrants searching for better things resulted in an economic turnaround midway through the Depression years, with promises of better things to come. Second, WB felt comfortable here, enjoying a frontier lifestyle strongly associated with the rich fur trade history and the people who were part of the community. Initially named Athabasca Landing (the latter word was dropped in 1913), this town built on south shore of the river flats was old when WB arrived in May 1938. For the previous six decades it had served as a Hudson's Bay Company distribution point for goods and supplies brought from Edmonton. These were carried by horse-drawn freighters travelling north on terrible trails to this terminus on the noble Athabasca River. From here they were carried by barge and steamer to the many northern HBC posts at Lesser Slave Lake, the Peace Country, Lake Athabasca, Great Slave Lake and up the Mackenzie Valley. It also had become an important HBC fur trade centre and in the late 1890s had been a frenzied departure point for the Klondike gold rush. Boat building on the south shore was a major industry for some time. The huge Northern Transportation Company (NTC) also operated out of here in competition to the HBC. Finally there were also links for WB in Athabasca to his Frog Lake days of the late 1880s. For example, Dr. Robert

Delaney had practised medicine here from 1911 to 1913. Delaney was the brother of federal government farm instructor John Delaney, a victim of the 1885 Frog Lake troubles and a man whom WB knew well. Another link to Athabasca was James (John) Williscraft, another of WB's friends and a victim of the same uprising. He had been killed just minutes after Delaney. Before going to Frog Lake in 1884, Williscraft, a millwright, was at Fort McMurray helping build the HBC steamer *Grahame*. This would become the first steamboat to work the river between McMurray and Lake Athabasca in 1883. Just a hundred yards (about ninety metres) or so below WB's drugstore on the river's edge was where all its heavy iron machinery had been piled after being hauled along the long muddy Edmonton–Athabasca Landing trail. Final delivery from the landing to Fort McMurray would be handled by the many HBC barges nosed up on the bank, manned by hard-working Metis.

I often imagine that sometimes in early fall mornings, when thick fog hung over the river, WB would stroll across the street and then down to the river's edge. He might have listened to the quack of squabbling ducks somewhere out there in the mist, rising above the river's soft hiss. When the ducks quit fighting he might have heard the ghostly creak of oarlocks as the Athabasca Brigade, mostly Metis, pulled away from shore and began their journey down river in heavily loaded scows. He liked these people who added so much colour to the town. Since WB could speak Cree and a bit of their Mitchif, a unique blend of Cree and French, they got along well with him. Agnes Cameron, no relation and an early writer, was also fascinated by these rivermen, writing, "The swart boatmen are the most interesting feature of the place—tall, silent men, followed at heel by ghostlike dogs."<sup>29</sup> WB would have enjoyed a visit with Captain Shot (Louis Fousseuneuve), a man born to the river, an overseer of boat construction, and known to win nearly all battles with the treacherous Grand Rapids downstream while leading the scow brigades.

WB rented a comfortable-looking building just a few years old in Block 6 at the east end of the town flats, on the corner of Litchfield Avenue and Skinner Street (later renamed Evans Street).<sup>30</sup> Litchfield Avenue ran east and west, between the town and the river, a "riverside drive." The Canadian Northern Railway ran next to it. About the same size as the Derwent store, WB's Athabasca drugstore had a large square front and big windows on each side of the street door. This allowed a beautiful view across the broad Athabasca River to see the hills rising rapidly on the north shore, heavily cloaked in white aspen and dark spruce. The building was newer than many in town, having been built sometime after the great fire of 1913 that levelled buildings in that location. At that time this spot on the corner was locally referred to as Ferry Corner because Skinner Street actually ran down to the river, becoming the south end of the ferry crossing. Appropriately, WB named his new premises "The Landing Drug Store," as clearly shown in an old photograph.

Above the door was the familiar drugstore sign. It closely resembled the one he had at Heinsburg, and was perhaps the same one. Immediately south was a large two-storey brick building, the Daigneau Block, with an Imperial Oil glass gas pump.<sup>31</sup> The photo is crisp enough that with a good magnifying glass, one can peek inside through the large north-facing windows and discover that WB used only the west half of the building for his store. Towards the back is a small room, which was likely his living quarters. In a window display one can see a curved Wampole's sign, while below it sits a sign for Milk of Magnesia. From other window signs we learn that he had begun selling Kodak film, but he did not do any print processing. In a handful of well-seasoned brown print mailing envelopes in the collection, some are from Bell Photo Finishing, at 10240-103rd Street, Edmonton, in which they sent his photographic prints. There is even a touch of professionalism evident, because on a hanger by the west window is a pharmacist's white smock. However, WB needed more than professionalism to stay in business since he was competing with the well-known Athabasca Pharmacy established by Harvey Cull in July 1910. Cull was a strong town supporter and he and his wife were well-known figures in the area.

But WB was not an unknown either, bringing into town a bit of notoriety. The *Athabasca Echo* welcomed him to town in the May 27, 1938, edition, stating that he was an author and historian who was opening a drugstore to supplement his writing income. To make things even more competitive, pharmacist Gerry F. Bullock was also involved in the Athabasca Pharmacy at that time.<sup>32</sup> WB pretty well said it all when he confided to Norman Luxton in a 1947 letter: "There's no money in drugs." This was also about the time that WB learned that his old friend of forty years, Owen Wister, had died.

Records held by the Alberta College of Pharmacists suggest that WB stayed open into the early 1940s. However, his correspondence indicates that he was spending more time in Edmonton than Athabasca in the late 1930s, when WWII was looming and Canada was about to be committed. WB must have had a vision of being back in uniform, fighting for his country just like he had for a short time during the North-West Rebellion. A Canadian Press wire service release picked up by the *Edmonton Bulletin* and the *Calgary Herald* dated September 7, 1940, reveals WB's tenacious nature. Its subtitle announced that "1885 Massacre Survivor Wants to Fight in Army," as WB had just applied in person to the Edmonton Fusiliers, wanting "to offer his services." The recruiting sergeant looked him over and said, "How old are you?" "Oh, a little over 45." "You aren't by any chance the Cameron who is the last survivor of the Frog Lake Massacre in 1885?" The article says that WB "hemmed and hawed a little but finally admitted that he was the man" and that Cameron was a little annoyed that he had come on a day when a recruiting officer sergeant was there who recognized him. Apparently the last time the sergeant saw him that

day, WB was still trying by hook or by crook to enlist.<sup>33</sup> Given the urgent need for military recruits during the early war years, WB's druggist's diploma and superb writing skills would have almost guaranteed him a non-commissioned officer (NCO) placement, or possibly a commission, but he had two strikes against him: he had only one good eye, and he was definitely "a little over 45." He was 78.

While in Athabasca, WB penned an unusual, little-known satirical piece called "The Yarn of the Howling Gale (An Alberta Barque with a Bad Bight—Cameron Shipyards, Athabasca, Alberta)." It was unusual because after his fateful experience in Vermilion thirty years earlier, which had effectively ruined his newspaper business, he seldom got involved in politics. However, it seems he was still a loyal Liberal and felt obliged to take a potshot at the recently elected Social Credit government under Premier William Aberhart. Up until 1935, Athabasca had traditionally practised a form of "political independence," but now in the midst of the Depression years had decided to vote with the rest of Alberta—Social Credit. In this case, Liberal MLA Frank Falconer was bumped out and the Social Credit party member Clarence Tade was now in: "She sailed away on an autumn day—'Twas in 1935—And out of her crew of 62, but few came back alive."<sup>34</sup> In a move of political musical chairs, Tade stepped aside, allowing a cabinet minister, C.C. Ross, to take his seat in the Alberta Legislature. WB, the new boy in town attempting to establish a business, chose to wear opposing colours and his stand must have hurt him. After he left, the drugstore building remained in use for some time, becoming The Old Trading Post. Nothing remains today of the old drugstore and a Sears retail outlet occupies the lot.

Now free of having to maintain a business, WB finished a job he had accepted earlier, that of editing a book for Sir Cecil Denny.<sup>35</sup> There is a good possibility that WB had personally met Denny somewhere in what is now southern Alberta in the years 1883–1884. Their paths must have crossed again at other times, such as in Edmonton when Denny was Assistant Archivist of Alberta (1922–1927), but WB doesn't seem to have mentioned it. Denny was another natural choice for WB to interview, being an early member of the force. A colourful, very active man, he had helped establish Fort Macleod and Fort Calgary. In fact, he stated that he had the true information on how the latter place had been named.<sup>36</sup> He had also been present during the historic signing of Treaty Seven at Blackfoot Crossing in 1877. Following his resignation from the police force in 1882, in quiet protest to Lawrence Herchmer's political appointment as NWMP Commissioner rather than to Assistant Commissioner Crozier, Denny was also involved in a scandal concerning a woman, which did not enhance his reputation.

Earlier, Denny had written a western book entitled *The Riders of the Plains* that had become popular, but he also recorded his memoirs. About ten years after his death

in 1928, about the time WB had his drugstore in Athabasca, the family approached WB to help get the memoirs published, knowing that he had done a fine job with *When Fur Was King*. WB then edited and arranged Denny's work, which was finally published in 1939. Evidently the first version was five hundred typewritten pages and titled *The Birth of Western Canada*, but WB cut the manuscript to three hundred pages, broke long chapters into thirty-odd shorter ones, wrote headings for these and the index while securing a publisher, J.M. Dent of London, which had also published *War Trail*. For his service, the estate paid him \$700.<sup>37</sup> Within the Cameron collection is an edited backup copy still wrapped in brown paper.

Now in his late seventies, WB was living in Edmonton, looking for more challenges and some income. In the *Edmonton Journal* he noticed that big Hollywood film producer Cecil B. DeMille had visited Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, on July 25 of that year. His company, Paramount Pictures, was making the movie *Northwest Mounted Police*. Since the Battle of Duck Lake was one of the first engagements involving the police in the Rebellion, the company had chosen that place for a scene in the film. Undaunted by big names, WB began what would be almost a year-long exchange of letters, written from several Edmonton addresses, between him and Paramount Pictures. It's interesting to see how the movie moguls treated this unknown fellow from Canada.

WB's first move was to send a rambling three-page letter, explaining who he was and his Rebellion and NWMP connections, with a large package of material he had written, including a copy of *War Trail*: "The purpose of this letter, as you are before this probably aware, is to learn whether you would not consider my writing, knowledge and experience as valuable if you plan making a western Canadian picture. I may safely say that there are very few, if any indeed, persons now living with the background and familiarity with the early Canadian west as myself."<sup>38</sup>

It was a sound point of view, but because of his wording ("whether you would not consider"), his pitch had a negative connotation. The studio was not impressed: "We regret to advise you the studio does not permit us to read unsolicited material."<sup>39</sup> The studio returned the complete package unopened. They did acknowledge, however, that they were aware of *The Law Marches West* and *The War Trail of Big Bear*, but nevertheless turned down his assistance. Within a short time WB replied, not to Calvin, the studio's research director, but once again directly to DeMille, with apologies for the way he had forwarded the material, hoping they would overlook their rule of not accepting unsolicited material.<sup>40</sup> In the same letter, however, he was bold enough to chastise Calvin for his opinion. "I am confident that he [Calvin] may be mistaken, no matter how much knowledge and experience may be embodied [in the studio's] writing and coaching staff." He reminded them that they had the

responsibility to present life accurately to the public. WB received a reply, this time right from the office of DeMille, stating that they had read the reviews but were returning the newspaper clippings and other material, and that if they needed his services, they would call.<sup>41</sup>

WB let this matter rest for about seven months, but after reading news about the production in the *Albertan*, he wrote to DeMille again. Writing at great length, still rambling, WB talked about his close association with Big Bear, his work at Frog Lake, and some of the Rebellion events.<sup>42</sup> He made one more pitch, this one quite bold, even taking credit for Big Bear's fame. "I take it that Big Bear was selected—as, I presume, the main Indian character in the picture—largely because of the prominence that came to be attached to his name through my writings and lectures over three winters." Once again he stated how valuable he would be and how he was ready to go. "Should you decide that it would be to your advantage to have me come to Hollywood, I am ready to go down at any time on short notice provided I am wired or mailed transportation."<sup>43</sup> In a final reply, Calvin said that their technical staff was already busy with the project and thanked WB for his kind offer. It's a shame that the company did not accept his offer of help, because he certainly had the first-hand knowledge that they did not. This movie premiered in Regina, in recognition of what is now the RCMP Academy, Depot Division, the world-recognized RCMP training centre.

But WB was not finished with the movie industry yet. Still in Vancouver, he took to task United Artists, another big Hollywood movie producer that was producing a movie, this one entitled *Blood on the Sun* and starring well-known actor James Cagney. His revised manuscript of *War Trail* was then at a New York publishers and WB implied it would soon be published (which it was not). He objected to the company's use of the title when he already had chosen it as the new name for *War Trail*, providing ample documentation:<sup>44</sup> "The coincidence of your choosing, word for word, my title, struck me as, to say the least, odd. I do not propose to abandon it. I must therefore request that you choose another title for your picture."<sup>45</sup> Whether or not United Artists replied is unknown but as they certainly weren't about to change the name, WB was thereby forced into changing his. As they say, the rest is history.

Radio had become very popular so WB had also dabbled a bit in creating radio scripts. A glimpse of what he had been doing before re-entering the druggist business can be gleaned from a letter written to him by his friend John Beamer. "I was very interested in your radio play. It is dramatic enough, but I doubt if you could get anybody to put all the Cree dialogue on the air. The Indians would have to speak English, and how to make them do it without queering the play would

be quite a problem, but I think you could do it. I am returning it.”<sup>46</sup> Later he also got involved with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Although information is sketchy about his work for the CBC, we know that he was hired to write eight radio plays for them in the late 1930s or early 1940s. Only two were completed. On March 14, 1940, the CBC broadcast a radio dramatization script of his concerning a clash in 1884 between the NWMP and Indians in which Big Bear was featured. WB called it a “grand story.”<sup>47</sup> WB’s friend Jim Buller heard the broadcast. “I enjoyed the dramatization of *The Trail of Big Bear* very much and as requested, I wrote the CBC at Toronto and congratulated them on the splendid program. I also told them that more of this type of [program] would be welcome to many hundreds of people all over the west.”<sup>48</sup> It must have had high merit because *Maclean’s* magazine published the print version. It is believed that the CBC dropped this projected eight-play contract because WB simply could not keep up, still having other pressing, but less lucrative, projects on the go. This was in spite of the fact that the CBC paid him \$160 from the public coffers for his work.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, WB was still struggling to make a living from writing. However, he would soon be offered an opportunity he could not pass up in Saskatchewan.

*The Museum and  
Those Cussed Animals  
1940–1947*

NOW EIGHTY-ONE, WB was still happily wandering about the Prairies while Canada was in the midst of the Second World War. In the fall of 1941, he was selling magazine subscriptions including the *Reader's Digest*. Over the years WB had gained a notable reputation within historical circles because of his writing, speaking engagements and storytelling. Earlier, on February 27, 1930, he had been made an honorary lifetime member of the Royal North West Police Veterans' Association. Through the eyes of RCMP Commissioner Stuart T. Wood, WB seemed the natural choice to assist with the Regina-based RCMP Museum, still in its infancy, because of his early experiences, his writing and his knowledge of things past. Wood offered him a job and WB accepted. In the Cameron collection is a small aged newspaper clipping from the *Edmonton Journal* published sometime in the early 1940s. "Cameron Named Museum Curator—W. Blaisdel [*sic*] Cameron, Alberta pioneer and author, recently was made curator of the Mounted Police museum, Regina. Mr. Cameron was the sole survivor of the Frog Lake massacre, 1885. He wrote several books dealing with pioneer days. For a sometime-druggist in Athabasca, he broke into the news again here [in Edmonton] in 1940 when he tried to enlist in the army." WB played a significant but little-recognized part in the museum's development.

After being housed in a number of temporary places on the sprawling RCMP Training Facilities (now the RCMP Academy, Depot Division) in Regina, the museum finally found a permanent home in 1973 during the RCMP's Centennial Year. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II officially opened a new brick structure located

immediately southeast of the RCMP Chapel built in 1882–1883, the single remaining wooden structure used by the original NWMP. Today this impressive museum, now called the RCMP Heritage Centre and housed since May 2007 in a modern new building designed by architect Arthur Erickson, holds some fifty thousand items, many of which are on view in a series of well-planned displays chronicling the history of the RCMP.

The facility was the vision of Commissioner Sir James Howden MacBrien and a few members who shared a historical interest and realized the value of the numerous artifacts and documents scattered across the country that were associated with the world-renowned Mounties. They had the foresight to begin gathering these items into a collection, not only for protection and preservation, but also for public view and study. At first, according to current curator Carmen Harry, the collection was made up of “odds and ends,” a hodgepodge of material not always related to the Force but nevertheless still significant and housed in a number of locations at Depot.<sup>1</sup> It all began in the hallway or annex of A Block, later renamed the A.B. Perry Block in recognition of that early commissioner, and then moved to the old C Block, in the basement and on the first floor. This building was located just east of the Chapel but was demolished. Before relocating to its present location, the collection was housed in the new C Block during the 1950s. Flooding occasionally happened, but it is unknown how much damage occurred.

To my knowledge, few people have read WB’s very interesting 1896 account of Regina’s NWMP post, written while he was with *Western Field & Stream*:

Various means of recreation and amusement are provided at the larger posts. At Regina, the headquarters of the Force, there are reading and billiard rooms, a gymnasium and entertainment hall; and at all divisional headquarters there are now canteens and reading-rooms. At Regina they have a piano, and in fact wherever half a dozen policemen are found together, the “Heavenly Maid” is seldom a total stranger. Everywhere are amateur musicians—the trill of the flute, the tinkle of a banjo, the ring of a violin. The regimental bands at Regina and Calgary are perhaps the best in the North-West; and a prettier sight it would be hard to imagine than the Depot Division Mounted Band on a warm summer afternoon, on parade, the sun glancing off burnished instruments and lighting up the scarlet and gold of the bandmen’s uniforms, while in perfect order the horses with arched necks step proudly to the time of the music. An officer always accompanies the band.<sup>2</sup>

WB’s old friend Major Fred Bagley had been one of these bandmaster officers.<sup>3</sup>

By 1943, WB had begun work in the museum. On RCMP letterhead, using a museum typewriter, WB wrote to his friend Norman Luxton: “I am just getting into the routine but think I’m going to like the job when I know just what it consists of. I’ve been showing people around all afternoon and expect to be busy again tomorrow. That will be jake as long as I’m paid for it, which of course I will be.”<sup>4</sup>

On April 2, he wrote again to Luxton: "I am commencing to feel at home here and believe I'm going to like my job."<sup>5</sup> He also stated that W.E.G. Macdonald, the editor of the RNWMP annual publication *Scarlet and Gold*,<sup>6</sup> wanted sixty copies of a Charles Russell print that Luxton had, asking him to ship these to Macdonald. He also reminded Luxton that this was the anniversary of the Frog Lake Massacre.

WB began work when the collection was housed in the old C Block. Although WB called himself the museum curator, and numerous newspaper clippings from Regina and Edmonton credit him with the title, details provided by William (Bill) Mackay, once a curator of the museum and now its director, seem to suggest that WB was likely hired to perform custodial duties.<sup>7</sup> Mackay pointed out that curators would have been members, appointed by the Depot Commanding Officer, who were nearing retirement or between assignments and who had shown an interest in the museum.<sup>8</sup> WB may have filled the curatorial role to a degree, however, working for Reg. No. 11041 Constable L.W. Latour, who held the curator's position at that time under Depot Commanding Officer Assistant Commissioner Denny LaNauze (1942–1944).<sup>9</sup> What is certain is that in the summer of 1944, Wood sent WB to Ottawa for some special RCMP historical work in the absence of the regular RCMP historian. At that time WB took the opportunity to call on the Honourable Ian MacKenzie to see if he could qualify for a War Veterans Allowance since he had been a Militia member during the North-West Rebellion. About this time he had also had surgery, a hernial repair.

Three professional photographs in the Cameron collection show sections of the museum as it was when WB was there. Impressive and well organized, it displayed a good-sized collection. Many glass-topped display cases were arranged on the hardwood floor, one of them displaying Aboriginal crafts and regalia. On one wall was the well-known photograph taken in 1884 at Fort Pitt showing some frontiersmen whom WB would have known well: T.T. Quinn, sub-Indian agent at Frog Lake, first to fall in the Frog Lake uprising; NWMP Captain Francis Dickens (son of Charles Dickens), in command of Fort Pitt; James Keith Simpson (son of Sir George Simpson, governor of the HBC), in charge of the HBC store at Frog Lake and WB's boss; Stanley Simpson (said to be a nephew of Sir George Simpson), clerk and postmaster at Fort Pitt and close personal friend of WB's; and Angus Mackay, officer in charge of the HBC. A second photo shows a seven-pound (over three-kilogram) brass cannon, still on display, and the howitzer, as well as a rack of nine rifles and a display case containing five medals, three of which appear to be the North West Canada Medals awarded for service during the 1885 North-West Rebellion. A third photo shows a display case with an Inuit parka, boots and another set of clothing.<sup>10</sup>

WB made some improvements to the museum system, but details are scarce. His friend Fred Bagley, an underaged boy when he joined the NWMP and who WB always referred to as “the Major,” wrote to him in 1943, addressing WB as “Billie.” Bagley’s comments may have had some bearing on WB’s museum work, for he says that “the museum is very interesting, not only to visitors but yourself. They have some very good stuff in there but when I saw it 2 or 3 years ago the greater part of the articles had no cards or other means of identification of the owners or lenders. I wish I could be with you for a while to assist you in this respect.”<sup>11</sup> But WB had already been working on that aspect for several months, as attested to in a letter to Luxton: “I suppose I’ll like it here [the museum] well enough when I get into the swing of things. It needs systematizing.”<sup>12</sup>

WB may have been uncomfortable with the military atmosphere, which would have been structured, formal and perhaps too restrictive for his free spirit. He later confided in a letter to Nosiseem: “I suppose you’re right about the officers in Regina, but the only one who seemed really friendly, barring yourself, was poor Dr. Powers,<sup>13</sup> who looked after me when I was laid up for a month [spring of 1943] with pneumonia.”<sup>14</sup> From this statement we know that WB was under the medical care of the RCMP, not at a general hospital. Because of this illness, he had been ordered by the Officer Commanding (OC) to take time off and recuperate. He was put up in the Kitchener Hotel in Regina. WB also liked Superintendent John F. Thrasher, who served at the Regina Depot twice. However, he writes that “for the most part I liked the non-coms [non-commissioned officers], Nevin, Robbi and others better than I did the officers.”<sup>15</sup>

Continuing to write while in Regina, WB still favoured subjects involving his experiences with the “primitive and romantic” aspects of the Indian, but he had dropped topics of homestead days. To his chagrin he realized that he had to change his style to suit the times, but admitted that it “cramped his method and composition.”

A notable number of artifacts that are part of today’s museum can be attributed to WB’s efforts to build up the collection. During WB’s many wanderings across the Prairies, he met E. (Ed) N. Higinbotham, a Lethbridge, Alberta, postmaster and avid collector of western Canadian historical items. Higinbotham died in 1943, and his wife turned over a large portion of the postmaster’s priceless collection to WB. Among the war clubs, stone pipes and bead necklaces was an old pair of field glasses once belonging to NWMP Inspector Sir Cecil Denny. Many of these items eventually found their way into the hands of WB’s friend Norman Luxton, the Banff collector. WB wrote to Luxton from the museum on June 30, 1943:

I intend writing to a number of my old friends with the idea of adding to our collection here . . . I have already obtained ten new exhibits, nine from one friend in Winnipeg. Among them is a splendid photo of [Fort Carlton], which as you remember was burned immediately after the Duck Lake fight on March 26th, 1885, so it must have been taken in '84 or early in '85. Another is a liquor permit for five gallons of brandy issued to R.R. Smith of Qu'Appelle by Hon. David Laird, first lieutenant governor of the N.W.T. on June 29th, 1880. The form was printed on the first press to be brought into the North West, at Battleford, then the capital, by P.G. Laurie.<sup>16</sup>

There were other donations as well, such as Sir Cecil Denny's personal diary, a precious leather-bound document filled with almost indecipherable writing and maps, still on display today, along with an autographed copy of *The Law Marches West*, Denny's accounts of early police presence in the West.<sup>17</sup> Two other donations made by WB in 1944 were a rarely issued territorial liquor permit for Lieutenant Colonel A.G. Irvine, Regina, on December 15, 1885, and some photographs taken at the Frog Lake massacre site.<sup>18</sup> In November 2007, curator Carmen Harry provided me with updated information related to WB's contributions to the museum. In 1944 he donated a territorial liquor permit originally issued on May 2, 1885,<sup>19</sup> to the Frog Lake Roman Catholic mission for eleven gallons (over forty litres) of sacramental wine. At this time he also donated what must be the original manuscript for *The Law Marches West* that he had edited for Sir Cecil Denny,<sup>20</sup> along with ten photographs related to the 1885 Rebellion. It is also believed that he arranged better provenance documentation for the numerous items already at the museum and for those being collected. We also know that while he was at the museum, he wrote a booklet about the facility based on what he already knew and on research he was sent to do in Winnipeg.

In his later years, WB developed a strong relationship with his friend Norman Luxton. The Banff entrepreneur was more than just an inspiration and comrade to WB; he also helped financially when WB needed it the most. Luxton and WB shared similar work and experiences. Luxton, too, was an adventurer and journalist. Although younger than WB by fourteen years, he had lived a colourful life. As a young man, he had worked for the Department of Indian Affairs in Ontario, and then headed for the Cariboo goldfields in BC, apparently making his fortune there. He then worked for the *Calgary Herald*, which he followed by setting up his own paper in Vancouver. But life turned dangerous when he and Captain John Voss attempted to sail a one-hundred-year-old Nootka dugout canoe named the *Tilicum* around the world in 1901. Arriving at Fiji with coral fever and strained relations with Voss, Luxton headed for Banff to convalesce. (The *Tilicum* can be seen today in the Maritime Museum of British Columbia in Victoria.) He also had a newspaper in Banff already, and being a shrewd businessman (a characteristic he and WB did not share), he bought other businesses, organized the Banff Indian Days and

established the Sign of the Goat Trading Post, Taxidermy and Museum (also known as the Sign of the Goat Curio Shop and Free Museum).<sup>21</sup> The latter became the Buffalo Nations Luxton Museum, the oldest Alberta museum recognizing Aboriginal peoples, and is very much in operation today.<sup>22</sup> The relationship between WB and Luxton was mutually beneficial, and it should be known that Luxton acquired many of his museum artifacts from WB.

In November 1944, his feet itchy once more, WB decided to leave what appeared to be the ideal job for him at the museum. He had more job security with Canada's national police force than he had ever known, and other perks as well, so why did he quit and head off once again into insecurity, loneliness and poverty? Leonard Nesbitt asked him the same question in 1944 when WB was visiting him in Calgary, this time about to set up a mink ranch on Vancouver Island. "Why did you give up the position with the RCMP museum?" WB responded: "I was getting in a rut." Then Nesbitt asked another question. "How old are you?" WB replied. "Well, Leonard, I have never made it a point to tell my age to anyone, but you being an old friend, I'll tell you. I'm 82."<sup>23</sup> In another letter, WB mentioned that "it was not the kind of job that appealed to me," strange indeed considering the kind of work he was doing. But a June 1945 piece in the *Edmonton Journal* noted that WB gave up his Regina job because there was not enough time to write.

Another writer he befriended in these years was R. Ross Annett. In his continuing quest for contact with published writers like himself, WB, then in Regina at the RCMP Museum, made himself known to Ross Annett, a local school principal in Consort, Alberta,<sup>24</sup> a small town on Highway 12 not far west of the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. WB congratulated him on his wonderful stories that were being published by the popular *Saturday Evening Post*. Annett disclosed to WB that he was a transplanted New York writer. A few successful sales to pulp magazines prompted him to "quit a good job in Wall Street"<sup>25</sup> and begin freelancing. "Like yourself, I've found writing a very tough racket,"<sup>26</sup> he wrote. This lack of sufficient success forced him to seek other work, and he eventually ended up teaching in this small prairie town. Annett was pleased that the Department of Education in Alberta added his book *Especially Babe* to their supplementary reading list in high school English.<sup>27</sup> Annett recognized that WB was struggling to make a living and was very supportive. "Here's wishing you all the luck in the world. If I ever get to Regina again I shall certainly call on you. And if you ever get that book published, put me down for a copy,"<sup>28</sup> referring to WB's desired new edition of *War Trail*. Until WB's death, they continued to share notes on writing and on family, along with shop talk and critiques of each other's work. WB even paid a personal visit to Annett's home. Annett knew that WB had been having stomach problems and during the time when WB was mink ranching, he expressed his sympathy. There was some talk of

a collaborative work about the early West, with Annett doing the writing while WB provided the background, but it never came to fruition. Sadly, while WB continued with only minor success in sales, his friend Annett was in demand, not only with his Babe and Little Joe series for the *Post*, but also a string of radio plays for the CBC called “The Jacksons and their Neighbours” for a radio program with a rural slant. In fact, the Writers Guild of Alberta has offered an annual R. Ross Annett Award for Children’s Literature since 1982.

The Annetts were grieved when they heard the announcement of WB’s death on the radio. They knew that something might be wrong, as he had not responded promptly to Annett’s last letter, as he usually did. However, they were more than gratified when Douglas wrote them shortly after the funeral. Annett expressed the following kind words to WB’s son Douglas: “Your father was a grand old man, and lived a full and eventful life. So much so, that we were always glad to have him visit us—both for his genial character and for his inexhaustible fund of interesting reminiscences . . . He was a vital link with the past and I felt strongly that he should get a lot more of his reminiscences into print.”<sup>29</sup> Oddly, no notice of WB’s death was published by the *Scarlet and Gold*, at least in 1951 or 1952.<sup>30</sup>

The perfect life for WB was to have a simple job, not too demanding, but that would provide enough cash to live on while he wrote. Living in Vancouver now, with the war about to end, he was finishing off a short term as “editor” of the *Scarlet and Gold*, the annual publication produced by the Royal North West Mounted Police Veterans’ Association “A” Division.<sup>31</sup> Never did he give up on the idea that he could make his living by doing what he loved the most, writing. But what could he do to make ends meet?

WB had considered mink farming much earlier, as revealed in one of his letters to Luxton. “What I want to do is raise minks and write. The two of them ought to go good together.”<sup>32</sup> Why he chose this demanding job at age eighty-three remained a mystery until correspondence contained in the R.H. Macdonald Papers had been reviewed.<sup>33</sup> While Rusty Macdonald had been preparing to publish *Eyewitness to History*, a number of letters had flowed between Macdonald and WB’s two daughters-in-law, Elsie and Jessie Cameron, along with a few unearthed between WB and Jessie. Just out of the Regina hospital after a bout of pneumonia, WB was still weak. Jessie was concerned and felt that her father-in-law should move closer to the Cameron family in Squamish, BC, where they could be of more help to him. She suggested that he consider raising mink and offered to send him some material. Although WB apparently said “forget it,” Jessie sent it anyway and after some thought, WB figured that a combination of raising mink and writing might not be so bad after all. Leonard Nesbitt also knew his plans because when WB had

faces and wore feathers a  
avel. Each had a rifle ac  
The Chief Factor ignored  
elf up, folding his blanket  
“Many Brave Feathers o  
pemmican, too. Asks O  
‘Tell your chief to beg

dropped by his Calgary home for a visit in 1944, he was bound for BC to “start a mink ranch.” His operation was to run about two years and is interesting to study.

WB was ill-prepared to dive into mink ranching, and had little guarantee of success. On paper and in the brochures it looked good, promising great returns with little work or expense

(similar to common rabbit-raising promotional material), but WB would soon learn that the realities of everyday operations far outweighed the benefits. For example, an infertile male or female is ruinous to a breeding program because mink only have one litter a year. In addition, the brochures didn't mention that when angry or upset, mink emit a strong, offensive odour, some say worse than a skunk, nor had anyone mentioned that mink are skittish, excitable animals that can get very ferocious. WB understood that good breeding stock was paramount but was ill-prepared to pay the price. He found out that the best money was to be made by selling breeding stock, typically a combination of two females to one male. Colour was critical, too, but highly dependent on the whims of fashion. White, or mutated, mink was very popular but subject to wide price changes. One year the browns and blacks would command good prices while in the next year, silver-blues and topazes were the rage. Little did WB seem to understand, moreover, that these skittish creatures require almost constant care. Cages needed cleaning. Mink do not do well in wet, cold weather. Aureomycin, an antibiotic, had to be added to the mink porridge already containing vitamins to prevent hot weather souring. Sometimes other medication had to be given. WB had no source of food for the mink other than the feed mill in nearby Nanaimo, from which he purchased mink meal at market rates. He also had an annual provincial licence, medicines, bedding and marketing to pay for, let alone trying to come out with some measure of profit. WB did not say what it cost to get into the business, who and where he got his stock from, or, secretive as usual, where the money came from.

By now WB had twelve mink. A fellow in the Vancouver suburb of Burnaby had looked after the animals until he got squared away at Parksville, on Vancouver Island. In the mid-1940s, this community about twenty-five miles (forty kilometres) north of Nanaimo was developing quickly, but still had empty spaces and affordable wilderness areas not yet claimed by developers. WB had found some land: “I found

an ideal place, 2 acres just on the southern border of the village [Parksville] about 200 yds [180 m] from the main highway joining Victoria, Nanaimo, Parksville and Courtenay for \$250. It's solid bush and has a small creek running across the back of the lot. It's 290 feet [nearly 90 metres] on the front and 300 feet [just over 90 metres] on the back." He went on to explain that Parksville was well developed and that he bought it as an investment.<sup>34</sup> About this time WB finally began to receive the War Veterans Allowance. On June 2, 1945, the Department of Veterans Affairs wrote: "The War Veteran's Allowance Board is pleased to advise that: a Veteran's Allowance of \$20.00 plus a Supplementary Allowance of \$10.41 is being awarded to you, effective February 3, 1945. Max income permissible from all sources is \$365.00 per annum in the case of a single veteran and \$730.00 per annum in the case of a married veteran. In addition, casual earnings of \$125.00 per annum are exempt. Make sure he notifies the department of earnings or income in excess to the above."<sup>35</sup> WB now had a bit of money to survive on between mink sales but continued to fight for a larger pension.

His land purchase he explained to Luxton: "I have to make a down payment of  $\frac{1}{3}$ , another at the end of September, and a final payment on December 31."<sup>37</sup> At this point he had eleven mink; three old ones and eight kits. One female had no litter, something he hadn't bargained on, another one had six, and a third only had two: "I may sell 3-4 this winter." He didn't seem concerned that mink have been known to have as many as fourteen and even eighteen kits, although the average is four. So far his kit production was right on average: "My minks are coming along fine."<sup>37</sup> In a letter to Doug he mentioned his financial situation. "I have \$100 to pay on the Parksville lots. I haven't got the money yet but I expect to raise it somehow." His mink were flourishing,<sup>38</sup> but nothing was said about whether he would be able to make ends meet.

He wrote to his nephew Arthur Bourinot, telling him about his project: "I expect to pay it off by New Year [1945]." He also mentioned that he had found an abandoned house and was going to fix it up, and that he had tried to sell some surplus mink.<sup>39</sup> About that time he defaulted on the lot payment, but Luxton may have come to the rescue.

Now living full-time in Parksville, WB wrote again to Luxton, partially repeating himself from letters to others but including some new details. "I bought two one acre [less than half a hectare] parcels for \$125 each from Harry Butler. It's handy, only a 10 minute walk from main street and the post office." One of WB's grandsons, Jim Cameron, and his wife, Ann, recently indicated on a map that indeed the post office then in use was a few blocks north of his property on Highway 4. The lots lay a few blocks just west of the old Island Highway (Highway 19 today). If he were

able to go back to his property now, he would hear the children playing on the Parksville Elementary School grounds just northwest of him and he would have to cut through the grounds of the Parksville Secondary School to get to the post office that he knew.<sup>40</sup>

WB had sold a story to the *Country Guide* for \$40 and stated in a January 7, 1946, letter to Luxton that he used it as a down payment, but we know that Luxton also assisted him. Parksville property values were rising, as he discovered when a Nanaimo woman offered him \$200 for a lot to build a residence for transients, but he didn't want to sell. He asked Luxton for \$50 for each of the following three months to help make payment on the lots. This worked out to \$40 plus \$50 (for the first month), or \$90, which would be a little over the one-third required down payment. "I sold three male mink for \$185 but I just broke even."<sup>41</sup> He also told Luxton about the abandoned shack but said that he wanted to build a log house on his property, which he never did.

His lots were uncleared, meaning that they were thickly covered with high, prickly blackberry bushes and a strange looking shrub called broom, brought into Victoria by a Scottish woman as a garden cover. Because of the warm, damp climate, the shrub spread over many parts of Vancouver Island like a bad weed. Whether or not he had to clear the lots is unknown, but if he did, it would have been a tough job for a man even half his age. Today, large powerful mowers are used in attempts to control it. The creek WB mentioned would have been a seasonal trickle of meltwater coming down from higher ground to the west to flow into Parksville Bay.

In January 1946 Douglas received a letter from WB written once again in New Westminster, but this was only because he was back on the mainland for a day or so, "arranging to ship minks, pens and personal stuff"<sup>42</sup> to the Island. He also mentioned to Douglas that out of two litters he got six males and sold three of them for \$185, the same facts he had told Luxton a few days earlier, stressing again that "it did not cover my expenses." He had offered to sell some mink to a buyer in Rogers, near Revelstoke, a Mr. S.W. McGibbon, and to keep them until spring, a deal that would later cause WB some problems. He told Douglas about the shack he found to live in, "but it's not on my two acres [under one hectare]. It's on [sixteen] acres [six and a half hectares] a mile [one and a half kilometres] north of Parksville, an abandoned house, likely up for taxes next year. It leaks like a sieve but I put on some roofing, put in a door, with a lock, and windows in those 'staring spaces.' I have the wood stove that Owen had at Campbell River roaring away." WB was pleased that he had no rent to pay, and no distractions. His expenses were cut. He managed to put on some roofing with the help of "a good neighbor across the road. This is only temporary though because the property will be up for taxes next year." He was

to pay the \$160 still owing on his two acres and would be “getting title at once,” he says. This time he borrowed the money from a friend in New Westminster. “I’m going to lunch this Monday with Mr. Dilworth, who is the head of CBC in Vancouver.”<sup>43</sup> Ever on the lookout for a market, we can be sure that WB would have been promoting his stories for broadcast while having a decent meal.

Later in January, WB had a rupture, an abdominal condition that had plagued him for years and would continue to cause him problems. He wrote Luxton from the Nanaimo hospital: “They are trying to reduce the swelling with ice packs but it is still pretty painful. The local doctor could get it back in.”<sup>44</sup> At this time, Luxton actually gave him more money than he had asked for, a total of \$80.

It should be understood that WB was not a beggar, although it might appear so. In fact, he was far from it. What he gave to Luxton as gifts during the time that he was trying to raise mink and not doing well would turn out to be more than ample payment. On June 19, 1944, while still at Regina, he had sent Luxton a drawing of a homesteader done by the famous cowboy artist Charles Russell, as mentioned earlier. By then, Russell’s work was commanding high prices, up to \$10,000 for an oil painting. In May 1945, Luxton sent more money and by then he had disposed of a Russell painting. These pieces were then bringing over \$400 each. In August 1945, WB noted that he was sending “some things” to Luxton (except a coup stick, which was too long to ship but that he would send later). In September 1945, he sent Luxton some “curios,” asking Luxton to sell them and to give him a portion of the sales. He advised Luxton to keep the “Blackfoot bone necklaces.” In 1946, he mailed the pipe and coup stick. Although the pipe had no stem, it was still very valuable, having come from a former HBC man at Fort Qu’Appelle, who in turn had obtained it from a Sioux who had escaped the conflict of the Sioux uprising in Minnesota in the 1860s.<sup>45</sup> All in all, these items once belonging to Lethbridge druggist and collector Ed Higinbotham, and given to WB by the widowed Mrs. Higinbotham, were worth thousands of dollars in those days, so Luxton was actually repaid quite well for helping WB.

In June 1946 he wrote to Douglas that he had been at “Elsie’s father’s place” at Nanaimo (WB refers to the man as the Brigadier) for dinner and they had run him back out to Parksville. “Later they drove me out to my temporary hangout north of Parksville and had a squint at my minks and diggings.”<sup>46</sup> It is interesting to speculate upon what the Brigadier thought of the operation when he saw the mink ranch. “I have 30 mink kits here and they are all big enough now to eat meat like wolves and run in and out of their nest boxes, but unfortunately only six are mine.” McGibbon, mentioned earlier, had agreed to buy two males and nine females who had litters, which WB looked after. About this time WB was beginning to realize

that his new enterprise was not cracked up to be what he thought it would. He was disposing of his mink as “fur ranching leaves me no chance to do anything else.”<sup>47</sup> According to WB, there were a number of publications waiting for his work and he was badly behind, though he had recently sold a fur ranching story for \$50, not bad money then. Knowing that WB was giving up mink ranching, Douglas asked in a letter, “Have you made any decision about a place to live yet? Are you still planning on going to Squamish when you give up the minks?”<sup>48</sup>

More trouble was ahead as WB wrote from Vancouver in December to S.W. McGibbon about nonpayment. WB had cared for McGibbon’s mink from January to August 1946, charging \$110.25. After four months, McGibbon had only paid \$51, even though WB said he was willing to accept only a further \$50 to get the account settled. “I think it is about high time for some plain comment regarding settlement on the balance due me for contributions made by me in cash and work in connection with the ranching of your mink near Parksville . . . It is the money I need and must have. I have been counting on this settlement from you to put me through this month until returns in cash from the articles and stories I am now sending out begin to arrive.” He went so far as to threaten court action against McGibbon. WB was also apparently acting as a go-between for McGibbon and some Quebec property and threatened to put it aside “until this matter of the minks is out of the way.”<sup>49</sup> It is not known whether McGibbon ever settled up with him.

On March 3, 1947, from Vancouver, WB wrote again to Luxton. He still had not paid Luxton back. “I hate to write because of that,” he says. He told Luxton that he gave up the mink in August 1946. “I sold them at good price but there were too many expenses.” He hoped to sell a lot or two. He had been given another offer for his land, \$300 this time for a lot, but he turned it down. WB related a different story in his letter to Nosiseem, mentioned earlier, written on June 23, 1947. “Fortunately I had acquired a few minks, which were then high in price, so I was able to survive. I sold the minks in August [1947] and as it turns out this has been a wise move since fur prices depreciated sharply.”

About two years later when WB was back in Calgary, he visited his friend Leonard Nesbitt.<sup>50</sup> Nesbitt asked him how he had gotten along with the mink. WB apparently declared that “between those cussed animals, the automobiles and the crowds, I nearly went out of my mind.”<sup>51</sup> A 1945 letter to his nephew Arthur Bourinot<sup>52</sup> was a tale of woe. He had made arrangements with a Vancouver friend to keep a table for him while he was over on Vancouver Island. He took it by taxi to his friend’s place, leaving it by a filling station while he went to do something else. When he returned the table was gone. He not only lost his table but he also had to hand over \$5 for the taxi! Then, while WB was checking his change from the driver, the taxi took off. On

the back seat lay many special things, among them a beautiful hand-carved cane, likely from John Beamer, and a book to be autographed by his nephew.<sup>53</sup> Also lost was a specially annotated book, *Epecially Babe*, by his writer friend Ross Annett, who had become famous, along with a couple of packets of honey. “I [hoped] he’d choke when he came to eat it,”<sup>54</sup> he said of the taxi driver.

Fate acts in strange ways. Jim Cameron and his wife, Ann, mentioned earlier, bought a house in Parksville, choosing a lovely place in a new subdivision of southwest Parksville on Bridgewater Lane. The family and I knew about WB’s mink operation in Parksville, but its location remained unknown until I uncovered land descriptions in material from letters written by WB to Luxton. These are now held in the Luxton collection, and I passed along copies of these letters to Jim and Ann.<sup>55</sup> They used this information to search for WB’s mink ranch. In a very creditable job of sleuthing, they eventually found it, using knowledge gleaned from local old-timers as well as a rescued 1946 linen map of Parksville about to be discarded. “Our birthday present to you [my birthday was about this time] is that we have found the mink farm,” Ann wrote. “No, we do not live on it but we are only two blocks away, towards the water.”<sup>56</sup> “Unbelievable,” we all marvelled. WB property backed onto Corfield Street and fronted on Bagshaw, two blocks over, on what are now Lots 15 and 16.<sup>57</sup> These lots are now part of a Parksville subdivision covered with houses. The creek, which ran through the property, has long since been filled in and Corfield Street was built more or less on top of it. This property, which WB paid \$250 for, is now worth in excess of \$1 million. Exactly to whom and when he sold his property is unknown.<sup>58</sup> From all indications with regard to his other land deals, WB may have even given up the land for taxes.

His mink ranch shut down, WB found himself once again in the Saskatchewan Valley doing what he dearly loved, discussing old times. Everett Baker, a rural field man working out of Regina for the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, and Campbell Innes, a long-time Battleford educator, historical researcher and writer, were two highly influential men busy with recording the stories and images of the old West that many others were forgetting. Both worked tirelessly to permanently record what the old-timers had to say. Both were also avid photographers, capturing western images on both prints and colour slides that otherwise would have been lost. The North-West Rebellion was one of their favourite projects.<sup>59</sup>

Between them they arranged a tour, sponsored by the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, planning to visit historical places associated with both Chief Big Bear and the Rebellion. Baker also approached A.P. Waldron, the managing editor of the *Western Producer*, to see if the magazine would be interested in the story, but Waldron turned him down.<sup>60</sup> WB was, of course, one of their first choices to come along and

be a guide:<sup>61</sup> “For some time I have been in correspondence with an Everett Baker in Regina who is greatly interested in the upper Saskatchewan end of the 1885 fuss and I have given him photos and information he wished for. He wrote me the other day to know if I would go up to Battleford or Pitt in July or possibly September if my expenses were paid and I was compensated for the week or so that I should spend in showing them around.”<sup>62</sup>

WB would have been excited at this opportunity, and he joined in the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool tour that took place in October 1947. This event was covered very nicely by Reg Taylor, a reporter for the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, in a three-part series.<sup>63</sup> WB enjoyed himself and later wrote to Luxton about it. “The weather was perfect—not a cloud in the sky all the time—and this man Baker took a great many colored pictures and they turned out beautifully, all gold and blue and [with the] rich warm brown of the grass and shrubbery.”<sup>64</sup>

While WB led the way, Baker, Innes (with the tour for the first two days), and Taylor continuously snapped many photographs in both black and white and colour throughout the trip. WB appeared in many of them. He looked quite old and stooped now, but he was no doubt greatly pleased to be retelling his stories once again. He was also meeting friends who meant so much to him in those earlier days, such as Horse Child, who was now seventy-five. Charlie Trottier, an active participant in the Rebellion, appears in one photo peering at the graves in the Frog Lake Rebellion cemetery. Another slide taken at Poundmaker Reserve west of Battleford shows WB standing by Harriet Yellow Mud Blanket, his arm entwined with hers. They look to be about the same age, and both are smiling.<sup>65</sup> On the back of the slide is an intriguing quotation taken from Harriet: “White men have many girlfriends.” Exactly what she meant is strictly speculative but intriguing nonetheless. Ross Innes, a son of Campbell Innes, has pointed out that they were on opposite sides during the Rebellion but it seemed they had “made up.” In the six decades since the troubles, the Frog Lake site had become badly overgrown with trees and other vegetation, making it hard to locate certain spots and clearly photograph them, but they tried.<sup>66</sup> The slides reveal sights long gone, such as one taken at Frog Lake showing WB hunched over the spot on a knoll where the blacksmith shop used to be. In another, he had positioned several children of local teacher Orolin Hunt on spots where the victims fell.<sup>67</sup> Travelling east to Onion Lake, WB is shown once more standing next to the remains of the old HBC store, now collapsed amidst fireweed and wild brome. At Fort Pitt, a ghostly white skull unearthed during cultivation, possibly a victim of the smallpox epidemic that had swept through the area long ago, stares out of a hole in the ground. At the Frenchman’s Butte battle site, WB, Baker and Innes stand high on a slope, looking down into the valley in which Militia soldiers got mired down in mud while trying to attack the rifle pits

above them filled with armed warriors. Seeing all this again after so many years must have been a remarkable experience.

WB enjoyed the tour immensely, so much, in fact, that it convinced him to come home, to return to the country he loved so much, this time never to leave again.



*Last Memories by the Lakes  
and the Fourth Edition  
1948–1951*

THE WILD setting of northwestern Saskatchewan, with heavy forest and deep-blue lakes filled with jackfish, would be a pleasant change for WB. “It should be a cheap place to live, fish and game being plentiful, and a good place to write, too—nothing to take you away from your work.”<sup>1</sup> In another letter, written from Vancouver in 1947, WB wrote that “too much of the allure and interesting years of my life [has] been spent along the North Saskatchewan River to allow me to look on any other section of our country as home.”<sup>2</sup> WB’s wish had been to leave Vancouver and move there in the spring of 1948. Now tired, stooped, more frequently ill as his health continued to deteriorate, he was to find solace in a simple life among old friends and familiar surroundings, happy with a cheap cigar or a cheap movie.<sup>3</sup>

Packed he was by February 22, 1948, ready to leave Vancouver with \$25 in his pocket. This cash was a gift from Luxton to help him on his way. WB had not been feeling well, having terrible indigestion for a week, a bad cold and a twisted ankle. A bad tooth had also been giving him grief, although by late February we find the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) had fitted him with a lower plate, giving him a full set of dentures. Hospitals had a tough time keeping him there; he was always on the run from them, never staying long and often checking himself out.<sup>4</sup>

On June 26, 1948, he arrived in Loon Lake with no place to stay except hotels, but “they’re a luxury,” he declared. A house was available to buy for \$1,500 but he had no money, having spent it all on moving. He was impressed with the town, and expounded on businesses there and about the flourishing Masonic lodge.<sup>5</sup>

By September, WB had made himself known in the community. In a letter from Ross Annett, he learned that Annett had read WB's editorial and an account of his life in the *Loon Lake Star*, the local newspaper.<sup>6</sup> This included his pitch to have a Rebellion battle site just west of Loon Lake named Steele Narrows after the NWMP's Sam Steele, in charge of Steele's Scouts, who tangled with Big Bear's group there on June 3, 1885. Eventually the site was given that name.

By early winter, he had gotten settled. In a long, rambling but fact-filled letter to Luxton, WB reminisced and discussed how things were going for him. He had a place to live now, keeping as warm as possible with a hungry wood-burning stove filled with sticks cut up with a swede saw. An Indian man had wanted to sell him some wood, but he was broke. Shortly after arriving, WB had a bad bronchitis attack and was sick for three weeks, spending most of the time in bed in the Loon Lake Hotel. There was "a nice Red Cross hospital and doctor," but he didn't go there except to get prescriptions filled. He had lost weight, going from 165 pounds (75 kilograms) down to 143 pounds (65 kilograms), nearly starving because he couldn't eat anything due to his continuing digestive problems. Socially active, he spoke at a local Boy Scout banquet, and read a yarn from Charles Russell's book *Rawhide Rawlins Stories*. The Rotarians were also inviting him to talk at their functions in Meadow Lake. He often travelled with the local druggist, a Mr. Hinchcliffe, who was also an avid photographer,<sup>7</sup> to Rotarian functions. There were problems in Loon Lake with electricity. Still in the habit of working late into the night, WB complained that the electric lights went out there about 12:30 a.m., always catching him in the middle of some work. "I can't work anymore by coal oil lamp." His house needed a lot of work; holes needed to be plugged and so on.

Luxton had not been forgotten, as WB continued to look for "Indian things" to send to him, such as beads off a war club and also a beaded moccasin he had gotten from a "very fine handsome Indian named Pierre from Long Lake [Kehewin Indian Reserve north of Elk Point] during the rebellion days." He originally had the pair but had lost one. It appears he might have given Luxton a double-barrelled shotgun that he had left in Vancouver but a friend had pawned it for him at the sign of the "three ball man,"<sup>8</sup> or pawnshop. He had also owned what he described as a dandy 40-60 Winchester but it disappeared, too, and a Smith & Wesson revolver.<sup>9</sup>

He described his house to Luxton, the United Church manse that he rented for \$15 a month. "It's 100 yards [about 90 metres] from town center, a block away from post office." Made of log, it had four rooms with a fireplace and cement basement but no running water.<sup>10</sup>

WB's letters written in the 1940s were often reflective, and sometimes revealed previously unknown information about his earlier years. For example, I was

surprised to discover that in the late 1920s WB had had an alcohol problem. This fact was revealed in another letter to Luxton, written in November 1948, in which he reminded his friend to stop drinking, to “quit the firewater,” admitting that both he and Luxton were bull headed “like a pig.” This would be about the time he was very much in demand and when *War Trail* was so popular. “I was pretty bad. I had the DT’s for 24 hours and ‘raised hell.’” Apparently he was in a hospital somewhere several times to sober up, stating that he now has more self respect since he quit drinking. This was the first and only time he mentioned this.

Although WB was now living in Loon Lake, medical issues and other needs often brought him to Saskatoon. The DVA in Saskatoon had been looking after him well, paying for bus fare, meals, new glasses, and medicine. It was on these trips that he often dropped in to see Rusty Macdonald and Jim Buller. In a letter to Luxton, WB mentioned that Buller, then with CNR Freight, resembled his grandfather, Four Sky Thunder. In this same letter, WB took a shot at Judge Charles-Borromée Rouleau, who had presided over the trial concerning the Frog Lake troubles, saying that Rouleau was a good “RC” and had sentenced Four Sky Thunder excessively because he had burned the Roman Catholic mission down, implying that if it had been of another denomination, the sentence might have been lighter. Luxton had now sent more money. WB cashed the cheque with a promise to pay.<sup>11</sup>

A bit later, in another letter to Luxton written from the DVA Hospital in Saskatoon, WB stated that he had been admitted to the hospital on December 23, 1948, spending Christmas in the ward, and would only be able to return to Loon Lake on January 4, 1949. He received more dental work and a new truss fitted for his hernial rupture. He was now frozen out of his cold and drafty house, unfortunately, and moved to a room over the pool hall. He didn’t cook anymore.<sup>12</sup> He was still buying Indian artifacts when he could for Luxton, and was embarrassed with a beaded buckskin shirt he had bought for \$3. It turned out to be cloth, not buckskin. It seems certain that his eyesight would have been failing him by now. One item he now mentioned having was a five-shot Colt revolving rifle, 1856, not in too bad a shape except for some broken nipples. The *American Rifleman* magazine valued it between \$50 and \$125. He offered it to Luxton, who later turned it down.<sup>13</sup>

Luxton, himself now sick with pneumonia and a bout of gall bladder trouble, had sent WB \$23. In return, WB was to send three beaded belts for which he paid \$1 each. Attempting to raise more cash, it was at this time that WB approached the Macmillan Publishing Company, asking them if they want to publish his fifty letters from Owen Wister. They had no interest.<sup>14</sup> WB struggled along with both his finances and his health, but finally admitted to Luxton that he needed stenographic help but couldn’t get it in Loon Lake. Thinking that Meadow Lake might be better,

WB made another move.<sup>15</sup>

In one last bit of historical narrative, again based on fact, I would like to offer readers a brief glimpse of what WB's life might have been like during his last days.

*WB stepped out of his small room into the heat of an August afternoon, a tarred-up briar pipe stuck in his mouth. Tired, not feeling well, and with a deadline to meet for a piece to be published in the Canadian Cattlemen magazine, he needed a break. The small building in Meadow Lake was stifling, his cramped room worse. Peering north up the gravel street towards the train station, he considered wandering that way to watch the train arrive, but it was just too hot.<sup>16</sup> Instead, he turned and slowly made his way next door to the Meadow Lake Red and White Store on the corner of Third St. East and Third Avenue.<sup>17</sup> A Metis trapper he knew, Harry Desjarlais, was just leaving, apparently satisfied with the deal he had just made. Fur buyer Fred Lazar, the store owner, always paid fairly for the winter's catch of mink, marten, beaver and weasels. Stopping to greet him, WB slid the pipe from his mouth and shook hands in the traditional way, a single shake, not like the moonias (whites) who loved to shake hands forever. Earlier, WB had been trying to buy a beautiful moose-skin coat for Luxton from Desjarlais, "who is more Indian than half breed."<sup>18</sup> After a few pleasantries WB walked into the store, the smoky smell of tanned hides tickling his nose. Hides used to be a common fur trade item, but by the late 1940s, they were quickly disappearing. This was especially true of the moose hides because of recent stringent hunting regulations in Saskatchewan. Not many people trapped anymore either, choosing easier ways to make a living. WB gazed at the carefully beaded deerskin gloves and wrap-up moccasins, reminded of times long past when he had stood behind the trade counter as a loyal Company man and Indian trader.*

WB's dwelling was owned by Fred S. Lazar, a Syrian who charged him \$15 a month rent. WB's description of the man is colourful. Lazar at that time had a black beard. He was into selling anything and everything, from cars and trucks to washing machines and clothing and other dry goods. He had bought this business in 1946, moving to Meadow Lake after trading in the north. WB was now dealing with Lazar for twenty-five caribou skins from Cree Lake at \$4 each, suggesting to Luxton a plan to get the Stoneys in the Banff area to make things from them.<sup>19</sup> Lazar did not have a high opinion of the Indians, who by then were getting a family allowance, removing their need to work or hunt. A deal was made, however. Luxton sent some money and WB finally bought eighteen caribou skins from Lazar for \$76 (slightly more than the \$4 original asking price). Fourteen of these were nearly warble free (warbles are an undesirable grub that live under the animal's skin). Four had holes, but WB figured they could be used to make gauntlets. While there was no open season on Saskatchewan moose, Indians from Cree Lake could hunt them.<sup>20</sup> A

receipt from Lazar's Red and White Store, April 29, 1949, showed purchase of the hides along with one pair of gloves for \$4.<sup>21</sup>

WB wrote numerous letters from Meadow Lake, many to son Douglas. Some of these letters were only a few days apart. They indicated that at first he liked this place that was still a frontier outpost. Bolsover House, established in 1799 by surveyor Peter Fidler for the HBC, has been much talked about by historians.<sup>22</sup> It was located somewhere near the lake itself, which is a large body of shallow water just east of town, surrounded by low-lying grassy areas neatly tucked in among thick forests of spruce, pine and aspen.<sup>23</sup>

WB complained about working alone. His cut-and-paste production method of creating his written work was similar to that commonly used today. He revealed how he did it. First he wrote the text in pencil and then he typed it. Then he cut and pasted it, retyped, and cut and pasted again up to six times. For those in our time who use word processors, this is a whiz, but for him it would have been very tedious. "A typist would help a lot." He estimated that this would multiply his productivity by three times. Thus, in Meadow Lake he worked with a typist, a woman who had two children. Once a court reporter, she took shorthand and typed. Only once, in an obscure way, did he ever mention her name, Mrs. Paul. It was she for whom he bought a second typewriter.<sup>24</sup>

Much of WB's time was now taken up preparing *War Trail* to be published again. It had been out of print for some time, and people were still asking for copies that neither he nor the publisher had. Goodness knows WB could use the royalties. By the mid-1940s, he had made a number of changes in the original manuscript, such as rearranging the chapters. He opened more of them with action rather than description, following a suggestion made by Owen Wister, who had also written a new forward for the book before his death. Two new chapters were written as well, "The Mutter of Drums" and "The Rescue of the White Women."

WB had also changed the name of the book. "I have also for a long time disliked the title and thought that in a new edition I might change it to something like 'Death Came with a Blood Red Sun.' The old title is really not appropriate and I was younger then I am now when I chose it and knew less (I hope)."<sup>25</sup> He also felt that Big Bear himself was not on the war trail, while the original title suggested just that. In time, WB settled on the title *Blood Red the Sun*, with good reason. Many years after the troubles, WB had met Louis Goulet, who had also been at Frog Lake on that fateful morning of April 2, 1885. In English heavily accented with French (often called "franglais"), Goulet explained that on his way back to the lumber camp west of the settlement, he had been captured at the mill site and along with others, escorted back to the settlement. In *War Trail*, WB had colourfully embellished

what Goulet had told him. "Presently the sun pushed a huge crimson shoulder above the skyline. It was a perfect morning." At the settlement, Imasees slid up to them saying, "Ho! I like to see the sun get up that way—red, like blood. It's a sure sign of victory for the Indians, always!"<sup>26</sup> This is the most plausible reason for the selection of this wording for the new title.

Now to find a publisher. WB first approached Lorne Pierce at Ryerson Press, who doubted the book would be profitable. Then Mrs. Jessie Bothwell, Saskatchewan provincial librarian and a great supporter of WB, got in touch with a Montreal reprint firm that apparently was interested, but WB did not like its proposition. "It seems that they have some sort of offset process of reproduction and can print only original stuff."<sup>27</sup> They could not accommodate his new material, additions and changes, including Wister's introduction, so that fell through.<sup>28</sup> He also had considered publishing it himself. He received a quote from a Vancouver firm for a dollar a copy, which could then be retailed at up to \$2.75. The book might "make a lot of money," he speculated, but he had no capital to print the 2,500 copies.

A grand opportunity for him came in July 1949. Kenneth Coppock, owner and editor of the Calgary-based *Canadian Cattlemen* magazine, asked if he would be interested in writing a series of articles for the magazine. This was just the kind of break he needed. Coppock later revealed to Elsie Cameron, Douglas' wife who was administering the estate by that time, that his relationship with WB was a close one.<sup>29</sup> Coppock had a very progressive policy for his magazine, wishing "to preserve in its columns the experiences and recollections of the old-timers who had come West prior to 1900."<sup>30</sup> WB replied soon, offering eleven different stories that he could quickly prepare<sup>31</sup> and he obliged by submitting material to Coppock for publication. The first story was about his old friend from Winnipeg Ad McPherson, the trader/freighter with whom WB travelled on his first trip west from Winnipeg to Battleford. This agreement, which would allow WB to be paid well for his work, pleased and encouraged WB. Always looking for a new opportunity, a day later, August 6, he contacted Coppock a second time, making what must have been an impressive pitch to have *War Trail* reprinted by Coppock.<sup>32</sup> Coppock thought it a good idea. "I am inclined to be quite interested."<sup>33</sup> By May 1950, they closed the deal to print the fourth edition of WB's book under its new title. Coppock later confided to Elsie that "it was only natural that Wm. Bleasdel Cameron found his way to me and that I was very sympathetic to his ambition to have a Fourth edition of Big Bear but with a new title."<sup>34</sup> Coppock put up all the money for printing costs, and he and WB would split the profits equally after expenses. Coppock left the printing arrangements to WB, who hired the Wrigley Printing Company of Vancouver to print six thousand copies at a cost of \$3,735. On February 16, 1950, WB, still in Meadow Lake, returned the edited galley proofs to Wrigley for printing. The editing

must have been no easy task, as he had fallen on his arm about that time, hurting himself. Under the Kenway Publishing Company name, *Blood Red the Sun* was finally published in May 1950 and the promotion and distribution process began. Later, in regard to a written contract between WB and Coppock, the latter stated that “ours was a simple business arrangement and as I recall it no formal written agreement was drawn up. It was simply an understanding between two fellow Rotarians whose words were as good as their bonds.”<sup>35</sup> This lack of a contract was to haunt Coppock twenty-five years later.

Readers will remember that WB had been and continued to remain a strong Liberal, and had enjoyed taking the odd potshot at the Social Credit government of the day. The poem that he wrote while he was in Athabasca, “The Yarn of the Howling Gale,” was one example. Sales of *Blood Red* were not going well in Alberta schools as the Department of Education had not placed any orders.<sup>36</sup> WB, perhaps tilting at windmills, blamed these poor sales on the Social Credit government’s reluctance to support a staunch Liberal’s work. This poor showing seems to have rectified itself later as Coppock talks about being “obliged to sell to libraries and to the Education Departments of the Province at less than wholesale prices.”<sup>37</sup>

WB only lived nine months after the fourth edition hit the stores so he could not fully enjoy the thrill of seeing his book once again on the shelves, but in that time he had managed to sell many, and also gave away a fair number, running up a substantial bill at Kenway Publishing. He attempted to clear the debt by sending the occasional payment, but it appears that he did not pay it in full. In addition, he seemed to have had a travel allowance, as Coppock cautions him to “keep it down.” He did not know that behind the scenes, his old friend Norman Luxton had been a prime push to have the book reprinted. “Have been corresponding with our mutual friend W.B. Cameron. As you know he is very anxious to have a reprint of his ‘Big Bear’ book but is lacking the necessary finances[. It] may be that I will be able to assist him. Why don’t you drop in and we can discuss this matter.”<sup>38</sup> Coppock also later indicated that he had WB write articles “to assist him financially.” This was a very noble gesture on Coppock’s part.<sup>39</sup>

The fourth edition did not sell as well as Coppock thought it would. In fact, fifteen years later in 1965, Kenway Publishing still had two thousand unsold copies, amounting to one-third of the run, leaving the company with a \$1,000 loss. And so ended the saga of the fourth edition, with a loss to Kenway Publishing and unsold inventory. Any suggestion of further reprints was dropped, that is, until Rusty Macdonald and the *Western Producer* came on the scene in the early 1970s, seriously considering a fifth edition.

In a letter, WB proudly mentioned that “The Meadow Lake Rotary Club made

me an honorary member last July 1949. They are to publish a full page, a whole story about me in the January [1950] issue of the *Rotarian*.<sup>40</sup> WB admitted he might not get paid for this and it would also be adapted by a jeweller named Revitt and another person without WB's name appearing. Publishing the article was a surprise to Coppock, he said, who had been trying for some time to get some Calgary publicity in the worldwide magazine. WB wasn't complaining, though, saying the publicity would still be great. He also got to Vermilion, for their old-timer's "annual roundup" as a guest speaker, all expenses paid, and was pleased with the reception he received. The *Vermilion Standard* covered this on November 10, 1949, and included a photograph showing WB alongside A.E. Shortell and Charles W. Robinson, former Vermilion mayor and president of the Old Timers' Association. WB appears quite slouched and much shorter than the men he's posing with in the photograph.<sup>41</sup>

The DVA provided him with a new prosthetic eye, this time a plastic one to replace the glass. It is not known whether his old glass eye was the original.<sup>42</sup> A short time later WB wrote to his son Douglas. Evidently, Douglas had written some material that WB lauded, saying Douglas must have got his writing ability not from himself but from his grandfather Bleasdel.<sup>43</sup> The day before Christmas 1950, WB pensively related in a long letter to Douglas that he was staying over in North Battleford on his way back to Meadow Lake. He had been ill and was in Saskatoon's DVA Hospital once again with heart trouble and high blood pressure. "It may be in part to the way I have to live at Meadow Lake—no place to eat that a white man could care to eat at." This was the second time he had mentioned the bad food to Douglas. He was also not getting the right kind of food in the right proportions, especially later when he began to cook his own on a hot plate in his room, "a waste of his time" he said. Loneliness was beginning to appear, with complaints about the lack of agreeable associations: "For the most part I live practically alone and it was getting me down—I found it too true that it is not good for man to live alone—you have too much time for introspection or self-communing and that is not good at all." Continuing on, he states, "Here [North Battleford] or at Vermilion I am able to get away from myself and already I feel much better. I will be packing up, moving to Vermilion or North Battleford." He mentioned that it's hard to get rooms at either place but he doesn't expect to return to Meadow Lake. "It's pretty primitive although a great trading center and a live[ly] place." While the fellows there were friendly and want him to stay, he said that they were not like the "Vermilion boys" who were always glad to see him. He felt that he could visit without feeling he was intruding. Apparently *Blood Red the Sun* was selling well in Edmonton. He had sold 250 in Meadow Lake alone and 50 in North Battleford.

As to my being no longer young, that is the disagreeable but naked and inexorable fact. I don't know how much longer I may live, but in any case why should [t]hat trouble me? I fancy there must come a time when any man—or woman—is greatly concerned about how long he or she may live. Once one's faculties—mental or physical—begin to deteriorate, why should one [feel] any great concern about the length of time on earth? In my case, I have lived far longer, at this time, than it is given most men to live and I must say that, by and large, I have enjoyed life, possibly I believe more than most men. One reason for this I think is I have always been, I take it, an optimist; I have had my periods of gloom but they never lasted long or got me utterly down and I have had some pretty hard jolts.<sup>44</sup>

In his later years, WB suffered from recurring bouts of pneumonia, often mentioning this fact in his letters. Physical resilience he had plenty of, but in late February 1951 that had run out. Admitting himself for the third time in two weeks into the two-storey Meadow Lake Hospital, only a few blocks south of his place, he may not have fathomed the possibility that he would not bounce back as he had done so often in the past. Seriously ill, exhausted and possibly malnourished, he now needed two canes to move around. The adventures WB still wished for were over, and the stories he wanted to write would never be put to paper.<sup>45</sup> He was immediately placed under the care of Dr. Bigelow, recently returned from service during WWII. Given a bed on the second floor, WB had a roommate named William J. Bobier.<sup>46</sup>

Details of WB's last days and his funeral are covered well in a letter written by Douglas to his older brother, Owen. The hospital had wired Douglas late in the afternoon of Friday, March 2, about the seriousness of WB's condition, asking if he could come to Meadow Lake as soon as possible. By noon on Sunday, March 4, he arrived after an exhausting trip from Montreal using airlines, a taxi, and a car driven by some of WB's friends. Considering that a prairie winter storm was raging and causing snow to drift over roads, it was a miracle the car got there at all.

WB had developed double pneumonia, which was complicated by a heart condition. He was still alive but by the time Douglas arrived he was very likely already in a coma and on oxygen, unable to speak. When Douglas arrived at WB's bedside, he tried to talk to his father. "I'm not sure if he knew I had got there. We asked him to nod his head if he could hear me speaking to him and knew I was there. He roused slightly and appeared to give an almost imperceptible nod but I am not certain that he knew." Three hours later, at 3 p.m., WB passed away. Douglas had a feeling that his father fought to hold on just a bit longer since he knew Douglas was coming. "I hope he knew that a member of the family was there at the end and thus he was not alone."<sup>47</sup>

Douglas assumed the task of arranging the funeral and settling the estate. WB died intestate, that is, with no will. When cleaning out his room, Douglas was shocked

to see that “the room was terrible, absolutely bare and cheerless during the cold, bleak days.” As Douglas noted in his letter to Owen, “other than his books, papers, typewriter, old radio, hot plate and clothing, he had very little.” Douglas locally disposed of most of it except the books and papers, which he packed into WB’s well-used trunk, ready for shipment to his home in Montreal. Within the collection was the famous note from T.T. Quinn that WB was so proud of possessing.<sup>48</sup> WB’s bank balance at the time of his death was \$62.<sup>49</sup> The funeral was scheduled for Tuesday, March 6, giving Douglas little time to prepare. Titley’s Funeral Home of Meadow Lake made the arrangements for his burial. Owner Titley was out of town at the time, so Bert Jackson, a good friend of WB who later bought the funeral home from Titley, officiated. The *Meadow Lake Progress* reported on the funeral, announcing that it would be held in the Meadow Lake United Church at 2:30 on Tuesday, March 6, with Reverend T.E. Pickering officiating. Reverend H.O. Hartig would be giving the funeral ovation. It mentioned that William Cameron was a Rotarian. Another Cameron, no relation to WB, and J.A. Davis, H.L. Cathrea, E.L. Meeres, F. Walsh and A.C. Stack were pallbearers. Recently, at the age of ninety-eight, Meadow Lake resident Mrs. Gorst recalled singing in the choir at WB’s funeral.<sup>50</sup>

Reverend Hartig had prepared a fitting sermon for WB.<sup>51</sup> The minister certainly knew about WB’s historical experiences and literary accomplishments, as gleaned from his visits with WB. He began:

Today, let us do what honor demands, bring to his final resting place one who has played his part in fashioning history, and emblazon on our minds the memory of this western-Canadian, a true pioneer and a friend. Of Wm. Bleasdel Cameron it has been said, ‘He is one of the most brilliant literary products of the Canadian soil.’ He is mentioned in Who’s Who in Canada. As this man thought, so he lived. He had an unbounded faith in the future of the Canadian north-west, he shared in its way of life by remaining on the territory rather than seeking his ease elsewhere, and he certainly has enriched its heritage through the power of his facile pen. No history of the north-west will be complete without some chapter devoted to the honesty, integrity, and faith of Wm. Bleasdel Cameron. Friend of the Indian, servant of authority, lover of the rugged outdoors, he has finished his course, he has run his race.

Hartig continued, now in reference to the Rotary Club:

In Rotary we cherish the names of many distinguished people in the world. Yet, to us in Meadow Lake, Rotarian Wm. Cameron will hold rank with them all. To us he gave richly of his experiences, well remembered are his anecdotes of the old west and the stirring reminders of empire building in which he humbly played his part. Frog Lake, Battleford, Vermilion and now Meadow Lake, will go down in our history because the name of this man is associated with them. Service is the motto of Rotary. How blessed this organization has been for the example of his outstanding service, the creed of this man. We have not just lost a member, but an honorable and true friend. Another chapter in the history of the north-west closes with the passing of Wm. Bleasdel Cameron. However, posterity is enriched for

his having lived; his associations and the stories of authentic history will keep his memory alive.

Hartig stated he was proud that Meadow Lake, still a small place, was recently mentioned by CBC Radio and the press because of WB's passing, which was a notable news item. He continued the ovation with Biblical references based on 2 Timothy 4:6, "the time of my departure has come." In closing he paraphrased the epitaph of American president James A. Garfield: "Life's race—well run, Life's work—well done, Life's crown—well won, Now comes rest. Amen."<sup>52</sup>

We learn from the *Meadow Lake Progress* that WB's friend Jim Buller attended the funeral. Buller at that time was a CNR Claims Agent in Saskatoon with whom WB had kept contact as he knew Buller's grandfather well. Other friends of WB, many of them Masons from North Battleford and Vermilion, among other places, were not able to attend because of the extremely poor roads and freezing temperatures of minus thirty degrees Fahrenheit (minus thirty-four degrees Celsius) caused by the storm.

WB's demise was reported by several newspapers, among them the North Battleford *Optimist* ("Famed Western Figure Dies at Meadow Lake"); the *Vermilion Standard* ("Lone Survivor of Frog Lake Massacre, William Bleasdel Cameron Dies"); and the *Prince Albert Daily Herald* ("Last Rites Held for Tale-Teller of Old Riel Days"). The *Meadow Lake Progress* was the only newspaper to disclose that at one time WB was the assistant general manager of the Winnipeg Exhibition and a western representative of an American medical publishing firm. These were facts gleaned from WB's visits to the *Progress* office. Now we know what his business had been in Winnipeg.<sup>53</sup> This very notable frontiersman lies in the Woodlawn Cemetery, Meadow Lake, in Lot 11, Block 4.

It's hot. Still only midmorning, heat waves rise from the grey pavement of Highway 4 on the Woodlawn Cemetery's west boundary. Ravenous grasshoppers pop out of the short grass ahead of us as Shirley and I slowly walk among the headstones of the carefully manicured grounds until we find WB. The gravestone is oval-topped and similar to others here. All are dedicated to military men and women who gallantly served Canada in wartime and in peacetime as well. The stone leans a little to the south, tipped by frost heaves from the bitterly cold winters common in northwestern Saskatchewan. Letters and numbers cut into the speckled white surface almost disappear in the July morning brightness. Provided by the Department of National Defence, the simple inscription appears to be based on Militia records. In deeply carved lettering, one and a half inches (four centimetres) high, into the granite below a cross the inscription reads "G. Scout, William B. Cameron, Northwest Field Force, 4th March, 1951—Rest In Peace."<sup>54</sup> WB had earned that simple

title for time spent with the Canadian Militia during the North-West Rebellion. No date of birth is on the headstone, which seems odd. Apparently his son Douglas did not see the headstone since it was placed sometime after the funeral. If he had, it might have read differently because Douglas knew that his father had been so much more than a government scout. I stop to gaze beyond WB's grave, past the towering elm on the chain-link fence, beyond the cars and trucks hissing by, my eyes drawn to a field of lemon-coloured canola across the road. High above is a cloudless blue sky, where I know WB's spirit peacefully rests forever.

### **How Old Are You?**

Age is a quality of mind,  
If you have left your dream behind,  
If hope is cold,  
If you no longer look ahead,  
If your ambition fires are dead,  
Then you are old.

But if from life you take the best,  
And if in life you keep the jest,  
If love you hold;  
No matter how the years go by,  
No matter how the birthdays fly,  
You are not old.

—William Bleasdel Cameron,  
date unknown



2008.008/29—WB closed the Derwent drugstore and opened this one in Lac La Biche, Alberta.

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



2008.008/31—WB's third attempt at operating a drugstore, in Heinsburg, Alberta, about twenty miles (thirty kilometres) east of Elk Point. He vacated these premises quickly after "three dark strangers" paid him a visit one evening, later returning only once to dispose of stock.

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



2008.008/30—WB's final drugstore in Athabasca, Alberta, named *The Landing Drug Store* because the corner on which he was located was known locally as *Landing Corner*, in close proximity to the old Athabasca River landing.

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



2008.008/67—A *Remington Noiseless Portable Number 7*, the kind used by WB after 1933.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ROBERT HENDRIKS.



*Minnie Cameron with her two sons, Owen and Douglas, sitting on a porch step, North Vancouver, British Columbia.*

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE CAMERON FAMILY.



*2008.008/65—Douglas and Elsie (née Stewart-Clough) Cameron. He was WB's second son and eventually worked for a Montreal promotional company. Like Owen, he was an accomplished athlete, but in his case in tennis.*

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE CAMERON FAMILY.



*2008.008/6—Part of the displays held by the old RCMP Museum in Regina, ca. the early 1940s while WB worked there. Note the brass mortar on the floor.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



*2008.008/4—James (Jim) Buller, Saskatoon, grandson of Four Sky Thunder who was convicted of burning the Oblate mission at Frog Lake in 1885. Buller was faithful in trying to keep in touch with WB.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



2008.008/58—*R. Ross Annett, Consort, Alberta, teacher and well-known published writer, who was a good friend of WB in the 1940s.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



2008.008/10—*Posing at the monument during the 1947 tour are, left to right: Mr. Provan, who apparently did the black and white photography, Dominion Lands Agent Harry Bowtell and WB.*

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



2008.008/15—WB and Harriet Yellow Mud Blanket, once his enemy during the Rebellion, are shown now on good terms on the Poundmaker Reserve west of Battleford. The photograph was taken on September 22, 1947, by Campbell Innes.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ROSS INNES.



2008.008/28—The Frog Lake National Historic Site Rebellion cemetery in 1947. This photograph was taken during the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool tour organized by Battleford historian Campbell Innes and Saskatchewan photograph historian Everett Baker and covered in a three-part series for the Saskatoon Star-Phoenix by writer Reg Taylor. Note the positions of the iron plaques are opposite to current orientation.

PHOTOGRAPH IN COLLECTION.



*2008.008/8—WB and his oldest son, Owen, who worked in the BC timber industry and was an accomplished athlete and lightweight boxer. WB said he never really understood Owen.*

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE CAMERON FAMILY.



*2008.008/90—Jim and Ann Cameron of Parksville, BC, who have followed WB's trail as best as they knew it. Ann at one time lived nearby St. George's Anglican Church in Trenton.*

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ROBERT HENDRIKS.



*2008.008/66—Author standing by WB's grave at the Woodlawn Cemetery in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, in 2002. The headstone's humble and innocuous inscription belies the true character of WB.*

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ROBERT HENDRIKS.

10  
*Minnie, Marriage, Money  
and the Boys*

SINCE MY focus has been on WB, I've said little to this point about his devoted wife, Mary Maude Wilson Atkins, or Minnie as she was commonly known.<sup>1</sup> However, Minnie played a far more important role in WB's life than she has thus far been credited with, so it is in fairness that I devote this chapter to her.

What little we know about Minnie I have pieced together from various sources to provide a better understanding of her relationship with WB. Photographs show her to be a small woman, narrow-shouldered, with dark piercing eyes and hair piled high. Born in 1875 at Napanee, Ontario, she was the only daughter of H.R and Kathleen Atkins. School records at Trafalgar Castle School, still in existence and formerly the Ontario Ladies College at Whitby, Ontario, tell us that she was there for one year, 1887–1888. She was well brought up according to her two daughters-in-law, Jessie and Elsie Cameron, who in later years noted that she was accustomed to “fine linen and china,” and that she “set a nice table.” In her younger years, Minnie's life was disrupted by an unhappy love affair. She had the desire to marry a Roman Catholic, but since she was not of that faith, her parents disallowed it. She had a falling out with her parents over this episode, and moved from Napanee to Fort Frances, in northwestern Ontario, to work for someone she referred to as “Uncle Tom,” helping “papa and mama” and Uncle Tom at a hotel. This thriving business serviced the lumber camps and also accommodated railway passengers passing through Fort Frances on the CPR.<sup>2</sup>

How Minnie met WB is not clear. The only common element seems to be that John Cameron, WB's father, had a sawmill in the small community of Napanee in 1849

and knew Minnie's parents. This may be the connection through which Minnie and WB were later introduced. Furthermore, WB was in Fort Frances in 1899 looking for work. As noted in Chapter 5, he had been offered a job with the News Publishing Company in Rat Portage (now Kenora). In Fort Frances, their romance developed and although their ages differed by thirteen years (WB was forty and Minnie was twenty-seven), they were married on July 8, 1902.<sup>3</sup>

Within months of their marriage, Minnie had to become used to the nomadic lifestyle that her new husband wished to live. It was to perpetually be a feast or famine situation, with WB always on the move. Readers will recall that shortly after their marriage, they moved to Spokane, Washington, but it's clear from correspondence that Minnie was not happy in Spokane and left, returning to Fort Frances alone by train to await WB. He had no job, was soon to be a father and forced to work in a bush lumber camp somewhere in the Rat Portage area.

It's obvious that Minnie truly tried to make their marriage a success, as revealed in eight letters written by her to WB from late 1901 to 1903. These were the early years in their relationship, and the letters reflected her feelings about WB and the life she was then living in Fort Frances. The letters, written in a style very Victorian in both content and form, where said becomes say'd and laid is lay'd, also hinted at WB's activities. Her letters are difficult to read because she inverted her m's, n's and u's, as was the style of the day.<sup>4</sup> It would have been wonderful if WB's letters to Minnie could be studied too, but unfortunately they have been lost. It is possible that they were even destroyed by Minnie herself.

When reading these letters, I felt I was intruding on everything they had to say, some of which was very personal and intimate. Minnie often called WB "my darling fiddle de winks" and sometimes "my dearest Billy," while she referred to herself as "your darling biddy." The tone of her early letters was very romantic, or "gushy," as we would say today. She wanted him to write every day and she promised that she would too. Raised as Victorians and very conservative in their manner, WB and Minnie also developed a way of discussing personal and intimate details between them in their letters, using odd words and phrases in a code only they understood. Their meanings, however, were quite clear. On other matters, Minnie was very direct. She wanted a home she could call her own; nothing fancy and yet comfortable. She was realistic: "My, I would be so glad if I could only live privately. Wouldn't it be lovely to be in a house by ourselves? We would, I think, be very happy."<sup>5</sup> She was very affectionate to him in their early years: "My poor little heart thought it would break in two last night. These partings are anything but pleasant."<sup>6</sup> These lines indicate, of course, that WB was once more out the door and on the move. In Fort Frances, she was working hard as a waitress, chambermaid and kitchen help:

"I made 23 pies yesterday." She was unhappy because WB was not there with her very much. A letter of April 13, 1903, is touching because she clearly states that she was expecting a child, but her comment following this strongly suggests she had miscarried earlier. Minnie knew the signs well, because first-born son Owen was born on December 3, 1903, at Fort Frances.

In her letters Minnie talked about the local people and what was happening in the community, but it is clear that she didn't get out much and was working very hard. WB occasionally showed up, coming in from the lumber camp to see her. Again Minnie pointed out she wanted a house and a private life. They must have had a squabble because she said she wanted to bury the hatchet. Eventually, they found a small house, referred to in a letter from WB's mother, Agnes Emma, as "WB's little two room house," asking how Mary (Minnie) likes it. I detect a bit of snideness in her comment. WB was going to come in from camp on April 15, 1903, likely for the last time, his job over. Allan Tibbits, a long-term resident of Fort Frances and a relation to Minnie, has said that he called WB Uncle Willie. According to Tibbits, WB wasn't popular with his wife and sons because he "he took off and left them" in Fort Frances.<sup>7</sup> WB had not been idle, though, after leaving the lumber camp because quite soon he had set up a newspaper, his first on his own, as described in earlier chapters.

Readers are now familiar with WB's series of moves and new businesses after abandoning the *Rainy Lake Press*. He relocated to Vermilion in late 1905, and by the summer of 1907, Minnie was pregnant with their second child. A simple statement in the newspaper reads, "Mrs. W.B. Cameron left on Friday to visit friends in the Rainy River District east of Winnipeg."<sup>8</sup> These jaunts away from Vermilion have to be regarded important for this woman who we know spent considerable time alone out on the farm. Six months later, WB's mother-in-law showed up on the scene. "Mrs. Atkins, mother of Mrs. W.B. Cameron, arrived by Friday's train from the East, to make her home in Vermilion."<sup>9</sup> We can only assume that she came to help her daughter while in the last few months of her pregnancy. It would not be fair to comment on what WB's reaction was to the visit except that Minnie now had some company.

After Vermilion, WB took the family south to Bassano in 1910, to Calgary in 1911, and to Battleford in 1912, finally ending up on the BC coast. Minnie told Jessie that at one time she and WB wanted to settle in the interior of BC, and had shipped most of their effects to an undisclosed BC railroad station for storage. However, in the interval awaiting their arrival the station house burned down and all their possessions were lost. That must have been heartbreaking for Minnie. This constant moving, with little money and two children to care for, took its toll, and Minnie

finally decided that she would move no more. She, Owen and Douglas ended up in North Vancouver. WB was still around at times, but he was as much of a wanderer as ever.

In 1926, WB and Minnie separated, and Douglas, now eighteen, took over and helped Minnie at home. Jessie, Owen's wife, later maintained that she could never be comfortable with Minnie and couldn't help Douglas' wife, Elsie, look after her. Minnie was very bitter because WB would not settle down. She even declared that she wouldn't attend Douglas and Elsie's wedding if WB came.<sup>10</sup> She needn't have worried, though, because WB was rambling about then along the North Saskatchewan River gathering stories. WB did not attend Owen's 1943 wedding either, as he was just out of hospital after a bout of pneumonia. In time, Minnie moved to Montreal, living with Douglas and Elsie for twelve years. Now very deaf, she was difficult to look after. "She had a lot of spunk," Elsie declared. In fact, Elsie found Minnie a bit spoiled and tyrannical, and not always truthful. She also had a habit of wandering into their bedroom without knocking. A continuing series of mini-strokes finally took her life in a Montreal nursing home in 1962. Minnie's remains were buried in a small cemetery north of Pointe-Claire. Sadly, the only ones other than Douglas and Elsie able to attend her funeral were Douglas' close friends.

Late in his life, WB finally acknowledged his true feelings about his marriage in revealing letters to Douglas, expressing regret and sadness about what had happened. I feel that deep down he knew he should be making life easier for his family with a steady income and a permanent home, but he simply could not do it because of his nature. While it's easy to blame WB, his letters to Douglas and others, quoted in part below, indicate that he tried to make the marriage work in the best way he could. In 1945, he applied for a double pension as a married man. However, the pension board refused because he was not living with his wife, for reasons WB described to them as "good and sufficient." Nevertheless, he refused to move in with her to solve this problem:

She has lived there for 30 years and she's anchored there and wouldn't leave, while I hate the place. It's inconvenient and expensive but the main obstacle is that she is terribly deaf and it's a strain to talk to her and I can't sit around without talking to her—I'm not a mummy and I'm heartily sympathetic and regret her heavy handicap. But she's like many other women—they measure success by the dollar standard and I've never been much of a dollar maker. I consider other things much more valuable than a lot of cash. So our views are apt to clash. I'm fond of her and help her as far as I'm able, with cash and the expensive medicine she's obliged to take constantly. I go over to see her—I spent last evening over there and everything was quite pleasant and she was cheerful and bright—quite often and I'd like to see her and I know it's a pleasure for her to have me show my affection and good will toward her. But I don't see why, under these circumstances, they refuse to allow me the married man's allowance and I don't mean to drop the matter. I haven't said that the objection to my living

over there is that I can't work there—that is, write—because she thinks I would make more money in other ways. And this makes it very unpleasant for me and practically impossible for me to work at what has for fifty years been my main interest and pleasure.<sup>11</sup>

The means test was used to determine his pension. War veterans were allowed to earn up to \$125 extra per year, but WB planned to protest this. However, nothing came of it.<sup>12</sup>

In a Boxing Day letter to Douglas in 1949, WB wrote more about his concern for Minnie:

I was glad to learn that Minnie had got away to Whitby for a visit. I'm sure it was a welcome change for her and did her good. I hope with you that she will become reconciled to wearing an earpiece. It would be an immense relief both to herself and those who talk with her. I have felt extremely sorry for her due to her most trying handicap. It keeps her so much out of everything, since she cannot hear without a great effort and it is besides a great strain to try to converse with her. I sincerely hope that she may obtain something that will overcome this sad hindrance to her leading a normal life. I sent her a small present for Christmas, wishing at the same time that I could have bought her something of more value. But I happen, for reasons which I will explain later, to be particularly short of funds. However, I'm looking forward to a better financial position before long.<sup>13</sup>

A short time later, WB commented again about Minnie. "Jessie wrote me that Minnie was not very well after her visit to Whitby. I hope she is better."<sup>14</sup> And on Christmas Eve, 1950, he wrote the following emotionally revealing passage to Douglas:

I think you are right, in a measure, that Minnie and I should never have been married. We had very little in common—our interests were entirely different. But I thought at the time that she would get a new viewpoint concerning things really worthwhile, and this was a mistake. Still, things might have been worse; at least I have you and two darling little grandchildren and four more not so adorable. But as for Minnie, I have always felt terribly sorry for her. It is too bad that things could not have been more agreeable, so that we could have lived together, but after you boys it became impossible. If there is anything that I abhor it is quarrelling and dissension. It makes me ill and I cannot work under such conditions. A writer needs, I think above everything, encouragement, appreciation and support and if he is unable to find them at home, home is little less than a mockery. So I made the best fist out of it I could, however poor a one it may have been. At any rate I cannot find very much for which to reproach myself. I might have become a beerswiller, or a renegade of sorts or gone to court and got a divorce, but I have kept within reasonably decent bounds, even though I may have had mad lapses. In any case, what's done [is done], and I'm not going to cry over what is past. But at least let me say that I have honestly and without reservation been truly sorry for Minnie. I realize that her life has been truly an unhappy one. But at least it has been within my power to have made it tragic and . . . I [forbore] to do so. Again, let me repeat how sorry I have been for her. If I had been a money maker I should gladly have done what I could to make it easier for her.<sup>15</sup>

Douglas, for his part, seemed to have a clear understanding of the issues of his parents. WB's Christmas Eve letter above was in response to this contemplative letter from Douglas:

You never attempted to make a fortune. That was not your chief purpose . . . I do not feel it was the fault of any one person. I don't think you and [M]other should have ever married because in my opinion your personalities are not compatible. Furthermore your outlook and interests were at such variance that the success of your marriage was almost impossible. You liked change, variety, new and exciting places and people. You wanted to be stimulated. The things that you wanted were almost the opposite of those that would satisfy [M]other. She does not like change and requires a feeling of security.<sup>16</sup>

As a father, WB was tough on the boys. He treated them the same way as his father had treated him. He and Minnie were often at odds over their oldest son, Owen. It was only in his later years that he began to understand that the two boys walked to the beat of different drummers. However, he was pleased that they both became successful in their own ways, marrying into respected families and raising their children in the proud Cameron manner. Nevertheless, WB was distressed that his boys never truly appreciated things that he valued most: "My sons do not prize these things. They are too much concerned with the present age. The only things the hoi polloi appreciate [are] drinks and other things they consider valuable."<sup>17</sup>

A glimpse into the family's home life during their several years in Vermilion, while WB was operating the *Vermilion Signal*, is evident in WB's Boxing Day, 1949, letter excerpted earlier. He appears to have experienced an increasing number of reflective moments at this time. He was living in an upstairs room of a boarding house in North Battleford, Saskatchewan.<sup>18</sup> It was the day after Christmas, it was cold and he was alone and depressed, hunched over his old typewriter. He reached out to Douglas, showing that deep down he did have compassion for his family. "My dear boy: I feel very guilty, I've been promising myself that I'd write to you for a month at least and here it is the day after Christmas and I'm only making a beginning."<sup>19</sup> These thoughts about his family he often had. WB was thinking about the boys, especially Owen, his first-born, now forty-five and living in BC:

As for Owen, I can't say that I ever understood him and don't yet. Perhaps the trouble is that there isn't much to understand. Not that I think he lacks intelligence but he was always something of an enigma to me. He was hard, too, to do anything with. If I corrected him for throwing stones at the horse or chickens and perhaps, exasperated, tickled him about the shins with a switch, he would commit the same offence over again. And Minnie seemed to consider him her special property—if I spanked him for something (usually in connection with you, the younger brother) his mother flew at me. Once she hit me in the mouth with her small fist. Of course I just laughed. But I concluded that if she wanted to bring him up without any help from me, I'd let her do it.<sup>20</sup>

And that was pretty much what happened. Minnie reared Owen until he was of age

and left home to seek work. In this same letter, however, WB also credited Owen, who had left his employer of the day and gone to work elsewhere. "I don't know to this day whether he left Crane's [a dry goods store] of his own accord or was fired. Anyway, I believe it was a good thing for him. He got into the kind of life he liked. And it was probably best for his development, physical and mental.<sup>21</sup> He changed quite a bit and began to talk and confide in me—that's it, he's [talking] to me about his work and his job—which was all to the good. Because it gave me an interest in him and his doings that I'd never had before."<sup>22</sup>

While with the RCMP Museum in Regina, WB received a note from Douglas informing him that Owen was to get married, so WB wrote to his future daughter-in-law, Jessie.<sup>23</sup> "I was more than pleased when Douglas wrote me recently that Owen was to be married 'in June' to a nice girl whom he had himself known for years."<sup>24</sup> WB apologized for not being able to attend because of poor health adding, "A long life of married happiness to you both, and let me add also, a prosperous one."<sup>25</sup> WB was pleased that Owen had settled down. "It was great relief to me when he got married. I was never certain how he'd turn out and feared for the future. Now he's certainly anchored. Jessie writes me often and Owen makes me very welcome when I've gone to Squamish."<sup>26</sup> He may have forgotten that Owen was a runner and a highly successful boxer, taking on the likes of Henry Wilson. In 1926, at 126 pounds (57 kilograms), Owen became the Pacific Coast Lightweight Champion Boxer.<sup>27</sup> Jim Cameron, Owen's son, revealed to me why he thought WB and Owen might always have been at odds: they were too much alike. Both were strong-willed and honest, both liked an adventuresome lifestyle drawn to where the action was and both married later in life.<sup>28</sup>

In the long Boxing Day, 1949, letter to Douglas, WB now turned to Douglas himself. WB's younger son, now forty-one, was a successful Montreal salesman married to Elsie Noreen Stewart-Clough,<sup>29</sup> with a family of three. "I've never felt any doubt about you. And when you took to sport, I was glad . . . Your tennis brought you contacts which I'm sure have been valuable to you—among cultured men and women."<sup>30</sup> Here he was referring to the year 1938, when Douglas played with Canada's Davis Cup tennis team internationally, which was finally defeated by Japan. Douglas was noted for his unique delivery called the American Twist. With his Type A personality he did everything wholeheartedly. In fact, he was able to buy and in five years pay for the family home in prestigious Pointe-Claire.<sup>31</sup> WB was fond of the family as well, especially their daughter Gail. "She is simply adorable. I love her. I daresay I'd feel the same about Glen [son] if I'd seen more of him . . . I could wish she [Gail] were mine instead of yours."<sup>32</sup> Could it be that he wished he and Minnie would have had a girl, too?

An item of interest appeared in an article WB published in 1926. It proved to be one of the rare times when he actually wrote about spending time with his own. Invited by Mikwoostigan, an old Frog Lake friend, to a Cree thirst dance at Frog Lake, he had brought Douglas, aged eight, with him from Battleford. WB took him fishing at Laurier Lake, not far north of today's Heinsburg. In the story, WB called him Babe. "He is no longer little, but, being my youngest, he is still Babe." According to WB, Babe, also known as Douglas, could put on a real temper tantrum. WB related how they both caught several pickerel, preferred by locals over the more common northern pike, and how they got their lines tangled. At supper they dined at Alfalfa Bill's place on "fresh eggs, new butter, pickerel browned on a spit before an open fire, venison steak, green onions, fried potatoes, raspberry pie with cream, and fragrant coffee." Babe declared, "My, papa, I do like the smell of a good meal." By now it was bedtime. Mikwoostigan presented Babe with a jackknife, an item dear to any young boy's heart, and from Alfalfa Bill he received an untanned deerskin. Soon, Babe was sound asleep, on the deerhide, in Mikwoostigan's log ranch house on Frog Creek.<sup>33</sup>

The boys took an interest in WB's welfare and both corresponded with him. But it was Douglas who had the strongest connection, as evident from his letters in WB's collection. Readers have learned that Douglas was with WB when he passed away in Meadow Lake in 1951. Then as executor, he tidied up WB's affairs. This role was later assumed by his wife, Elsie, who after Douglas' death was sometimes assisted by Owen's wife, Jessie. Elsie acted in this capacity until her death in 2003.

While I was preparing this biography, Ann Cameron, Owen and Jessie's daughter-in-law, kindly wrote about an early, fascinating Trenton connection she had to the Cameron family. Ann's story appears below.

### **A Match Meant to Be**

One cloudy Sunday afternoon while sitting in my mother-in-law, Jessie Cameron's, living room in Squamish, BC, researching the family history, something happened that truly cemented my belief in destiny. Our activities usually involved going through her hope chest or leafing through her many photo albums and boxes of old papers. I would ask questions about the various objects and she would revel in telling the stories. This particular day we were going through the boxes and I came across a brown envelope that held various photographs. I took one out and had the strange feeling that I recognized the image of the house. When I turned the picture over and read the inscription, I realized that I knew this house. The inscription read, "born [in] old stone house, Trenton, Ontario—the house where I was born, July 26th, 1862, at Trenton, Ontario. Photo, July 1928—W.B. Cameron." Having read a great deal about the man, I knew that WB's grandfather had been the Deacon of St. George's Anglican Church in Trenton. That church was just around the corner from a house that I once lived in, and I recognized the house in the

photo as being one that was just across from the church. I felt a sudden sense of awe, realizing that the house was our neighbouring house and one that I had spent some time in, playing with a friend when I was eleven and twelve years of age (from 1961 to 1962). My recollection of the house is that it was very old at the time. It had a farmhouse feel with a big comfortable kitchen and large front porch.

I have always been a great believer in fate and I truly believe that WB Cameron's grandson and I were meant to meet and marry. Jim and I met in Lahr, Germany, in 1968 while he was serving in the Canadian Armed Forces and I was finishing my final year of high school in Lahr, while my father, who was also in the RCAF, was stationed there. We married in 1972 at Jim's mother's house in Squamish, BC.

When we lived in Ottawa from 1984 to 1988 we travelled to Trenton and visited the Church, searching for the Deacon's grave. We wandered around the graveyard but could not find any mention of him and gave up the search, thinking that we were probably at the wrong church. Years later we found out that he is buried in the Church. During that visit, we visited my family's old house, not knowing that the house just over the fence was the one in which Jim's grandfather had been born.

-Ann Cameron, Owen and Jessie Cameron's daughter-in-law  
Parksville, BC, December 2002



11  
*The Fifth Edition and  
Eyewitness to History*

IT ALL started with a casual inquiry made to Kenneth Coppock by the executive editor of the *Western Producer* in 1973.

R.H. (Rusty) Macdonald, the veteran journalist and feature writer, shared with Coppock the philosophy that the stories of old-timers must be preserved and put into print for future generations to enjoy. Readers will recall from Chapter 8 that Battleford historian Campbell Innes, one of the organizers of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool tour WB joined in 1947, had shared the same view three decades before. During the winter of 1950–1951, Macdonald had gotten to know the eighty-eight-year-old WB, because he wanted to print WB’s stories in the *Western Producer*. Macdonald offered WB an opportunity seldom awarded to writers: the magazine would print whatever he could supply them with.<sup>1</sup> During his visits to the DVA Hospital in Saskatoon due to failing health, WB would drop off manuscripts while collecting payment in advance. “He was usually short of funds and at the same time uncertain about his next forwarding address,” noted Macdonald, who also noticed that WB was finding it increasingly hard to keep up.<sup>2</sup> “Even with an editor’s open invitation to ‘send all the stuff you can—we’ll publish it,’ he was unable to take full advantage of the opportunity.”<sup>3</sup>

Now involved with Prairie Books, a special department of the *Western Producer*, Macdonald got in touch with Coppock. “Some years ago the book ‘Blood Red the Sun’ by Bleasdell Cameron was published, I think by you. I now understand that it is out of print. If this is so, and if there are no plans to republish it, Western Producer Prairie Books would like to consider reviving it. This would involve finding

Cameron's heir and paying him a royalty."<sup>4</sup> Coppock's reply concerning a reprint was very positive, suggesting that although he had no intention of doing so himself, he thought that both he and Mr. Cameron's heir had a "basic right in determining the future of the book."<sup>5</sup> He offered two suggestions. The first was not to print a new edition, which would place the book in the rare category and thereby shove the price up. This might allow him to get rid of the surplus inventory of the fourth edition. The second was to recognize *Blood Red the Sun* as a book of historical value and reprint it. Coppock favoured the latter idea.

Macdonald then tracked down Owen, WB's eldest son living in Squamish, BC, learning that there were more heirs than at first anticipated, but beginning to make tentative reprinting arrangements. Unfortunately, before anything concrete could be drawn up, Owen passed away in 1976. His sister-in-law, Elsie, was delegated to act on behalf of WB and his material. By early spring 1977, an agreement had been reached between Elsie and Rusty, and plans to reprint the fifth edition of *Blood Red the Sun* commenced. A massive shock wave hit the *Western Producer* when they discovered that another publisher, the large Edmonton firm of Hurtig Publishers, was well underway with the fifth edition. This hit the stands in May 1977. And no one involved in the fifth edition seemed aware that McClelland & Stewart, the well-established eastern Canadian publisher, had also reprinted about 55 percent of WB's book in *The Frog Lake "Massacre"*<sup>6</sup> in 1976 and were claiming copyright to all.<sup>7</sup> The correspondence amongst all the players by now involved legal firms because the copyright problem had to be settled. The wrangling began in earnest and in great volume, and is much too involved to be included here to any great length. (However, it would be an interesting study.) This was clearly a very complicated, delicate situation that had to be resolved.

Correspondence reveals that when challenged by Coppock, McClelland & Stewart withdrew. This withdrawal occurred after they discovered that WB's material had been extracted from *Blood Red the Sun* without Coppock's approval.<sup>8</sup> In the meantime, Coppock was seriously attempting to rectify the situation. It appears that he came to feel that Macdonald had dropped the idea of a fifth edition. "I think at this point I should say that I am enclosing a copy of Mr. R.H. Macdonald's letter of Jan. 22, 1973 addressed to me, and my reply of Feb. 12, 1973. While I expected an answer in return, no reply was forthcoming so I concluded he had no further interest."<sup>9</sup> It is not entirely clear who initiated the fifth edition, Hurtig Publishers or Coppock, but an agreement had been prepared between them for Hurtig to reprint the fifth edition, since Coppock had been the last publisher (under the Kenway Publishing Company name). A second problem Coppock faced had to do with heirs. This was an issue he was unsure about in 1949–1950. "My information was that Mr. Cameron had a son or sons in the East but I was never told about their

whereabouts.”<sup>10</sup> He reiterated this fact a month later, after Elsie had filled him in on the heir situation. “This is an area never discussed with Mr. Cameron for I was led to believe that he was completely out of touch with his family. I am comforted to know that this apparently was not the case.”<sup>11</sup> He had earlier noted something that had confounded him. “What is confusing is that the two sons did not make themselves known during that period or for over 25 years and then only through yourself.”<sup>12</sup> In the end, Elsie made a four-year agreement with Hurtig Publishers that was finalized on July 31, 1978. The company would, among other details, acknowledge the eight heirs and pay a 7 percent flat royalty.<sup>13</sup> The fifth edition was released in May 1977, with a foreword by well-known Calgary historian Hugh Dempsey. Owen Wister’s foreword of 1929 was also retained, as was WB’s 1950 introduction. The book’s production surpassed Coppock’s expectations. Hurtig printed 5,582 paperbacks and 528 hardcover versions. They honoured the agreement, and royalties began to roll in. Although hardcover copies were sold out by 1981, in 1985 there still remained 25 percent of the softcover version. And the royalties? “It wasn’t much,” Elsie declared.<sup>14</sup> Split eight ways over the time period, payments amounted to about \$20 annually.

And what about the plans of Western Producer Prairie Books? The company was highly disappointed, but there was little they could do but shelve the project. However, Macdonald carried on with his recognition of WB’s work. Tenacious and willing, he continued his project in a new direction.

I’m happy to note that both Kenneth Coppock and Hurtig Publishers, recognizing the historical value of WB’s work and wishing it to be added to Canadiana collections, cooperated well and made many concessions to accomplish this goal. Mel Hurtig, a strong supporter of Canada and things Canadian, was also at that time publishing similar but apparently out-of-print material in his efforts to keep Canadian history alive. Coppock wrote to Elsie: “I share with you the hope that ‘Blood Red the Sun’ will be placed in libraries and schools to become an important part of Canadiana.” He even went as far as to include a clause in his agreement with Hurtig Publishers “to effect the widest possible distribution of the book.”<sup>15</sup> For this, all Canadians can be thankful.

Although disappointed by his unsuccessful attempt to reprint *Blood Red the Sun*, Macdonald worked through a totally new agreement with Elsie to publish an anthology of selected stories by WB, finalizing the deal on June 17, 1977. By this time Elsie had had enough frustration in administering the re-publication of WB’s work, and turned the whole matter over to her sister-in-law Jessie and her daughter, Elaine Morton. Macdonald worked on this project on and off for twelve years, as often as his regular writing allowed. This work resulted in the fitting tribute to WB,

*Eyewitness to History: William Bleasdel Cameron, Frontier Journalist.* Macdonald had originally chosen the title “Western Adventures with Bleasdel Cameron,” but the editorial board of Prairie Books adopted the current title instead.<sup>16</sup> The preface and a detailed eight-thousand-word introduction were written by Macdonald, who used to advantage (as I have) his access to the papers included in the trunk and his time spent personally interviewing members of the family. Macdonald approached Hugh Dempsey to review the work, who accepted the job on January 27, 1985, making a number of suggestions and changes. Dempsey noted that Macdonald was sometimes “hard-pressed” to come up with something innovative; in some cases, WB’s own words were best and Dempsey advised that they should simply be used themselves. (Occasionally I did the same thing in preparing this biography, finding that WB’s text far surpassed anything that I could come up with.) It is interesting to note that according to Dempsey, some of WB’s published work had been poorly edited earlier, with the addition of massive punctuation and even added sentences, altering his style.<sup>17</sup>

After Macdonald’s manuscript had undergone what to me were a surprising number of editing changes, the final result was a 180-page book containing a preface, biography and short reference section by Macdonald, plus twenty-five of WB’s stories presented in five thematic sections suggested by Dempsey: Elements of the Adventure, the Fur Trade, the North-West Mounted Police, the Frog Lake Massacre and the Indian. Most of these stories had been previously published. Choosing them, from among the 140 or so that WB wrote, must have been daunting.<sup>18</sup> Macdonald received fine media coverage in Saskatoon<sup>19</sup> and through the *Western Producer*. It appears that while most of the family liked the publication, Elsie did not, but was unable to explain to me why she felt that way.<sup>20</sup>

I got in touch with Alex Macdonald, Rusty’s son, himself a writer and publisher, and invited him to write something about his father. I was pleased with what Alex wrote.

#### **A Personal Note about Rusty Macdonald**

Dad was passionately in love with western Canada.

His creations—the *Western Producer*’s magazine section and later Prairie Books Ltd.—were the vehicles for that love. The magazine allowed him to travel throughout the Prairie Provinces telling people’s stories, and it gave him the luxury of good camera equipment and endless film processing.

The magazine and the book company allowed prairie writers, poets and historians the outlets that fulfilled one of Dad’s big dreams, that of putting an end to the invisibility of both the roots and the daily lives of an important culture.

It’s only a distant echo in my memory, but I recall Dad bubbling with the joy of having located a very distant relative of a historical writer he was researching, securing permission to look through a big trunk in her attic, and discovering a

trove of the man's writings. I'm reasonably sure the writer's name was William Bleasdel Cameron.

Cameron would have been the perfect target for my father's passion. In his day, Cameron was both a contemporary historian and an image-maker—just like my father in his time. Dad's respect for Cameron's recognition of the future historical importance of *today* would have been strong.

When I first visited my fiancé's family cabin at a lake near Edmonton, there on the wall was Dad's stunning photo of the last steam locomotive run between Saskatoon and Regina. He took that photo during a 120-mile-per-hour [nearly 200-kilometre-per-hour] hopscotch car pursuit looking for just the right juxtaposition of locomotive, snowdrifts and azure blue sky. I was with him on that trip, and though I was young, I wasn't bored. It wasn't the speed; he *always* drove fast. I wasn't bored because by then I was just beginning to realize just how exciting Dad's passion could be.

When Dad died, western Canada lost a believer, a promoter, a lover. In his wake he left a wide, visible swath of history, literature and images.

And I believe that in his passionate respect for Cameron, he also ensured that Cameron's contribution to western Canada's knowledge of itself was re-exposed and given the new life it so much deserves.

—Alex Macdonald, son of R.H. (Rusty) Macdonald  
Edmonton, 2003



## Appendix

Several items of interest did not seem to fit into the flow of the story and yet are important. The following is a potpourri of such things.

- It's amazing that WB was such a prolific writer even though he had only one eye with which to work. Many of us are hard pressed to produce just a portion of his output with two eyes.
- How the past can re-enter the present is exemplified in a story related by WB's grandson Jim Cameron. We've already learned that WB's sister Agnes married NWMP Inspector Joseph Howe, but it was never mentioned that they had a son named Joseph, who also became an RCMP officer. By 1960 he had retired, becoming a magistrate in New Westminster, BC, a Vancouver suburb. Jim's brother, Ross, had apparently committed a traffic violation, and had to appear in court before none other than Joe Howe. Owen was aware of this and gave his magistrate relative a nudge to "put a scare into Ross," which he did.
- F. Stanley Simpson was probably one of the closest male friends WB ever had. While they had some differing views they were alike in many other ways. Exactly when they met is unknown but this interesting fellow, said to be a nephew of Sir George Simpson, had been in the Saskatchewan Valley since 1882, employed by the HBC. "Stanley Simpson of Sault Ste. Marie arrived from Carlton Mar 15 to work for the HBC in Battleford."<sup>1</sup> WB later wrote about his friend. "During my first year in the Canadian North-west, I met a young fellow of about my own age; a mutual liking ensued and we became fast friends for a number of years."<sup>2</sup> A year later Simpson was transferred to Fort Pitt, becoming postmaster,<sup>3</sup> and was there until his capture by Big Bear's rebels. Before WB arrived in the Frog Lake district to trade, Simpson had been witness to a huge beaver killed in the area. "A gigantic beaver was killed near Ft. Pitt. The skin was four feet [over a metre] long and valued at \$10."<sup>4</sup> A month later, he had been fiddling with a small cannon kept at the fort, its presence more for show and noise than protection. There was an accident. "Stanley Simpson is down from Ft. Pitt for medical aid. He was pouring powder into the vent of a small cannon when it went off, setting fire to the powder he was holding in his hand. It blew the breech, shooting the gun 10 feet [3 metres]. Simpson hurt his eyes so he couldn't see, having had a bad trip in. He is recovering."<sup>5</sup> Like WB, Simpson had a glass eye. Apparently the newspaper editor who reported on the accident was not aware of this. Simpson had a spare glass eye that was discovered by the rebels when they were looting Fort Pitt. One rebel gave it to another rebel missing an eye, thinking that it might help him see. Much to his chagrin it did not. Thinking quickly, Simpson explained to this disgruntled and dangerous man that since the glass eye was blue, obviously Simpson's eye colour, it would not work with a brown-eyed man.<sup>6</sup> At the trials in Regina, Simpson was called to testify, as WB had done, but his true knowledge of the Cree language proved shaky and his views bigoted, so his testimony was proven unreliable.<sup>7</sup> Simpson was brave, however, and lost his life because of it. In "The Fur Trade in the Far North," WB described the accident. "On the first of October, 1892, Stanley Simpson was on his way home from Norway House at the head of Lake Winnipeg to his post at Cross Lake on the Nelson River." There were three of them in a canoe: Simpson in the front paddling with his dog beside him, HBC Chief Factor Belanger, a big man, in the middle and an Aboriginal steersman aft. The canoe got caught in a current, upset, and the men were thrown into the icy water and swept away. Three days later a York boat crew was attracted to "piteous howling" of a little dog on the shore near Sea Falls. They found Belanger, by now dead, with his arm tied to the painter (rope), and later downstream they found the steersman, barely alive. A week later they found Simpson, also dead. "He was young, strong and an uncommonly good swimmer," WB states. He had tied Belanger's arm to the canoe, hoping it would save him, but had himself died from exhaustion and exposure. While at Fort Alexander, WB wrote a poem, a tribute to his lost friend, published in the *Free Press* on November 10, 1892.
- About 146 original copies of the *Vermilion Signal* still exist in two different sets in Edmonton, one in the Provincial Archives of Alberta, the other in the Legislature Library. The Glenbow Library in Calgary also has copies of the archives set. The first two copies of the *Signal* were

preserved by the Brimacombe family and later turned over to the Glenbow, so for the year 1906 there are only two copies extant. For 1907, most of January, February, March, April, November and December are missing, except for the February 28 edition. For 1908, only January is lost.<sup>8</sup> For the remainder of the *Signal's* life, most copies are available. Fortunately, the existing copies were microfilmed and are available at selected locations, one of them being the Vermilion Public Library. A thrill and a privilege it is to be able to gaze at the large *Vermilion Signal* banner, the masthead, and study the manner in which WB and his typesetters arranged the newspaper. The *Bassano Times* continues to be published in Bassano. In my files there is a copy of no. 1, vol. 1. The Bassano Memorial Library also had hard copies of all editions but recently handed them over to the Bassano Historical Society for use in their revised local history book (published in 2006).

- About a year or two before he died, WB paid \$65 to an old newspaperman for a second Remington Noiseless, a bit newer than his, lending it to Mrs. Paul, whom he had hired to help him in Meadow Lake. These two typewriters, which would have been priceless mementos of WB's work, have disappeared. After WB's death in March 1951, Douglas was in Meadow Lake attending to WB's estate. A typewriter was included in WB's effects and it appears from what Douglas told his brother, Owen, in a letter written shortly after WB's funeral, that it had been sold along with some other things.<sup>9</sup> The typewriter Mrs. Paul was using has never surfaced either.<sup>10</sup>
- Known to some, there was money to be made out West, lots of it, in land development. Obtaining large tracts of prairie with the blessing of the federal government was the thing to do. Among the more affluent men of Trenton, many of them older friends of WB or family acquaintances, substantial capital was quietly being raised for the recently formed Prince Albert Colonization Company. These included John White, William Sharples, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Williams,<sup>11</sup> all the local MPs, J.C. Jamieson, William Jeffs, D. (David) Gilmour, Thomas McGreevy and a few others. In fact, Williams, the Tory MP for Port Hope, had sold much of his family's property in Ontario to raise money for this land scheme out west. (WB would meet up with Williams soon during the North-West Rebellion because Williams became the commanding officer of the Ontario-based Midland Battalion, which received much acclaim at the battles of Fish Creek and Batoche.) The ever-revealing *Trenton Courier* reports on July 8, 1881, a bit after WB had left, that "Messrs. Jeffs, Baker, Lee and Frallick are off to the North West for their re-colonization scheme. A large number of Trenton people have taken interest." This plan in a short time would create havoc for the federal government. While full details of the Prince Albert Colonization Company are beyond the scope of this book, WB was close enough to it for a brief explanation here. The company made an agreement with the Canadian government to obtain Township 45, a big chunk of land between Duck Lake and Prince Albert in the Saskatchewan Valley, including the village of St. Laurent, for settlement. This would be surveyed into parcels and sold for a quick profitable sale to the hordes of settlers beginning to fill up the West. But someone forgot to inform the land company that Township 45 was already settled—by the Metis people, refugees from earlier Red River troubles, desiring nothing but peace and quiet. They did not take kindly to what was happening and some historians point out that the Prince Albert Colonization Company's plans may have been one of the triggers that set off the North-West Rebellion. Thankfully, fairness prevailed when the Prince Albert Colonization Company was taken to court later in 1885, and the land reverted back to the federal government. The company shareholders lost their investments. Unfortunately, so did the Metis. Today much of the land is part of a forestry reserve.<sup>12</sup>
- Cemetery searches always seem to have strange twists and turns, often revealing more than what one expects. This is the case for WB, who is buried immediately next to a Mr. Dodds. Current members of this family living in Meadow Lake helped me more than once in providing details about the people and the area. And lying one more plot to the north is Barbara Titley, wife of the well-known local clergyman and funeral director, Reverend William Titley. Burial services for WB were carried out by Titley's Funeral Home based in Meadow Lake. Another interesting character of the northwest, William Titley's life needs telling.
- It was mentioned that one of the pallbearers was E.L. (Ted) Meeres, who was manager of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce branch in Meadow Lake from 1945 to 1952. The

banker was good to WB. Not long before his death, still writing, WB approached Meeres with a thick scrapbook of clippings and notes he had collected over the years about the North-West Rebellion, asking Meeres if he could hire one or more of the typists working at the bank to retype it all into one work. Meeres agreed and in time the work was done by bank employees such as Birdella Oyal, Hazel Yake, Marjorie Boe, Calla Carlisle, Kay Morgenstern and Laura Olsen. WB was to pay the bank for the work they did, all 225 pages of it. Whether the typists were working on CIBC time is not known. Meeres was holding the scrapbook and typed material until WB could pay the bill. In a letter to Meeres on December 19, 1949, WB, in North Battleford for the winter, asks if he can borrow the scrapbook for a couple of days as he needed some names for an article he was writing, promising to return it promptly. In a second letter, on borrowed stationery from the Auditorium Hotel, North Battleford, written three months later on March 27, 1950, he asks Meeres for a \$10 loan because neither the *Western Producer* nor the *Canadian Cattleman* had paid him for stories they bought. Whether or not Meeres approved the small loan is not known, but I feel he did. After all, he still had the typed work for collateral, even though the scrapbook was still with WB. Douglas stayed with the Meeres family while in Meadow Lake, but it appears that he did not know about the scrapbook, nor the account against the custom typing the bank employees had done. Meeres still had the material when WB died, keeping it all until he decided to turn it all over to the Red Deer and District Museum and Archives (now called the Red Deer Museum + Art Gallery). According to Michael Dawe, now city archivist for Red Deer, when Meeres, living in his later years in Red Deer, turned over his collection to the museum, he was still miffed that the bill had never been paid. Notable is that the original scrapbook somehow found its way into the hands of well-known Battleford historian and educator Campbell Innes, who eventually passed it on to a son, Ross, living today in Medicine Hat.

- A strange occurrence in WB's life was an accusation that he had "lifted" an article written by another writer. It seems that Zachary (Zack) Hamilton, a journalist with the *Regina Leader-Post* and member of the Saskatchewan Historical Society, had sold a piece called "Body and Bones" to the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* in the early 1920s for \$30. The topic was about the troubles in Battleford during the 1885 uprising. Apparently, this same article was republished somewhere else with WB's name attached to it. I do not know the repercussions, if any, from this odd episode in WB's life, but for WB to be faced with such an accusation seems completely out of character.<sup>13</sup>
- If WB had a chance to return to Trenton today, he would be shocked at the changes, not only in city development alone. The sky over Trenton, that he remembered being speckled with gulls swooping about and squabbling over dead fish along the river and on the lakeshore, has also changed. The large open fields WB could see to the east of town from his vantage point on Mount Pelion were officially declared part of RCAF Station Trenton in 1931, the home of No. 1 Fighter and No. 3 Army Cooperation Flights, with biplanes such as the Siskin fighter and the familiar Tiger Moth flitting about. Eventually the base became part of the Canada-wide British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP), training aircrew for WWII, among other operations, and the neighbouring skies became filled with the loud snarl of "yellow perils," the Harvard two-seat trainers. Today the area echoes with the sound of rumbling CC-130 Hercules transports and massive CC-150 Polaris (A310 Airbus) and CC-177 Globemaster III strategic airlifters arriving and departing for all points on the globe, day and night. WB would also hear the whumpety-whumpety-whumpety of low-flying Cormorant helicopters. All these aircraft belong to 8 Wing, with its nine units heavily involved in air transport operations, search and rescue and numerous other vital tasks. The base is now called 8 Wing Trenton, today one of Canada's "largest and busiest air force bases."<sup>14</sup>
- As the years passed, with WB's moves becoming more frequent and his memory beginning to lapse, many of his belongings became scattered to the four winds. Doug Light confirmed this when he once said to me that WB "often left things behind where he stayed." The following is a list of more notable items still likely in existence yet unaccounted for:
  1. A letter from General Middleton attesting to his Rebellion service.
  2. A letter from General Strange attesting to the same.

3. A collection of notebooks containing stories told to him by Metis and Aboriginal peoples.
4. His North West Canada Medal.
5. An HBC Post Ledger, believed to be from Fort Alexander.
6. An unpublished manuscript about General Middleton.
7. One of the first autographed copies of Owen Wister's *The Virginian*.
8. An autographed copy of *Rawhide Rawlins Stories* by Charles Russell, possibly given to Owen Wister.
9. The flint and steel once owned by Wandering Spirit and used in WB's talks.
10. The silver porringer sent to Minnie as a gift for baby Owen by Mrs. Wister.
11. WB's collection of handwritten notes.
12. A partially completed novel, nature unknown.
13. Seven *Scarlet and Gold* magazines.
14. *The Pocock Diaries: The Life of Roger Pocock, Frontiersman*, preface by Stephen Gwynne, London Lane, date unknown.
15. Forty or more Kodachrome slides given to WB by Everett Baker.
16. A number of glass lantern slides.
17. The infamous note from T.T. Quinn with his request to give Miserable Man one blanket.
18. The Colt revolving rifle.
19. The 40-60 Winchester rifle.
20. The rifle WB had had in his room before his death, the one that Douglas presented to the Rotary Club in Meadow Lake.
21. The Remington Noiseless typewriters, one of which Douglas sold in Meadow Lake, the other in Mrs. Paul's possession.
22. Galley proofs of *Blood Red the Sun* from the Wrigley Printing Company, fourth edition.

It would be interesting to find out where these items finally found a home.

- Often overlooked and overshadowed by his prolific and colourful prose is the poetry that WB wrote. Chapter 9 of this biography concludes with his poem "How Old Are You?" but I would like to draw attention to four other pieces of poetry, or rhyming prose if you wish, all of a historical nature, that are included in the Cameron collection. There are three originals and one carbon copy, all stained and yellowed now, appearing to be intended for publication but that never were published. No dates appear on any of these documents. Most interesting are the phrases and words he uses that have been long out of use.

"Tony The Fish Peddler" is the shortest, only six stanzas. Likely written in the late 1930s, perhaps while he was living in Athabasca, this is WB's potshot at Hitler (by way of Italy). In the introduction he writes that "we speak of the farmer as a son of the soil, the forester as a son of the bush, the rascal as a son of a gun, so naturally, we think of Tony, the fish peddler, as a son of a beach." WB does a good job of mimicking the Italian accent of a chap he calls Tony Paroni.

I sella da feesh and I sella da crab,  
 I am notta so good and I notta so bad,  
 I leev on da shack, vere da seagull is screech—  
 I am Tony Paroni, a soona da beach.

"Trouble On The Line" is 112 lines. This is a poem about a telegrapher/lineman named Lemuel Jones, who in the late 1800s was posted to a remote location on land occupied by the Cree, the

nearest settlement being Fort Carlton, a fur trade post 80 miles (130 kilometres) away. Jones only gets supplies twice a year, and he has been robbed by a Cree named Mooseskin, whom he now has to pursue to get his goods back. The technical information WB uses is based on his days working on the Dominion Telegraph line west from Battleford.

“Gentleman Joe,” written in 150 lines, is WB’s version of the opening battle of the Rebellion at Duck Lake, based on a conversation he and Joe McKay had in the late 1920s. Details I’ve never seen before, about the location of the battle and placement of the troops and Metis insurgents, are clearly given. Interesting also is the inside address at the top of the document: “W.B. Cameron, Edmonton, Alta., C/O Central Drug Store.” This indicates that he may have been transient at that time. WB noted in pencil on the margin that Major Crozier, in charge of the troopers, received a flesh wound in the cheek. Oddly, he never mentioned that his brother-in-law NWMP Inspector Joseph Howe was wounded in the leg.

The final poem in the collection is the longest, at 165 lines. Called “Good Night: The Story of Tipiskow and his Nice Turtle Lake Fur Farm,” this work demonstrates the volatile conflict between Aboriginal peoples and the federal government as territorial land was quickly being surveyed for settlement. A ninety-eight-year-old chief named Tipiskow, whose name, according to WB, means night, is trying to halt work being done on his ancestral land around Turtle Lake by the Dominion Land Surveyors working northeast of what is now Turtleford, Saskatchewan. Tipiskow in his cunning way created some trouble, but was arrested by the NWMP and taken to court in Battleford. A hint of when WB wrote this piece can be derived from the inside address: “Wm. Bleasdel Cameron, 114 Justice Bldg., R.C.M.P., Ottawa, Ont.” In my opinion, he wrote it in the early 1940s while in the employ of what was then the RCMP Museum in Regina, which had sent him to do research in Ottawa.

- It seems entirely appropriate to conclude with two of WB’s finest short works, “Christmas at Frog Lake, 1884” and “The Romance of Pemmican.” The first, described in Chapter 3, was published in the *Vermilion Signal* in 1908 when WB was that newspaper’s editor. Although fictional, it was based on fact. The second, which was published in the *Canadian Magazine* in 1902 and later appeared in Macdonald’s *Eyewitness to History*, is probably the most detailed and concise description—among the many accounts of trading in the West—of this vital food product made at key trading posts. For example, Fort Pitt, located on the banks of the North Saskatchewan River north and east of the present-day border city of Lloydminster, was a huge pemmican factory, producing hundreds of tonnes of this high-energy food staple so much in demand by other fur trade posts and voyageurs. As an observer, WB explains how it all worked. Here, then, are the stories as WB wrote them.

#### Christmas at Frog Lake, 1884<sup>15</sup>

Christmas to the bachelor and married men away from home, of which two classes the white population of the North West in the early eighties was largely made up of, did not offer many opportunities for festivities. Still those nomads who had wheeled their way—most of them in screeching Red River carts, built entirely of wood—from the rim of civilization at Winnipeg and reached Saskatchewan, did not allow this season of rejoicing to pass unrecognized but made the best of such material for amusement and good cheer as the country afforded. Visits to those infrequent homes presided over by a goddess named Woman (women were all goddesses in those early days of the West), excursions to the shacks of convivial bachelors who had brought in kegs of Scotch or Hudson’s Bay Dark under permit from the lieutenant-governor, rabbit hunts, and a ball at the Mounted Police barracks where two-thirds of the fair sex were fully of the opposite complexion—[coiffured] beauties, wearing white satin dresses in folly below atmosphere—these composed nearly the full list of Christmas gaieties.

But unless you happened to live within one hundred miles of Battleford or Edmonton or Prince Albert, the list was apt to be further curtailed—you could not very well attend the police ball. If you lived at Fort Pitt, which was only ninety-five miles from Battleford, you of course would be there. But Frog Lake was one hundred and twenty-five miles off and that was rather too far. We had to have a ball of our own. There were six men of the North West Mounted Police (including Corporal Sleigh, a relative of Lord Roberts), a

halfbreed carpenter named Charlie Gouin (violinist), Tom Quinn, the six-and-a-half-foot Indian Agent with a trace of Sioux blood in his veins, Mrs. Quinn, who was pure Cree, Henry Quinn, his nephew (second violinist), Johnny Pritchard, the halfbreed interpreter, Mrs. Pritchard, a judicious compound of Cree and French, The Broncho, a charming Indian maiden in a pink calico gown, The Grenadier, a tall and stately daughter of the Crees, James Keith Simpson, two or three distinguished members of the Chippewyan tribe of Cold Lake, Genevieve, coquette, the belle of the Settlement, Little Stick of the Wood Crees, and his bride—in fact all the aristocracy of the district—and the Hudson's Bay clerk in charge of Frog Lake trading post, namely myself.

We had a very pleasant evening indeed. The ball was held in Johnny Pritchard's log house, the ground floor of which constituted a single living room with a door in the rear opening into the kitchen. The refreshments consisted of Armour's Canned Corn Beef, fruit biscuits, Hudson's Bay black tea, raisins and white lump sugar.

In the balls of those early days one did not drift through the dreamy measures of the waltz to the languorous strains of the Blue Danube, and a two-step would have been considered too slow for anything but cripples or couples past the age limit for such frivolities as dancing. No, there was nothing slow about the Saskatchewan dance of '84 or '85. The programme would read like this—only there wasn't any programme—you just grabbed your partner and made for the centre of the floor, where the crush was thickest. But, if there had been a programme it would have read like this: Circassian Circle, Reel de Huit, Double Jig, Reel de Quatre, Cotillion, Drop O' Brandy, Duck Dance, Highland Fling, Rabbit Dance and Red River Jig. When the music stopped everybody shouted "Apeeta" which is Cree for "Half" and means just the same as "Encore" in English—or French if you prefer.

But I started to tell of this particular dance at Frog Lake on Christmas of 1884. There was a halfbreed trader among the guests, Gregoire Plante from Cold Lake. He was a short, compactly built son of the soil and dancing was his long suit. He was great on the Red River Jig. When his feet got properly going he hit a gait that would have put an electric dynamo on the retired list in a speed contest. All you could see of his feet was just a twinkling close to the ground. They fairly purred. In fact, the only way you could tell he had feet at all was by listening to the patter of his moccasins on the floor.

Well Mr. Gregoire Plante was doing his prettiest. All eyes in the room were fixed upon him and he knew it and was tickled to death. He was just showing the crowd where the Red River Jig started from. There was not a man in the room but would have been ashamed to confess that he had ever seen the Red River Jig danced before. Even the Hudson's Bay clerk, who used to think himself no small potatoes on the jig, went away back into the corner and sat down resolved that he would never again attempt it, except in the privacy of his own room at the post or else for the edification of indulgent but benighted relatives if he ever got back to the effete East.

There was a big iron spoon suspended by a nail on the wall and Patsy Carroll—his name isn't Patsy, but that doesn't matter; he is still very much alive, at Saddle Lake, Corporal Carroll, of the Royal North West Mounted Police (it wasn't the "Royal" North West Mounted Police then, but that doesn't matter either)—Patsy reached up and annexed it, I don't know how long the spoon was, but it could not have been more than two feet and it certainly was not much less. There was a hole in the handle to hang it up by.

Mr. Gregoire Plante was too pleased with himself and the admiration he was attracting to give attention to anything else. He wore a black blanket Hudson's Bay coat. There was a hood attached to the collar of it and from the point of his hood two long black ribbons trailed gracefully down to his heels. Carroll slipped round behind Mr. Plante, poked the ribbons through the hole in the handle of the big spoon and fastened it securely to the hood of the capote.

The jig went on, and as it grew faster and faster and scope for the display of some really fine footwork increased, Mr. Plante grew still more ambitious. He skimmed across

from one corner of the room to the other, around the side and back, picking up any stray particles of dust that happened to be left in the cracks between the boards of the floor, and the big iron spoon on the end of the capote began to quiver and dart. The other merry-makers, seated around the four large walls of the house, noticed it and their interest in the performance took on a new and unexpected aspect. It became genuine and acute. It was the real thing. Presently the spoon spun around and grazed The Broncho's ear. Everybody laughed. Mr. Plante glanced about him with a look of pained surprise on his features. He did not consider his performance a subject for amusement at all. He redoubled his efforts and the spoon began to whirl. The onlookers were ducking and dodging. They grew uproarious and the blood mounted slowly to Mr. Plante's face until it rivaled the hue of the crimson fringe that decorated the lapel of his black blanket capote. But he did not stop and the spoon continued its irresponsible flight, until the big, loose end of it landed in Charlie Gouin's mouth. He had been too strenuously engaged with his fiddle to notice what had been going on.

Mr. Gouin was slow to anger, but when the business end of a big iron spoon comes in contact with a man's front teeth, it is apt to engender feelings of sudden hostility in the bosom of the most ardent peace-lover. Mr. Gouin jumped to his feet and demanded to know, in as good English as the condition of his damaged mouth would permit, what was meant by this onslaught? Two heavyweights from among the guests bore down upon him and swept him into the kitchen. The dance stopped. Mr. Plante seized the hateful spoon, tore it from the ribbons of his capote and flung it across the room. Then he turned on Henry Quinn, his eyes blazing with anger, and asked him what he meant by playing such a lowdown trick on a gentleman of his education and ability as a jigger, and covering the performance with ridicule and shame?

Quinn, dressed in a white shirt, black trousers and embroidered moccasins, with a colored silk sash about his waist, was playing second violin and kicking time with his heels on the floor. He was a tall, active, young man, and while he was hugely indignant at being wrongfully accused, he got up and walked around the room, forcibly disclaiming responsibility, while the injured Plante followed, growling like a terrier at his heels. It was useless for Quinn to deny guilty complicity with the spoon, he was not believed.

At last he turned, caught Mr. Plante round the neck and dragged him into the kitchen. There was a pot of tea on the stove. Quinn picked it up and, stooping down, emptied the contents into Mr. Plante's moccasins. It was not scalding hot; still it was warm as the springs at Banff and kindred waters recommended for rheumatism and other crippling complaints. Mr. Plante kicked and yelled and Quinn turned him loose.

"Dance," he observed. "Give us something good and lively. Show us what you can do when you are trying. Wake up."

And Mr. Plante woke up accordingly and for the space of a minute gave an exhibition of high stepping that made all of his former efforts seem lame and amateurish by comparison.

Subsequently, Mr. Plante's feelings were mollified when somebody dug up a steaming drink of Eau de Cologne and sugar for him. Then another ration of Armour's Canned Corn Beef, fruit biscuits and black tea was served and joy unconfined surged on uninterruptedly until the grey dawn of a new day broke over the wooded Frog Lake hills.

It was the last dance at which poor Charlie Gouin scraped the catgut, or poor Tom Quinn shuffled a moccasin. On the morning of the second of April following, both were shot dead by the Indians in front of Pritchard's house, not ten yards from the spot where they danced and fiddled on the night of Christmas 1884. A few weeks later, Sleigh fell at Cut Knife, the first man killed in Poundmaker's fight with the Battleford flying column under Otter.

I often wonder if a judgment ever overtook Carroll, the author of the mischief, who sat through the dance looking as innocent as a white owl, for the diabolical part that he

played that night. If it has not already done so, it certainly will catch him yet, if he lives long enough, for seek as we may we can none of us escape the penalty of our sinister plotting and misdeeds.

### **The Romance of Pemmican<sup>16</sup>**

In the month of June, 1899, the Government of Canada invited tenders for the supply of a quantity of pemmican to be used by that substantial division of the Canadian Northwest Mounted Police quartered in the mining district of the Yukon. The quantity required was ten tons, and bids were invited for the supply of the whole or any portion of it. It was to be put up in 50-pound rawhide sacks and to be of three qualities: the first, for human consumption, made from good steers and cows, and the second and third from bulls and coarse cattle and fat, healthy horses, for the sustenance of the transport equipment of the Yukon division—the trains of big “Huskie” sled dogs, animals best fitted to the purposes of winter travel in the inhospitable corners of the North.

That the tenderers were few seems probable from the fact that the pemmican was manufactured, during the following months of July and August, by the Mounted Police themselves, or rather by halfbreeds and Indians under supervision of members of the Force. Some five tons were put up at Duck Lake, on the Saskatchewan River. Nearly 100 head of cattle were purchased in the district and turned over to Joseph Parenteau, an old French-Cree halfbreed buffalo hunter, who had contracted at a cent a pound for the manufacture of pemmican. Parenteau engaged Cree Indians from the adjacent reservations to do the actual work, for which they received as payment the heads and offal of the slaughtered animals. A Sergeant-Major of the Mounted Police was on hand to superintend operations and see that no tainted or foreign ingredients went into the product.

Fifty years ago pemmican was, to the shifting and scant population of the Northwest, what flour is in the present day to English-speaking peoples in most civilized portions of the globe—the staple and most common food of the country. Then it was always made from the buffalo which covered the western plains. The great fur corporation known as the Hudson’s Bay Company bought hundreds of bags of the dark, nutritious compound annually from the Indians, for use at its trading posts scattered over the vast wilderness stretching from Red River and Hudson Bay to the Rocky Mountains and from the two Saskatchewan to the Arctic Sea, a region then designated Prince Rupert’s Land. Pemmican (or, more properly, pimeekon) is a Cree word, meaning a mixture, or something made with fat. It was composed of buffalo meat dried in the sun and pounded fine, mixed with melted fat; and was sewn up in sacks made from the rawhide of the buffalo, the hair outside. It did not look inviting, but was in fact wholesome, strong food which would keep for years. Besides, owing to its compactness, it was easily transported, an important consideration in the fur trade—particularly to the tripper and voyageur, whether by dog-sled, canoe or York boat. Flour, in those times, was something the great Company’s servant seldom saw; a small cake or two at Christmastide was a rare treat. And tea was little less of a luxury. But, so pemmican was plenty, the absence of these things was scarcely a deprivation to him, and the rugged Orkneyman or swart halfbreed, seated by the bank of some mighty inland stream or crouched in the snow over his camp fire of willows beside the frozen highway of the wilds, ate his chunk of the packed meat and drank his tin “pot” of cold water with greater relish, perhaps, even than the fastidious clubman disposed of his dinner and wine at his fashionable Gotham or London club. What was good enough for Jack was good enough for his master, too, and no Hudson’s Bay Company’s officer or clerk would despise a piece of good pemmican.

But if the buffalo was important to the fur trader, the ungainly animal was life itself to the redman; for it furnished him with everything his heart could desire or with the means of procuring it. And as, owing to the migratory instincts of the herds, which took them first into the recognized territory of one tribe and next into that of an enemy, fresh meat was not always obtainable, pemmican was the form in which the Indian preserved

and laid away his store of provisions against the day of scarcity.

Omitting the excitement of the hunt and substituting domestic herds for the wild ones of the plains, a description of pemmican making by the Indians a quarter of a century ago will give an idea of what might have been witnessed at Duck Lake in the summer of 1899.

Intelligence that a band of buffalo was in the vicinity threw the Indian camp at once into a state of violent excitement. Men rushed from the lodges, buckling on quivers of arrows and belts of cartridges, women talked and gesticulated, boys raced wildly about shouting shrilly to one another, the horse herd was driven in, and in a few minutes the bucks, mounted on their "buffalo-runners" and under the direction of the chief of the hunt, moved in a silent body out of the camp. On nearing the herd advantage was taken of each slight rise or dip to cover the approach, which was always up wind, so that the wary brutes should not catch the scent. Stealthily they rode, one behind another, until concealment was no longer possible. Then, at a signal from the chief, they burst upon the open plain, and dashed, yelling, at the top speed of their trained horses at the startled herd.

Usually it was some distance away—perhaps half-a-mile—and it took a good horse to overhaul a buffalo. Once up with the straining animals, however, their pace slackened, and the rest was comparatively easy. Onward galloped the hunters between the long, undulating files of shaggy, brown backs, picking out the fat cows and the young bulls at their leisure. And, as a feathered shaft left the snapping bowstring and a stricken beast tottered and went down, the loud, triumphant cry of the hunter rang out, and he tossed a moccasin or a beaded firebag beside it to mark his kill, and then flew on.

The chase might last as long as the horses' wind. When it was over the women came with the ponies and trailing travoys [travois] upon the field of slaughter. The carcasses were soon stripped of their hairy coats, the meat packed on the travoys, the bones broken and the marrow extracted, and loaded with the red spoil, the whole party returned to camp. Here, in an incredibly short time, the meat was cut in wide, thin sheets, and hung upon pole frames in the sun and wind to dry. After a day or two these sheets were removed and spread upon the clean prairie-grass, where, if the weather continued fair, they soon became as hard as shingles. They were then placed upon a hide threshing-floor with the sides elevated on short pegs to form a sort of basin and beaten with flails or between stones until the meat was reduced almost to a powder. The strange thing was that if properly handled the flesh seldom, if ever, became at all tainted, though in any other than dry, pure atmosphere of the Northwest such a method of preparing it would doubtless be impossible.

Meanwhile, the marrow and other choice fat had been rendered, and bags, some two feet by one and a half, of raw buffalo hide doubled over at the bottom and sewn up the sides with the sinew of the animal, made for the reception of the pemmican. The melted fat was next poured over the shredded meat in the threshing basin and the whole mixed to the consistency of paste. That was the pemmican. It was shoveled into the sacks, pounded down, and after the tops had been sewn up and the bags jumped upon to make them flat, the cooled pemmican packages were as solid and almost as hard as so many boulders. When you desired to eat pemmican you chopped a piece off with an axe, sack and all. The meat was already cooked in a measure by sun, wind and the hot fat, but if you preferred, after tearing off the adhering hide, you could fry it in a pan or boil it in a pot.

Only the leanest meat is used for pemmican. That which is streaked with fat and, therefore, will not get hard enough to pulverize well, is called dried meat. It is cut and cured in sheets like the other, but is afterward folded up and tied, half a dozen sheets together, into bales two feet square. Like pemmican the dried meat is nutritious, but it is not quite so palatable, especially if it has been made for a long time. Nor does it keep as well.

Such, twenty years ago, was pemmican making on the plains. Shooting cattle was tame sport compared with the buffalo chase, but when in 1900 the Indians learned of the call for tenders, they spoke together of the bountiful past and came 200 miles to feast and look on. For days the sheets of rich beef hung warping in the sun, and by night the tom-toms beat and quaint wild chants rose above a hundred camp fires.

The accompanying photographs<sup>17</sup> were taken at Duck Lake during the pemmican making. The first shows the initial step in the process—the steer just shot. Near his head stands the Sergeant-Major of the Mounted Police and the halfbreed contractor, Parenteau. Eyapais, a Salteaux Indian, kneels beside the dead animal. The frontispiece shows the beef drying on the pole frames, and in the illustration on this page some of the portions given the Indians in payment for work performed; these are also being prepared for future consumption.

Eighty-six animals, in all, were slaughtered, representing some 60,000 pounds of dressed fresh meat. From this was secured two tons, each first and second class pemmican, and one ton of dried meat, a total of 10,000 pounds. As the latter figures represent the full food product (including the tongues, which are dried) and nutritive strength of the 86 animals, it will be at once seen what an economical form of provision, for transportation purposes, pemmican is. When it is further recollected that in any moderately temperate climate it will keep for years, the idea suggests itself that pemmican might be a useful addition to the commissariat of a military campaign such as the British are now conducting in South Africa.

As nearly as may be estimated without official data, the cost to the Canadian Government of the pemmican made at Duck Lake—each pound of which was the equivalent of six pounds of fresh beef—would be about 40 cents per pound.

In the winter of 1881–2 I bought 50 pounds of pemmican from a halfbreed trader, for use on a 200-mile trip along the North Saskatchewan River. It had been made by the Blackfoot Indians and occasional buffalo hairs or stalks of dry grasses were found in it. Yet I have made many such trips since, and on none of them have I eaten meat more wholesome, sustaining, or that I more thoroughly enjoyed than my 50-pound lump of pemmican. The halfbreeds make a preparation of it which they call “rubaboo.” The pemmican is mixed with flour and water, seasoned and stewed in a frying pan. This I found the most appetizing form in which to eat it.

In the Athabasca and Mackenzie River districts of the Far North the Indians make a pemmican of moose and caribou flesh, mixed with dried wild fruit. It is called “berry pemmican,” and I have heard it compared with English plum-pudding. But the true “pemmican days” have gone with many other of the most picturesque features of the old Northwest life. Only the counterfeit remains.

## Notes

### Preface

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Flanagan, *Louis David Riel*, Historical booklet no. 50. (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1992), 4.

<sup>2</sup> W.B. Cameron, "W.B. Cameron's Life History," 1948, unpublished manuscript in the Cameron collection.

<sup>3</sup> Cameron, "Life History."

### Author's Notes

<sup>1</sup> Please see the Bank of Canada's Inflation Calculator at [http://www.bankofcanada.ca/en/rates/inflation\\_calc.html](http://www.bankofcanada.ca/en/rates/inflation_calc.html) and S. Morgan Friedman's Inflation Calculator (in US funds) at <http://www.westegg.com/inflation/>.

<sup>2</sup> The Appendix includes two of WB's finest short works, "Christmas at Frog Lake, 1884" and "The Romance of Pemican."

### In Search of WB

<sup>1</sup> There is a question of whether or not he was actually the curator, but he was definitely involved in collections and their organization, and also conducted some museum research.

### Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup> Reverend Canon William Bleasdel, "Trenton One Hundred Years Ago," in *The Evolution of Trenton: 1813-1913*, by Thomas Jarrett (Trenton, ON: 1913; Trenton: Kiwanis Service Club, reprinted in 1986), 5. Citations are to the 1986 edition.

<sup>2</sup> *Trenton Courier*, June 15, 1867.

<sup>3</sup> *Trenton Courier*, May 7, 1885.

<sup>4</sup> I was not able to determine if this house still remains.

<sup>5</sup> The Gills were influential business people in town. One son, Henry, would become one of Trenton's most successful businessmen in the early 1900s with the Gill and Fortune Lumber Merchants.

<sup>6</sup> Readers will enjoy the words of Ann Cameron, wife of one of WB's grandsons, Jim, who remarkably describes her own experience of the church long before she knew the Camerons. (Please see Chapter 10.)

<sup>7</sup> Norman Luxton, adventurer, journalist, and entrepreneur, was a colourful character in his own right, and his name lives on in the Luxton Museum (now called the Buffalo Nations Luxton Museum) in Banff.

<sup>8</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, November 19, 1948, Loon Lake, SK. Robert and Shirley Hendriks collection of William Bleasdel Cameron, Thomas A. Edge Archives & Special Collections, Athabasca University. Most letter citations, unless otherwise specified, are part of the Cameron collection.

<sup>9</sup> W.B. Cameron to R.H. Macdonald. R.H. Macdonald Papers, Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), Saskatoon, SK. I have not been able to determine exactly where or when he was buried.

<sup>10</sup> The *G.H. Detior Diary: Deaths and Acquaintances & Others* (Gen. Det. 001-2) from Trenton lists one John Cameron, Lumberman, as having passed away on September 1, 1875. Information courtesy of the late Marion Baker, Trent Port Historical Society, Genealogy Committee, personal communication to author, April 5, 2002. Of note is that she too lived on Byron Street in Trenton.

<sup>11</sup> W.B. Cameron to R.H. Macdonald. R.H. Macdonald Papers, SAB, Saskatoon.

<sup>12</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, January 17, 1949, Loon Lake.

<sup>13</sup> Day was also very civic minded, serving as a councillor and then mayor of Trenton (1881-1882). He was also Worshipful Master of Trent Lodge #38, A.F. & A.M., with WB's grandfather William Bleasdel in 1880, the year before WB left.

<sup>14</sup> His photograph in *The Evolution of Trenton* shows a heavy-set man in a suit with a string bow tie. He is bald, with a fringe of hair around his head and huge mutton chop whiskers.

<sup>15</sup> W.B. Cameron to Douglas Cameron, December 26, 1949, North Battleford.

<sup>16</sup>When WB was working for the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) at Frog Lake, North-West Territories (NWT), he became close friends with Stanley Simpson who was working for the HBC as a clerk and postmaster at Fort Pitt at the same time. Simpson, too, had only one eye. The local Aboriginal peoples found these glass eyes very mysterious. (See Appendix for further information.)

<sup>17</sup>Jarrett, *Evolution of Trenton*, 26.

<sup>18</sup>*Pioneer Life on the Bay of Quinte* (Toronto: Rolfe & Clarke, 1903), 127.

<sup>19</sup>It is not known whether or not WB attended his grandfather's funeral, as he was working in Regina at this time.

<sup>20</sup>Reverend Paul Kompass, pastor (retired) of St. George's Anglican Church, personal communication to author, July 27, 2002.

<sup>21</sup>*Trenton Courier*, January 13, 1887.

<sup>22</sup>Jarrett, *Evolution of Trenton*, 5.

<sup>23</sup>In early Trenton all streets and avenues were called streets.

<sup>24</sup>*Trenton Courier*, May 5, 1870.

<sup>25</sup>Among the students listed as high scorers, Reverend Bleasdel's youngest girl, Florence (WB's aunt), did well, scoring above 1,300 "credit points." It seems that 1,700 credit points gained a student top honours.

<sup>26</sup>It is unknown if Miss Price's school was able to continue.

<sup>27</sup>Please see Appendix for two of these short works, "Christmas at Frog Lake, 1884" and "The Romance of Pemmican."

<sup>28</sup>*Trenton Courier*, April 4, 1878. A.D.C. Hawley had established Trenton's first drugstore in 1851. The original building was later destroyed by fire.

<sup>29</sup>Fred and Ethel Hicks, interview with the author, January 20, 2002, Vegreville, AB. Ethel passed away in 2007.

<sup>30</sup>Doug Sumner, personal communication to author, July 16, 2002.

<sup>31</sup>Also of interest is the fact that WB's uncle A.W. Bleasdel later opened the People's Drug Store in Pincher Creek, in 1888.

<sup>32</sup>Carrot River is east of Prince Albert in Saskatchewan.

<sup>33</sup>*Trenton Courier*, November 14, 1878.

<sup>34</sup>NWMP Reg. No. 192 Sub-Constable Joseph B. Woods enlisted at Toronto on April 1, 1874, and is believed to have been part of the March West in that year. Most of his service was at Fort Walsh. He was discharged at Fort Walsh on April 12, 1877, upon completion of service, but remained in the West.

<sup>35</sup>What I am about to describe is what WB likely first experienced over a century ago. Sitting in a circle on the grass, in my case high on a hill overlooking the North Saskatchewan River, I watched silently as the pipe bowl and wooden stem were removed by the spiritual leader from separate compartments in a beaded bag, and then purified over a smudge fire made from sweetgrass. This one was made of a dark soapstone, but red pipe stone was often used as well. The shaman then loaded the bowl with a form of tobacco, kinnikinic, made from the inner bark of the red osier or dogwood. Each pinch was prayed over and then offered to each of the four winds, starting in the west, then to the sky and finally to Mother Earth before the bowl was joined to the stem. The pipe was then lit and passed around. Upon my turn, when the pipe was ceremoniously offered to me, I took a puff or two of the bittersweet smoke, blew it out and watched as it rose to the sky, symbolizing an offering to God by those who smoked within the circle.

<sup>36</sup>W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, February 28, 1948, Glenbow Archives.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>This episode in American history that took place in northern Montana is commonly known as the Battle of Little Bighorn, but the Battle of Greasy Grass is preferred by the Sioux.

<sup>40</sup>T.E. Mails, *The Mystic Warriors of the Plains* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972).

<sup>41</sup>Cameron, "W.B. Cameron's Life History," 1948, unpublished manuscript in the Cameron collection.

<sup>42</sup>W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, February 28, 1948. There is no proof that the bloodstains are those of Custer.

<sup>43</sup>I must mention an interesting ad that was carried in the June 24, 1869, edition of the *Courier* promoting the Leffel Water Turbine now being sold by Mr. G. Young of Trenton, vaunted to be the most efficient water turbine of the century. It read, in part, "Leffel's Celebrated American Double Turbine Water Wheels, the most perfect and economical waterwheel in use." WB may not have paid any heed to it but I certainly did because in sixteen short years this turbine would be historically connected to him forever. In the early spring of 1885, while a clerk with the HBC at Frog Lake, NWT, WB watched a large turbine being hauled past him on its way to the creek a few kilometres west, loaded on a sleigh pulled by a fine team of horses driven by Metis freighter Harry Sayers. The equipment to be installed shortly in Frog Creek by Johnny Gowanlock and Dick Laurie. The turbine was to power the grist and sawmill then being constructed by them under contract for the Department of the Interior. I also noted an ad in the October 21, 1878, edition of the *Courier* that J.H. Vrooman's store was advertising fifty buffalo robes for sale for \$3.50 and \$6.00. Apparently some had more holes in them or were smaller, hence the price difference. "No humbug, no second price" the ad stated. The ad does not say where they came from. But another *Courier* ad, this one from March 1880, must have caught WB's eye and inspired a feeling of pride. *Belford's Canadian Monthly*, apparently a popular magazine, featured "The National Development of Canada." The magazine's table of contents lists an article written by John George Bourinot, who would soon marry WB's eldest sister, Isabelle, becoming his brother-in-law.

## Chapter 2

<sup>1</sup>W.B. Cameron, "La Belle Qu'Appelle, A Prospect of the West As it Was In The Wild Days," *Free Press*, June 11, 1927. Robert and Shirley Hendriks collection of William Bleasdel Cameron, Thomas A. Edge Archives & Special Collections, Athabasca University. Some other newspaper citations are also part of the Cameron collection. Please also note that every effort has been made to maintain title capitalization as it originally appeared, in either published or unpublished form.

<sup>2</sup>This line was fast becoming one of the most infamous branch lines in Canada, hastily built, its bridges teetering, and only one water tank to service the steam engines in the sixty-three miles (just over one hundred kilometres) to Winnipeg.

<sup>3</sup>Before long, WB would meet Father Fafard there, a priest destined for martyrdom.

<sup>4</sup>Edmonton's population was only 263 in 1881.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas Flanagan, *Louis David Riel* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1992), 3.

<sup>6</sup>Insider information about Winnipeg development including this HBC Reserve property was circulating among Company employees, who began to madly buy up lots. In fact, in 1881 the chief commissioner for HBC, James A. Grahame, and some of his cronies bought fifty-six of these lots for \$280,000 and then sold just eleven of them two weeks later for \$275,000. When one considers that a good life could be lived for about \$1,200 a year, they had made a small fortune.

<sup>7</sup>All that can be seen today is the original Fort Garry stone gate located near the modern Fort Garry Hotel.

<sup>8</sup>Today they are known as the Anishnabe (Plains Ojibway or Saulteaux).

<sup>9</sup>W.B. Cameron, "The Trail of 1881" *Beaver*, March 1943: 42–45. This is where the article originally appeared; the magazine at that time was published quarterly in Winnipeg by the HBC.

<sup>10</sup>Shirley and I lived in Winnipeg at one time and like WB, we wandered about in the old downtown area, truly enjoying the adventure, enthralled with the old buildings still in existence.

<sup>11</sup>This intersection would become the famous Portage and Main, purportedly the coldest, windiest winter corner in Canada.

<sup>12</sup>Today, this area is roughly bounded on the north by the bus station on Portage, the Winnipeg Art Gallery on Memorial and on down to the Manitoba Legislative Building on Broadway.

<sup>13</sup>W.B. Cameron, "Cart Transportation in the Early West," *Western Producer*, December 1, 1949. Also published in R.H. Macdonald, ed., *EyeWitness to History: William Bleasdel Cameron, Frontier Journalist* (Saskatoon, SK: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1985), 14–19.

<sup>14</sup>A thole pin is in my personal collection.

<sup>15</sup>In the article WB mentions the use of metal bushings inside the wheels introduced at a later date.

Further evidence of bushings in Red River cart wheels was found in the Fort Pitt Inventory of 1884, where one could buy a cart without bushings for \$12 and one with bushings for \$15. See Rebellion Claims and Losses, Reel 4M17/E.9/1, Hudson's Bay Company Archives—Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

<sup>16</sup>In July 1883, McPherson and John Coleman won a mail contract to deliver between Edmonton and Calgary every two weeks. They started a passenger and express service as well. In 1899, McPherson and J.J. Cooper opened a high-grade coal mine in the Black Diamond-Turner Valley area. This mine site can still be seen today.

<sup>17</sup>W.B. Cameron to Kenneth Coppock, August 19, 1949, Meadow Lake, SK.

<sup>18</sup>Cameron, "Trail of 1881," *Beaver*, 42.

<sup>19</sup>Fort Ellice is located just west of St. Lazare, Manitoba.

<sup>20</sup>*Saskatchewan Herald*, September 18, 1881.

<sup>21</sup>Cameron, "Cart Transportation in the Early West," in *Eyewitness to History*, 15.

<sup>22</sup>The *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* defines a cayuse as "a feral or domesticated mustang or pony in the North American West, especially one tamed by Aboriginal peoples."

<sup>23</sup>Cameron, "Cart Transportation in the Early West," in *Eyewitness to History*, 17.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>Cameron, "Trail of 1881," *Beaver*, 44.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>28</sup>Venne was a free trader from Batoche. He had been found in possession of stolen HBC goods towards the end of April 1885, allegedly booty from looting the Green Lake post east of Meadow Lake, but I do not know if he was ever charged.

<sup>29</sup>W.B. Cameron, "A Reconnaissance At Fort Ellice," *Toronto Saturday Night*, Christmas Number, 1895.

<sup>30</sup>Shirley and I on occasion volunteer to help run a local jamboree. Many of the musicians are of Metis descent, and as I watch them dance or play the fiddle it's thrilling, knowing that the melodies and the steps have not changed in centuries and that I'm witnessing Metis history coming alive again.

<sup>31</sup>Cameron, "Trail of 1881," in *Eyewitness to History*, 19.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup>WB had memories of this place too, as seen in his writing of "La Belle Qu'Appelle" in the *Free Press* in 1927 and "The Historic Vale of La Belle Qu'Appelle," publisher and date unknown. Treaty Four was signed in 1874 near here, marked by a monument erected in 1915.

<sup>35</sup>In all there were four trading posts built in this area at different times, the last being in 1879. These posts were a supply depot of dried buffalo meat, grease and pemmican for posts from as far south as Fort Ellice and north to Prince Albert.

<sup>36</sup>Desmond Morton and Reginald H. Roy, eds., *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1972).

<sup>37</sup>Cameron, "Trail of 1881," *Beaver*, 45.

<sup>38</sup>In recent years, the building was renamed Territorial House. Despite valiant efforts by at least two Battleford historical groups, little progress was made in gaining title and commencing restoration of this historically important structure. The building was destroyed by vandalism in the spring of 2003.

<sup>39</sup>Walter Hildebrandt, *Views from Fort Battleford: Constructed Visions of an Anglo-Canadian West* (Regina, SK: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1994), 21.

<sup>40</sup>*Saskatchewan Herald*, February 25, 1882.

<sup>41</sup>*Saskatchewan Herald*, March 11, 1882.

<sup>42</sup>*Saskatchewan Herald*, April 12, 1882.

<sup>43</sup>Contest information supplied in part by historian Bob Beal. The *Saskatchewan Herald* stated the contest was in the log billiard hall owned by Grew and Paton. WB met F. Stanley Simpson, said to be

a nephew of Sir George Simpson, either before or shortly after WB's arrival in Battleford. The two men became fast friends.

<sup>44</sup>The exact location has not been determined. Saskatchewan began selling information about land titles through its Information Services Corporation (ISC) of Saskatchewan in Regina. Without a specific land description or an old map showing names of early homesteads, my title search quickly became convoluted, complicated and expensive.

<sup>45</sup>The *Saskatchewan Herald*, June 10, 1882, shows a land sketch with T.T. Quinn on the left, then William Parker, Mr. Clink and then E.C. Baker. WB's property would have been nearby. Claim jumping was not unknown in situations where new land was being offered at low prices, a result of the Dominion Lands Act (often called the Homestead Act), but it was illegal, and the original land claimant often took the case to court. WB became involved in just such a situation in 1882, a landmark case in how land claims were being administered and controlled. Newspaperman P.G. Laurie, known for his inquiring nature, followed the case closely. Land claims were being filed almost daily by the many settlers arriving. The Homestead Act allowed each claimant with options for more land, but the "more" was sometimes stretched by claimants, as NWMP Superintendent William Herchmer, commanding officer of Fort Battleford, had done. He grabbed 820 acres (over 320 hectares) west of the NWMP Barracks on the old Fort Edmonton trail. Sometime later, William Macdonnell, "guided" by WB, laid claim to the same land. Herchmer took Macdonnell to court for claim jumping, appearing before Magistrate William Forget in June 1882. WB testified as a witness that neither he nor Macdonnell had seen any claim stakes. The jury could reach no verdict so the case was adjourned until July 10, 1882. At this time the jury found no fault, although Macdonnell admitted to trespassing. The charge was dismissed, but WB learned the law of the land cannot be disregarded. This case also brought about a complete review of land claim procedures while tightening up how much land any one settler could claim.

<sup>46</sup>*Saskatchewan Herald*, September 30, 1882. Please see the Appendix for further information on the unethical dealings of the Prince Albert Colonization Company.

<sup>47</sup>J.S. Macdonald, *The Dominion Telegraph*, vol. 1, no. VI (Battleford, SK: Canadian North-West Historical Society Publications, 1930).

<sup>48</sup>This telegraph station operated by Robert McKernan was located in the alkali bottom of Grizzly Bear Coulee about eighteen and a half miles (thirty kilometres) southeast of Vermilion, Alberta. During a visit there I could see the cellar where the building stood. Scattered about were bits of broken insulators and wet cell batteries.

<sup>49</sup>*Saskatchewan Herald*, October 28, 1882.

<sup>50</sup>W.B. Cameron, "The Tale of a Shirt," *Waverley Magazine*, December 1, 1894.

<sup>51</sup>A Victorian innovation, Penny Readings were explained by Charles Dickens as "instruction and amusement for the lower classes" but were simply a social evening out for all, admission being "a penny." The "amateur night" popular in rural areas was very similar.

<sup>52</sup>*Saskatchewan Herald*, April 14, 1883.

<sup>53</sup>Meaning "tongue-tied" in Cree.

<sup>54</sup>W.B. Cameron to Kenneth Coppock, August 5, 1949, Meadow Lake. Glenbow Archives. It seems an odd comment since this country is noted for its long views: unless they were travelling by night or in fog, they should have been able to see the siding from a great distance away.

<sup>55</sup>*Mail*, April 12, 1885. "Battleford to beginning of woods on Eagle Hills 4 miles [6.4 kilometres]; woods to valley of alkaline lakes [1] mile [1.6 kilometres]; alkaline lakes to end of bluffs 8 miles [13 kilometres]; end of bluffs to beginning of [new] bluffs 2 miles [3 kilometres]; bluffs to Eagle Hill Creek 8 miles [13 kilometres]" and so on.

<sup>56</sup>Harry Sanders uses the word *sawaums*, meaning "holy headdress" in Blackfoot. See Harry M. Sanders, *The Story Behind Alberta Place Names* (Calgary: Red Deer Press, 2003), 213.

<sup>57</sup>Grant had the distinction of laying eight miles (thirteen kilometres) of track in one day at Alderson, near today's town of Brooks. Natural gas was also discovered here by a water-well drilling crew. By the 1890s, Grant became president of the Great Falls and Canada Railway, contracting to build a railroad line from Great Falls to the American border, hooking up to the Alberta and Great Waterways Railway running south from Lethbridge. See George H. Buck, *From Summit to Sea: An Illustrated History of Railroads in British Columbia and Alberta* (Calgary: Fifth House Publishers, 1997).

<sup>58</sup>This bridge was the largest on the line so far, over 985 feet (300 metres) long. It was later taken down and replaced by a new iron structure.

<sup>59</sup>What he may not have known was that early land speculators had paid certain “settlers” to take up plots in an area that would later be totally unaffected by development, in effect creating a bogus land rush and sky-high land prices. *Saskatchewan Herald*, October 28, 1882.

<sup>60</sup>*Daily Post*, May 15, 1928.

<sup>61</sup>W.B. Cameron, “Life History.”

<sup>62</sup>Cameron, “Life History.” WB did not mention that in 1894, Cushing contracted to build the Calgary General Hospital, demolished in recent times. Along with Senator James Lougheed and Reverend Kerby, among others, Cushing had been a founding member of Calgary’s United (Methodist) Church built in 1904–1905, when he was owner of Cushing Bros. Ltd. “Greatest Window and Door Manufacturing Company in Western Canada,” supplying the decorative woodwork and doors.

<sup>63</sup>Buck, *From Summit to Sea*, 121.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 107, 135.

<sup>65</sup>Cameron, “Life History.”

<sup>66</sup>Major Walker was a former NWMP Inspector.

<sup>67</sup>Donald Edward Brown, “The Cochrane Ranche,” *Alberta Historical Review* 4, Autumn (1956), 3–8.

<sup>68</sup>While in the south country, he had the opportunity to meet many of the West’s colourful characters such as Sam Livingston, an old time buffalo hunter dubiously credited with killing the last wild buffalo in what is now a Calgary suburb.

<sup>69</sup>Half Scottish, half Piegan (or Blood, as some historians say), Potts became acclaimed as a scout and interpreter for the NWMP. A man of few words, he often shortened Siksika (Blackfoot) names when he translated. Many towns in southern Alberta used his version, such as Old Man’s River (now abbreviated further to the Oldman River) that in Blackfoot used to be “the river the Old Man played on.” He died on July 14, 1896, and is buried in the police cemetery in Fort Macleod.

<sup>70</sup>“No kicking regarding the quality or quantity of meals will be allowed . . . Assaults on the cook are strictly forbidden,” and “To attract attention of waiters or bell boys, shoot a hole through the door panel. Two shots for ice water, three for a deck of cards and so forth.”

<sup>71</sup>*Saskatchewan Herald*, October 17, 1884. “Inspector Howe and 14 men arrived from Battleford as part of the regular staff.” Howe was wounded in the leg at the Battle of Duck Lake.

<sup>72</sup>W.B. Cameron, “Under the Snow,” *Outing* February (1897): 419–423.

<sup>73</sup>Pincher Creek was so named because an old pair of wire cutters had been found near where the townsite was later located.

<sup>74</sup>*Macleod Gazette*, August 29, 1884. This newspaper, established by ex-NWMP members C.E.C. Wood and E.T. Saunders, was to be the oldest continuously published newspaper in what became Alberta. Melanie St. Amour, Reference and Information Service, Library and Archives Canada, personal communication to author, October 27, 2002.

<sup>75</sup>WB was very secretive about how he financed any of his numerous ventures.

<sup>76</sup>WB never mentioned the fact that A.W. Bleasdel was his uncle. A graduate of the Ontario College of Pharmacy, he practised in Winnipeg before moving to Fort Macleod in 1887. In time, he operated a series of drugstores throughout BC.

<sup>77</sup>“Old Comrades Review Story Frontier War,” *Cranbrook Courier*, November 24, 1927.

<sup>78</sup>See WB’s story “The Three Scouts” in *Eyewitness to History*.

<sup>79</sup>The Siksika tribe, once known as Blackfoot because of their foot travel over burned and blackened ground, dominated much of the southern plains. They were aggressive, warlike and feared by many.

<sup>80</sup>W.B. Cameron [Utamakan, pseud.], “Law and Kiskawasis,” *Scarlet and Gold* 12th annual (1931): 53–57. WB sometimes used pseudonyms in his writing, many in his stories published in the Royal North West Mounted Police Veteran’s Association “A” Division annual magazine, *Scarlet and Gold*, when he was its “editor” in 1931. He might have used these pseudonyms to make it appear there were many other contributors, or perhaps it was just his way of getting published. Primarily he used Aboriginal names. Examples include Musquash, “My Old Guitar,” *Canadian Magazine* May

(1898): 58, and Camp Crier, "Taming Sitting Bull," *Scarlet and Gold*, 12th annual (1931): 99. There were also other stories published in the *Scarlet and Gold*, and similar magazines, written by others using Aboriginal names (for example, Waseecha Hoska, "The Brand of Cain and An Idyll of Lake Qu'Appelle," who was actually RNWMP Staff Sergeant George W. Guernsey).

<sup>81</sup> R.H. Macdonald Papers, SAB, Saskatoon.

<sup>82</sup> There is ample evidence that Charles was with WB on this trip, but WB chose to leave him out, one of many irregularities and possibly wilful omissions we find in some of his tales.

<sup>83</sup> Cameron, "Law and Kiskawasis," 53.

<sup>84</sup> Sir Cecil Denny, *The Law Marches West*, ed. W.B. Cameron. 2nd ed. (Moreton-in-March, Gloucestershire, UK: Denny Publishing Limited, 2000), 89.

<sup>85</sup> Later renamed Fort Calgary.

<sup>86</sup> Denny, *Law Marches West*, 90.

<sup>87</sup> Cameron, "Law and Kiskawasis," 55.

<sup>88</sup> A combined audio/video copy of the 1950 Elk Point Bridge opening, including WB's speech, was given to me by the Elk Point Historical Society, and is now part of the Cameron collection. CFRN, an Edmonton radio station, recorded the audio portion for broadcast.

<sup>89</sup> In fact, it was 1884.

<sup>90</sup> This ford, locally called Hood's Crossing, was used until the government ferry was built in 1913 and even after that, I'm told.

<sup>91</sup> *Saskatchewan Herald*, May 31, 1884.

<sup>92</sup> This program was intended to teach First Nations peoples how to raise their own food and also to help support existing villages like Frog Lake.

<sup>93</sup> *Saskatchewan Herald*, May 17, 1884.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Onion Lake was small settlement on the Seekaskootch Indian Reserve midway between Fort Pitt and Frog Lake.

<sup>96</sup> *Saskatchewan Herald*, August 1, 1884.

<sup>97</sup> *Saskatchewan Herald*, October 4, 1884. There were many traders at Pitt, including WB, for the treaty payments. Apparently, prices were cut to the bone and no one did well.

<sup>98</sup> *Saskatchewan Herald*, September 6, 1884.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> R.H. Macdonald Papers, SAB, Saskatoon.

<sup>101</sup> *Saskatchewan Herald*, December 12, 1884.

<sup>102</sup> A postmaster in early HBC days meant just that—an employee who managed the place. But in later years, it seems to have reverted more to that of looking after mail and dispatches.

<sup>103</sup> R.H. Macdonald Papers, SAB, Saskatoon.

<sup>104</sup> *Saskatchewan Herald*, December 12, 1884.

<sup>105</sup> *Saskatchewan Herald*, May 17, 1886.

### Chapter 3

<sup>1</sup> Immediately west of Frog Lake proper lies Puskiakiwenin Reserve #122. To the south, around but not including the Frog Lake National Historic Site, lies Unipouheos Reserve #121.

<sup>2</sup> Erected in 1925 by the Frys, a local family, using fieldstone collected nearby by Metis Pierre Gladue.

<sup>3</sup> The Oblates placed this marker in the 1930s in memory of Fathers Fafard and Marchand.

<sup>4</sup> Such mounds would likely be remnants of collapsed chimneys, rubble piles, wells, or dirt piles from early excavation.

<sup>5</sup> W.B. Cameron, *The War Trail of Big Bear* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1926), 12.

<sup>6</sup> Quiet rumours indicate that this flag still exists somewhere on one of the two Frog Lake reserves.

<sup>7</sup> I did a low-level aerial photographic survey in late March 1990, when the snow was nearly gone and the grass was still pressed down. Not only did the furrows show up clearly but so did Delaney's

garden north of the house, its location until this time unknown.

<sup>8</sup>Among these families was Peter St. Luke, a man about whom little is known.

<sup>9</sup>Isabelle Little Bear John “My Own Story” in *Reflections* (Elk Point, AB: Elk Point Historical Society, 1977). Her story originally appeared in a 1968 *Bonnyville Tribune* article written by Ovi E. Baril, “My Own Story, Isabelle Little Bear John, One Of The Last Remaining Links With Riel Rebellion.” Interestingly, she refers to the HBC store operated by Glass Eyes (that would be WB); the writer, Baril, assumed WB wore glasses and did not know of the glass eye. There is a photo of WB sitting on a saddle horse in front of the cairn. He was quite old by then, in his late seventies or early eighties.

<sup>10</sup>Big Bear had three different camps, the first established in late fall of 1884 a mile (a kilometre or two) west of the settlement. It was moved during the night before the massacre to what was known as Smoking Hill, about a mile (a kilometre and a half) north of the settlement. This was the camp in which the prisoners were first held. The third and final camp was in the spruce east of Smoking Hill.

<sup>11</sup>Armour’s Corned Beef was made in Chicago. Remnants of these corned beef cans can still be seen poking out of eroded spots about the site.

<sup>12</sup>W.B. Cameron, “Christmas at Frog Lake, 1884,” SAB, Saskatoon. This story was originally published in the *Vermilion Signal*, January 2, 1908. The complete story appears in the Appendix and a photocopy of the story can be found in the Cameron collection.

<sup>13</sup>In Cree meaning “little bad man.” Gabe Dion, a great-grandson of Big Bear and resident of Frog Lake, was later jokingly called that by his grandmother (his kookum).

<sup>14</sup>Bob Beal and Rod Macleod, *Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1984). Also see Rudy Wiebe and Bob Beal, eds., *War in the West: Voices of the 1885 Rebellion* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1985).

<sup>15</sup>Beal had warned me that there was a five-year period where HBC records are completely missing and it could be that the information I needed was just not available.

<sup>16</sup>Post History: Post Managers, 1885, March-April: William Bleasdel Cameron, Clerk (E.9/27 fo. 199–204). Hudson’s Bay Company Archives—Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

<sup>17</sup>Deposition given by James K. Simpson, Fort Pitt, August 4, 1885.

<sup>18</sup>Employees were allowed to trap furs to supplement their wage and reduce the monotony. WB did not take part but he occasionally helped Stanley Simpson with his trapline at Fort Pitt.

<sup>19</sup>Fort Alexander is known today as Sagkeeng First Nation, Pine Falls, Manitoba.

<sup>20</sup>The HBC, when making claims in 1886 for Rebellion losses, valued the store at \$300 but the dwelling at \$700. See Rebellion Claims and Losses, 1886, Reel 4M17/E.9/1, Hudson’s Bay Company Archives—Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

<sup>21</sup>Sheila J. Minnie, Archaeological Investigation of the Frog Lake Massacre Site, FkOo 10, prepared for the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, September 1985.

<sup>22</sup>W.B. Cameron, “Christmas at Fort Pitt,” *Beaver*, December (1945), and “New Year’s Day at a Hudson’s Bay Fur Post,” *Outing*, January (1899).

<sup>23</sup>This arduous journey would, by boat, take perhaps two days.

<sup>24</sup>HBC Post records, Hudson’s Bay Company Archives—Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

<sup>25</sup>On his speaking tours, he often demonstrated some of this sign language he once used, which was generally a big hit with the audience.

<sup>26</sup>Fragments of this pattern continue to appear on the site, pushed up to the surface by moles or exposed by erosion.

<sup>27</sup>A made beaver was usually a wooden token representing one beaver pelt.

<sup>28</sup>W.B. Cameron, *Blood Red the Sun*, 5th ed. (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1977). Readers should be aware that W.B. Cameron’s book was originally called *The War Trail of Big Bear* and later changed to *Blood Red the Sun*.

<sup>29</sup>Harry Prest, “William Bleasdel Cameron,” in *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Canadian Writers before 1890*, ed. W.H. New (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1990), 58.

<sup>30</sup>Macdonald, *Eyewitness to History*, xxv.

<sup>31</sup>Wandering Spirit, a well-known troublemaker, had been with Big Bear’s band for a number of years. In an 1878 protest, Big Bear’s band stopped a government crew surveying around the Red

Deer and Bow rivers, and Wandering Spirit destroyed survey markers. Arrested by the NWMP, he appeared in a Fort Walsh court, where he was admonished but set free.

<sup>32</sup>The Rattler Society was a Cree warrior group, the fighters. It was quite elite, with warriors chosen for strength and bravery. Most bands had them in their membership.

<sup>33</sup>*Mail*, April 10, 1885.

<sup>34</sup>Cameron, *War Trail of Big Bear*, 76. Generally, Bay men were highly respected by Aboriginal peoples. In fact, WB later stated that no employee of the Company had ever been killed, even during the Rebellion, and history bears this out.

<sup>35</sup>Cameron, *Blood Red the Sun*, 57.

<sup>36</sup>Cameron, *War Trail of Big Bear*, 86.

<sup>37</sup>In English, the name means He-Who-Stands Up-Before-Him or Tall Man. Spellings of his name vary, WB's variation being Oneepohayo.

<sup>38</sup>Charles Pelham Mulvaney, *The History of the North-West Rebellion of 1885* (Toronto: A.H. Hovey and Co., 1885; facsimile edition, Toronto: Coles, 1971), 94. This was one of the first in-depth books published about the Rebellion.

<sup>39</sup>WB proudly showed this pencilled note during his speaking tours. It was not in the collection that we received, having disappeared several years ago, as noted by WB's daughter-in-law Elsie Cameron.

<sup>40</sup>Catherine Simpson is alleged to be Gabriel Dumont's sister. This was her second marriage, with her sons Louis and Ben being from her first marriage to Louis Patenaude, an Assiniboine. No one in this family was ever truly prisoner. Louis became WB's protector. The Simpson family later settled in the Fort Pitt area.

<sup>41</sup>James (Jim) Keith Simpson was Metis, a son of Sir George Simpson, a governor of the HBC, and Mary Keith. Simpson was noted for his fine horses. He died at Onion Lake on December 22, 1901. See Doug Light, *Footprints in the Dust* (North Battleford, SK: Turner-Warwick, 1987), 208.

<sup>42</sup>This information is courtesy Sam Barstad. Sarah Carter noted this too, but named Mrs. John Horse as one of the two women. See *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear: The Life and Adventures of Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney, with a Scholarly Introduction by Sarah Carter* (Regina, SK: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1999), xxi. See also Beal and Macleod, *Prairie Fire*, 202.

<sup>43</sup>Mails, *Mystic Warriors*. This reference was used by Kevin Costner while preparing to film *Dances with Wolves* (1990).

<sup>44</sup>A modern form of this blanket or robe is seen in the social habit among teenaged Aboriginal (and other) students to wear a hooded pullover, the hoodie. Normally, the hoods are thrown back and the student acts quite normally, but occasionally the hood is up, the student's demeanour clearly showing that he or she is having a bad hair day or simply wants to be left alone.

<sup>45</sup>W.B. Cameron, *War Trail of Big Bear*, 173.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup>Light, *Footprints in the Dust*, 208. Sarah Carter concurs with Light's assertion. See Carter's introduction in *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear*.

<sup>48</sup>Guillaume Charette, *Vanishing Spaces: Memoirs of Louis Goulet* (Winnipeg: Editions Bois-Brûlés, 1976), 131. In this work, Goulet refers to Dufresne as Old Man Dufresne. He worked for T.T. Quinn at Frog Lake while his family lived at Fort Pitt. This indicates that he did spend some time at Frog Lake and could well have been there on April 2. Dufresne was related to interpreter John Pritchard by marriage.

<sup>49</sup>Mulvaney, *History of the North-West Rebellion*. Mulvaney may have quoted from a published report of prisoners held by Big Bear that appeared in either the *Saskatchewan Herald* or the *Mail* (based in Toronto).

<sup>50</sup>Dickens was a son of the novelist Charles Dickens.

<sup>51</sup>Dufresne is buried in the Roman Catholic Cemetery at Onion Lake.

<sup>52</sup>In later years, when WB was in Vermilion, Kuehn had the pleasure of giving him a haircut.

<sup>53</sup>Todd Kuehn, interview with the author, September 14, 2003, Vermilion, AB.

<sup>54</sup>Chester Botting, interview with the author, November 12, 1992, Heinsburg, AB. Botting further relates that he had helped WB carry some freight from the CNR station to the drugstore. Receiving

little for his labour, he “liberated” an ivory toothbrush from the drugstore as compensation.

<sup>55</sup>F.O. Seward, “The Unveiling of [the] Frog Lake Massacre Cairn,” document written in Kitscoty, AB, n.d., in the author’s possession. A closer examination of this document reveals more interesting information about WB’s relationship with the two First Nations reserves at Frog Lake. A businessman in Kitscoty, and one who was keenly interested in local history, Seward voluntarily made two car trips to Frog Lake when the unveiling of the cairn took place (see Chapter 6).

Seward describes the unveiling of the cairn by WB, and when all had been said and done, the ceremony apparently over, an Aboriginal man appeared “out of the bush,” asking to be allowed to speak. His name was George Stanley, and had at one time been chief at Frog Lake. Bareheaded, with an eagle plume in his hair, he took his place before the cairn and for some time appeared to be struggling to give his speech. In time he spoke, in Cree, which was translated to the effect that on behalf of the band, he wanted to shake hands with Judge Howay, who was representing the federal Historic Sites and Monuments Board.

Seward gave Stanley’s apparent stage shock some thought and, based on what he learned later, it seems that Stanley was struggling with whether or not he should give the speech prepared for him by Alex Peterson, one of the organizers of the unveiling, or speak in his own words about events of April 2, 1885, as he knew them. Stanley seems to have chosen to do neither, but from what Seward learned later, it was the younger men from the reserves who had been aggressive that fateful day, because WB and other whites “had won the favour of the young squaws” and all that comes with it, and Stanley may have been one of those angry young men.

This seems to confirm both Chester Botting and Todd Kuehn’s observations outlined above.

<sup>56</sup>The current term would be post-traumatic stress disorder.

<sup>57</sup>Cameron, *War Trail of Big Bear*, 11.

<sup>58</sup>Charette, *Vanishing Spaces*, 128.

<sup>59</sup>Eileen Lacoursiere, Paynton, SK, personal communication to author, June 7 and June 24, 2002. Eileen is the granddaughter of Mary Rose Pritchard, eleven years old at the time, a daughter of John and Rose Pritchard who were living at the settlement.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Bitterness about how John Pritchard was judged runs deep. A comment in the *Saskatchewan Herald*, June 8, 1885, states that John “Pritchard is said to be armed and acting more like an Indian than a prisoner.”

<sup>62</sup>The flagrant abuse of such sacred items greatly bothered WB.

<sup>63</sup>Cameron, *War Trail of Big Bear*, 109.

<sup>64</sup>Stands of dark spruce still remain, with some of the older trees dating back to WB’s time.

<sup>65</sup>The two Therasas suffered terrible anguish and depression from their ordeals. Theresa Gowanlock died at age thirty-six, never fully recovering. Theresa Delaney lived until age sixty-four. WB recovered, living to almost eighty-nine.

<sup>66</sup>Cameron, *War Trail of Big Bear*, 134. Five of the victims were left where they died on April 2, denied burial by the war chief, until the Militia arrived in late May. Only then were they given proper burials.

<sup>67</sup>W.B. Cameron, “Thirst Dance and A Fin-flash.” *Free Press*, July 3, 1926.

<sup>68</sup>David Elliot, “In Defense of Big Bear: The Role of Henry Ross Halpin,” *Prairie Forum* vol. 28, no.1 (Spring 2003): 33, copy courtesy of Vaughan Smith.

<sup>69</sup>Captain La Touche Tupper, 92nd Winnipeg Light Infantry, in a letter to a friend, subsequently published in the *Minnedosa Tribune*, May 22, 1885. See *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear*, xxvii.

<sup>70</sup>Cameron, *War Trail of Big Bear*, 195.

<sup>71</sup>The key’s current whereabouts are unknown.

<sup>72</sup>Cameron, *War Trail of Big Bear*, 203.

<sup>73</sup>Cameron, *Blood Red the Sun*, 181.

<sup>74</sup>Cameron, *War Trail of Big Bear*, 212.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>WB’s story “Mopping Up 1885” nicely covers this episode. In modified form, it was published by the *Beaver* in September 1952. (The *Beaver* did not make mention of WB’s recent death.)

<sup>77</sup> Verne June Goodwin [née Macadam], *A Scot Named Macadam: The Battlefords North-West Historical Society Inc Newsletter* 1, no. 2 (December 2003). Battleford physician Dr. S. Macadam, an appointed Alberta Field Force surgeon, attended the warrior, keeping him alive while he was prisoner. Wandering Spirit was hanged at Battleford with seven others on November 27, 1885.

<sup>78</sup> Cameron, *War Trail of Big Bear*, 217.

<sup>79</sup> WB often demonstrated the flint and steel to crowds attending his talks. Its whereabouts today is not known.

<sup>80</sup> While further into my research at the Glenbow, I was amazed to discover that ten years after relieving Wandering Spirit of what later would become historically precious items, WB also got his hands on a pipe once belonging to Imasees, acquiring it in 1895. This catlinite pipe in the shape of a tomahawk was inlaid with lead to form turtle shapes. As with the fire bag, this item was passed on to Norman Luxton, and eventually was given by him to the Glenbow.

<sup>81</sup> Isabelle Cameron to W.B. Cameron, April 27, 1885, Toronto.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Here she is referring to the Queen's Own Rifles (Q.O.R.). This fellow was J.P. Edgar, 2nd Company, Q.O.R. His father was an MP.

<sup>84</sup> Agnes Cameron to W.B. Cameron, April 27, 1885, Toronto.

<sup>85</sup> Maude Cameron to W.B. Cameron, Toronto, October 8, 1885. She would have been twelve years old.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Fred White, Comptroller, NWMP, to William Bleasdel, April 28, 1885, Ottawa. Ref. No. 307. The Cameron collection.

<sup>88</sup> Agnes Emma Bleasdel to W.B. Cameron, Toronto, June 14, 1885. This letter, "interpreted" by my wife, Shirley, was very difficult to read, as his mother wrote in a neat scrawl, similar to that of his future wife, Minnie. She then turned the letter sideways, and started all over again, writing over her first letter, a paper-saving practice then, making it tougher yet to decipher.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Light, *Footprints in the Dust*, 486.

<sup>91</sup> Charles would have tramped the same ground at Frog Lake as did his brother. WB must have known this but for some reason chose to ignore it.

<sup>92</sup> Robert K. Allan, "A Riel Rebellion Diary." *Alberta Historical Review* 12, Summer (1964), 15–25.

<sup>93</sup> Agnes Emma Bleasdel to W.B. Cameron, Toronto, June 14, 1885.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. Late in June 1885, sometime after WB arrived at Fort Pitt, now a free man, another mail shipment for the troops from the East was unloaded at Fort Pitt. Very likely, this letter of Agnes Emma's was in that shipment.

<sup>95</sup> W.B. Cameron to Agnes Emma Bleasdel, July 5, 1885, Battleford. Apparently she had sent WB some money.

<sup>96</sup> Charles Whitcombe to Agnes Emma Bleasdel, June 30, 1885, Fort Pitt, NWT.

<sup>97</sup> Horse Child, Mistatim Awasis in Cree, was one of Big Bear's younger sons, twelve years old when Big Bear surrendered near Fort Carlton on July 4, 1885. In later years, WB visited with his friend Horse Child at his home on Poundmaker's Reserve west of Battleford.

<sup>98</sup> Always the opportunist, WB typed the following on the back of this photograph (which graces the front cover and is included in the Cameron collection): "I dressed him up in feathers and beaded moccasins and took him with me [to a] photographers in Regina. I was in scouting garb and carrying a Winchester and revolver, also wearing moccasins and belt of cartridges. The boy is holding two feathers and barbed arrows in his hand. They were made by the Assiniboines."

<sup>99</sup> P.G. Laurie, *Saskatchewan Herald*, October 5, 1885.

<sup>100</sup> A fine reference on the trials can be found in Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser, *Loyal Till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion* (Calgary: Fifth House Publishers, 1997).

<sup>101</sup> In later years he was able to help Battleford historians locate the mass grave below the ridge to the northeast of the barracks, which was badly eroding by then with the coffins falling apart and bones visible.

<sup>102</sup> P.G. Laurie, *Saskatchewan Herald*, December 14, 1885.

<sup>103</sup> *Trenton Courier*, July 30, 1885.

<sup>104</sup> “North-West Incidents—An Interview with W.B. Cameron.” *Trenton Advocate*, March 1886.

<sup>105</sup> Military Bounty Land Warrant No. 0583, Library and Archives Canada. Copy in the Cameron collection.

<sup>106</sup> Scrip was the alternate form of a land grant. It's said that Alloway and Champion of Winnipeg set up Canada's largest private bank, reselling scrip purchased from Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal scrip was often bought from them by unscrupulous speculators at a fraction of the true value.

<sup>107</sup> Noted as No. 14151 under the A.G.O. Service Roll, North West Canada Medal Register (RG9 II A 5), Library and Archives Canada. This medal was awarded initially to Militia members serving in the Rebellion west of Port Arthur and selected volunteers. If a person saw action in the main battles, a bar was attached. Recipients were entitled to land grants or scrip. At first the NWMP were left out but were included later. The present whereabouts of WB's medal is unknown. It is hoped that some family member has it in his or her possession.

<sup>108</sup> Isabelle Cameron to W.B. Cameron, August 2, 1886, Napanee, ON.

<sup>109</sup> See Rebellion Claims and Losses, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Reel 4M17/E.9/1.

<sup>110</sup> *Saskatchewan Herald*, October 25, 1886.

<sup>111</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, August 11, 1888.

<sup>112</sup> When WB worked in Duck Lake, Lucy Maude Montgomery, author of *Anne of Green Gables*, lived in Prince Albert, not far north.

<sup>113</sup> An early form of bicycle sometimes referred to as a penny farthing or boneshaker.

<sup>114</sup> Stobart was the original townsite, located on the northeast corner of Duck Lake itself. The settlement would be moved later a half mile (about a kilometre) east and be renamed Duck Lake.

<sup>115</sup> This classic photograph is held by the University of Saskatchewan, Shortt Library, Special Collections, MSS 550/2/3.16, Stewart Collection.

<sup>116</sup> E. Pauline Johnson gave a recital there in mid-1890s when she was waylaid by a winter snowstorm. She and WB later met when she was in Vermilion in 1908.

<sup>117</sup> Federal Deputy Minister of the Interior A.M. Burgess was supposed to be in attendance too. However, it seems he was more interested in bird hunting and wasn't satisfied until he had accidentally shot two tame geese belonging to the St. Laurent schoolteacher.

<sup>118</sup> Duck Lake has continued the racing tradition but currently focuses on its annual chuckwagon races.

<sup>119</sup> University of Saskatchewan, Shortt Library, Special Collections, MSS 550/2/3.18, Stewart Collection.

<sup>120</sup> WB's future brother-in-law Inspector Joseph Howe was shot in the leg during this battle.

<sup>121</sup> The exact location of WB's land was unknown until my investigation. The legal description is NE 1/4 Sec. 8 Twp. 44 R 2 W3. (A quarter section is 160 acres, or about 65 hectares.) The old building site is now bordered with poplar and maple. There is no sign of any buildings. Once owned by G. Pelletier, it's currently held by Alex Jungman.

<sup>122</sup> Shirley and I wandered about the spot where the mission once stood, but there was little to see in the now-cultivated field, nor could we see any evidence of the fairgrounds.

<sup>123</sup> Also spelled Ayasiw, meaning crow in English.

<sup>124</sup> Oblate Mary Immaculate (OMI) Willow Cree Church Registry, December 25, 1894–1927. The first child, a girl born July 18, 1910, was named Anna Agnes, notable because readers will recall that WB's mother and one of his sisters shared the second name.

<sup>125</sup> Her annual salary was \$600 (worth about \$13,700 today), exactly double what previous matrons had been paid, though the reason for such a queenly salary remains a mystery. She appears on the 1891 Dominion Census as living in Battleford with two daughters, Agnes, age twenty, and Maude, age eighteen. Isabelle was still back east. By 1892, Agnes Emma had returned to Toronto. Agnes was married in Battleford that year to Joseph Howe, but WB did not get to the wedding. He did send a wedding gift, however, a travel case.

<sup>126</sup> See Chapter 6 for more about Moberly.

<sup>127</sup> Almighty Voice was jailed in Duck Lake and then escaped. He was finally tracked down and killed by the NWMP, along with two of his friends, eighteen months later in the bush east of Duck Lake but

not before they had fatally shot Sergeant Colebrook. WB's story appears in Macdonald's *Eyewitness to History*.

<sup>128</sup> Marion Lamontagne, ed., *The Voice of the People: Reminiscences of the Prince Albert Settlement's Early Citizens, 1866–1896* (Prince Albert, SK: Prince Albert Historical Society, 1985), and *Their Dreams, Our Memories: A History of Duck Lake and District* (Duck Lake, SK: Duck Lake History Committee, 1988).

<sup>129</sup> Today's visitors to the area find it highly interesting. Many of the downtown buildings have wonderful historical murals painted in them. Duck Lake residents Darlene and Lawrence Mullis note that some of the birth certificates of older residents show their place of birth as Duck Lake, North-West Territories.

## Chapter 4

<sup>1</sup> Over the next fifteen years, WB would work for, operate or own a total of five newspapers.

<sup>2</sup> This position involved selecting stories gathered from telegraphic service for publication.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of recommendation from Ray F. Durham, Managing Editor, *Duluth News Tribune*, November 6, 1896, Duluth, MN.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Since WB played a major role in laying the foundation for what was and continues to be a very successful magazine (simply called *Field & Stream* magazine after WB shortened the name in 1898), I have devoted more attention to this part of his life.

<sup>6</sup> *Western Field & Stream*, Christmas Number, December, 1896.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> WB had little regard for Burkhard, criticizing him as a forty-year-old bachelor and a coddled businessman who would never make a go of it. His father was a leading sports goods dealer in St. Paul. Sometime later, Burkhard apparently did marry.

<sup>9</sup> W.B. Cameron, *Field & Stream*, February 1898.

<sup>10</sup> Hugh A. Dempsey, "Foreword to Fifth Edition" in *Blood Red the Sun* by W.B. Cameron, ix.

<sup>11</sup> W.B. Cameron to Leonard Nesbitt, February 6, 1945, Vancouver. This letter contains much of the information given above about WB's involvement with *Field & Stream*.

<sup>12</sup> In recent contacts with the current magazine, management noted that it has gone through many owners over the years. Unfortunately, each time it was sold, paper records were discarded. The current management also seemed to know little of the magazine's proud past, nor had they heard of WB. The Library of Congress, fortunately, has some holdings, and the Minnesota Historical Society holds the following: vol. 1–2, no. 7, 1896–1897 of *Western Field & Stream* and vol. 2, no. 8–88; January 1898–April 1984 of *Field & Stream*, SK1.F45. Several clippings of original material are in the Cameron collection.

<sup>13</sup> Remington became famous for his detailed work in paintings, drawings and sculptures. Among his first work were the illustrations for Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem *The Song of Hiawatha* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1891).

<sup>14</sup> Copy of contract between W.B. Cameron and Charles Russell, September 30, 1897.

<sup>15</sup> C.M. Russell, *Lewis and Clark Meeting the Mandans*, reproduced in *Western Field & Stream*, January 1898. When Russell's work was first published, WB wrote a very complimentary piece about him in the magazine.

<sup>16</sup> Likely *Chas. M. Russell*, reproduced in *Western Field & Stream*, August 1897, or *Bested*, appearing in the September 1897 issue.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Russell to W.B. Cameron, December 8, 1897, Great Falls, MT.

<sup>18</sup> Ben Roberts to W.B. Cameron, September 28, 1897, Cascade, MT.

<sup>19</sup> Austin Russell, *Charles Marion Russell, Cowboy Artist* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1957).

<sup>20</sup> There is some truth to this. Russell illustrated WB's story "Keeoma's Wooing" about a fictional Blackfoot (Siksika) woman that was published in *Western Field & Stream* in July 1897. In 1908 Russell sculpted a plaster model called *Piegan Squaw*, thought to be Keeoma. A number of these were produced, first in plaster, then in bronze. All are highly collectible. Keeoma (or Keoma) in Siksika means distant, or far away.

- <sup>21</sup> In January 1924, WB paid a personal visit to Russell, now living in Great Falls. One topic of conversation would have been the paintings. At this time Russell gave WB an autographed copy of a book he had published called *Rawhide Rawlins Stories*. In what may have been payment, WB then passed it on to the writer Owen Wister. W.B. Cameron to James McIntosh, January 21, 1949, Calling Lake, AB. (McIntosh was a general merchant and fur trader.)
- <sup>22</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, June 19, 1944, Regina.
- <sup>23</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, March 20, 1947, Vancouver.
- <sup>24</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, March 29, 1947, Vancouver. Here we learn that Russell created fewer works than requested in the contract.
- <sup>25</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, February 27, 1948, Vancouver.
- <sup>26</sup> The Wister letters are part of the Cameron collection.
- <sup>27</sup> W.B. Cameron, "Many Brave Feathers," pts. 1 and 2, *Harper's Weekly*, June 15 and 27, 1896.
- <sup>28</sup> Wister married a cousin, Mary Channing, in April 1898. In all they had six children.
- <sup>29</sup> *The Virginian* was published in 1902, and eventually made into several film adaptations, a stage play and the famous television series. The book has never been out of print.
- <sup>30</sup> Owen Wister to W.B. Cameron, July 5, year undated, Philadelphia.
- <sup>31</sup> Harte was one of the first writers of western genre before Wister. He became first editor of *Overland Monthly*. This magazine published WB's "A Mule-skinner's Coincidence," vol. XXVIII, no. 196, ca. 1896. It was here that WB introduced his character Jim Vue.
- <sup>32</sup> "The Stony Arrow" is part of the Cameron collection.
- <sup>33</sup> Owen Wister to W.B. Cameron, February 4, 1896, Philadelphia. WB must have told him about winning a cash prize from *Toronto Saturday Night* for his story "A Reconnaissance At Fort Ellice."
- <sup>34</sup> Owen Wister to W.B. Cameron, July 17, 1896, Philadelphia.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>36</sup> Owen Wister to W.B. Cameron, January 15, 1897, Philadelphia.
- <sup>37</sup> Owen Wister to W.B. Cameron, May 5, 1899, Philadelphia.
- <sup>38</sup> Owen Wister to W.B. Cameron, September 14, 1899, Philadelphia. This story was about an Aboriginal girl who offers herself to a white man, and the conflicts in morality that arose within WB himself.
- <sup>39</sup> Owen Wister to W.B. Cameron, June 3, 1902, Philadelphia. By this time, WB was in northwestern Ontario and about to be married.
- <sup>40</sup> Owen Wister to W.B. Cameron, January 4, 1908, Philadelphia.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* This reveals that he did not know what WB looked like. It is also apparent that WB was doing some farming now because Wister asked him about his crops.
- <sup>42</sup> Owen Wister to W.B. Cameron, February 21, 1911, Philadelphia. WB was in the United States promoting his writing.
- <sup>43</sup> W.B. Cameron to Kenneth Coppock, August 19, 1949, Meadow Lake. A porringer is a small children's soup bowl.
- <sup>44</sup> Mary Wister to W.B. Cameron, n.d., Philadelphia.
- <sup>45</sup> R.H. Macdonald Papers, SAB, Saskatoon.
- <sup>46</sup> Over the years, this collection has now dwindled to about half.
- <sup>47</sup> Charles E. Cunningham, Managing Editor, Macmillan Publishing Company, to W.B. Cameron, February 4, 1949, New York.
- <sup>48</sup> W.H. Hunt, manager, the News Publishing Company, to W.B. Cameron, December 3, 1900, Rat Portage, ON.
- <sup>49</sup> WB's wife, Minnie, is a very important figure in WB's life, so for that reason I have devoted much of Chapter 10 to her and the family.
- <sup>50</sup> Agnes Howe to W.B. Cameron, January 28, 1903, Macleod, NWT.
- <sup>51</sup> Please see the history of the *Fort Frances Times* and *Rainy Lake Herald*, <http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/205/301/ic/cdc/frances/index.html> (accessed October 3, 2003).
- <sup>52</sup> It appears that WB may have sold the defunct paper at this point, but details are scarce. Minnie was from Fort Frances, of course, but I've also discovered a Trenton connection. The Hennessey

family of Trenton was introduced to Anglicanism by WB's grandfather, Reverend William Bleasdel. In 1894, one of their children, Sheldon Hawley Hennessey, moved to the Rat Portage (Kenora) area. He was named after A.W. Hawley, the man who coached WB through his druggist apprenticeship in Trenton. Hennessey and WB would have known each other and perhaps occasionally met.

## Chapter 5

<sup>1</sup>The Signal Publishing Company was also known as the Vermilion Publishing Company.

<sup>2</sup>WB's property was Lot 17, on the northwest corner of the intersection of Alberta Avenue (today's 51st Street) and First Street North (now 51st Avenue), just across the street west of today's Saan Store. He apparently owned the building because in 1908 he tore off the porch for reasons we shall see later.

<sup>3</sup>WB sent photographs of Vermilion to Owen Wister in 1908. These may be in the Owen Wister Collection held by the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>4</sup>*Vermilion Signal*, August 15, 1909.

<sup>5</sup>Alf Maggs proved invaluable to WB, later single-handedly moving WB's presses to Bassano, Alberta, by wagon. Maggs continued his newspaper career, eventually becoming editor of the *Victoria Colonist*.

<sup>6</sup>On November 11, 1909, WB mentioned in the *Signal* that Alf Maggs and Charlie Atkinson, "the leading local printers," were off on a moose hunt far north of town, but it is believed that Charlie Atkinson was no longer with him by that time.

<sup>7</sup>WB's homestead was located on the NW 1/4 Sec. 14 Twp. 53 R 6, north of Vermilion. (A quarter section is 160 acres, or about 65 hectares.)

<sup>8</sup>*Vermilion Signal*, June 27, 1907.

<sup>9</sup>*Vermilion Signal*, September 12, 1907.

<sup>10</sup>*Vermilion Signal*, February 6, 1908.

<sup>11</sup>Sir Clifford Sifton, "The Immigrants Canada Wants," *Maclean's*, April 1, 1922, in *John Robert Colombo's Famous Lasting Words: Great Canadian Quotations* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2000), 265.

<sup>12</sup>Later, in one of his last editions of the *Bassano News*, April 21, 1911, WB again supported Oliver by stating that "The Calgary Herald has been howling for knowledge of the Premier's view on reciprocity. The Honorable Frank Oliver is going to enlighten Calgary citizens."

<sup>13</sup>WB had first introduced this concept several years earlier when he was with the Winnipeg Exhibition Board.

<sup>14</sup>W.B. Cameron, *Vermilion Signal*, April 23, 1908.

<sup>15</sup>W.B. Cameron, *Vermilion Signal*, April 8, 1908.

<sup>16</sup>W.B. Cameron, "A Matter of Politics," *Vermilion Signal*, September 27, 1908.

<sup>17</sup>W.B. Cameron, *Vermilion Signal*, October 29, 1908.

<sup>18</sup>Interestingly, on January 9, 1908, he mentioned that he was goalie for the Vermilion hockey team playing against Kitscoty, which stands as his only mention of being active in any sport.

<sup>19</sup>W.B. Cameron, *Vermilion Signal*, May 6, 1909.

<sup>20</sup>It is unclear why WB had so much editorial freedom at the *Signal* if Cooper, a Conservative, owned the paper. It is interesting to speculate on the reasons. Did Cooper intend to give WB just enough rope to hang himself, perhaps?

<sup>21</sup>*Vegreville Observer*, May 13, 1909.

<sup>22</sup>W.B. Cameron, *Vermilion Signal*, February 24, 1910.

<sup>23</sup>*Vermilion Standard*, April 20, 1910.

<sup>24</sup>I found a newspaper clipping taken from the *Brooks Bulletin*, which ran a piece on WB called "Colorful Character of Early Years—W.B. Cameron" by journalist Leonard D. Nesbitt in the July 20, 1961, edition. Nesbitt, who had worked for the *Calgary Herald* in 1911, met WB while he was owner and editor of the *Bassano News*. Nesbitt learned much about WB's Vermilion days; WB claimed he left because "the town temporarily fell asleep." Of course, we now know better.

<sup>25</sup>Please also refer to Chapter 10.

<sup>26</sup>The SE 1/4 Sec. 16, Twp. 51, R 6, W 4.

<sup>27</sup>W.B. Cameron, Sworn Land Title Statement, Dominion Lands Board, October 27, 1908, Vermilion.

<sup>28</sup>Either C.E. Olstad or Charles Johnson bought it.

<sup>29</sup>Vermilion historian Jean Inman, interview with the author, April 2001, Vermilion.

<sup>30</sup>Jessie Cameron to R.H. Macdonald, July 26, 1979, R.H. Macdonald Papers, SAB, Saskatoon.

<sup>31</sup>*Vermilion Signal*, May 6, 1909.

<sup>32</sup>*Vermilion Signal*, April 2, 1908.

<sup>33</sup>However, in a serious town fire in 1918, all the town records of that year and prior to it were destroyed, and twenty-eight stores and thirty-eight firms were lost. Damage estimates ran anywhere from \$150,000 to \$350,000 in 1908 currency.

<sup>34</sup>There is an old photograph in the collection of WB displaying a beautiful silver cup, upon which is inscribed "The Edmonton Board of Trade" and at its base is a photograph of grain stooks in a large field with elevators in the background. Could this be the cup that Vermilion won at the Edmonton Exhibition?

<sup>35</sup>Three references for lodge background information have been available: the *Vermilion Signal*; *The Bull's Eye: Bowtell's-Breage-Vermilion Cameron and the Vermilion Signal*, by Allen Ronaghan (Islay, AB: Big Dipper Publications, 2001); and "A History of Vermilion Lodge #24," prepared by Art Boggs for the area's two-volume history entitled *Vermilion Memories II*, 1994. Boggs' material became the primary reference, both written and through a 2002 interview, as he used the original lodge minutes, supplementary material being added from the *Signal* and *The Bull's Eye*. Boggs related the fact that these early minutes of Vermilion Lodge #24 were lost for some time, but were eventually recovered from a farm granary, intact and readable. In fact they are sometimes quoted during current meetings because of their historical merit.

<sup>36</sup>Sam Johnson to W.B. Cameron, January 6, 1910, Edmonton. This letter has been modified slightly with capitalization and punctuation to aid the reader.

<sup>37</sup>Cameron, *Blood Red the Sun*, 79.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 132. He also encouraged WB to marry into the band.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 105. It is believed that the second bullet fired at Loasby by Lone Man is the one Loasby later had mounted on a ring.

<sup>40</sup>W.B. Cameron, "The Three Scouts," in *Eyewitness to History*.

<sup>41</sup>*Saskatchewan Herald*, October 29, 1886.

<sup>42</sup>*Saskatchewan Herald*, June 7, 1912.

<sup>43</sup>Elliot, "In Defense of Big Bear," *Prairie Forum*.

<sup>44</sup>Dennis had led the Dominion Land Surveyor's Intelligence Corps during the Rebellion in 1869.

<sup>45</sup>The town was named after the Marquess de Bassano, an Italian nobleman and CPR shareholder. Its Blackfoot (Siksika) name is *Ah bit chic I (pa)*, meaning something that is braced to keep it from falling down, referring to the old high CPR coal chute.

<sup>46</sup>*Bassano Mail*, January 23, 1919. This newspaper was a later version of the *Bassano News*.

<sup>47</sup>Nesbitt, "Colorful Character," *Brooks Bulletin*, July 20, 1961. Nesbitt bought WB out in 1911, so his comments about later years were based on personal observations.

<sup>48</sup>Careful readers will note that both Calgary and Vermilion had an Alberta Hotel.

<sup>49</sup>This land became the notable Duck Lake Ranch, an American-based operation. Locals say more rain sometimes falls here than in the surrounding area.

<sup>50</sup>W.B. Cameron to Leonard Nesbitt, July 17, 1943, Regina.

<sup>51</sup>This section was not from Esling's listings, as it turned out, and where it came from was not mentioned. As for Esling, he invested his \$500 from WB in a corner lot of a new town not far away called Tilley. It seems that in those times banks liked to buy corner lots and that is what happened with Esling—a bank bought his lot at a neat profit to him. Esling later became an MP for a Kootenay, BC, riding.

<sup>52</sup>This was diagonally opposite today's Astros Restaurant. Bob Stiles used to work at the newspaper

office in later years, and his house is just to the east. When he was excavating his basement, he kept finding pieces of lead in the spill pile. He identified these as scraps from a linotype machine, verifying there had once been a printing shop nearby.

<sup>53</sup> Nesbitt, "Colorful Character," *Brooks Bulletin*, July 20, 1961.

<sup>54</sup> *Henderson's Gazetteer and Directory* was an annual publication that covered much of western Canada, listing who lived where, with whom and what they did. It is no longer produced but is a very useful research tool.

<sup>55</sup> Nesbitt, "Colorful Character," *Brooks Bulletin*, July 20, 1961.

<sup>56</sup> *Best in the West by a Dam Site* (Bassano, AB: Bassano History Book Club, 1974).

<sup>57</sup> Careful readers will note that WB was still in Vermilion at this time. His publication and distribution of this trial edition of the new Bassano paper stands as a remarkable feat that was unknown until this time.

<sup>58</sup> Caldwell, an American horseman, was well liked in the community, and by the time WB arrived, had moved to Bassano to operate the "Exchange Barn," where the busy stagecoaches changed teams.

<sup>59</sup> At this time the swastika symbol was widely used by Aboriginal peoples of the Americas in an entirely different way to that of Hitler. The symbol might mean peace or the sun, for example; in this case it was probably the latter.

<sup>60</sup> *Bassano News*, January 5, 1910.

<sup>61</sup> W.B. Cameron, *Bassano News*, April 29, 1910, 2.

<sup>62</sup> Today's Bassano historians like to tell this story. When the foundation and cornerstone of the new brick school was laid, the local Masonic Lodge #55 placed the traditional tin box in the cornerstone. Made of galvanized iron by one of the two local blacksmiths, Norman Garland or Gilbert La Croix, the box contained a number of items pertinent to the day. In October 1958, before demolition, the cornerstone was broken open and the box retrieved. There was real silver, quarters and fifty-cent pieces, and pictures of King Edward VII and King George V. The box also contained a parchment listing dignitaries of 1911 from the federal, provincial and municipal levels, as well as high-ranking Masonic officers. But the dime was missing, either a George V or an Edward VII, today purportedly worth \$1 million.

<sup>63</sup> W.B. Cameron, "Bassano Gets Its Second Wind," *Bassano News*, August 19, 1910.

<sup>64</sup> *Bassano News*, June 24, 1910.

<sup>65</sup> W.B. Cameron, *Bassano News*, April 21, 1911.

<sup>66</sup> W.B. Cameron, *Bassano News*, March 24, 1911. In *War Trail*, he used the term "dusky maidens" in reference to the beauty of young Aboriginal women, but later edited it out, probably at his publisher's suggestion. However, this sentence, unusually harsh for WB, remained in *War Trail*: "After all, an Indian, take him by and large, is nothing but a grown up child." The term "dusky" was also used in his poem "Gentleman Joe."

<sup>67</sup> Details are confusing about Sharp's simultaneous involvement with Nesbitt in the newspaper and with WB in Calgary real estate. Sharp later enlisted in the Great War and was killed overseas at Vimy Ridge.

<sup>68</sup> In Nesbitt's 1961 "Colorful Character" article about WB, he noted WB's glass eye: "He was of medium height and was blind in one eye and turned his head to one side in looking at you."

<sup>69</sup> In later years, Nesbitt's son Clive moved the equipment and building to Brooks, and used it there to publish the *Brooks Bulletin*. Jamie Nesbitt, Leonard's grandson, is currently the editor of the *Brooks Bulletin*. He has his grandfather's autographed copy of *The War Trail of Big Bear* with WB's notation in it about a visit with Leonard Nesbitt in Calgary.

## Chapter 6

<sup>1</sup> WB was job printing at 1420a-1st Street North and living at 539-22nd Avenue West. Both addresses are now considered part of the city's southwest quadrant. My initial inquiry to the city of Calgary concerning these two locations was redirected to Glenbow Museum and Archives staff, producing some fascinating results. Both addresses were just blocks west of today's Victoria and Stampede parks. 1420a was his real estate address while 1420b was for Inland Press, the

name he used for his printing business that he sold that same year to Fred Cummer & Son. Apparently the site is empty today.

<sup>2</sup> Information courtesy of Lindsay Moir, Senior Librarian, Glenbow Museum Library, personal communication to author, October 24, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> As we learned earlier, he gave his life at Vimy Ridge.

<sup>4</sup> The June 14 issue of the *Herald* further noted that “a new bridge has been constructed over the Battle River” and “owners of Riverside [a new subdivision] are putting up lots for sale this week at low prices and on easy terms.”

<sup>5</sup> *Saskatchewan Herald*, April 27, 1912.

<sup>6</sup> *Saskatchewan Herald*, December 20, 1912.

<sup>7</sup> On a more sombre note, these newspapers record that Joe Patenaude, grandson of Catherine Simpson (wife of WB’s boss at Frog Lake, James Simpson), had shot himself at Onion Lake.

<sup>8</sup> *Saskatchewan Herald*, May 4, 1912.

<sup>9</sup> *Saskatchewan Herald*, August 2, 1912.

<sup>10</sup> *Saskatchewan Herald*, December 6, 1912.

<sup>11</sup> *Saskatchewan Herald*, December 27, 1912.

<sup>12</sup> Four Sky Thunder had been convicted of arson after torching the mission in Frog Lake during the uprising.

<sup>13</sup> Macdonald, *Eyewitness to History*.

<sup>14</sup> David Williams, *A World of His Own: The Double Life of George Borrow* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

<sup>15</sup> R.H. Macdonald Papers, SAB, Saskatoon.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Miller to W.B. Cameron, October 28, 1928, Toronto.

<sup>18</sup> Jim Buller to W.B. Cameron, March 6, 1931, Saskatoon.

<sup>19</sup> John Beamer to W.B. Cameron, November 1, 1932, Toronto.

<sup>20</sup> Jim Buller to W.B. Cameron, April 8, 1940, Saskatoon. This letter has been modified slightly with capitalization and punctuation to aid the reader.

<sup>21</sup> Owen Wister to W.B. Cameron, February 14, 1914, Philadelphia.

<sup>22</sup> Jim Cameron thinks the photo might have been taken in 1910. That would be during WB’s Bassano venture, which is also plausible.

<sup>23</sup> Macdonald, *Eyewitness to History*, xviii.

<sup>24</sup> There are two reserves here, but one school serves both of them.

<sup>25</sup> These include F.O. Seward’s fascinating account described in a lengthy Chapter 3 note.

<sup>26</sup> The next day, Seward again provided taxi service for the dignitaries presiding over the unveiling, including Judge Howay and reporter Angus Kennedy. Seward did not mention that they had to cross the North Saskatchewan River at Lea Park by ferry, nor did WB tell him that the first ferryman at Lea Park was his old friend, Louis Patenaude, Catherine Simpson’s son. In WB’s story “The Fall of Stalking Spirit,” Tall Pine’s character was based on Patenaude. Cairn unveiling information courtesy of the Seal family and Keith Davidson, October 2003.

<sup>27</sup> No doubt Peterson was displeased at this turn of events, and he blamed the CRN telegrapher for communicating that the road was impassable.

<sup>28</sup> A quote from the *Lloydminster Times* from August 26, 1909, says that “it is interesting to note that the monument in question took the form of iron crosses and were made by Mr. J. Whitbread and inscriptions written by Mr. George E. Adams.” Both men were from Lloydminster. Information courtesy of Keith Davidson, October 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Cameron, *War Trail of Big Bear*, 254–256.

<sup>30</sup> A new plaque is being considered and its text is currently undergoing revisions. Written in three languages, English, French and Cree, no names at all are to be included this time.

<sup>31</sup> These notes have long since vanished.

<sup>32</sup> The composition of many of his photographs is askew. Having only one eye didn’t help matters, of course, and perhaps the tiny viewing aperture of early cameras made it difficult

for WB to properly frame his subjects.

<sup>33</sup> S.R. Moore to A.S. Morton, November 30, 1923, Swift Current, SK.

<sup>34</sup> Based in Montreal, Kennedy was first going to Winnipeg.

<sup>35</sup> Howard Kennedy to W.B. Cameron, June 29, 1925.

<sup>36</sup> It is unclear why Ryerson Press did not print it themselves. It is interesting to note that Pierce also worked with the well-known book illustrator C.W. Jeffreys, who did a great amount of historical illustrating.

<sup>37</sup> This agreement also stated that WB retained the copyright, reserving for himself, his successors, heirs and assigns, all rights other than the book rights in the said book.

<sup>38</sup> Readers will be interested to learn that Duckworth is still in business.

<sup>39</sup> Collectors will recognize that the American edition is likely more valuable than the rest.

<sup>40</sup> Henry Dickens to W.B. Cameron, November 30, 1926, London, UK. From this letter we learn that, in Henry's view, Frank (Francis) was "a strange mixture, highly cultivated in his intellect, exceedingly well read, but there was a strange touch of eccentricity and instability about him."

<sup>41</sup> Morton urged the university bookstore to purchase an additional twenty copies immediately, perhaps for faculty.

<sup>42</sup> W.C. Murray, President, University of Saskatchewan, to W.B. Cameron, October 22, 1926, Saskatoon.

<sup>43</sup> Apparently at one point, Dr. Morton went to Lloydminster with WB in a Ford that overheated.

<sup>44</sup> W.B. Cameron to A.S. Morton, October 22, 1925, Regina. Arthur S. Morton Manuscripts Collection, University of Saskatchewan.

<sup>45</sup> W.B. Cameron to A.S. Morton, January 1, 1927, Vancouver. Arthur S. Morton Manuscripts Collection, University of Saskatchewan.

<sup>46</sup> W.B. Cameron to A.S. Morton, February 15, 1927, Vancouver. Arthur S. Morton Manuscripts Collection, University of Saskatchewan. It is not clear who actually typed the manuscript.

<sup>47</sup> W.B. Cameron to A.S. Morton, March 8, 1930, Vancouver. Arthur S. Morton Manuscripts Collection, University of Saskatchewan.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> W.B. Cameron to A.S. Morton, March 14, 1930, Vancouver. Arthur S. Morton Manuscripts Collection, University of Saskatchewan.

<sup>50</sup> This story was eventually published in the RNWMP annual *Scarlet and Gold* under one of WB's pseudonyms. W.B. Cameron [Camp Crier, pseud.], "Taming Sitting Bull." *Scarlet and Gold* 12th annual (1931): 99.

<sup>51</sup> W.B. Cameron to A.S. Morton, April 30, 1930, Vancouver. Arthur S. Morton Manuscripts Collection, University of Saskatchewan.

<sup>52</sup> Morton's reasons are unknown, but it is possible that WB may not have produced all the stories and interviews to which he and Morton had agreed. Morton may have been tired of keeping track of WB's whereabouts, too.

<sup>53</sup> Interested parties can review a list of WB's material held by the University of Saskatchewan Libraries in their Northwest Resistance database at the following Web site: <http://library2.usask.ca/northwest>.

<sup>54</sup> Readers interested in Moberly will discover that his life is presented very well in his recollections, written in collaboration with W.B. Cameron, in *When Fur Was King* (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1929). Although out of print, copies can be found at used bookstores.

<sup>55</sup> This was indicated in a *Free Press* book review published in the 1920s ("Early Days of the West—Retired Factor Writes of Fur Trading Posts in Northern Territory").

<sup>56</sup> W.B. Cameron to Henry John Moberly, June 20, 1930, Edmonton.

<sup>57</sup> Moberly's receipt scrawled in pencil at Batoche by a shaky hand, dated December 13, 1929: "Received from W.B. Cameron the sum of \$5.94 being my share of the royalties on the book *When Fur Was King*."

<sup>58</sup> J. Lewis Milligan, "In The Days of King Fur," a review of *When Fur Was King*, publisher and date unknown.

<sup>59</sup> Few visiting the site today realize that an important artifact associated with the Rebellion is housed very close by. In the belfry of this neat, tiny church hangs the brass bell that once tolled from the deck of the steamer *Northcote*. Part of General Middleton's offensive, this steamboat was riddled with bullets as it passed by Batoche on May 9, 1885. Its smokestack and part of the upper deck were ripped off by a ferry cable loosened hurriedly by the rebels as the boat floated past in an escape attempt.

<sup>60</sup> This scrapbook is part of the Cameron collection.

<sup>61</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, March 16, 1929.

<sup>62</sup> *Swift Current Sun*, May 15, 1928. Why the editor, S.R. Moore, granted him this professional distinction is unknown but we do know that WB had been interviewed in that newspaper office just five years before.

<sup>63</sup> Norman Calkins to W.B. Cameron, Talbot, AB, March 19, 1928. This letter was simply addressed to "Mr. W.B. Cameron in care of the *Grain Grower's Guide*, Winnipeg." WB received it in May 1928.

<sup>64</sup> In a fascinating bit of evidence from these Depression years, we find that WB's sister Isabelle (Lady Bourinot) died in 1930, and in her will she left WB \$200, a sizeable sum then. What is odd is that this document, obviously written and signed by WB, gives instructions to the executor, the Royal Trust Company in Toronto, to dispense the \$200 not to him but to Alexander Cameron Rutherford (of the address 916, McLeod Building in Edmonton), Alberta's first premier. Why did WB give his legacy to Rutherford? Did he borrow money from Rutherford?

<sup>65</sup> Early versions of the slides were made of two-inch (five-centimetre) square glass. The illustrations were painted on them and then projected onto a screen or wall. In later years, WB used the new Kodachrome 35 mm slides often provided by Campbell Innes and Everett Baker. None of WB's old lantern slides have ever been found.

An interesting clipping from a Moose Jaw newspaper circa 1928, covering WB's speaking tours, states that "a group of lantern slides was shown by Mr. Cameron, which was very interesting. [He made] special mention of one, 'The Memorial Block,' erected by the Government in commemoration of those who died in the tragedy of Frog Lake." This unique term for the monument is seldom, if ever, used today.

<sup>66</sup> "With The Boy Scouts," *Quinte Sun*, July 1928.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>68</sup> Eldon Johnson, interview with the author, Eatonia, SK, April 14, 2000.

<sup>69</sup> What makes this a notable occasion was that it was forty-seven years before that WB began his trek west from a location close to the Fort Garry Hotel.

<sup>70</sup> Andrew Miller to W.B. Cameron, October 15, 1928, Toronto. This was to do with the Henry Moberly story, which was to run in instalments with WB's photographs.

## Chapter 7

<sup>1</sup> W.B. Cameron to Nosiseem, June 23, 1947, Vancouver. Nosiseem's identity is mysterious, but will be discussed in Chapter 8.

<sup>2</sup> John Beamer to W.B. Cameron, November 13, 1932, Toronto. The word "canning" shows up once, providing a clue he may have been working in a local fish factory.

<sup>3</sup> W.B. Cameron to Harry Ross, September 30, 1932, Elk Point.

<sup>4</sup> Linda Hagen, Registry Leader, Alberta College of Pharmacists, Edmonton, personal communication to author, January 2, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, both the diploma and licence are missing.

<sup>6</sup> D.M. Cameron, *The History of Pharmacy in Alberta: The First One Hundred Years* (Edmonton: Alberta Pharmaceutical Association, 1993), 44.

<sup>7</sup> As he indicated in his letter to Nosiseem, noted above.

<sup>8</sup> Fred and Ethel Hicks, interview with the author, January 20, 2002, Vegreville.

<sup>9</sup> This building still exists, now owned by long-time Derwent resident Mike Maksymec. (The Buick in the photograph was not WB's, for he did not drive.)

<sup>10</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, November 19, 1948, Loon Lake, SK. Luxton family fonds, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Banff, AB.

<sup>11</sup> Fred and Ethel Hicks, interview with the author, January 20, 2002, Vegreville.

<sup>12</sup> W.B. Cameron to Douglas Cameron, December 8, 1950, Meadow Lake. "It is now 3:30 AM and I'll have to finish this later. I'd better 'hit the hay' now." This letter was written just months before he passed away.

<sup>13</sup> Thank goodness he did, for those who have struggled to follow his trail using his handwritten letters become highly frustrated. WB's handwriting was atrocious, at times indecipherable. We know that amidst the scrawl was important and often vital information, but I could not make it out. Only the most determined reader could extract the needed details. In my case, my wife, Shirley, was able to "tune in" to his scribble and tell me what WB wrote.

<sup>14</sup> It must have been quiet, based on comments made by Marlie Wasson of Abbotsford, BC, but formerly from North Battleford. In 1949, WB had rented a room in their house on Main Street. Marlie remembers WB well, saying that she was quite aware that WB worked late at night but that she had never heard him typing. In fact, WB had written many letters and several stories on a machine so silent it couldn't be heard just around the corner by the keen ears of a twelve-year-old child. Marlie Wasson, interview with the author, March 14, 2002, Abbotsford.

<sup>15</sup> For example, his letter to Nosiseem on June 23, 1947, clearly shows evidence of the Remington's paper feed problems.

<sup>16</sup> Fred and Ethel Hicks, interview with the author, January 20, 2002, Vegreville.

<sup>17</sup> The ballot box stuffing took place at a small lake south of Lac La Biche. Today the lake is appropriately called Election Lake.

<sup>18</sup> In *Eyewitness to History*, Rusty Macdonald erroneously referred to this village as Harrisburg. This was almost certainly due to WB's bad handwriting in a letter Macdonald had used as reference.

<sup>19</sup> This tank, one of only eight built in Alberta, has been completely restored, now serving as a powerful reminder of railroad days.

<sup>20</sup> While the 7th Fusiliers performed much sentry duty, little recognition has been given to the fact that in the early phases of the Rebellion they played a huge part in transporting war supplies. Scows, steered by large oars or sweeps, drifted down the South Saskatchewan River from the main supply depot at Swift Current to Clarke's Crossing north of Saskatoon. Gordon Tolton, *Prairie Warships: River Navigation in the Northwest Rebellion* (Surrey, BC: Heritage House, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> The old Graham farmhouse now sits in my yard, filled with whatnots.

<sup>22</sup> This was the place where he was "spooked" in the early spring of 1937, with "three dark men" coming to visit him one evening. (Please see Chapter 3 for more details.)

<sup>23</sup> Bob Davis, "The Man to Whom Dickens's Gold Watch Was Offered for \$15," Bob Davis Recalls, *New York Sun*, November 27, 1928.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Bob Davis to W.B. Cameron, October 5, 1936, on letterhead of the *New York Sun*. At this time WB had a drugstore in Lac La Biche.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Bob Davis to W.B. Cameron, September 16, no year available (but it would likely be 1937). At this point WB had left Lac La Biche to set up a drugstore in Heinsburg.

<sup>28</sup> Alice Gregor, interview with the author, January 2003, Heinsburg.

<sup>29</sup> David Gregory and the Athabasca Historical Society. *Athabasca Landing—An Illustrated History* (Athabasca, AB: Athabasca Historical Society, 1986).

<sup>30</sup> Litchfield Avenue became today's 50th Avenue, and Skinner Street, later renamed Evans Street, is now 48th Street. In earlier times this location was called Ferry Corner because the south end of the ferry was located across the avenue from WB's store.

<sup>31</sup> The Daigneau Block was destroyed by fire in 1986.

<sup>32</sup> Bullock eventually became president of the Rexall Drug Stores of Canada.

<sup>33</sup> Information courtesy of Keith Davidson, interview with the author, October 2003.

<sup>34</sup> W.B. Cameron, "The Yarn of the Howling Gale (An Alberta Barque with a Bad Bight—Cameron Shipyards, Athabasca, Alberta)."

<sup>35</sup> It was NWMP Inspector Denny who kept watch over Kiskawasis, or George Godin, during his transfer from Fort Macleod to Regina (another detachment took over from Denny at the Bow River)

in the late 1870s. Readers will recall from Chapter 2 that Kiskawasis later abandoned WB on his trading trek in 1884 to Fort Edmonton, Frog Lake and Fort Pitt.

<sup>36</sup> Denny, *Law Marches West*, 90. Denny states that he was one of three present, including Colonel James Macleod, who witnessed the naming of Fort Calgary in 1876. It was named after a Scottish castle owned by the Macleod clan, and in Gaelic means clear running water.

<sup>37</sup> *The Law Marches West* was republished by Denny Publishing Company of Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire, UK, in 2000. Many readers will recognize the address as being in southwestern England's picturesque Cotswold Hills country.

<sup>38</sup> W.B. Cameron to Cecil B. DeMille, August 1, 1939, Edmonton.

<sup>39</sup> Frank E. Calvin, Research Secretary, Cecil B. DeMille Productions, to W.B. Cameron, August 7, 1939, Hollywood.

<sup>40</sup> W.B. Cameron to Cecil B. DeMille, August 26, 1939, Edmonton.

<sup>41</sup> Florence Cole, Office of Cecil B. DeMille, to W.B. Cameron, September 6, 1939, Hollywood.

<sup>42</sup> Of note here is that WB states he was *in charge* of the HBC post when in fact he was only an apprentice clerk. He also reveals a little-known fact that Big Bear, while imprisoned in Stony Mountain Penitentiary, was not held within the prison confines but was provided a cottage outside the walls, given the task of "guarding the buffalo."

<sup>43</sup> W.B. Cameron to Cecil B. DeMille, March 30, 1940, Edmonton.

<sup>44</sup> W.B. Cameron to United Artists Corporation, January 15, 1945, Edmonton.

<sup>45</sup> It's obvious that the company did not at all take WB seriously and retained the name in spite of his protests. A movie clip from a Vancouver newspaper advertised that *Blood on the Sun* was showing at the Vogue Theatre, starring Sylvia Sidney playing opposite Cagney.

<sup>46</sup> John Beamer to W.B. Cameron, November 13, 1932, Toronto. WB's play never was produced.

<sup>47</sup> W.B. Cameron to Cecil B. DeMille, August 1, 1939, Edmonton.

<sup>48</sup> Jim Buller to W.B. Cameron, April 8, 1940, Saskatoon. Readers may recall from Chapter 6 that Buller was grandson of Four Sky Thunder.

<sup>49</sup> This receipt and others from WB's literary work were prepared by WB and are to be found in the Cameron collection.

## Chapter 8

<sup>1</sup> Carmen Harry, Curator, RCMP Museum (now called the RCMP Interpretive Centre), interview with the author, May 16, 2003, Regina.

<sup>2</sup> W.B. Cameron. "The North-West Mounted Police of Canada." *Toronto Saturday Night*, May 23, 1896.

<sup>3</sup> Bagley had the distinction of being the youngest member in the March West of 1874, as a trumpeter. He was only fourteen.

<sup>4</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, February 26, 1943, Regina. For readers unfamiliar with the term, *jake* is slang for all right or satisfactory.

<sup>5</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, April 2, 1943, Regina.

<sup>6</sup> This magazine, first published in 1919, was produced by the Vancouver Division of the Royal North West Mounted Police Veterans' Association as a way to raise funds for conducting the Association's benevolent work among ex-members in ways beyond the scope of pension regulations and to foster continuing comradeship. In 1954 the name was changed to the RCMP Veterans' Association.

<sup>7</sup> Bill Mackay, Director, RCMP Museum (now the RCMP Interpretive Centre), interview with the author, May 16, 2003, Regina.

<sup>8</sup> Leonard Nesbitt, "Colorful Character," *Brooks Bulletin*, July 20, 1961. Nesbitt, who had bought the *Bassano News* from WB in 1911, recounts that he had received a letter from WB in which he was informed by WB "that he had been appointed custodian of the Royal Canadian Police Museum."

<sup>9</sup> After retirement, LaNauze became a magistrate in Lacombe, Alberta, and was a gentleman with whom WB occasionally talked about old times.

<sup>10</sup> Bill Mackay noted that this was not the proper way to display such clothing items.

<sup>11</sup> Fred Bagley to W.B. Cameron, December 16, 1943, Banff.

<sup>12</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, March 13, 1943, Regina.

<sup>13</sup> WB was aware that Dr. Maurice Powers, an RCMP surgeon based in Regina, was killed on October 20, 1943, in an RCAF plane crash south of Battleford returning from inquest duties at North Battleford during bad weather. Powers had organized the first RCMP crime detection lab.

<sup>14</sup> W.B. Cameron to Nosiseem, June 23, 1947, Vancouver. WB was writing in Saulteaux. In Cree the name would be Nosisim, but the meaning is still the same, a generic term for “grandchild.” Exactly who Nosiseem is has not been determined, but this person was male, spoke both Cree and Saulteaux and was familiar with Regina Depot staffing. Possibly he was a member. WB’s closing was a blessing, suggesting that Nosiseem may have been about to die. Could Nosiseem have been another grandchild?

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, June 30, 1943, Regina. I missed seeing these items during my visit to the museum in 2003 so they may not have been on display at that time.

<sup>17</sup> WB may have accepted the historically valuable diary as partial payment for his help in editing *The Law Marches West*. According to curator Carmen Harry, another copy of *The Law Marches West* is now on display, and the copy that WB gave the museum is in their library.

<sup>18</sup> I also noted during my visit a note associated with a clipping of February 22, 1944, concerning the murder of Sergeant Colbrook by Cree fugitive Almighty Voice. The note had no signature, but the distinctive scrawl in ink was the giveaway that it was penned by WB.

<sup>19</sup> This date seems surprising, but the permit would have been issued some time before the uprising and the shipment never delivered.

<sup>20</sup> The original backup copy edited by WB is part of the Cameron collection.

<sup>21</sup> In an interview with Doug Light on July 2, 2002, I learned that Eric Harvie, the well-known Calgary oil baron and originator of the Glenbow Museum and Archives, had worked with Luxton to develop the Luxton Museum.

<sup>22</sup> Canada’s Digital Collections, the Collections of the Luxton Museum of the Plains Indian, <http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/205/301/ic/cdc/luxton/default.htm> (accessed April 10, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> Nesbitt, “Colorful Character,” *Brooks Bulletin*, July 20, 1961.

<sup>24</sup> This community is the hometown of singer-songwriter k.d. lang.

<sup>25</sup> Ross Annett to W.B. Cameron, February 11, 1944, Consort, AB.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> The fourth edition of *Blood Red the Sun* found its way into Alberta and Saskatchewan school libraries in a similar fashion.

<sup>28</sup> Ross Annett to W.B. Cameron, February 11, 1944, Consort.

<sup>29</sup> Ross Annett to Douglas Cameron, March 26, 1951, Consort.

<sup>30</sup> Don Klancher, RCMP (Retired), Kamloops, personal communication to author, October 25, 2003. Klancher has in his possession all issues of the *Scarlet and Gold* from its beginning in 1919. Two *Scarlet and Gold* magazines (from 1922 and 1931) are included in the Cameron collection.

<sup>31</sup> Information about WB’s official job titles at the RCMP, including that of museum curator, is ambiguous. An e-mail message from Don Klancher, October 22, 2003, stated that he had checked issues of the *Scarlet and Gold* from 1935 to 1949, and found no reference to WB as editor. WB did contribute articles, however, and was more likely a copy editor.

<sup>32</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, November 23, 1941, Nanaimo, BC.

<sup>33</sup> R.H. Macdonald Papers, SAB, Saskatoon.

<sup>34</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, May 5, 1945, Vancouver. There is evidence that Luxton helped him with the land purchase.

<sup>35</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs to W.B. Cameron, June 2, 1945, Ottawa.

<sup>36</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, August 3, 1945, New Westminster, BC.

<sup>37</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, September 8, 1945, New Westminster.

<sup>38</sup> W.B. Cameron to Douglas Cameron, September 24, 1945, New Westminster.

<sup>39</sup> W.B. Cameron to Arthur Bourinot, May 1945, and November 22, 1945, New Westminster.

<sup>40</sup> Jim Cameron, personal communications to author, March 5, 2003, and August 2003.

<sup>41</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, January 7, 1946, New Westminster.

<sup>42</sup> W.B. Cameron to Douglas Cameron, January 9, 1946, New Westminster.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, January 31, 1946, Nanaimo.

<sup>45</sup> Frog Lake memories return here because the Indian sub-agent WB knew well there, T.T. Quinn, a victim at Frog Lake in 1885, had barely escaped the same fate in Minnesota, where his parents had been killed.

<sup>46</sup> W.B. Cameron to Douglas Cameron, June 12, 1946, Parksville, BC. WB's use of "north" in this letter is puzzling.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Douglas Cameron to W.B. Cameron, June 23, 1946, Montreal. Douglas was referring to Jessie and Owen's place in Squamish, BC.

<sup>49</sup> W.B. Cameron to S.W. McGibbon, December 12, 1946, Vancouver.

<sup>50</sup> He was on his way back to Saskatchewan after the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool tour in 1947: "I had forgotten how beautiful the lakes were there and so I decided to return to Loon Lake." This tour is described later in this chapter.

<sup>51</sup> Nesbitt, "Colorful Character," *Brooks Bulletin*, July 20, 1961.

<sup>52</sup> Bourinot wrote verse and one of his poems was published in a leading children's reader of the 1940s, *All Sails Set*. The name of his poem? "An Indian Arrowhead."

<sup>53</sup> This was likely Bourinot's *True Harvest* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1945).

<sup>54</sup> W.B. Cameron to Arthur Bourinot, November 22, 1945.

<sup>55</sup> Luxton family fonds, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Banff.

<sup>56</sup> Ann Cameron, personal communication to author, August 23, 2003.

<sup>57</sup> On Lots 7 and 8 is Thrifty Foods.

<sup>58</sup> A title search using BC's Land Title Registry services could find out, but the Camerons and I decided to abandon the search due to prohibitive title search fees.

<sup>59</sup> See the Everett Baker Collection under the care of Saskatchewan History and Folklore in Regina, and short television clips appearing on the Saskatchewan Communications Network (SCN). The Innes Collection is held by Ross Innes, Medicine Hat, AB. Baker is sometimes referred to as Saskatchewan's "pictorial historian."

<sup>60</sup> Everett Baker to A.P. Waldron, December 16, 1946. R.H. Macdonald Papers, SAB, Saskatoon.

<sup>61</sup> WB may not have been a stranger to the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, as there is a suggestion in one of his letters that in 1944 they had him return to Frog Lake to retell the story of the uprising on film. Michael Dawe, at one time the Red Deer and District Museum curator (the museum is now called the Red Deer Museum + Art Gallery), remembers seeing WB in a short historical film broadcast on television in the 1950s. To date, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool has not been able to verify the existence of this film.

<sup>62</sup> W.B. Cameron to Nosiseem, June 23, 1947, Vancouver.

<sup>63</sup> Reg Taylor, series of articles on the "North West Rebellion of 1885 Connection with Big Bear's Cree Indian Band." *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, October 22, 23 and 27, 1947.

<sup>64</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, February 22, 1948, Vancouver.

<sup>65</sup> In the *Saskatchewan Herald*, March 11, 1882, was news that Two and Two, a Cree from the Poundmaker Reserve, had threatened Yellow Mud Blanket with a gun but was ordered off the reserve for that (and also for being nasty to his wives).

<sup>66</sup> I feel that by this time WB's memories were dimming. This slipping is evident in comments noted on the back of some of the photographs. On the back of one picture, for example, WB wrote that he was standing on the site where the store he and Dill used to own was located. However, evidence uncovered since then shows this to be an error.

<sup>67</sup> Lloydminster historian Keith Davidson relates that WB used sticks poked in the ground to show where victims fell. Todd Kuehn of Vermilion says that he had actually seen WB do just that.

## Chapter 9

<sup>1</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, February 22, 1948, Vancouver.

<sup>2</sup> R.H. Macdonald Papers, SAB, Saskatoon.

<sup>3</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, February 19, 1948, Vancouver.

<sup>4</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, April 12, 1949, Meadow Lake.

<sup>5</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, July 8, 1948, Loon Lake.

<sup>6</sup> Old copies of the *Loon Lake Star* are archived at the Big Bear Trail Museum in Loon Lake.

<sup>7</sup> Hinchliffe's brother living in Victoria, BC, apparently has archived all those early photographs. Ed Stennett, interview with the author, July 23, 2003, Loon Lake.

<sup>8</sup> WB referred to pawnbrokers as the "three ball men," based on the old English custom of pawnshops displaying the three ball sign above their doors.

<sup>9</sup> A Remington rifle was in his effects at Meadow Lake that Douglas donated to the local Rotary Club. The rifle he is talking about may have been another one. Parties who have the Colt, the Winchester and the revolver are unknown.

<sup>10</sup> This building still exists, next to the United Church, all surrounded by tall spruce. The "Condemned" sign tacked on the front door is very obvious. Local historian Ed Stennett lived here with his family in 1953, not long after WB had left. He remembers how cold the place was in the winter because of the drafty big stone fireplace on the north wall.

<sup>11</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, November 19, 1948, Loon Lake.

<sup>12</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, January 2, 1949, from the DVA Hospital in Saskatoon. This pool hall still exists as well, but the windows are now blocked off.

<sup>13</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, January 8, 1949, Loon Lake.

<sup>14</sup> W.B. Cameron to the Macmillan Publishing Company, January 26, 1949, Loon Lake.

<sup>15</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, April 3, 1949, Loon Lake.

<sup>16</sup> When WB lived there, this building adjoined the Red and White Store on the north side, but sometime after WB's days, Lazar moved it a short distance north, making room for a lean-to.

<sup>17</sup> This same building is now owned by Tom and Marlene Miller, who until recently had used it to retail western wear.

<sup>18</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, April 26, 1949, Meadow Lake.

<sup>19</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, April 12, 1949, Meadow Lake.

<sup>20</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, April 30, 1949, Meadow Lake.

<sup>21</sup> Luxton family fonds, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Banff.

<sup>22</sup> Exactly where Bolsover House was has never been proven, but during excavation for the water treatment plant on the east side of town by the lake, old logs were dug up. Could this be the site?

<sup>23</sup> A recently published book by University of Manitoba English professor Warren Cariou openly and humorously discusses Meadow Lake, where Cariou was raised. Warren Cariou, *Lake of the Prairies* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> W.B. Cameron to Clifford Wilson, *Beaver*, May 20, 1949, Meadow Lake. Ms. Paul is a mystery woman. Long-time residents of Meadow Lake such as Jacqueline Lazar and Grace Bowerman do not remember her at all.

<sup>25</sup> W.B. Cameron to Kenneth Coppock, August 6, 1949, Meadow Lake. Glenbow Archives.

<sup>26</sup> W.B. Cameron, *War Trail of Big Bear*, 83.

<sup>27</sup> W.B. Cameron to Kenneth Coppock, August 6, 1949, Meadow Lake.

<sup>28</sup> He was likely referring to the process of photographing the original pages and then burning negatives onto metal that were then used as printing plates, eliminating typesetting.

<sup>29</sup> Kenneth Coppock to Elsie Cameron, May 9, 1977, Scottsdale, AZ.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> W.B. Cameron to Kenneth Coppock, August 5, 1949, Meadow Lake.

<sup>32</sup> W.B. Cameron to Kenneth Coppock, August 6, 1949, Meadow Lake.

<sup>33</sup> Kenneth Coppock to W.B. Cameron, August 23, 1949, Calgary.

<sup>34</sup> Kenneth Coppock to Elsie Cameron, May 9, 1977, Scottsdale.

<sup>35</sup> Kenneth Coppock to F.W. Shandro of Clark, Wilson & Company, Vancouver, June 27, 1977, Scottsdale.

<sup>36</sup> Kenneth Coppock to W.B. Cameron, December 5, 1950, Calgary.

<sup>37</sup> Kenneth Coppock to R.H. Macdonald, February 12, 1973, Scottsdale.

<sup>38</sup> Kenneth Coppock to Norman Luxton, September 13, 1949. Glenbow Archives.

<sup>39</sup> Kenneth Coppock to F.W. Shandro of Clark, Wilson & Company, Vancouver, June 27, 1977, Scottsdale.

<sup>40</sup> W.B. Cameron to Douglas Cameron, December 26, 1949, North Battleford.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> A Miss Gray did the fitting of the new eye. W.B. Cameron to Kenneth Coppock, October 24, 1950, Meadow Lake.

<sup>43</sup> W.B. Cameron to Douglas Cameron, December 8, 1950, Meadow Lake.

<sup>44</sup> W.B. Cameron to Douglas Cameron, December 24, 1950, North Battleford.

<sup>45</sup> Called Hospital #3, it was located on Centre Street and 6th Avenue. After being used for many other purposes, Hospital #3 was abandoned in the 1960s. Declared unsafe, it was demolished and burned by the Meadow Lake Fire Department in May 1985, and then replaced by the new Union Hospital. Later, Meadow Lake Manor was built on that location.

<sup>46</sup> After WB's death, all his effects in the hospital were gathered and given to Douglas. Overlooked, however, were the two canes he had brought with him. In time these were given to William Bobier, who, unable to walk, took them with him when he was discharged. These canes are still in his family's possession. Information courtesy of William's son, Willy Bobier, interview with the author, August 12, 2003, Rapid View, SK.

<sup>47</sup> Douglas Cameron to Owen Cameron on Canadian National stationery, March 8, 1951. At the time he wrote this, Douglas was returning home after the funeral. The Cameron family was not aware that another friend had come to see WB the day before, on March 3. Doug Light, a teenager then, who knew and admired WB from later Battleford times, was in Meadow Lake playing in a hockey tournament that weekend and had gone to see him on Saturday afternoon. Light found WB asleep so he left, planning to return sometime the following day after his hockey games. He was very saddened to learn that WB had passed away before he could get there.

<sup>48</sup> Remaining contents of the trunk have been referred to here as the Cameron collection. The note from Quinn has since disappeared.

<sup>49</sup> Douglas Cameron to Owen Cameron, March 8, 1951.

<sup>50</sup> Mrs. Gorst, matriarch of the Gorst family, the noted Meadow Lake chuckwagon professionals, was at one time the Meadow Lake librarian. She remembers WB borrowing books. Grace Bowerman, personal communication to author, July 21, 2003.

<sup>51</sup> Memorable in itself was the fact that it was typewritten onto the back side of a circular announcing a meeting of the Ministerial Association. Likely few in attendance realized Hartig's frugality.

<sup>52</sup> Hartig's original sermon is part of the Cameron collection.

<sup>53</sup> For some reason, WB's death was not registered until April 3, 1951. The death certificate issued September 15, 1976, by the Province of Saskatchewan, Department of Health Division of Vital Statistics, Reg. No. 51-07-002290, states "Deceased at Meadow Lake, March 4, age 88 years 7 months 6 days." The cause of death was pneumonia. (I do not know why there is a twenty-five year difference in dates between the death being registered and the date the death certificate was issued.)

<sup>54</sup> G. Scout was a shorter, and cheaper for inscription, version of government scout.

## Chapter 10

<sup>1</sup> Minnie was always referred to as Mary by WB's mother, Agnes Emma, however.

<sup>2</sup> Elsie Cameron, interview with the author, March 23-24, 2002, Lantzville, BC. See also the R.H. Macdonald Papers, SAB, Saskatoon.

<sup>3</sup> Where they married is not known.

<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, my wife, Shirley, managed to interpret most of them.

<sup>5</sup> Minnie Cameron to W.B. Cameron, Fort Frances, ON. There is no date on this letter, but it was likely around Thanksgiving in 1902 or 1903.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> R.H. Macdonald Papers, SAB, Saskatoon.

<sup>8</sup> W.B. Cameron, *Vermilion Signal*, August 8, 1907.

<sup>9</sup> W.B. Cameron, *Vermilion Signal*, February 20, 1908. Could it be that Minnie was ill during her pregnancy with Douglas, thus requiring her mother's help? Nothing has ever been revealed about this turn of events.

<sup>10</sup> Douglas and Elsie were married on Christmas Eve, 1942.

<sup>11</sup> W.B. Cameron to Nosiseem, June 23, 1947, Vancouver.

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that in 1948 while in Vancouver, WB had to pawn some things off to raise money.

<sup>13</sup> W.B. Cameron to Douglas Cameron, December 26, 1949, North Battleford.

<sup>14</sup> W.B. Cameron to Douglas Cameron, January 13, 1950, North Battleford.

<sup>15</sup> W.B. Cameron to Douglas Cameron, December 24, 1950, North Battleford.

<sup>16</sup> Douglas Cameron to W.B. Cameron, October 27, 1950, Montreal.

<sup>17</sup> W.B. Cameron to Norman Luxton, February 27, 1948, Vancouver. Here, WB was justifying why he was selling things to Luxton rather than keeping them in his estate.

<sup>18</sup> This was the Dr. Wasson house on Main Street in North Battleford, directly across from today's Royal Canadian Legion. Remodelled, it now houses a photographic studio.

<sup>19</sup> W.B. Cameron to Douglas Cameron, December 26, 1949, North Battleford.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Owen was a skilled boomer on the BC coast. His job was to gather floating logs and chain them together into log booms. His son Jim did the same thing for some time on Vancouver Island.

<sup>22</sup> W.B. Cameron to Douglas Cameron, December 26, 1949, North Battleford.

<sup>23</sup> Jessie Muir Chapman. The Chapmans contributed much to North Vancouver development and to sports. Jessie, an athletic cyclist, was involved with what would become the North Vancouver Recreational Club as well as with hostel development. The Chapmans helped establish the Capilano Tennis Club. Jessie's father, James, worked with the local school board for a number of years. Sadly, Jessie suffered for many years with Alzheimer's disease and we never got a chance to meet her.

<sup>24</sup> W.B. Cameron to Jessie Chapman, June 9, 1943, Regina.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> W.B. Cameron to Douglas Cameron, December 26, 1949, North Battleford.

<sup>27</sup> Jim and Ann Cameron, interview with the author, March 24–25, 2002, Parksville.

<sup>28</sup> Jim and Elsie Cameron, interview with the author, March 23–24, 2002, Lantzville. WB was forty when he married; Owen was thirty-eight.

<sup>29</sup> Elsie Noreen Stewart-Clough was the daughter of Brigadier General J.R. Stewart-Clough, Vancouver, with the British Columbia Light Horse and later the Seaforth Highlanders. She jokingly recalled to us that at regimental balls, her dance card was always filled because of the young officers in attendance. My wife, Shirley, and I had the wonderful pleasure of interviewing Elsie at her waterfront home in Lantzville in March 2003. She passed away on May 13, 2003.

<sup>30</sup> W.B. Cameron to Douglas Cameron, December 26, 1949, North Battleford. Owen died on December 4, 1974; Douglas on January 14, 1973.

<sup>31</sup> Elsie Cameron, interview with the author, March 23–24, 2002, Lantzville.

<sup>32</sup> W.B. Cameron to Douglas Cameron, December 26, 1949, North Battleford.

<sup>33</sup> Cameron, "Thirst Dance and A Fin-flash," *Free Press*, July 3, 1926. In Cree, Mikwoostigan means red-headed. Without a doubt, WB is referring to his old Vermilion friend Harry Bowtell, who was now ranching on Frog Creek, his house just across the road from the 1885 mill site. Alfalfa Bill was apparently Bill Gregor, who once farmed immediately south of Laurier Lake.

## Chapter 11

<sup>1</sup> Readers will recall from Chapter 9 that WB had a similar arrangement with Kenneth Coppock to

create pieces for *Canadian Cattlemen* in the late 1940s.

<sup>2</sup> Macdonald, *Eyewitness to History*, ix.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiii. WB was never one to sit down with the boys over coffee, even though they would have loved to have heard his adventurous tales, nor did he mix with the community, other than during the occasional lodge visit or when he was on speaking engagements. In his later years, WB retreated to his place of residence and wrote letters, many of them, their content often repeated.

<sup>4</sup> R.H. Macdonald to Kenneth Coppock, January 22, 1973, Saskatoon.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Coppock to R.H. Macdonald, February 12, 1973, Scottsdale.

<sup>6</sup> Stuart Hughes, *The Frog Lake "Massacre": Personal Perspectives on Ethnic Conflict* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> R.H. Macdonald to Elsie Cameron, March 17, 1977, Saskatoon.

<sup>8</sup> Linda McKnight, Managing Editor, McClelland & Stewart, to Elsie Cameron, May 31, 1977, Toronto.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Coppock to Elsie Cameron, May 9, 1977, Scottsdale.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth Coppock to Elsie Cameron, June 5, 1977, Scottsdale.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Coppock to Elsie Cameron, May 9, 1977, Scottsdale.

<sup>13</sup> They may also have paid Coppock \$500, who apparently never did hold the copyright according to Elsie's lawyers, but changes in the contract between Mel Hurtig and Elsie Cameron may have cancelled the payment. F.W. Shandro of Clark, Wilson & Company, to Hurtig Publishers, August 12, 1977, Vancouver.

<sup>14</sup> Elsie Cameron, interview with the author, March 23–24, 2002, Lantzville.

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth Coppock to Elsie Cameron, June 5, 1977, Scottsdale.

<sup>16</sup> R.H. Macdonald Papers, SAB, Saskatoon.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> One of the short works selected, "The Romance of Pemmican," appears in the Appendix of this book. Also in the Appendix is the story "Christmas at Frog Lake, 1884," which was not published in *Eyewitness to History*.

<sup>19</sup> This media coverage included television and radio segments on CTV Saskatoon (CFQC-TV) on October 23, 1985, and C95 FM radio on October 28, 1985.

<sup>20</sup> Elsie Cameron, interview with the author, Lantzville, March 23–24, 2002.

## Appendix

<sup>1</sup> *Saskatchewan Herald*, April 1, 1882.

<sup>2</sup> W.B. Cameron, "The Fur Trade in the Far North," first appearing in the *Northwest Illustrated Monthly* in February 1897.

<sup>3</sup> *Saskatchewan Herald*, September 1, 1883.

<sup>4</sup> *Saskatchewan Herald*, January 12, 1884.

<sup>5</sup> *Saskatchewan Herald*, February 9, 1884.

<sup>6</sup> Beal and Macleod, *Prairie Fire*, 219.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

<sup>8</sup> Ronaghan, *The Bull's Eye*.

<sup>9</sup> Douglas Cameron to Owen Cameron, March 8, 1951, en route via Canadian National to Montreal after WB's funeral.

<sup>10</sup> A Remington Noiseless Portable typewriter is held by the Barr Colony Heritage Cultural Centre in Lloydminster, likely identical to WB's. The Meadow Lake Museum also holds a Remington Noiseless but it is not a portable. Could this be the typewriter Mrs. Paul used?

<sup>11</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Williams' second wife (his first wife had died in a carriage accident) was the daughter of the Minister of the Interior, Sir David Macpherson.

<sup>12</sup> It was not until I began research for this book that I learned of the Prince Albert Colonization Company. To my surprise I also discovered that the late David Gilmour, an attorney then, was my

cousin several times removed, on my mother's side.

<sup>13</sup> Arthur S. Morton Manuscripts Collection, University of Saskatchewan.

<sup>14</sup> National Defence, Air Force, Welcome to 8 Wing, [http://www.airforce.forces.gc.ca/8wing/about\\_us/index\\_e.asp](http://www.airforce.forces.gc.ca/8wing/about_us/index_e.asp) (accessed April 30, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> W.B. Cameron, "Christmas at Frog Lake, 1884," SAB, Saskatoon. The story was originally published in the *Vermilion Signal*, January 2, 1908. A photocopy can be found in the Cameron collection.

<sup>16</sup> Bleasdel Cameron, "The Romance of Pemmican," *Canadian Magazine*, March (1902): 429–433. This article can be found in the Cameron collection. It later appeared in *Eyewitness to History*, 9–13.

<sup>17</sup> The article as published in *Canadian Magazine* includes the images described, as illustrations drawn from photographs.



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- Statements Regarding Property Destroyed During the Rebellion (E.9/28)
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- Post Histories of Fort Alexander, Fort Pitt and Frog Lake



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*“[H]istory has recorded that [William Bleasdel Cameron] was the only white man to escape the massacre. To have been the ‘sole white male survivor of the 1885 Frog Lake Massacre,’ a note he wrote on the back of one of his photographs, made WB special and newsworthy and he perpetuated this idea. Press releases and articles written about him invariably mention this fact. But was he really the only white male survivor?”*

*—from William Bleasdel Cameron: A Life of Writing and Adventure*

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ISBN 978-1-897425-32-9



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