THE DAWSON ROUTE
A PHASE OF WESTWARD EXPANSION

by

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ABSTRACT

THE DAWSON ROUTE: A PHASE OF WESTWARD EXPANSION

The basic problem attacked in this thesis is the general lack of readily available knowledge concerning the Dawson Route. While there is much material in manuscript collections and in government publications, little attention has been paid the route in other places. Several scholars have dealt briefly with particular aspects of the route, but no person has treated it in a comprehensive fashion. This thesis sets out to rectify this situation. It has been written in the belief that a short general history of the Dawson Route -- dealing with its origins, development, use, and significance -- is justified and will be of some interest.

Secondary problems have emerged in the course of this inquiry. In coping with these, the writer has attempted to describe the physical nature of the route and the natural obstacles overcome in its construction, and to tell why and how it was built. He has also tried to tell who used it, what it was like to travel the route during the 1870's, and to describe its relationship to other transportation routes. Finally, he has attempted to explain why it declined and to assess its significance. The thesis, in short, is a brief general history of the Dawson Route.

The research for this paper has been carried forward at libraries and archives in Ottawa, Toronto, Port Arthur, St. Paul,
Winnipeg, and Atikokan. Because physiography looms large in the story of the Dawson Route, a number of field trips into the area it traversed have been undertaken. Again, because the route was a physical thing, considerable effort has been expended in locating and reproducing maps and pictorial material to illustrate its use, its characteristics, and the country through which it passed. The writer has benefitted from involvement in archaeological and historical projects undertaken along the route in recent years.

Several conclusions have grown out of this inquiry. In large degree, the Dawson Route was an extension and refinement of a long tradition of water transportation in the area between Lake Superior and the Red River. It was developed in the face of considerable physical obstacles and may be viewed as a triumph over those obstacles. Concern for the economic and political future of the British Northwest inspired its construction. This concern was largely a result of the expansionist temper of Americans, and particularly Minnesotans. Combined with this were transportation developments and physical expansion in Minnesota, as well as the activities of the Canadian Party in Red River, which also worked to encourage the construction of a Canadian transportation route. The Dawson Route served a useful military-political purpose in 1870, but its success as an emigrant route to attract settlers to the Red River area (for which it was primarily designed) was severely limited. It declined because of inherent weaknesses and because of
developments in competing transportation facilities, both north and south of the international boundary. The relationship of the Dawson Route to the Canadian Pacific Railway was closer than has been suspected, and the fact that it survived for even a short period after 1873 was largely owing to the railway policy of Prime Minister Alexander Mackenzie. In a sense, the route was obsolete from the day it opened for emigrant travel in 1871. Nonetheless, it served a useful purpose and appears to have reflected the willingness of Canadians to marshal the resources of the new nation in the interests of an expansive national purpose.
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with the origins, development, use, and significance of the Dawson Route. More specifically, beginning with an outline of the geography and earlier history of the area under examination, it is intended to describe how and why the Dawson Route was conceived, explored, surveyed, and built. It is also intended to tell who used it, and in what numbers, and what it was like to travel the route. Finally, the thesis seeks to assess the importance of this short-lived (1870-78) transportation system. In short, this piece of work might be styled a brief general treatment of the Dawson Route presented with emphasis on social history.

* * * * * * *

A substantial remnant of the Dawson Route trends southwest through Quetico Provincial Park -- a preserve of approximately 1,750 square miles situated between Fort William and Fort Frances in Northwestern Ontario. For some sixty of its 450 miles, the route passed through the present park area. It was here, during summers of employment as a park ranger, that the writer first examined what subsequently proved to be the remains of Dawson Route dams, way-stations, and vessels. At the time, and for several years thereafter, little was learned about these remains. It seems, however, that their accidental discovery -- perhaps given heightened impact by the solitude and unpolished beauty of the wilderness setting --
marked the beginning of an investigation the results of which follow. It was a fortunate contingency that the initial encounter with the Dawson Route took place in Quetico Park. Because the park is a protected area where human interference with the natural environment is minimal, the portion of the route within its boundaries remains much as it was almost a century ago. While water levels have undoubtedly changed slightly, they are not appreciably different, and the portage trails are virtually unaltered. With only a modest exercise of the imagination, one can very nearly duplicate the experiences of early travellers on the route. This, at any rate, has been the experience of the writer, and it may explain why there are numerous references to this particular (but quite representative) segment of the Dawson Route. It should, however, be added that the writer has observed portions of the route from Port Arthur to Winnipeg during the course of several field trips into the area.

During the period 1963-67, research has been carried forward at the following places: the Public Archives of Canada (Ottawa, Ontario), the Ontario Department of Public Records and Archives (Toronto, Ontario), the Minnesota Historical Society (St. Paul, Minnesota), the Port Arthur Public Library (Port Arthur, Ontario), the Quetico-Superior Wilderness Research Station (Basswood Lake, Superior National Forest, Minnesota), at the National Museum of Canada and the headquarters of the Geological Survey of Canada (both in Ottawa),
and at the Toronto Public Library, the Legislative Library of Ontario, the Surveys and Mapping Branch of the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests, and the University of Toronto Library (all in Toronto). The writer has also visited briefly the library of the Hudson's Bay Company, Hudson's Bay House (Winnipeg, Manitoba), and the Atikokan Public Library (Atikokan, Ontario).

Field trips for physical examination of both the Dawson Route and the Pigeon River Route (trending west from Grand Portage) have taken the writer to the valleys of the Kaministiquia, Matawin, and Shebandowan Rivers; to Shebandowan, Kashabowie, Windigoostigwan, and Rainy Lakes; to Grand Portage, parts of the Pigeon River, and Saganaga Lake; to the Northwest Angle of Lake of the Woods; and to portions of the Rainy River as well as the country immediately east of Winnipeg. The segment of the Dawson Route from French Lake via Pickerel and Sturgeon Lakes, then down the Maligne River to Lac La Croix has been paddled many times, as has the boundary waters route from Saganaga, via Knife, Basswood, and Crooked Lakes, to Lac La Croix. The writer has also had the privilege of participating in Dawson Route archaeological work conducted at French Portage and Deux Rivières Portage by the Royal Ontario Museum, Lakehead University, and the Quetico Foundation, in cooperation with the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests. Working with a National Geographic Society photographer and with a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation television crew along portions of the
Dawson Route has provided further opportunity for coming to grips with the country and its history.

* * * * * * *

It is a germane fact (and to the writer, a rather overwhelming one) that the Dawson Route was conceived during the decade before Confederation and constructed immediately following that event. Its conception was related to larger plans which were being formulated between 1857 and 1867, and its construction took place at a time when the new Dominion was attempting to cope with the momentous problems of westward expansion, the doctrine of "manifest destiny" as preached and practised by some Americans (particularly in Minnesota), the first Riel Rebellion, the transfer of Hudson's Bay Company territory to Canada, the creation of Manitoba, and the surveying and construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. All of these large topics bear upon the Dawson Route and none of them can be excluded from this thesis. It has been, however, the intention of the writer to avoid these major issues as being beyond the scope of this paper, except insofar as it has proved necessary to refer to them to illuminate the story of the Dawson Route.

* * * * * * *
CHAPTER ONE: THE GEOGRAPHICAL, PREHISTORIC, AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE DAWSON ROUTE AREA

Scouring the surface of the Shield itself, pouring boulder clay into the valleys to the south, the ice sheets had hollowed the beds of new lakes and had diverted the courses of ancient rivers. There was left a drainage system, grand in its extent and in the volume of its waters, but youthful, wilful and turbulent.¹

Donald G. Creighton, 1956.

Here is an area about 175 miles long from east to west and of variable width up to 100 miles containing approximately 16,000 square miles [the country between Lake Superior and Lake of the Woods] where at least forty per cent of the surface is covered by lake waters and connecting streams and where the disarrangement of drainage due to intense glaciation presents an intriguing puzzle to the physiographic geologist.²

Wallace W. Atwood, 1949.

There is probably no part of the globe which can boast of so many noble reservoirs of fresh water as this country. From Lake Superior to Lake Ouinipique, the two largest lakes, there is a chain of fifteen considerable ones, besides others of less note, and into which several noble rivers fall.³

Peter Grant, c. 1804.
The exploration, surveying, and construction of a transportation route might be considered a human triumph over geographical features. The degree to which such efforts deserve to be styled a triumph depends upon the efficiency of the resultant route, the distance involved, and the geographical peculiarities of the country traversed.

The Dawson Route, in its ultimate form, stretched for 452.05 circuitous miles between Prince Arthur's Landing, on Thunder Bay, and Fort Garry, at the confluence of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers. At its eastern extremity, the route began with a 45 mile wagon road from Thunder Bay to Lake Shebandowan. Proceeding in a generally westerly direction, this was followed by 312.05 miles of broken navigation (including eleven portages with a combined length of 8.33 miles). This navigable section linked Lower Shebandowan Lake to the Northwest Angle of Lake of the Woods. A second wagon trail (known as the Fort Garry Road, or Snow's Road) extended from the latter place to the western terminus of the route, a distance of 95 miles. The two terminal roads totalled 140 miles in length; the intervening navigable waters, including portages, added another 312.05 miles. Given these figures, it becomes clear that more than two-thirds of the Dawson Route depended on water transportation (see map no. 1, unbound).

This is not surprising. Except for a span of some thirty miles immediately east of the Red River, the entire Dawson Route passed through Precambrian Shield country.
Much of the Dawson Route passed through country characterized by rock ridges, water, and coniferous forests.
This is not to deny variations in soils and landforms, for the route not only crossed the height of land west of Lake Superior, but also passed through a portion of the Thunder Bay clay pocket (by way of the Thunder Bay Road) and the Rainy River clay plain (by means of the river). In addition, the Fort Garry Road crossed a large tract of wooded swamps and open muskegs for more than half its length before dipping down into the Manitoba Lowland. On the whole, however, the Dawson Route traversed what is commonly thought of as typical Precambrian Shield country of the Northwestern Ontario variety. That is, it passed largely through a landscape characterized by glacially scoured rock, thin and discontinuous soils, rocky hills and ridges ranging in local relief up to 500 feet, and forests of Black Spruce, Trembling Aspen, Silver Birch, and Jack, Red, and White Pine (see map no. 2, unbound).

The most striking characteristic of the region is, however, the intricate river and lake system which seams and surrounds it. A trip through the area will confirm this view, for it will quickly become evident that lakes, swamps, beaver-meadows, rivers, and streams dominate the landscape. Their genesis is to be found during the glacial epochs when the rocky Precambrian substructure was scoured, gouged, and laid bare by massive ice action. The continental ice sheets -- their slow advances like those of giant rock-studded rasps -- scraped away the soils of the region, carried them south, and deposited them in the area now occupied by the north-central
Lakes, swamps, beaver-meadows, and rivers dominate much of the landscape in the area of the Dawson Route. A portion of the route is indicated in orange.
states. The mile-thick glaciers did more, however, for they left a wrenched and ravaged terrain marked by ice-gouged depressions ranging up to several hundred feet in depth and about forty square miles in extent.

When the last of the four great ice sheets (the Wisconsin glaciation) retreated from the area some 10,000 years ago, its melt-waters filled in the labyrinth of basins which the glaciers had left behind. In the merest twinkling of geological time these basins brimmed over, their waters spilling into adjacent depressions. In this manner a complex pattern of drainage was created at an early date over much of the Dawson Route area. It is almost certain, however, that the western portion of the route (from about Rainy Lake west) remained submerged beneath the waters of glacial Lake Agassiz from the time of the Valders Retreat (8,500 to 7,000 B.C.) of the Wisconsin glaciation until approximately 500 B.C. Nevertheless, during this period Lake Agassiz continued to drain eastward into the Lake Superior basin until, by 500 B.C., its level had been reduced to reveal a fragmented, disarranged drainage pattern similar to that which prevails today.6

** ** ** ** ** **

From the time of the Aqua-Plano Indians (c. 7,000 to c. 5,000 B.C.), who lived near the shores of glacial and post-glacial lakes, through the period of the Boreal Archaic Indians (c. 5,000 to c. 500 B.C.), who apparently used dugout canoes, life in the region was strikingly -- and understandably -- water
oriented. This was also the case with the Middle Woodland Indians, who inhabited the country from about 500 B.C. to about A.D. 500. They were followed by the Late Woodland Indians who used canoes of bark construction and who persisted into the protohistoric period. It is almost certain that all of the Indians mentioned above had boats of some kind. Moreover, the settlement patterns of these Indians clearly demonstrate their dependence upon the lakes and rivers. George I. Quimby, an acknowledged authority on these people, writes that "although other cultural or environmental forces may have operated, waterways as means of travel, transport, and settlement were the most important single geographic factor of the region after 7000 B.C."\(^7\)

With the arrival of Europeans in the area — of whom Jacques de Noyon, who travelled west from Lake Superior in 1688, appears to have been first — the Indian history becomes puzzling and complex. It is likely that the confusing nomenclature (where Indian tribes were concerned) of early historical diaries and accounts has tended to obfuscate the situation. Nonetheless, taking both historical and archaeological evidence into account, it seems that the water highways of the region between the Red River and Lake Superior served a number of shifting and meeting cultures. There is evidence that there were Siouian people (Assiniboine) in the area about A.D. 1,000 and that, after A.D. 1,400 or thereabouts, they were joined by Algonkian Indians (Cree) who moved in from the north or north-east in large numbers. During the early years of French-Indian contact west of Superior,
both the Assiniboine and Cree were present. Contact (and conflict) between these two tribes was especially evident around Christinaux Lake (Lake of the Crees, now known as Rainy Lake) and Lake of the Woods (also known as Lake of the Assiniboine during early historical times). By the time of La Vérendrye's arrival in the area, however, the Ojibwa were exerting pressure from the east and the Cree and Assiniboine were being pushed into the more westerly portion of the border lakes country. In broad terms, there was a general westward shift of peoples, probably inspired by inter-tribal conflicts and the systematic extermination of fur-bearing animals in the East. Added to this was pressure brought to bear by the Forest Sioux of present-day northern Minnesota. Acculturation and inter-marriage have served to further complicate the pattern of tribal movements for twentieth-century historians and anthropologists. By about 1800, however, the Ojibwa controlled most of the area later traversed by the Dawson Route, even though intermittent warfare between them and the Forest Sioux continued well into the nineteenth century.

The Ojibwa assumed control of an area poor in arable land and heavily forested, but rich in waterways. The only long-term inhabitants during historical times, they were an itinerant, hunting, fishing, and gathering people who neither settled in large static groups, nor practised agriculture to any significant extent. Nomads by necessity, they seldom stayed more than a week in one location during the winter months. Instead, they
moved in family groups by snowshoe and toboggan from one forest location to another. During most of the year, however, these master canoe men and builders moved along the water trails, frequently shifting their lodges from place to place as they travelled between fishing grounds, wild-rice beds, and areas of plentiful game.\(^\text{10}\)

* * * * * *

Considering the waterways in a broader sense, the history of the region hinges on its strategic location in terms of continental geography, for it lies directly between Lake Superior (the western node of the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence drainage system) and Lake Winnipeg (the water crossroads of the Northwest). And while the intervening drainage is complex and intricate, there is a discernible pattern to it. The height of land, which separates the waters flowing west to Lake Winnipeg (and eventually into Hudson Bay) from those flowing east into Lake Superior, is located roughly fifty air-miles west of Fort William. Surprising as it may seem, there are good water connections between the easterly and westerly flowage at several points along this continental watershed (see map no. 3, unbound). There are, of course, portages at these points, but those between South Lake and North Lake (on the Pigeon River Route) and Kashabowie Lake and Lac Des Mille Lacs (on the Dawson Route) are short -- the former being a mere 680 paces, and the latter one mile in length. The crossing between the Dog River and the Savanne River on the northernmost route is more difficult. Both of
Map of Surveyor General, Joseph Bouchette, 1815. The Dog Lake and Pigeon River canoe routes are traced over in yellow; the height of land is already more than adequately emphasized.
these rivers flow away from the divide through flat, swampy country, and two long portages aptly named the Swampy Portage (2,659 yards) and the Meadow Portage (4,566 yards) must be carried. Despite these difficulties, the route was used by fur traders and others for many decades. These water and portage connections across the height of land made possible the use of several natural canoe routes which begin at Lake Superior and extend more or less west to arrive, eventually, at Lake Winnipeg.

For the purpose of the early European explorers and traders, these canoe routes served as a convenient westward extension of the St. Lawrence - Great Lakes corridor to the interior of North America. And while other water arteries could, with difficulty, be followed between Lake Superior and the West (the Seine River system is an example), the two fastest and most efficient routes were the Dog Lake route (used most heavily after 1804 and following the Kaministiquia River, Dog Lake, Lac Des Mille Lacs, and the Maligne River to Rainy Lake and points west) and the Pigeon River (international boundary waters) Route. These converge at Lac La Croix, within the present bounds of Quetico Provincial Park, and then continue on to Lake Winnipeg via Namakan and Rainy Lakes, the Rainy River, Lake of the Woods, and the Winnipeg River (see map no. 4, unbound).

In brief, during the early historical period (1688-1821), its drainage pattern and location made the region later traversed by the Dawson Route an integral link in the major water highway joining East and West. And, for the student of geopolitics,
its canoe routes stand as one of the reasons why Canada de-
veloped along an east-west axis -- not in spite of her geography,
but because of it. 11

* * * * * * *

In 1688, Jacques de Noyon -- twenty years old, and born 
at Trois Rivières -- ascended the Kaministiquia, packed his 
gear across the height of land, swung west among the jumbled 
lakes, swamps, and rivers of the pays d'en haut and arrived,
finally, at Rainy Lake, where he wintered. De Noyon left no 
journal of his trip, but it is likely that he followed the 
Seine River system west of Lac Des Mille Lacs. 12 While French 
records are silent about the region for about thirty years 
after de Noyon's inaugural trip, it is almost certain that 
other white men soon followed him west of Superior.

In 1696, the French posts of the western interior were 
abandoned, and for more than a decade the upper country was 
deserted except for the odd renegade coureur de bois and a 
few Jesuits. Then, in 1717, Sieur de la Nôue re-established 
the fort which Dulhut had first built (about 1680) at the 
mouth of the Kaministiquia River. 13 Five years later an 
officer named Pachot wrote that the best route to the West 
was via the Nantokouagane River, "about seven leagues from 
Kaministigoya." 14 This, evidently, was the Pigeon River 
route, later to achieve great prominence, and the tenor of 
Pachot's comment suggests that Frenchmen had already been 
using it.
It remained, however, for La Vérendrye to place the southern route clearly and permanently on the map. At his Lake Nipigon trading post, in 1727 and 1728, he had heard from Indian customers of the rich fur country to the west. Accordingly, in 1731, he sent his nephew La Jemeraye west from Grand Portage with three canoes and a handful of paddlers. The terminus of this important thrust of exploration was Rainy Lake. The following spring La Vérendrye followed his nephew west with seven canoes, clearing some forty portage trails as he went. Three years later a fort had been built on the Red River and the waterway to the west had been revealed. During the 1730's, 40's, and 50's many French canoes followed La Vérendrye's lead, some going inland from the "Great Carrying Place" at Grand Portage, others taking the northern route via Dog Lake (see map no. 4, unbound). More important, the region between Lake Superior and Lake Winnipeg was now firmly established as a link in the fur traders' trunk route to the West. The waterways had come into their own, and for almost a hundred years, while the epic fur trade adventure dominated the history of the Northwest, the canoes of countless voyageurs passed along them.

With the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, however, the trend of ever-increasing traffic was temporarily reversed. Trade on Lake Superior and to the west was all but abandoned as, one by one, the "Posts of the Western Sea" were closed. Nonetheless, with France eliminated (after 1763) as a North
American power, the English, American and Scottish adventurers who flocked into Canada behind Wolfe's soldiers were quick to follow where the French traders had led. In 1774, alone, more than sixty big North Canoes went inland from Grand Portage and two years later the new "Lords of the North" were working the country well above Lake Winnipeg.

Unlike the French, who had used both the Pigeon River and Dog Lake routes, the pedlars from Quebec travelled exclusively via the southern waterway. Thus the old canoe trail located to the north fell into disuse until circumstances made necessary its re-discovery at a later date. In the interim the trade expanded, the North West Company was formed, and traffic along the waterway leading west from Superior grew in volume.

Then, after a decade of North West Company existence, and following the American Revolutionary War, international rivalries began to complicate the already competitive trading situation. And, with the United States Government declaring its intention to tax British merchandise passing through Grand Portage, the Northwesterners began a pressing search for an alternate route to the West. In 1798 the search bore fruit when Roderic Mackenzie rediscovered the strangely forgotten French route via Dog Lake. MacKenzie travelled the route from Lac La Croix to "Caministiquia on Lake Superior, from whence", he wrote, "I soon reached Grand Portage, being the first who reached there from Lac La Pluie direct by water
"Lake Superior", by Frances Ann Hopkins, from a reproduction of the original oil painting, Minnesota Historical Society. The original is at the Glenbow Foundation, Calgary.

Mrs. Hopkins, the wife of Sir George Simpson's personal secretary, often travelled in North Canoes such as those depicted here. Her paintings of voyageurs and their craft are without equal.
communication." The North West Company immediately began to plan its move from Grand Portage Bay to the mouth of the Kaministiquia River. By 1801 the move had begun. Two years later Alexander Henry the Younger found Fort William well on the way to completion; until 1821 it was to remain the great inland headquarters of the North-westers. Here, where the floating population during the summer was estimated at 3,000, was an oasis of civilization even grander than that of Grand Portage. The canoe route leading up the Kaministiquia did not, however, shine so brightly in the eyes of the voyageurs. It was longer and more difficult than the Pigeon River route. From Lake Superior to Lake Winnipeg, the paddlers counted sixty portages (a total land carry of about twenty miles). The water portions of the route stretched for approximately 600 miles to the mouth of the Winnipeg River (about fifty miles longer than the Pigeon River route). From 1804 until 1821 this was to be the major highway linking Lake Superior to Lake Winnipeg even though the boundary waters route continued to be used by competitors of the North West Company.

With the coalition of 1821, however, it was decided to abandon Fort William as a major depot. This decision made it clear "that in the old clash of transport routes the approach through Hudson Bay had triumphed over that through Montreal." The vast majority of the Hudson's Bay Company traffic was soon passing into the interior via York Factory. "The Northwest Company route from Fort William to Lake Winnipeg
dependent on the expensive canoe", writes H. A. Innis, "was abandoned and the York boat was supreme." In general, this is true. It should be added, however, that the Dog Lake route was not completely abandoned. Fort William remained in operation as a post of greatly reduced importance until 1878, and the Hudson's Bay Company continued to send express canoes over the route as well as a severely limited amount of goods for local distribution. The post journals and district reports of the Company indicate that the route was used sporadically throughout the 1820's, 30's, 40's, and 50's, even though some of the westward traffic was routed via the Whitefish River and Lac La Flèche (Arrow Lake). This latter trail joined the Pigeon River route (see map no. 5, unbound) which continued to be lightly used by the American Fur Company, independent traders, and others.

Fur traders, moreover, were not the only users of the Dog Lake route. In 1823, Major Stephen Long, acting under instructions of the United States Government, led an expedition from Lake Winnipeg to Fort William. At the same time, and for several years thereafter, American and British boundary surveyors, operating under Article 7 of the Treaty of Ghent (1814), were examining both the Pigeon River and Dog Lake routes. Missionaries also used the route. Abbé G. A. Belcourt, for instance, left a detailed account of his journey in 1831. Use continued into the 1840's. In June, 1843, Henry Lefroy (on his way to make magnetic surveys in the North)
passed along the waterway which he described as "a succession of pretty lakes emptying into one another by short crooked channels broken by falls and rapids, and necessitating many portages." A year later, four Grey Nuns, en route to the Red River Settlement, travelled the same way, to be followed (in 1846) by Paul Kane, the illustrious painter of Canadian Indians. John Rae, who had used the route in 1844 and in 1845, used it again in 1848 when he accompanied Sir John Richardson into the Northwest in search of the ill-fated Franklin Expedition.

The Dog Lake Route was never completely abandoned. It was used by travellers such as those mentioned above, by the Ojibwa, and by express canoes of the Hudson's Bay Company. Governor George Simpson, for example, paddled by his superb Iroquois crew, continued to use the waterway well into the 1850's. It, like the Pigeon River route, fell into comparative disuse and disrepair but both waterways were known and sporadically used when George Gladman led the Red River Exploring Expedition west from Lake Superior in 1857.
FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER ONE

1 Donald Creighton, The Empire of the St. Lawrence (Toronto, 1956), p.4.


4 The distances given in this paragraph are from "North-Western Communication", in "General Report of the Minister of Public Works for the year ending 30th June, 1873", Canada: Sessional Papers, vol.7, no.2, 1874, p.49.

The Sessional Papers of Canada (hereafter referred to as C.S.P.) contain the "General Reports of the Minister of Public Works" which, in turn, include sections entitled "North-Western Communication". In many cases S. J. Dawson's reports to the Minister are appended. To simplify things, these appended reports are cited hereafter as in the following sample: Dawson, "Report of 1874", C.S.P., vol.8, no.6, 1875, Appendix 23, p.181. It is understood that Dawson's reports are attached to the "North-Western Communication" section of the "General Report of the Minister of Public Works" unless otherwise specified.


Eric W. Morse, Canoe Routes of the Voyageurs, The Geography and Logistics of the Canadian Fur Trade (Toronto, the Quetico Foundation, 1962) treats the importance of the water routes in this reproduction of three articles which first appeared in the Canadian Geographical Journal in May, July, and August, 1961.

De Noyon's trip is described in a memorandum from Governor de Vaudreuil and Intendant Michel Begon to the Duke of Orleans, 13 Feb., 1717; see Abbé G. Dugas, The Canadian West, Its Discovery by the Sieur de la Vérendrye, Its Development by the Fur-Trading Companies, down to the Year 1822 (Montreal, 1905), pp. 32-34.

The initial date of construction and exact location of Fort Kaministiquia have been subjects of some dispute. An account of some of the differing points of view is given in J. P. Bertrand, Highway of Destiny (New York, 1959), pp. 53-57.


An excellent and detailed description of the Pigeon River route is found in Coues, vol. 1, pp. 7-57; see also A. S. Morton, A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71 (Toronto, n.d.), pp. 174-175.

Among the earliest of the independent traders to go into the Northwest were James Finlay, Maurice Blondeau, Thomas Corry, Alexander Henry the Elder, and Benjamin and Joseph Frobisher. Perhaps the first of them was a hold-over from the French Regime, a mysterious (to historians) coureur de bois called Franceway or Francois the French Pedlar, and known to the Indians as Saswee; see Innis, pp. 187-189 and Mari Sandoz, The Beaver Men (New York, 1964), pp. 144-155. For use of the waterways immediately after 1763, see also W. Stewart Wallace, The Pedlars from Quebec and Other Papers on the Nor' Westers (Toronto, 1954), pp. 1-18; W. L. Morton, Manitoba, A History (Toronto, 1957), pp. 35-43; Innis, pp. 188-200; Alexander Henry, Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories between the Years 1760

17 Jonathan Carver, who visited Grand Portage in 1767, indicated that it was already an important rendezvous for traders proceeding west. Carver, Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America, p. 106; see also Solon J. Buck, "The Story of Grand Portage", in Rhoda R. Gilman and June D. Holmquist (eds.), Selections from Minnesota History (St. Paul, 1965), pp. 26-38.


19 The Treaty of Paris (1783) between Britain and the United States gave Grand Portage to the latter.

20 Masson, vol. 1, p. 46.


22 Good descriptions of Fort William (so named in 1807) are found in the following: Ross Cox, Adventures on the Columbia River ... Together with a Journey across the American Continent, vol. 2 (London, 1832), pp. 249-255; Gabriel Franchere, Narrative of a Voyage to the Northwest Coast of America in the years 1811, 1812, 1813, and 1814 (New York, 1854); Wallace, The Pedlars from Quebec, pp. 72-80.

23 A statistical comparison of the Pigeon River and Dog Lake routes is found in Henry Youle Hind, Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857 and of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition of 1858, vol. 2 (London, 1860), pp. 399-402 and 427-433. There are many accounts of the Dog Lake route during the period 1804-1821, but among the most useful are: Coues, vol. 1, pp. 216-223; "The Diary of Hugh Faries", in Gates (ed.), pp. 195-203;


25 Innis, p. 289.

26 The microfilm copies of these journals and reports from the Hudson's Bay Company Archives (1670-1870) at the Public Archives of Canada contain much valuable material. See especially B105/e/2, "Lac La Pluie, 1822-23"; B105/e/3, "Lac La Pluie, Report on District, 1823-24"; B105/e/4, "Lac La Pluie, Report on District, 1824-25"; see also Lac La Pluie Post Journals 1822-23 through 1837-38 (Reel no. 1 M 68, Series 1) and "A Journal of Transactions and Occurrences at Fort William from 1st June 1831 to 1st June 1852". The Hudson's Bay Company microfilm was used with the kind permission of the Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company.

27 William H. Keating, *Narrative of an Expedition*, vol. 2, pp. 77-149.

28 Involved in this first careful survey of the Dawson Route area were David Thompson, Dr. John J. Bigsby, and Major Joseph Delafield, among others. Several canoe routes were examined and much information concerning these routes is found in: Major Joseph Delafield, *The Unfortified Boundary, A Diary of the First Survey of the Canadian Boundary Line From St. Regis to the Lake of the Woods*, Robert McElroy and Thomas Riggs, eds. (privately printed, 1943); John J. Bigsby, *The Shoe and Canoe; or, Pictures of Travel in the Canadas*, vol. 2 (London, 1850); *International Boundary Commission, Joint Report Upon the Survey and Demarcation of the Boundary between the United States and Canada from the Northwesternmost Point of Lake of the Woods to Lake Superior* (Washington, 1931).


30 W. S. Wallace (ed.) "Sir Henry Lefroy's Journey to the North-West in 1843-4", *Transactions of the Royal Society*


33 Sir George Simpson made the canoe voyage between Lake Superior and Lake Winnipeg on twenty-five occasions during the years 1826-1859. A good account of one such voyage, in 1854, is given in Hugh J. Moberly, When Fur Was King (Toronto, 1929).

34 Many of the works cited above (including the Hudson's Bay Company microfilm) supply information on use of the Pigeon River Route. Its use immediately prior to 1857 is mentioned in Hind, Narrative of the Canadian Exploring Expeditions, vol. 2, p. 423; see also Grace Lee Nute, The Voyageur's Highway, Minnesota's Border Lake Land (St. Paul, 1951).
CHAPTER TWO: PROLOGUE TO THE DAWSON ROUTE; THE 1840's, 1850's AND EARLY 1860's

In the 'forties Canadians began to dream again of the Northwest; in the 'fifties the dreams assumed recognizable form; and in the next decade, Canada reached out for her prize. Here, as in the United States, westward expansion was powered by many forces.¹

Alvin C. Gluek, Jr.

But significant thinking and endeavour in connection with the problem of the future of the west were still confined largely to leaders in the politico-business world, and even among them to a minority.²

Reginald G. Trotter

At last in 1858 a group which included Macdonell secured a charter for the North-West Transportation Navigation and Railway Company. The new company proposed to build from Lake Superior to Rainy Lake, where steamers would be used to Lake of the Woods, and thence by rail to the Red River .... Such schemes have a more than antiquarian interest, for they not only indicate the growth of a belief in the practicability of a Pacific railway, but served at the time to stimulate opinion in Great Britain and Canada in favour of improved communications with the west.³

G. P. de T. Glazebrook
The general function of the Dawson Route was to conquer the "canoe country" of the Precambrian Shield between Thunder Bay and Fort Garry, thereby providing a means of transportation and communication linking East to West. In accomplishing this, however briefly and inefficiently, it deserves to be remembered as a precursor of the Canadian Pacific Railway. The relationship between the two transportation routes was, in fact, close, despite the obvious differences between them. Like the country mouse and city mouse of children's story-books, they were genetically related. In broad terms, the construction of the Dawson Route was inspired by the same Canadian impulse toward westward expansion and nation-building which precipitated the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

1857 was the year in which this Canadian concern for the vast area beyond Lake Superior attained an unprecedented level. It was, in W. L. Morton's words, "the year in which Upper Canadian interest in the annexation of the North-West became active with the despatch of the exploring expeditions led by S. J. Dawson and H. Y. Hind." These expeditions, both literally and figuratively, blazed the trail for the Dawson, or Red River Route. Exploring activity west of Lake Superior was, however, but one aspect of the 1857 outburst of interest concerning the Northwest. Many of the events of that climactic year were interrelated and relevant to the development of a route between the Province of Canada and Fort Garry, the nerve-centre of Rupert's Land. Behind these
events lay developments in the Hudson's Bay Company territories, the Minnesota Territory, Great Britain, and Canada West. They took place during the period 1840-56.

Rupert's Land, 1840-56:

In 1850, the Hudson's Bay Company held the West. Its holdings were in three parts: Rupert's Land, which encompassed the lands draining into Hudson Bay and which was held by title under the Charter of 1670; the Indian Territory, which involved all the wilderness not under colonial rule and in which the company had an exclusive licence to trade (renewed in 1838 for twenty-one years); and Vancouver Island, which was, after 1849, a Crown Colony administered by the company. In Rupert's Land, the focus of attention and activity was the Red River Settlement, also known as Assiniboia. The parishes of the settlement were strung out along the banks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, and at the centre, where the rivers come together, was Upper Fort Garry. The Upper Fort was the seat of government for the District of Assiniboia, an important provisions and transportation depot of the Hudson's Bay Company, and the headquarters of the fur trade of the Red River District. During the 1840's, the Red River Settlement was relatively isolated and unknown. It was, as W. L. Morton notes, "a simple community, made self-subsistent by agriculture to some degree, but dependent on hunt and fur trade, and as yet more
a religious and missionary settlement than a political community, however rudimentary." But the Settlement also performed an essential function in the fur trade of the Northwest and in this connection there were problems.

The Hudson's Bay Company not only governed in Rupert's Land, but it also enjoyed the exclusive right of trade. From 1843, however, the company had been involved in fierce competition with American rivals in the border area from Rainy Lake west through Pembina to Turtle Mountain. Of greater significance, the border competition drove up the price of pelts and offered an alternative market to prospective private traders residing within the Red River District. Although such trade was illegal, it began in 1844 when Norman W. Kittson of the American Fur Company set up shop at Pembina. His venture resulted in an outburst of free trading in Red River and consequent opposition to the Hudson's Bay Company's monopoly rights on the part of those engaged in the illicit trade. Many of the private traders were métis and half-breeds; their grievances were to be heard in both Great Britain and the Province of Canada; and their activities were to pose a serious threat to the Company's political authority and commercial rights.

Kittson's chief allies were the Red River Settlement's leading merchants, James Sinclair and Andrew McDermot. "Here were two men", writes Alvin Gluek, Jr., "whom pride never prevented from stooping over to pick up a penny." Their
alliance with Kittson was precipitated by the Hudson's Bay Company's closure of York Factory to independent importers. Lacking a viable route to Lake Superior, Sinclair, McDermot, and others turned south to Pembina and St. Paul. The number of pelts smuggled out of Rupert's Land grew rapidly.\textsuperscript{10} "The free traders of Red River, especially McDermot and James Sinclair," notes E. E. Rich, "were building up a challenge based on the American market and on the presence of Norman Kittson at Pembina."\textsuperscript{11}

The Company tried to stop the illicit trade with the result that its Charter and its government were attacked and complaints sent to England. It seemed that there was little possibility of halting the private trade in furs. Even the arrival of Imperial troops in June, 1846, did not work to the lasting benefit of the Company.\textsuperscript{12} By 1850, Governor George Simpson and the Council of Assiniboia had "virtually accepted the colony as a potentially independent, self-governing, and partly French-speaking community."\textsuperscript{13} Behind this tacit acceptance was métis nationalism and métis insistence on freedom to trade augmented by American support for free settlement and free trade. While the chartered monopoly rights of the Company officially continued, the independent trade in furs increased in volume after 1850.

Despite the Company's concessions, difficulties in the Red River Settlement did not disappear. In 1851, 540 métis petitioned the Aborigines Protection Society claiming formal freedom of trade and the right to the land, among other things.\textsuperscript{14}
This petition, its edge effectively blunted by the de facto extension of freedom to trade, was referred to the Colonial Office which was becoming increasingly conscious of the questionable status of Assiniboia and the other territories of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Other factors were also bringing the Red River Settlement into the purview of the outside world. Among them were improved communications and simple growth. Since George Simpson, following the coalition of 1821, had shifted the supply system of the Company away from the Fort William route and north to Hudson Bay, the colony had been largely isolated from the Province of Canada. Even mail contact had declined to a twice-yearly basis. In 1853, however, a monthly mail service was organized via Minnesota, and the people of Red River came into frequent communication with the world outside. The improving waggon trails and steamboat services to the south also gave the settlers of Red River an increased opportunity for direct contact with outsiders. "We now see people from Red River almost every week", wrote a resident of Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, during the summer of 1853.

And the population was growing. The census of 1849 showed a total population of 5,391; by 1856, it had risen to 6,523. The population continued to grow. Already, by 1849, it had outgrown subordination to the Hudson's Bay Company. Numbers, and the development of civilized institutions were proving inimical to the regime of the fur trade.
Of all the developments in the Red River Settlement, however, the rise of the private trade in furs was most significant. The old order in the Northwest was in decline. The Hudson's Bay Company could not enforce its monopoly in the face of popular resentment. The crumbling of commercial monopoly could only lead to self-government, the growth of general commerce, and the rise of agriculture. These things were clearly coming, but to a few interested onlookers in 1850 -- and to many more in 1856 -- it seemed that "Red River's trade and loyalty would gravitate towards America rather than towards Canada, for there appeared a strong possibility that Canada ... reaching out towards the prairies in rivalry with America, might herself succumb to the economic strength which was developing to the south."

Minnesota, 1840-56:

To the south of the Red River Settlement, considerable strength was developing. Until 1837 there were no lands in the area of Minnesota open for settlement. All was "Indian country" except for a tiny nucleus of white settlers who had been given permission to establish themselves at Fort Snelling. By 1849, when Minnesota achieved territorial status, fewer than 4,000 people (not counting Indians) lived within the bounds of what was to become the State of Minnesota. In the same year, the population of the Red River Settlement was 5,391
(including 537 Indians). By 1857, however, the population of the Minnesota Territory had mushroomed to no less than 150,037! That of Assiniboia, judging by the 1856 figure of 6,523, was only about 7,000.

For Minnesota this was a boom period of spectacular expansion which made developments to the north look paltry indeed. Little wonder that "newspapers of the territory and the state during the 1850s and 1860s revealed a global view of Minnesota's manifest destiny". Town building and land speculation were rampant and were attended by the expansion of transportation facilities. By 1854 there was a good railroad-steamboat connection from New York to St. Paul and steamboat arrivals at the latter place rose from more than one hundred in 1855 to nearly three hundred in 1857.

Also important were developments in trade and transportation between St. Paul and the Red River Settlement. The unofficial extension of the right of free trade in the Red River settlement marked a period of tribulation for the Hudson's Bay Company; for the commerce of Minnesota it signalled good times. As the technically illegal cart-loads of fur found their way south via Pembina, traders such as Kittson prospered and the economic ties between St. Paul and Assiniboia were knit and then strengthened. With the opening of free trade with St. Paul, the occupation of cart-freighting came into its own. "After 1850", writes W. L. Morton, "the carts were organized in brigades of indefinite and growing numbers, and
wound, lurching and shrieking, by the Crow Wing and other trails over the height of land to St. Paul.25

Railroads and steamboats would follow, but during the years 1850-56, the Red River carts (replaced by dog sleds in winter) linked Fort Garry to St. Paul (see map no. 6 on following page). The effect of this link was dramatic. St. Paul became the centre of commerce for the Red River settlers, and fur sales in the river port climbed up and up. By far the larger proportion of the pelts came from the British Northwest. According to the St. Paul Press, 29 August, 1863, fur sales in 1850 amounted to $15,000; in 1855 they totalled $40,000. The figures for 1856 and 1857 were $97,253 and $182,491 respectively.26 Moreover, Minnesota merchants were not just buying; they were also selling trade and consumer goods to the people of Assiniboia. By 1856, although no exact figures were available, the Governor of Assiniboia calculated that goods imported from St. Paul could not "now be less than half, and in a few years will probably exceed in value the whole of the Company's [trade] to Red River by way of York Factory."27

Free trade, the development of the cart trails, and the widespread improvement of transportation facilities in the United States had made the Red River Settlement part of the economic hinterland of a vigorous St. Paul. Already, in 1854, John Ballenden had advised Sir George Simpson that the Minnesota route would soon afford the only viable means for importing goods from Canada and England.28 In 1856, there
The West Plains Trail
The East Plains Trail
The Woods Trail
Portion of Dawson Route (after 1871)

Early trails from the Red River Settlement to St. Paul
(adapted from Grace Lee Nute, "The Red River Trails", Minnesota History, September, 1925)
was no transportation route running across British soil between the Province of Canada and the Red River. After 1821, the east-west route had given way to the northern route via Hudson Bay. Now the arduous York Factory route (some seven hundred miles long and involving thirty-four portages) was threatened. Rail communications in the United States were rapidly extending westward (see map no. 7 on following page), steamboats were arriving regularly at St. Paul, and the Red River cart trails were well on the way to replacing the water route from Hudson Bay. Just as Canadian influence in the Northwest had declined with the demise of the old canoe route from Lake Superior, so Minnesota's influence grew with the rise of the southern route.

In the meantime, the Territory of Minnesota was moving ahead. By the time it achieved statehood in 1858, eighty-nine newspapers and thirty banks had been established. A million acres of land had been sold and, while most immigrants went to the south of the territory, "to the north, and reaching for the Red River Valley, there could be seen a faint line of settlement."

With growth and commercial inroads in the Red River Settlement came the first rumblings of expansionist sentiment in Minnesota. Men such as Henry H. Sibley (Minnesota Territory's first delegate to Congress, 1849-53), Henry M. Rice (who succeeded Sibley, 1853-58), and Alexander Ramsey (Minnesota's first territorial governor, 1849-53) encouraged trade relations with Red River with an eye to their territory's geopolitical
Proximity of railheads to St. Paul in 1858

- Prince Arthur’s Landing (1870)
- St. Paul
- La Crosse (Chicago and Milwaukee, 1858)
- Prairie du Chien (Milwaukee and Mississippi, 1857)
- Galena (Illinois Central, 1856)
- Rock Island (Chicago and Rock Island, 1854)

One inch to 64 miles
interests. Ramsey "regarded Minnesota's frontier as an irresistible force destined to spread, Oregon-like, over all the British Northwest." Such was the effect of developments in Minnesota during the period 1840-56. Following 1856, this expansionist sentiment was to grow and it was not to pass unnoticed in Canada, Red River, and at the Colonial Office. It would cause alarm and serve to focus attention on the Northwest. It would underline the need for efficient communications between the Province of Canada and the Red River Settlement -- communications through British territory for the purposes of trade, defence, and immigration.

Great Britain, 1840-56:

Great Britain, during the years 1840-56, had not been entirely divorced from developments in the Northwest. Especially at the Colonial Office, the affairs of the Hudson's Bay Company -- coloured by questions of defence in the West -- were discussed. In May, 1838, the Company's licence for exclusive trade was renewed for twenty-one years. The Colonial Secretary, Lord Glenelg, saw to it, however, that a clause stating that colonies might be carved out of the Company's territories was incorporated in the new agreement. By 1850, nine years before the licence was to expire, it had become evident that the Hudson's Bay Company could no longer keep Red River and Rupert's Land in a condition of isolation.
The questions of colonizing the Northwest and extinguishing the Company's territorial rights were beginning to occupy an important position in the politics of Great Britain. There the climate of opinion was conditioned by doctrines of economic liberalism which began to influence British colonial policy during the mid-Victorian period. It followed that the great trading (and governing) monopolies were often viewed in Britain with little sympathy. There was, in fact, "a thriving opposition to monopolistic institutions in British Parliamentary circles." 

Within a few years of the renewal of the Company's right of exclusive trade, its right to control administration, justice, taxation, and the conduct of private trade was being seriously questioned. In June, 1842, the Company was asked to defend its position in documents to be laid before the House of Commons. As a result, criticism was, for the moment, silenced. Then, in 1847, Alexander Isbister published an attack on the Company which was partially founded on the belief that its lands should be opened for settlement, that its attitude was obstructive, and that its Charter was invalid in law. In the same year he presented a petition of the French and English half-breeds to the Colonial Office which prayed for relief from the monopoly and rule of the Company. There followed a number of enquiries on the part of Earl Grey, which convinced him that there was no necessity for a government investigation of the Company. Both Isbister and John McLaughlin, however, continued to challenge
the Company via the Colonial Office, and in William Gladstone (soon to become Chancellor of the Exchequer) they found a sympathetic ear. In the House of Commons, on 18 August, 1848, Gladstone bitterly attacked the Company, with little success. The next year, however, the House "asked that all the correspondence on complaints against the Company should be placed before the House, and in June the Earl of Lincoln (later to become Colonial Secretary as the Duke of Newcastle) gave the House a diatribe against the Company which lasted four and a half hours." Shortly thereafter (July, 1849) it was decided that the legal validity of the Company's Charter should be investigated. The Law Officers of the Crown decided, in turn, that the Charter was almost certainly valid, but it remained unchallenged in the law courts.

The Company's troubles were not over. 1850 brought the Colonial Secretary a complaint from the American government stating that the Company traded vast quantities of liquor on the north-west frontier of the United States. Then, in 1851, another petition (delivered by way of the Aborigines Protective Society) arrived at the Colonial Office. Its inconsiderable effect has been briefly discussed above.

Problems of defence also served to draw British attention to the Northwest and to underline the weakness of its position in North America. In 1845, the surge of American frontiersmen into the Oregon country, combined with the inflammatory slogans of James K. Polk, who had been elected President of the United
States in the autumn of 1844, gave justifiable cause for alarm in Canada and Great Britain. This alarm was cleverly cultivated by George Simpson in a number of highly coloured reports which exaggerated the dangers to the British Northwest. His efforts bore fruit despite considerable resistance in Britain, where many politicians pointed to the folly of imperial defence commitments in Canada, and where the Duke of Wellington argued that the frontier of Canada was indefensible. In 1845, two young army lieutenants, Henry J. Warre and Marvin Vavasour, travelled west to report on the possibilities of defending the frontier from Lake Superior to the Pacific Ocean. At the same time, Simpson enjoyed the limited support of Lord Metcalfe, the new Governor-General of Canada. After considerable debate, Simpson and the Hudson's Bay Company managed to blend their commercial interests with the need for defence of the British possessions, and troops were despatched from Ireland on 26 June, 1846, ten days after the Oregon boundary had been settled and three days before the government was officially notified of its peaceful settlement. Early in 1846, Simpson had begun to organize canoes at Sault Ste. Marie to transport troops across the languishing water route west of Thunder Bay. Warre and Vavasour had, however, advised that this route was impractical and the troops were therefore sent to Red River by way of York Factory. This limited commitment of imperial troops, and the discussion which preceded it, served to raise further questions about the future of the Northwest. The
arrangements for transporting the troops also pointed to the lack of an effective communication between the Province of Canada and Red River -- a lack which was to be emphasized when the Royal Canadian Rifles were sent to the Northwest (again via York Factory) in the autumn of 1857.\textsuperscript{39}

By 1856, many in Great Britain, "Liberals and Conservatives alike looked forward to the dissolution of the empire with a complacency tinged by an impatience that tended to grow with the years."\textsuperscript{40} Little Englanders, in that year, also made it known that they wished Canada to assume responsibility for the British inheritance in North America.\textsuperscript{41} This included the territory of the Hudson's Bay Company. That the Company was willing to consider this had been made clear by Robert P. Pelly, then Governor of Assiniboia, in 1849. Such a move was also considered in 1856 by Sir George Simpson. It was also clear, however, that neither of these men would consider such action without adequate compensation to the Company.\textsuperscript{42}

In 1856, Henry Labouchere, the Colonial Secretary, decided to have a committee organized to examine the future of the Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest. This move reflected opposition to the Company in Red River and Canada. It also reflected a realization on the part of the Company and the British government that "it was only a matter of time before the monopoly must be ended and a new form of government set up in the Northwest."\textsuperscript{43} This realization was, in turn, a response to British opposition to large monopolies and Canadian
fears and aspirations for the interior west and north-west of Lake Superior.

The Province of Canada, 1840-56:

Following the great days of the North West Company, which ended with the merger of 1821, the western interior faded from the attention of Canadians. Moreover, until 1857 it cannot be said that there was widespread Canadian interest in the Northwest. There were, however, a few persons -- especially in Canada West -- giving thought to the future of the area during the 1840's and early 1850's. And it is possible to chart the gradual re-emergence of a more general concern for the future of the Hudson's Bay Company territories and for improved communications with them.

With the organization of the Geological Survey of Canada in 1842, the economic possibilities of the Precambrian Shield began to come into focus. Mining companies started to operate along the north shores of Lakes Huron and Superior, thus laying a partial foundation for a new Canadian thrust into the Northwest. In addition, as the best agricultural lands in the Province of Canada became occupied, prospective farmers began to look elsewhere: many to the United States; a few others to the Red River area. The settlement of the Oregon dispute (1846) added to Canadian interest in the Northwest and to Canadian scepticism about the future of lands held by the Hudson's Bay
In A. S. Morton's words, "the fear that a rush of American immigrants into the vacant spaces of Rupert's Land might sweep the West into the United States awakened the Canadians to the possibility of their West being lost to Britain and to them, and they recoiled from the thought that Canada might become no more than a British colony on the Atlantic, hemmed in by the Republic to the south and to the west."

The Oregon dispute was attended by the realization that Americans, in significant numbers, were anti-British and powerfully inspired by the doctrine of "Manifest Destiny". This realization was to be amplified by the formation of the Territory of Minnesota (1849), which marked the advance of the American agricultural frontier into the Mississippi valley.

In addition to large events and broadscale developments, individual voices directed some attention to the Northwest. In 1847, Robert Baldwin Sullivan addressed the Toronto Mechanics' Institute expressing the fear that Rupert's Land might fall to the United States. Sullivan's appreciation of the possibilities of the western country struck a sympathetic chord with George Brown, editor of the Toronto Globe, and the lecture was published in full in its pages. During the next decade, Brown and the Globe were to be the chief instruments in arousing Canadian interest in the Northwest. Of the Globe, F. H. Underhill writes: "More than any other agency it deserves the credit for educating Canadian public opinion up to the conception that the future of Canada depended upon the country beyond
During 1848-49, two pamphlets brought additional attention concerning the Northwest in Britain and Canada. The first, *Canada in 1848*, was written by Captain M. H. Synge, an officer of the Royal Engineers stationed in Canada. Synge argued that efficient communications were essential for the defence of the British North American colonies and, anticipating the Dawson Route in macrocosm, called for a combined water and land route across the continent. The second pamphlet, written by Major R. Carmichael-Smythe, advocated a rail line between Halifax and the mouth of the Fraser River. This was, in the words of R. G. Trotter, "the first genuine attempt to demonstrate in detail the practicability of a railway from sea to sea." Carmichael-Smythe's ideas were of more than passing interest for they were instrumental in turning the attention of Sandford Fleming to the concept of a transcontinental railway through British North America.

Theory was followed by an attempt at practice when, in 1851, Allan Macdonell of Toronto -- a believer in the value of the western country -- sought a charter for a railway linking Lake Superior and the Pacific. The Legislature refused Macdonell's application, but the Standing Committee on Railways and Telegraph Lines (chaired by Sir Allan MacNab) noted that the application warranted serious attention and Macdonell did not abandon his project. In the same year, George Brown raised the question of the future of the Northwest in his maiden speech in parliament. He was to do so again during the sessions
Until 1855, interest in the lands west and north-west of Superior had been scant and slow in growing. In that year, however, it took a substantial upward surge. The occasion was the completion of the Northern Railway which ran from Toronto to Collingwood. In addition to opening up the fertile country north of the burgeoning city, the line was to serve as a portage railway joining the port on Lake Ontario to Georgian Bay and the Upper Lakes. It would connect with the ports of Lakes Huron and Michigan and draw the trade of the West to Toronto. "Sometimes added to this", writes G. P. de T. Glazebrook, "was the hope of restoring the old North West Company's fur-trade route through Canada, lost since 1821." The opening of the Sault Ste. Marie canal (U.S.A.) in 1856, and the formation of the Toronto-based North Western Steamboat Company in the same year made the scheme yet more feasible. On August 1, the Globe announced the imminent formation of the Company, observing that the success of the route to the West via Collingwood and Lake Superior could no longer be in doubt. All that remained was to re-open the canoe trail from Fort William to Fort Garry. The commercial hegemony of Toronto over a vast western hinterland would follow. The merchants of St. Paul had other ideas. The merchants of St. Paul could not, however, reverse the tide. The Canadian drive to the West was on. There were commercial and political reasons for it, but scarcity of land was also a factor. In 1855, the last block of wild land in the western
peninsula of Canada West was auctioned. The *Globe* reported the event in an article entitled "New Lands to Conquer". The new lands lay north and west of the Upper Lakes.

North of Lake Superior the way had, in a sense, already been prepared. In 1850, the Lake Superior Treaty (Treaty No. 60) had been concluded between Her Majesty the Queen and Mishe-muckqua (and others representing the Ojibwa of the north shore). The treaty -- which was, in part, a response to the number of mining locations in the area -- saw the vast tract of land from Batchewanaung Bay to the Pigeon River, and from the shoreline to the height of land, ceded to the government except for three small reservations. 63 "This treaty", notes J. P. Bertrand, "was of special significance since from then on began the modest development of natural resources in northwestern Ontario." 64

Of more immediate significance in 1856 were the activities of William Kennedy and his well-placed associates. Kennedy, a former clerk with the Hudson's Bay Company, joined Allan Macdonell in addressing the Toronto Board of Trade in December. 65 They asserted that Rupert's Land should belong to Canada and, furthermore, that its inhabitants wanted to be Canadian. As 1856 turned to 1857, Kennedy was preparing a mission to Rupert's Land on behalf of the North West Trading and Colonization Company of Toronto. He had two purposes: to re-open the old canoe route from Lake Superior to Fort Garry, and to convince the Red River settlers that annexation to Canada would best
serve their political and economic future. As Toronto interests made a definite move toward the Northwest, George Brown gave support by mounting an intensive editorial campaign in the Globe. By the end of 1856 he had, in fact, committed his journal and himself to "the expansion of Canada across the great interior plains, and ultimately to the Pacific."66

The Northwest was becoming a focus of considerable interest, and developments in Red River, the Minnesota Territory, Great Britain, and the Province of Canada had paved the way for the climactic events of 1857. Many of the pre-1857 developments had borne a close relationship to shifts in lines of communication and transportation. Minnesota had gained a strong hold on the Northwest partially because of superior communications. Canada had, in large degree, lost contact with the area for lack of good communications. The problems of Imperial defence in North America were sharpened by the difficulty of sending troops west over British soil. The people of Red River showed signs of being politically influenced by the strong trade and transportation connection with Minnesota. These things were realized by many of those who participated in the events of 1857. In that year, and for some time thereafter, the problems of transportation and communications were to be raised, ventilated, and attacked.
Simplified map:

**SHIFTING LINES OF COMMUNICATION WITH THE NORTHWEST**

- French and British fur trade route to Canada; declined after 1821. The Lower Great Lakes were also used as an adjunct of this route.

- Hudson's Bay Company route to Britain; in decline after 1858. Used most heavily between 1821 and 1858.

- Minnesota route; most heavily used after the H. B. Co. adopted it for most of its traffic in 1859. Goods shipped across the Atlantic came via the U.S.A. or Canada to connect with this route. As a "Canadian" connection with the Northwest, it was superseded by the C.P.R. The Dawson Route had special virtues, but it did not replace the Minnesota route for general use.
A Route to the West, 1857-59:

A Canadian dream, decked out with streamers of economic nationalism, clearly emerged in 1857. "But," as A. S. Morton indicates, "there were two great obstacles in the way of the realization of the Canadian dream -- the one physical and the other political. The physical obstacle lay in the territory between Lake Superior and the Red River, a land of rocky hillocks, swamps, and lakes. If the Canadians were to capture the trade of the Settlement they must open up a line of transportation through this forbidding country."67

Canadians, in 1857, were moving toward that goal. In January the North West Trading and Colonization Company, backed by wealthy Torontonians, was established.68 The Company, an unchartered concern, sent William Kennedy to discover the most practicable communications route from Thunder Bay to the Red River. In addition to agitating against the Hudson's Bay Company in Red River, it was expected that Kennedy -- in the grand tradition of the old North West Company -- would bring furs across the route and down to Toronto. Before the Company collapsed in late 1857 he managed to encourage 372 people of Red River to petition the Legislative Assembly of Canada for annexation and to buy a few furs at inflated prices. The Company, however, came to nothing and the Shield country west of Lake Superior remained unconquered.69

Political progress was made in the same month that the
short-lived North West Trading and Colonization Company was formed. On 8 January, 150 Reformers met in Toronto for a grand party convention. There, under the careful direction of George Brown, they agreed upon a platform which included annexation of the Northwest. Brown and the Globe, aided by editorial writer William McDougall (later, as Minister of Public Works, to bear much of the responsibility for building the Dawson Route), kept up the pressure for annexation throughout the year. The need for a transportation route was a corollary of their aspirations.

Also in 1857, a Select Committee of the British House of Commons was appointed to consider the state of British possessions administered by the Hudson's Bay Company. In view of growing Canadian interest in the Northwest, the Province was invited to send a representative to put her case. William Henry Draper, Chief Justice of Canada West, was selected. He was instructed to uphold Canada's claim to the lion's share of the Northwest and "to urge the expediency of marking out the limits, and so protecting the frontier of the lands above Lake Superior, about Red River, and from thence to the Pacific, as effectually to secure them against violent seizure or irregular settlement until the advancing tide of emigrants from Canada and the United Kingdom may fairly flow into them, and occupy them as subjects of the Queen, on behalf of the British empire." In addition, he was to see "that every facility should be secured for enabling Canada to explore and survey
the territory between Lake Superior and the Rocky Mountains -- and if the Provincial Legislature should think fit to provide the means of so doing, no obstacle should be thrown in the way of the constructing of roads or the improvement of water communication, or the promotion of settlement beyond the line supposed to separate the territory of the Hudson's Bay Company from that of Canada.\(^7^3\)

The report of the Committee, published in August, concluded that "it is essential to meet the just and reasonable wishes of Canada to be enabled to annex to her territory such portion of the land in her neighbourhood as may be available to her for the purposes of settlement, with which lands she is willing to open and maintain communications, and for which she will provide the means of local administration."\(^7^4\)

The inquiry opened the way for a gradual, piecemeal extension of Canadian control over the Hudson's Bay Company territories. Draper, however, was not at all sure that Canada could establish sufficiently efficient communications with Red River or that she could effectively govern the territory between Lake Superior and the Rocky Mountains.\(^7^5\) The question of communications, in fact, was a thorny one. Many witnesses had testified before the Select Committee to the effect that the route via St. Paul was excellent but that the rugged water and portage route via British soil was totally impracticable. Nonetheless, there were advocates of the Canadian route and even Chief Justice Draper, although rather apologetically,
spoke of hopes for a transcontinental railway. It was clear, at any rate, that some sort of Canadian communication with the Northwest had to be built. Draper made the point: "All I can say is, that unless you do that, farewell to its long being maintained as a British territory."76

For many Canadians, the report of the Select Committee underlined the need and hope of acquiring Rupert's Land. Others were dissatisfied. One of them was George Brown, who expressed his opinion in the Globe: "The country which is ours by legal right, we may have possession of by giving security to maintain roads and establish civilized institutions -- and meantime it is to remain in the hands of monopolists who have never opened a road or done one act for the material or moral elevation of the people of the Territory."77 It was agitation as usual with Brown, and it was to continue until the Canadian government committed itself to the annexation of the Northwest.

Meanwhile, in Minnesota -- where the report of the Select Committee was read with nearly as much interest as it was in Canada -- the reaction was almost jubilant. Minnesotans examined the recommendations of the Committee and concluded that the imperial and provincial governments were about to open the country to settlement. Such a move, noted the Pioneer and Democrat (16 Aug., 1857), "will be hailed with delight throughout the Northwest."78 In commenting later on the proceedings of the Select Committee, the same newspaper gave the reason
for its stand: "the whole tendency of the testimony was to fix St. Paul as the natural outlet of this whole region."\(^{79}\)

This outlook ran counter to much of the opinion expressed before Canada's own Select Committee, appointed on 11 May, 1857. This Committee, formed in response to much debate in the Legislature and a number of petitions received by that body,\(^{80}\) did little more than collect information of varying quality -- most of it faulty. Much of it was concerned with communications. In this respect, practical difficulties (and legal problems) were thrown to the winds as the three witnesses examined expressed their confident opinion that easy and inexpensive communication could be made from Lake Superior to Fort Garry.\(^{81}\) One of them, Allan Macdonell, gave vent to his own ambitions in maintaining that, "if the route was opened from Lake Superior, I have no doubt but the whole trade of that country would come down Lake Superior."\(^{82}\) In his view, the St. Paul route would be out of business along with that via York Factory. Traffic over the Minnesota route was, in fact, about to grow in volume, but many Torontonians -- having devoured, if not digested, the \textit{Globe}'s glowing reports of Rupert's Land -- agreed with Macdonell.

Macdonell's poor opinion of the York Factory route was supported by the testimony of Colonel John Crofton during the British parliamentary inquiry.\(^{83}\) Crofton declared emphatically that the Dog Lake canoe route was far superior to the Hudson Bay route. Events of 1857 lent some force to his argument.
In that year the limitations of the York Factory route were demonstrated when, in response to American military activity in the vicinity of Pembina, a detachment of the Royal Canadian Rifles was sent to Fort Garry. In May, its commander, Major George Seton, travelled west with George Simpson. The troops, however, took the long way 'round sailing from Montreal on 20 June, bound for York Factory. Their travel plans had been made before Colonel Crofton gave his evidence and had been shaped by the opinion that travel via the old canoe route was impossible. Simon J. Dawson was later to write: "So general was this opinion as to the character of the route, by Lake Superior ... that the Imperial Government on two occasions sent troops by way of Hudson's [sic] Bay to Fort Garry, once in 1846 ... and again in 1857, when several companies of the Canadian Rifles were sent out." The troops arrived at York Factory about 25 September and were not reunited with their commander, at Fort Garry, until the middle of October. It had taken them almost four months to get from Montreal to the Red River Settlement. In the days before railway and steamboat transportation, the heavily loaded freight canoes of the fur traders would have made the trip from Lachine to Fort Garry (barring particularly bad head-winds) in just over half the time. In 1857, with rails from Montreal via Toronto to Collingwood, and steamboats on the Upper Lakes, the duration of the Royal Canadian Rifles' journey was ludicrous. It served to emphasize the need to span the country from Lake Superior
to Red River.

The journey also served to underline the deficiencies of the Hudson's Bay Company's system of inland transportation. The route between Fort Garry and York Factory was already creaking under the weight of the growing indents for the Red River District. When, in 1857, the system had to accommodate troops as well as trade goods, it proved incapable of carrying the load. "So many trade goods had to be left behind in York Factory", writes Alvin Gluek, Jr., "that there was a shortage in the Company's sales shops, while the shelves of its competitors were jammed with attractive American imports." The situation worried William Mactavish, the chief factor in charge of the district, and was made worse by demands for wage increases on the part of the boatmen. By winter Mactavish had decided on a course of action: he ordered a small quantity of goods to be imported via the United States during the summer of 1858. The goods came by rail and steamboat from New York to St. Paul and then by cart to Fort Garry. Furthermore, freightage costs from England were approximately 35-40 per cent less than by way of York Factory. Accordingly, with the season of 1859 a new transportation pattern emerged in which St. Paul played a key role. The geographical allegiance of the Company had shifted away from the Bay, not to the east, but to the south. As if to mark the occasion, the Anson Northup steamed down the Red River and into Fort Garry on 11 June, 1859. It was the first steamboat on the Red and, as Bishop
Taché later recalled, "each turn of the engine appeared to bring us nearer by so much to the civilized world."\(^{37}\)

If steamboat connection with Minnesota loomed large in the minds of Red River settlers, it also had meaning for Minnesotans and Canadians. Steam transportation on the river cut the land carry to St. Paul in half, thus increasing the capacity of the Minnesota route. In July, 1859, Simpson added the Anson Northup to the Hudson's Bay Company's new transportation system which, for approximately a decade, served as the major Company connection with the Northwest. The economic ties with Minnesota, and especially St. Paul were again strengthened. Furthermore, the Company could now shut down the old canoe route (still used for express travel) to Lake Superior and "once the forests reclaimed the portage trails, prospective interlopers from Canada would be deterred from attempting to reach Rupert's Land."\(^{38}\)

The "prospective interlopers" of 1857, however, had no intention of being deterred. Two documents prepared by Joseph Cauchon, the Commissioner of Crown Lands, and published in 1857, made this clear. The first was a memorandum designed to sway the opinion of the British Select Committee. It revived the French and North West Company claims to the Hudson's Bay Company territories and concluded that the Northwest belonged to Canada by right of prior discovery and occupation. The Company, in Cauchon's magnanimous view, could claim clear title to a mere strip of territory in the immediate vicinity of its
posts on Hudson Bay. With regard to communications, the memorandum noted that the "necessity for expansion compels the Provincial Government to create further facilities for it. With this view", Cauchon continued, "preparations were made in the Crown Lands Department last summer for a preliminary survey from the head of Lake Superior westward, preparatory to the opening of free grant roads ... for the purpose of farming a nucleus of a settlement which would gradually penetrate to the valley of the Red River and the prairies beyond; besides which, a first-class thoroughfare would be necessary to afford easier means of communication with the navigable waters flowing to the west."³⁹

The second document prepared by Cauchon (probably with the help of William MacDonnel Dawson) was the first annual report of the Crown Lands Department. This -- "the longest, most imaginative and most far-reaching of all nineteenth century Crown Lands Reports"⁴⁰ -- indicated that the province was running short of good farm land available for settlement and proceeded to mount a series of arguments for Canada's immediate expansion into the West. Steps in this expansion would be, first, a thorough exploration of the country west of Lake Superior, second, an expanded railway system including a line along the north shore of Lake Huron and, third, the surveying of an ambitious colonization road stretching from Thunder Bay to the Red River. Cauchon went on to envision "a line of communication by land, or partly by water, to the Pacific."⁴¹ The memorandum
and report prepared by Cauchon were influential, not only by virtue of his position as Commissioner or their inherent worth, but also because he was an influential politician. During the period 1854-57 he was credited with having a personal following of eighteen members in parliament. And when he left his position of Commissioner of Crown Lands in 1857, he carried his enthusiasm for westward expansion to higher political levels.

The questions raised concerning the Northwest in 1857 were large ones and would take considerable time to resolve. The effective realization of Canadian hopes would have to wait on political union of the British American colonies and the purchase of the Hudson's Bay Company's territorial rights. In the more limited area of western communications, however, 1857 was an eventful year. The events included concrete actions as well as compendiums of wishful thinking and declarations of intent. The physical improvements of the Minnesota route and its adoption by the Hudson's Bay Company have been mentioned. An attempt to counter the real economic and possible political effects of these actions was begun in 1857 with the despatch of two exploring expeditions, one from Britain, the other from Canada.

The British expedition, led by Captain John Palliser and sponsored by the Imperial Government and the Royal Geographical Society, arrived at Fort William on 12 June. The general purpose of the undertaking was to make a geographical survey
Fort William in 1861. The houses of John McIntyre (Chief Factor) and other Hudson's Bay Company employees are on the right. Mount McKay is seen to the west, across the Kaministiquia River. From a water colour by William Armstrong.
of the country between Lake Superior and the Pacific. This, it was hoped, would help to remedy the lack of exact knowledge of the West — a lack abundantly demonstrated during the British parliamentary inquiry. The first job, however, was to examine the water routes west of Fort William and to report on the feasibility of a communication and transportation line to Red River. The examination was made during June and July.\textsuperscript{94} The report was not particularly favourable. Writing to the Colonial Secretary on 20 May, 1859, Palliser noted that travel to and from Red River would have to be through the United States, the routes by York Factory and Fort William being "too tedious, difficult and expensive for the generality of settlers."\textsuperscript{95} While his canoe journey had convinced him that neither a road nor water route could be constructed without tremendous difficulty and enormous cost, he also saw dangers in the St. Paul route: "This connexion, which is year by year increasing will, if some steps are not taken for the opening of a practicable route with Canada, monopolize the whole traffic of the interior, and thus drawing those strong ties of commerce and mutual interest tighter, may yet cost England a province, and offer an impassable barrier to the contemplated connexion of her Atlantic and Pacific Colonies."\textsuperscript{96} These economic and political considerations led him to propose a land route "from a harbour on the north side of Lake Superior passing the north end of the Lake of the Woods to Red River Settlement ...." This would", he added, "necessitate the formation of about five hundred
miles of road, through probably a difficult country." 97

This road was to be a crude affair. The rivers would be crossed by means of boats or floating bridges to be established by settlers. During the winter the trail "would naturally deviate from the summer road, for the purpose of keeping on the lakes and swamps where the travelling is level, but still it would in most parts follow the cut road." 98 He gave two final arguments in support of his proposed trail: "it would be on the line of, and consequently aid considerably, in the construction of a railroad, besides being well removed from the international boundary." 99 His projected road was also well removed from the realm of practicality. It depended, unrealistically, upon settlers locating along the rugged Shield country it was to traverse and took the scantest notice of the difficult terrain and hundreds of lakes and rivers en route. 100 Nevertheless, Palliser rejected proposals for a combined water and land route in favour of his plan. Perhaps the reason is to be found in his admission that, "at present we know little or nothing of the district of country between Lake Superior and the Lake of the Woods, except just along the 'canoe route'." 101 The Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857 took a more positive view concerning a land and water route.

Immediately following the report of the Canadian Select Committee, the Provincial Legislature voted a grant of £5,000 towards the opening of communications with Red River. An
exploring party was promptly organized. On 1 August, just a month and a half behind Palliser, it arrived at Fort William.

The director of the expedition during its first season of operations was George Gladman, an avowed advocate of westward expansion. Under his direction, but enjoying considerable freedom in the discharge of their professional duties, were a geologist, civil engineer, and surveyor. Professor Henry Youle Hind, of the University of Trinity College, Toronto, was the geologist. The engineer was W. H. E. Napier, and Simon J. Dawson was appointed surveyor and cartographer. In all, the party numbered forty-four (including twelve Caughnawaga Iroquois, and twelve Ojibwa Indians from Fort William).

In 1858, the composition and terms of reference of the expedition were to change. During 1857, however, it had one overriding goal which was clearly set out in Gladman's instructions: "The primary object of the expedition is to make a thorough examination of the tract of country between Lake Superior and Red River, by which may be determined the best route for opening a facile communication through British territory, from that lake to the Red River Settlements, and ultimately to the great tracts of cultivable lands beyond them." Unlike the Palliser expedition, that of the Canadians commenced operations with the clear understanding that there was to be a route. It only remained to see what path it would follow.

The party accordingly split up into small groups which
Chief Trader John Bell, of the Hudson's Bay Company, running Tanner's Rapids on the Maligne River, 1857 or 1858. From a water colour by W. H. E. Napier, Engineer on the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition.
These illustrations from Hind's, *Narrative of the Canadian Exploring Expeditions*, are based on the original water colours by John Fleming which are now held by the Toronto Public Library. John, a brother of Sandford Fleming, was assistant surveyor on the exploring expedition. He was later engaged in C.P.R. surveys and in 1865 was employed by the city of New York. *Annual Report of the Association of Ontario Land Surveyors*, no. 35 (Toronto, 1920), pp. 121-123.
set about exploring the waterways west of Thunder Bay. They were far more thorough than Palliser. Despite minor problems with the Saulteux (their motives were questioned rather intelligently by a war party on Lake of the Woods) they managed to examine the Dog Lake canoe route in its entirety. In addition, Napier followed the northern (winter) route from Northwest Bay of Rainy Lake to Lake of the Woods, while Dawson and Hind did some exploring along the western shore of the latter lake. In September and October a line between Pembina and Lake of the Woods (via the Roseau and Reed Rivers) was also partially examined from horseback. And during the winter of 1857-58 George Gladman's son, Henry, explored a route from Pointe de Meuron, on the Kaministiquia River, to Arrow Lake (Lac La Flèche) and Gunflint Lake while Dawson surveyed a line from the Northwest Angle to Fort Garry. In the meantime George Gladman returned to Toronto by way of the Pigeon River route and proceeded to urge an early start on road construction and the establishment of a monthly mail service to Red River. He had no success in encouraging construction, and explorations were resumed in April 1858 without his services.

The organization and operations for 1858 were outlined in a letter from T. J. J. Loranger, the Provincial Secretary, to Sir George Simpson (14 April, 1858), stating that "the expedition will be divided into two parties, of which one will be under the direction of Professor Hind, and the other under that of Mr. Dawson .... The operations of Mr. Dawson and his party
RIVER EXPLORING EXPEDITION

By
G. Hind

From Hind's annotated MS. map.

Photo: B. M. Litteljohn
... will be confined pretty much to the same ground as last year, namely, the route from Fort William to Fort Garry; while the operations of Professor Hind and his staff will extend to the country west of Red River and Lake Winnipeg.\textsuperscript{108} Hind's party, which included pioneer photographer Humphrey Lloyd Hime,\textsuperscript{109} did not, however, completely ignore communications with Fort Garry. It travelled west via the Pigeon River Route which impressed the professor as being preferable to that via Dog Lake.\textsuperscript{110}

Hind's party arrived at the Red River Settlement on 2 June, twenty-one travelling days from Grand Portage. A month later (4 July), Dawson's party, which had been paddling the Saskatchewan River, assembled at the Settlement and started east. Working in two, and sometimes three small groups, it explored the waterways and terrain between Rainy Lake and Lake Superior for the remainder of the season and during the winter of 1858-59.\textsuperscript{111} Lindsay Russell ran a second line from the Kaministiquia to Gunflint Lake and found the country too rugged for a road. The Seine River, between Rainy Lake and Lac Des Mille Lacs, was explored and rejected in favour of the waterway to Lac La Croix. A road line was surveyed from Dog Lake to Thunder Bay, and A. A. Wells even paddled the little-known side route from Saganaga Lake to Sturgeon Lake and the Maligne River. Finally, in the spring of 1859 -- long after Hind had left the field (Dec., 1858) -- Dawson learned of a "gravelly ridge" extending across the worst swamps west of Lake of the
Encampment of Hind's party on the Red River, 1858. Taken by pioneer photographer Humphrey Lloyd Hime.
The Public Archives of Canada

Hind's party making a portage, 1858. Photograph by Humphrey Lloyd Hime.
Woods. This section had posed one of the most difficult problems for the explorers and so it was with evident jubilation that Dawson wrote (the italics are his), "over this line our party rode clear through to the Lake of the Woods, on horseback." By 1 June, then, the basic exploratory work necessary for the opening a communication had been done. Much of the Dawson Route stood revealed, the explorations were terminated, and Dawson estimated that a preliminary line could be opened for about £50,000.

The work had been thoroughly done. One might argue, in fact, that there had been unnecessary duplication. In some cases, three different parties examined and reported on the same waterway. It followed that, on the subject of communications, Hind and Dawson differed on some points. The geologist argued that the Pigeon River Route was faster, shorter, and generally better than that via Dog Lake. The surveyor disagreed, noting that "for a distance of one hundred and thirty miles from Lake Superior, westward, it cannot be made in any way available as a line of water communication, except for small canoes; that the country being for a great part of the distance rugged, mountainous and cut up with lakes, it is next to impracticable for roads, and, finally, that there being a much better route to the eastward, entirely within British territory, there would be no object in attempting to open this line, or spending further sums in its exploration." In essentials, however, the two men were in perfect accord: the
Detail of Hind's map, annotated by Gibbard; showing the line surveyed between Lake of the Woods and the Red River Settlement.
Photo: Martha A. Kidd

Northwest was an area of great potential and should be settled and developed -- but not by Americans. And there should be a route linking it to Canada.

In Dawson's view, a rail and water, or road and water communication would provide effective competition to the Minnesota route. The fur traders of the West would turn to it, and immigrants from Canada would flock across it. Nine long years were to pass, however, before the government seriously commenced construction of the Red River Route.

Nevertheless, in 1858, a private concern based in Toronto set out to do what the government would not. The North-West Transportation, Navigation and Railway Company was directed by expansionist associates of George Brown including Allan Macdonell (its chief publicist), William MacDonnel Dawson, Lewis Moffat, William Howland, John McMurrich, and William McMaster. Its charter -- marking the successful outcome of Macdonell's efforts since 1851 -- gave it the "paper power" to "construct links of railway between navigable lakes and rivers, so as to provide facilities for transport from the shores of Lake Superior to Fraser's River." The plan was to build a rail line to Rainy Lake, proceed by steamboat to the western shore of Lake of the Woods, then to Fort Garry by rail, and, finally, to place steamers on Lake Winnipeg and the Saskatchewan River. By this means the Canadian fur trade would be revived and the Minnesota route superceded. The Company also went into the Northwest armed with a government subsidy to pay for the carriage
of mails and to aid in the opening of communications with Red River.

Its accomplishments were, however, modest. A tug, the Rescue, was converted into a passenger boat and placed in service between Collingwood and Thunder Bay. A patch of forest at Depot was cleared and two buildings and a wharf constructed. And a rough trail was cut out of the bush between Depot and Dog Lake. Mail was forwarded by canoe from the latter place to Fort Garry, and in winter dog-teams were substituted. During the summer mail was carried west on a bi-monthly basis; during the winter the service was reduced to once a month. The service was, however, quite inefficient. In the beginning it depended on the good will and help of Hudson's Bay Company personnel who even picked up mail bags left hanging on trees and delivered them to Red River. This good will soon evaporated when George Simpson, hearing that his men were delivering the mail, wrote that immediate steps were to be taken to "guard against such mistakes occurring in the future." In July of 1859 the Company's mail contract was transferred to a political friend of the government. Service was put on a monthly basis and became even less efficient. In June, 1860, as the Nor'-Wester indicated (14 June, 1860), only six letters were sent east via the Canadian route, while 208 letters and 532 newspapers went by way of Minnesota. George Simpson estimated that letters from Red River to Toronto cost no less than £100 each to carry over British soil and took five times
as long to reach their destination. In 1860, the postal service from Fort William to Fort Garry was, understandably, abandoned. Two years later, the Provincial Secretary wrote: "Arrangements were made within the last four years for postal service with Red River, but the want of territorial rights at Red River and along the greater part of the route defeated the plans of the Canadian Government, and, after a very considerable outlay, the line had to be abandoned." The Provincial Secretary gave only a partial explanation. He might also have mentioned the physical difficulties of the route, the lack of Hudson's Bay Company cooperation, the length of time taken to deliver mails, and the enormous cost of the service. The postal experiment had demonstrated the total inability of the Canadian route to compete with that via St. Paul.

If the members of the North-West Transportation, Navigation and Railway Company were disappointed in their mail contract, they were also disappointed in their larger plans. Failing to find sufficient financial support in either government subsidies or private investment they ceased operations in 1861 having done very little towards opening a route from Lake Superior to Fort Garry. Shortly thereafter a forest fire swept across their trail to Dog Lake and consumed their buildings and wharf at Depot. Starting out in a flame of enthusiasm, they ended in a pall of smoke. And nothing much happened in between.

* * * * * * *
The economic *cum* nationalist spirit that inspired the concern did not, however, die. Neither did the related desire for a westward communication. The elements of this outlook had combined during the years 1857-59. For Canadians, especially the vociferous and powerful group in Toronto, acquisition of, and communications with the Northwest had become more a necessity and more a possibility as the decade ended. The Select Committees at home and abroad had underlined this view. In the West the Hudson's Bay Company was losing its hold, and the limited capacity of the York Factory route had been demonstrated. At the same time, the rise of the Minnesota communication and the growth of expansionist sentiment in the state had justifiably aroused concern in the Province of Canada. Furthermore, the British authorities had held out the possibility of annexing western territory — a possibility contingent upon the opening of communications and the assumption of administrative responsibility. At the Red River Settlement the advocates of annexation to Canada had grown in number and found an effective voice in the *Nor'-Wester*. In Canada West, Reformers had been infused with the expansionist spirit of George Brown and had adopted annexation of the Hudson's Bay territories as a plank in their platform. The Toronto business community had taken money in hand and attempted to span the country dividing East from West. Its failure only demonstrated that the job was too much for private capital and that government would have to take a hand. Cauchon had pointed
to the need for new lands for Canadians to conquer. And, finally, the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition had inspected the ground and, in its essentials, laid out the line of communication with the West.

The Early 1860's:

As 1859 turned to 1860, it must have seemed as if construction of a route was imminent; but for eight years nothing of consequence was done. The project was temporarily abandoned for several reasons. For one thing, Dawson, Gladman, and Hind had explored in Rupert's Land at the pleasure of the Hudson's Bay Company. While Cauchon had hopefully declared that the Company held no territorial rights in the area of investigation, the legality and ethics of building a route across portions of Rupert's Land would be open to serious debate. Subsequent events indicated that the Company did, indeed, possess proprietary rights for which compensation would have to be paid. Construction, therefore, would legally have to await the transfer of those rights to Canada. Second, it became evident that western expansion and communications "could only be realized effectively through British American political union." The vast project, in which the Dawson Route was to play a part, was too big and too expensive for the Province of Canada. This was especially the case in view of the sharp commercial depression which began in 1857 and reached its worst phase in
1859. Much of Canada's political and economic talent was, accordingly, diverted from relatively small considerations, such as a route between Thunder Bay and Fort Garry, to the big questions of depression and political union of the colonies. The 'sixties also saw the outbreak of the American Civil War and attendant Anglo-American differences which served to turn the attention of the Canadian Government away from the Northwest. Of lesser significance, but demanding consideration, was the fact that the reports of Dawson and Hind led the government to revise its ideas about the method of opening a westward communication. For all their enthusiasm, the reports indicated that the cost of the proposed route would be large. They also showed that the government's preliminary plan of organizing townships along the line, thus advancing the frontier of settlement hand in hand with construction crews, was entirely unrealistic. The tracts of cultivable land -- such as along the Rainy River -- were small oases in a vast, rocky, and inhospitable wilderness. As one critic put it, "the natural difficulties of the country will make road-making a very expensive business, while the soil, which consists chiefly of rock and swamp, will offer no inducement to settlers, even if they obtain the land for nothing." It would, clearly, be quite impossible to establish a line of settlement from Thunder Bay to Red River.

The communications impetus of 1857-59 seemed to evaporate in the hiatus of the early 'sixties. In fact, it was only
temporarily and partially submerged by larger events. In government there were a few futile gestures during the period. On 15 April, 1862, for instance, the Provincial Secretary wrote to the Governor of Rupert's Land stating that "appropriations have been made by the Legislature for roads towards Red River .... Canada is, therefore, now prepared to guarantee that, so far as her undisputed boundary extends, every facility will henceforth exist towards a communication with the west." This fond hope floundered on the reef of Hudson's Bay Company intransigence. Postmaster-General Michael Foley stood behind a second flurry of activity in 1862 in advocating the re-establishment of mail services, the construction of roads, and the improvement of waterways west of Lake Superior towards British Columbia. While his foray was fruitless, his report to the Cabinet (17 Oct., 1862) is quoted here at some length because of its representative, expansionist blending of fact, fancy, frustration, and foresight. Noting the discovery of gold on the Fraser River in British Oregon, and the undoubted virtues of the Pacific Coast as a field for settlement, Foley turned to the problem of communications:

The shortest and most natural route to these inviting territories lies through the St. Lawrence and its chain of tributary lakes; but owing to the want of facilities for transit beyond the head of Lake Superior, persons destined for the western settlements necessarily make the voyage by sea, or accomplish the first stage in the land journey -- Fort Garry on the Red River -- by way of Minnesota and Dacotah. Thus it may in truth be said that the people of the neighbouring states hold the key to the British possessions in the west, and while by this means their wild lands are being settled and improved,
ours, lying immediately adjacent and quite as well fitted for cultivation, remain a mere hunting ground for the sole benefit and advantage of a company of traders, whose object it is to keep them a wilderness productive only of game, and who, to this end, do all in their power to divert into foreign channels, to the promotion of alien interests, the commerce carried on by them with the outside world.

In the judgement of the undersigned, the time has arrived when more decisive and effective means than have yet been put forth should be employed in opening up and perfecting the communication westward from Lake Superior through British territory. Cut off from intercourse with their fellow-subjects ... the people of the Red River Settlement have for many years past been loud in their expressions of dissatisfaction. Minnesota, and not Canada, is, from imperious necessity, the emporium of their trade; the chief recent additions to their population are from the United States, and their sympathies, in spite of their wishes, are being drawn into a channel leading in an opposite direction from that of the source of their allegiance. In a word, the central link in the chain of settlements which should connect Canada with British Columbia is being rapidly Americanized, and unless a prompt effort be made to advance British interests in that direction, there is reason to fear that incalculable mischief will follow.

The tendencies which have in the main operated in keeping the Northwestern country closed to the industrial enterprise of the British and Canadian people, may be traced to the alleged obstacles in the way of the construction of practicable roads and the improvement of navigation. Recent explorations, however, prove these obstacles to have been greatly exaggerated. The expeditions of the Imperial and Canadian Governments demonstrate the entire feasibility of establishing communication for postal and telegraphic service, at reasonable rates, through the territories which the Hudson's Bay Company claim as being under their jurisdiction.132

Foley's report might have been lifted from the pages of the Globe, and, in fact, as a Liberal leader in the Legislative Assembly, he was closely associated with George Brown.133

The following spring (28 April, 1863), Edward Watkin, representing the Atlantic and Pacific Transit and Telegraph Company and acting in harmony with Foley's report, put forward
a proposal for the "establishment of a postal and telegraphic route between Canada and the Pacific Ocean." The proposal did not, however, make provision for the construction of a road and the Canadian Government rejected it on those grounds.

Meanwhile, changes were taking place in Red River. In 1859, William Buckingham and William Coldwell, "fresh from service with the Toronto Globe and with the wind of Northwest destiny in their nostrils," established their newspaper, the Nor'-Wester, in the Settlement. One of its chief messages was that the Northwest should be annexed to Canada. The weekly served as the fulcrum of the "Canadian party" whose meager numbers had been augmented by a few Canadians who emigrated to the Settlement in the wake of the 1857-59 exploring expeditions. In 1860, Dr. John Christian Schultz became leader of this group and from 1864 until 1868 directed the activities of the Nor'-Wester. Under his control, the paper continued to assail the Hudson's Bay Company and to urge annexation by Canada, but with increasing vehemence. In 1863 he was instrumental in securing a petition (sent to Sandford Fleming and, by him, to the Canadian Government) praying for a means of communication with Canada. Schultz was also instrumental in creating considerable distrust of the "Canadian party" in the minds of the métis, and he contributed not a little to the outbreak of rebellion in 1869 -- an outbreak which forcibly emphasized the need for a military communication, through British territory to Red River.
In Minnesota, the Panic of 1857, the Civil War, and the Sioux uprising of 1862 slowed the northwestward movement of the frontier during the early 'sixties. Nevertheless, throughout the war years, strenuous efforts to promote better trade relations with the Red River Settlement were continued. And, in spite of temporary disruption of the St. Paul-Fort Gary route (occasioned by Indian interference in 1862), the volume of trade between the two centres grew to new heights. Following the war, however, commercial intercourse was coupled with schemes of territorial aggrandizement. The period 1865-70 was one of material expansion and expansionist materialism during which militant exponents of "Manifest Destiny" sought to detach Rupert's Land from British North America. Their efforts were stimulated by the efflorescence of Canadian transcontinentalism. At the same time, Canada's drive to the west was spurred on by Minnesota's obvious greed.138

As the 1860's wore on, there was continuing talk about the Northwest and the lack of a Canadian communication with it. The Globe and the Nor'-Wester were especially eloquent on the subject. In George Brown's opinion the government had failed to adequately pursue the Northwest question and had fumbled negotiations with Watkin. In commenting, in 1864, on rumours of a railway to join St. Paul and Fort Garry, he prophesied that "the movement which has now been instituted... is nothing more or less than the handing over of the vast North West Territory, not only commercially but politically, to the United
States."¹³⁹ "Thus it is", the Nor'-Wester had warned in similar circumstances, "that Minnesota stretches out her arms to embrace the little colony of British subjects in the far north."¹⁴⁰ Equally relevant to the communications question, and of more lasting importance, were the strides taken toward Confederation and the transfer of Rupert's Land to Canada.¹⁴¹ On the ground between Thunder Bay and Red River, however, the construction of a transportation route waited on the events of 1867.
FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER TWO

1 Alvin C. Gluek, Jr., Minnesota and the Manifest Destiny of the Canadian Northwest (Toronto, 1965), p. 220.

2 Reginald G. Trotter, Canadian Federation, Its Origins and Achievement, A Study in Nation Building (Toronto, 1924), p. 255.


7 Morton, op. cit., xxi.

8 Kittson, born in Lower Canada, and an experienced and tenacious fur trader, was made manager of the American Fur Company's Northern Department in 1843. He was instrumental in developing the transportation system between St. Paul and Fort Garry. He joined the Hudson's Bay Company as a Chief Trader about 1862.

9 Gluek, Jr., p. 48

10 A detailed and fascinating account of the growth of free trade in Rupert's Land and the growing influence
of Minnesota in the affairs of the British Northwest is found in Gluek, Jr.


12 Governor George Simpson wanted the troops to intimidate the turbulent métis. The need for military preparations in the face of the potentially explosive Oregon question provided him with the lever necessary to influence the Imperial Government. Some 350 soldiers, commanded by Major J. F. Crofton, travelled to the Red River Settlement, via York Factory, in 1846. They were recalled in June, 1848.


14 Ibid., p. 793.


16 Hercules Dousman to Henry Fisher, 6 Aug., 1853; cited in Gluek, Jr., p. 100.


18 W. L. Morton, Manitoba, A History (Toronto, 1957), pp. 77-78.


22 Ibid., p. 173.


24 Blegen, p. 180. The railroad extended west to Rock Island, Illinois, on the Mississippi River (see map no. 7). Gluek, Jr., p. 100, places the number of steamboat arrivals at St. Paul in 1855 at 563.

25 W. L. Morton, *Manitoba, A History*, p. 82. Joseph Kinsey Howard indicates that, by 1851, more than one hundred carts were making the trip to St. Paul each year and that this number had increased to six hundred by 1858. Howard, *Strange Empire, A Narrative of the Northwest* (New York, 1952), p. 57. The cart routes are amply treated in Grace Lee Nute, "The Red River Trails", *Minnesota History*, vol. 6, Sept., 1925, pp. 279-87; see also Gluek, Jr., pp. 96-100.

26 Cited in Gluek, Jr., p. 152; see also E. E. Rich, p. 519.

27 Francis G. Johnson to the Secretary, June, 1856, cited in Gluek, Jr., p. 92.

28 Gluek, Jr., p. 92. Ballenden was the Hudson's Bay Company's chief factor in the Red River District.

29 Between 1856 and 1858, three additional railheads reached the Mississippi: the Illinois Central at Galena (1856), the Milwaukee and Mississippi at Prairie du Chien (1857), and the Chicago and Milwaukee at La Crosse (1858). See map no. 7.

30 Gluek, Jr., p. 116; see also Blegen, p. 195.
Gluek, Jr., p. 105.

Ibid., p. 115.

Stanley, p. 20


Isbister and his actions are dealt with in Rich, pp. 545-46, and in W. L. Morton, Manitoba, A History, p. 76.


Simpson wanted the troops in Red River to preserve the Company's trading monopoly; he was not so greatly disturbed by the activities of President Polk and other proponents of the "Manifest Destiny" doctrine. See Gluek, Jr., pp. 60-61; and E. E. Rich, p. 724.

Useful accounts of the Warre-Vavasour journey and the despatch of troops to Red River in 1846 are given in Gluek, Jr., pp. 60-67, and E. E. Rich, pp. 537-40 and 725-32.


W. L. Morton, Manitoba, A History, pp. 94-95.

Morton, The Kingdom of Canada, p. 291. Additional information on mining activity in the Thunder Bay area is found in Robert Bell, "Thunder Bay Silver Mines", in Walpole Roland (ed.), Algoma West, Its Mines, Scenery and Industrial


A. S. Morton, p. 825.


The expansion of agriculture in the Minnesota Territory is treated in Blegen, pp. 159-210; and Folwell, vol. 1, pp. 351-365.

Sullivan, politician and judge, was elected mayor of Toronto in 1835 and was appointed a member of the Executive Council of Upper Canada in the following year. He played an important part in bringing about the union of Upper and Lower Canada in 1840 and became president of the council in the first government of the united province. He resigned in 1844 and in 1848 was appointed a judge of the court of Queen's Bench. W. Stewart Wallace, The Macmillan Dictionary of Canadian Biography, 3rd ed. (Toronto, 1963), p. 726.

Toronto Globe, 24 March, 1847.


In 1848, Synge was employed on works at Bytown (Ottawa), Canada West. He also published a work entitled The Colony of Rupert's Land (London, 1863) and eventually rose to the rank of major-general in the British army.
Carmichael-Smythe's pamphlet, published in 1849, was entitled *A Letter, from Major Robert Carmichael-Smythe to his friend the author of "the Clockmaker" containing thoughts on the subject of a British Colonial Railway Communication between the Atlantic and the Pacific*. The major argued primarily from the commercial point of view but also had military communications in mind. See A. S. Morton, pp. 825-826; and Trotter, pp. 257-258.

Trotter, p. 257.

Ibid., n., p. 265. Fleming became chief engineer of the Northern Railway in 1857, was chief engineer of the Intercolonial Railway during its construction, and in 1871 was appointed engineer-in-chief to superintend the surveys for the Canadian Pacific Railway.

See Stanley, p. 25; Careless, vol. 1, p. 230; and Trotter, p. 258. Macdonell was a lawyer and one-time partner of Sir Allan MacNab. In his later years he turned prospector and explored the mining possibilities of the Lake Superior region.

Macdonell's project was set out in a paper entitled *Observations upon the Construction of a Railroad from Lake Superior to the Pacific*, published in *Eighth Report of the Standing Committee on Railways and Telegraphs* (Toronto, 1852). He tried again for a charter in 1853 and 1855, but without success.


The North Western Steamboat Company was founded in August, 1856. George Brown's brother, Gordon, was associated with the Company.


of Lands and Forests, 1943), pp. 29-30, gives the details of the treaty. The creation of the Provisional Judicial District of Algoma in 1859 (see Canada Gazette, 1859, p. 2154) also helped to prepare the way for westward movement and settlement.

64 Bertrand, p. 165.

65 Kennedy had been a clerk at Fort Chimo. In 1851 he was given the command of a ship and sent out in search of Sir John Franklin. Two years later he published A Short Narrative of the Second Voyage of the Prince Albert, in Search of Sir John Franklin. He spent the later years of his life at the Red River Settlement and died in 1890.


68 Among the backers of this concern were Gordon Brown, W. P. Howland (a member of Legislative Assembly of Canada who was to become lieutenant-governor of Ontario, 1868-73), John McMurrich (a wholesale merchant who sat in the Legislative Council of Canada, 1862-64), and William McMaster (a wealthy Toronto business Liberal); see Careless, vol. 1, p. 239. Allan Macdonell was also, apparently, involved; see Gluek, Jr., p. 124.

69 See Gluek, Jr., pp. 123-125 and 225-26; A. S. Morton, p. 827; and Careless, vol. 1, p. 239.


71 McDougall was to have a close association with the Northwest. He was a member of parliament almost continuously from 1858 until 1882. From 1862 to 1864 he was Commissioner of Crown Lands and was a delegate to the Charlottetown and Quebec Conferences in 1864 as well as the Westminster Confederation Conference in 1866. In 1867 he became a leading Liberal in the first government of the Dominion and was Minister of Public Works from 1867 to 1869. In 1868 he accompanied Sir George Cartier to England to arrange the transfer of the Hudson's Bay Company's territories to Canada, and in 1869 was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Rupert's Land and the North West Territories. The unfortunate, and well-known episode which followed destroyed his political influence.


Report from the Select Committee on the Hudson's Bay Company, pp. iii-iv (my underlining).

Draper viewed the Rockies as the proper western boundary of Canada.


Cited in Gluek, Jr., p. 130.

St. Paul Pioneer and Democrat, 3 July, 1858; cited in Gluek, Jr., p. 130. Draper had noted, in almost the same words, that "the natural outlet of the country appears ... to be into the United States", adding that as Hudson Bay was not navigable during much of the year, the only viable communication on British soil was through Canada. Cited in Glazebrook, vol. 2 (Carleton Library edition), p. 39.


E. E. Rich, p. 798. The three witnesses were George Gladman (soon to lead the Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857), Allan Macdonell, and William MacDonnel Dawson. The latter was chief of the Woods and Forests
Branch of the Crown Lands Department and a brother of Simon J. Dawson, after whom the Dawson Route was named. William Dawson was also a close associate of Joseph Cauchon, the Commissioner of Crown Lands who was a strong advocate of westward expansion. Cauchon was a member of the Canadian Select Committee, as was the omnipresent George Brown.


83 Crofton, then a major, had commanded the imperial troops sent to Red River via York Factory in 1846. He had travelled both routes during his time in the Northwest.

84 A. S. Morton, p. 828.


86 Gluek, Jr., p. 140.

87 A. A. Taché, Sketch of the North-West of America, trans. by Capt. D. R. Cameron (Montreal, 1870), pp. 39-40; cited in Gluek, Jr., p. 139. Taché went to Red River as a missionary in 1845; in 1853 he became second bishop of St. Boniface; and in 1871 he was created archbishop and metropolitan of St. Boniface.

88 Gluek, Jr., p. 146. This paragraph, and the preceding two, are based largely on Gluek, Jr., pp. 137-150 and E. E. Rich, pp. 794-795.


92 Lower, p. 303.
93 Cauchon sat in the Legislative Assembly of Canada or the Canadian House of Commons from 1844, without interruption, until 1872. From 1861 to 1862 he was Commissioner of Public Works in the Cartier-Macdonald government. In 1867 he became Speaker of the Senate. Ten years later he was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba, a post which he held until 1882.


95 Cited in A. S. Morton, p. 834.

96 Great Britain, Further Papers Relative to the Exploration by the Expedition under Captain Palliser of that Portion of British North America which Lies Between the Northern Branch of the River Saskatchewan and the Frontier of the United States; and between the Red River and the Rocky Mountains, and thence to the Pacific Ocean (London, 1860), p. 57.

97 Ibid., p. 58

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 The Trans-Canada Highway now more or less follows the route envisaged by Palliser for 435 miles between Port Arthur and Winnipeg.

101 Further Papers, p. 58

102 Gladman was a retired Chief Trader who had served thirty-one years with the Hudson's Bay Company. He had testified before the Canadian Select Committee and favoured an end to Company rule in the Northwest.

103 Hind, born in England, came to Canada in 1846. He was professor of chemistry and geology at the University
of Trinity College from 1853 to 1864. In 1861 he led an expedition to Labrador. His Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857 and of The Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition of 1858, 2 vols. (London, 1860) is an enlarged, and interesting version of his official reports. This work established him as an influential advocate of Canadian westward expansion.

104 Of all the principals of the expedition, Dawson was to have the longest and closest association with the Northwest. A civil engineer, he was employed in supervising public works along the St. Maurice River prior to 1857. A decade later he settled in Port Arthur where he became the chief architect and advocate of the Red River (Dawson) Route. From 1875 until 1878 he represented Algoma West in the Ontario Legislature and for the next thirteen years he sat in the Canadian House of Commons for the same constituency. He was active in Indian affairs, as in most other aspects of life in the area. One of the first landowners in Port Arthur (its rather prosaic name was "Depot" when he first located there), he became its most distinguished citizen until his death in 1902. A useful source of information on this man is the "Simon J. Dawson Papers" recently acquired by the Ontario Department of Records and Archives.

105 E. Parent, Assistant Provincial Secretary, to Gladman, 22 July, 1857, in Report on the Exploration of the Country between Lake Superior and the Red River Settlement, printed by order of the Legislative Assembly (Toronto, 1858), pp. 5-6. This report runs to 424 pages and is an important source of information on the expedition. It includes all government instructions, all communications concerning the initial organization of the party, and all reports to date. A second important source is Simon J. Dawson, Report on the Exploration of the Country between Lake Superior and the Red River Settlement, and between the latter place and the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan, printed by order of the Legislative Assembly (Toronto, 1859); and a third is Henry Y. Hind, North West Territory; Reports of Progress; together with a preliminary and General Report on the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition made under Instructions from the Provincial Secretary, Canada, printed by order of the Legislative Assembly (Toronto, 1859). The above are also found in the Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada, vol. 16, 1858, and vol. 17, 1859. See also Hind's, Narrative of the Canadian Exploring Expeditions and Great Britain, Colonial Office, Papers Relative to the Exploration of the Country between Lake Superior and the Red River Settlement (London, 1859).


Histories of the West and textbooks of Canadian history usually devote a sentence or two to the purposes and accomplishments of the expedition.

There was also exploration to the west of Fort Garry, but prairie exploration -- while an important function of the expeditions of 1857 and 1858 -- is largely ignored in this treatment.

Two maps, annotated by Gladman and now held by the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests (Lands and Surveys Branch), are particularly useful. They are "Map of the Winter Route by the North from Fort Frances to the Rat Portage", signed by W. H. E. Napier, Red River Settlement, 10 Dec., 1857 (file no. 012-10); and "Map No. 3, Shewing the Areas of Arable Land on the Canoe Route from Fort William, Lake Superior, to Fort Garry, Red River, and the Valley of the Red River", signed by Henry Youle Hind, 6 Feb., 1858 (file no. 012-11). See also "Plan of Canoe Route from Fort William to Fort Garry", W. H. E. Napier, 10 Dec., 1857 (file no. 013-21); and "Plan Shewing the Proposed Route from Lake Superior to Red River Settlement", S. J. Dawson, Dec., 1857, Red River (file no. 010-22). The most interesting of all the maps, however, is "Map to Accompany Report on the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition", 1858, signed by Hind and later profusely annotated by William Gibbard (P.A.C., Vl/701). Gibbard, a land surveyor and employee of the Crown Lands Department,
became fisheries overseer for the Lake Huron and Superior district in 1859. He apparently had considerable travel experience in the country west of Thunder Bay and his notes (added to the map about 1861) provide a capsule history of fur trade logistics in the area. He was murdered in 1863 in the course of upholding fishing regulations near Manitoulin Island.


109 Some of Hime's work illustrates this thesis. His work was important in the development of photography in Canada and he was the first photographer of the Northwest. See Ralph Greenhill, "Early Canadian Photographer, Humphrey Lloyd Hime", Image, The Bulletin of the George Eastman House of Photography, vol. 11, no. 3, 1962, pp. 9-11; and Ralph Greenhill, Early Photography in Canada (Toronto, 1965), pp. 36, 50-51. Hime was a partner in the Toronto firm of Armstrong, Beere & Hime, "ambrotypists and photographers", which included William Armstrong. Armstrong was to become famous for his sketches and watercolours, many of them done in the country between Fort William and Fort Garry, and was to cross the Dawson Route in 1870.


111 A brief resume of this work is given in S. J. Dawson, "Report on the Line of Route between Lake Superior and the Red River Settlement", in Russell, The Red River Country, pp. 164-165. This report, submitted 20 April, 1868, is also found in C. S. P., vol. 1, no. 9, 1867-8, paper 81. A more detailed account is found in Dawson's 1859 report.


113 Trotter, p. 251


116 Lists of personnel, which differ somewhat, are found in Careless, vol. 1, p. 307, and Bertrand, pp. 176-177. The group was almost exactly the same as that which backed the North West Trading and Colonization Company of 1857.


119 Gluek, Jr., p. 227.

120 Simpson to the Governor and Committee, 21 June, 1859; cited in Gluek, Jr., p. 227.


123 Rich, p. 807. A. S. Morton, p. 837, notes that the winter mail was discontinued in 1859-60 and that the summer mail of 24 June, 1860, consisted of four newspapers carried by five men!

124 Charles Alleyn to Alexander G. Dallas, Governor of Rupert's land, 15 April, 1862; cited in Ontario Boundary Papers, 1856-82, p. 89.

125 Trotter, pp. 263-264.

126 In terms of physical attempts to span the Shield country west of Thunder Bay, there was a definite hiatus from 1859 until 1868. And while there were important political developments, associated with Confederation, which made a communication vital and increasingly possible, these have been largely passed over as being beyond the scope of this thesis.

128 Lower, p. 294.

129 W. Berens, Governor of Hudson's Bay Company, to the Duke of Newcastle (the Colonial Secretary), 19 May, 1862; cited in Ontario Boundary Papers, 1856-82, p. 92.

130 Cited in Ontario Boundary Papers, 1856-82, p. 89. This declaration of intent was inspired by Edward Watkin's visit to Canada (1861) in the interests of the Grand Trunk Railway; see Trotter, pp. 267-269.

131 Trotter, p. 269.


133 Careless, vol. 2, pp. 64, 67.

134 Edward W. Watkin to the Duke of Newcastle, 28 April, 1863; cited in Ontario Boundary Papers, 1856-82, pp. 97-98. Watkin, president of the Grand Trunk Railway Company from 1861 to 1863, had been sent to Canada by the Colonial Office in 1861 to investigate the possible federation of the British North American provinces. He was interested in extending the Grand Trunk to the Pacific and was also deeply involved in the purchase of controlling interest in the Hudson's Bay Company (summer, 1863) by the International Financial Society.


137 Stanley, pp. 49-50.

138 This paragraph is based largely on Gluek, Jr., pp. 158-219.

Nor'-Wester, 15 Aug., 1861; cited in Gluek, Jr., p. 234. The Nor'-Wester's comment was inspired by the inauguration of the Burbank line, a transportation firm which made regular, year-round, shipments of goods from St. Paul to Fort Garry.

Many of the basic documents on the large questions of Confederation and the transfer of Rupert's Land (including asides on a communication) are conveniently brought together in Ontario Boundary Papers, 1856-82 and in P. B. Waite, (ed.), The Confederation Debates in the Province of Canada, 1865 (Toronto, 1963).
CHAPTER THREE: INITIAL CONSTRUCTION AND INAUGURATION
OF THE DAWSON ROUTE, 1867-70

I would be quite willing, personally, to leave that whole country [the Northwest] a wilderness for the next half-century, but I fear if Englishmen do not go there, Yankees will ....

John A. Macdonald, 1865

I must confess, Mr. Speaker, that it looks like a burlesque to speak as a means of defence of a scheme of Confederation to unite the whole country extending from Newfoundland to Vancouver's Island, thousands of miles intervening without any communication, except through the United States or around Cape Horn.

Antoine Aimé Dorion, 1865

In this view let us look at the immense extent of territory that stretches away west of Upper Canada .... I believe that one of the first acts of the General Government of the United Provinces will be to enter into public obligations for the purpose of opening up and developing that vast region ....

Alexander Tilloch Galt, 1865
On 1 July, 1867, Confederation became a reality and the new federal union began its official existence. The race for the Pacific, and to incorporate Rupert's Land, was the first urgent task faced by the Canadian Government — "the first real test of the founding fathers' dream." As yet, the West, including the North-West Territories and British Columbia, as well as Rupert's Land, stood outside the union.

With the aggressive and expansionist sentiment of "Manifest Destiny" in full career south of the border, speed was imperative. In Minnesota, particularly, voices were raised in favour of annexation of the territory to the north. The poplar and cottonwood lined Red River, and its incredibly flat flanking grasslands, bound the American and British NorthWESTs together in a broad regional economy. At first it was this economic advantage (arrested to some degree by the Hudson's Bay Company until 1867) that excited Minnesotans, then, in the year of Confederation, the cork popped and a blatantly jingoistic and militantly expansionist spirit spewed forth. In the House of Representatives, Ignatius Donnelly of Minnesota (among others) sounded the trumpet: "With our great nation on the south of this region, and our new acquisition of Alaska resting upon its northern boundary, British dominion will be inevitably pressed out of western British America. It will disappear between the upper and the nether mill-stones. These jaws of the nation will swallow it up."  

Canada's purchase of the Hudson's Bay Company lands in
1869 blunted but did not stop the contentious clamour. The St. Paul Press' reaction was a bitter editorial entitled "Our Commercial Empire". Commenting on the new ownership of Rupert's Land, it observed: "If politically it belongs to Canada, geographically and commercially it belongs not to Canada but to Minnesota .... Canadian policy may propose, but American enterprise will dispose." With the Riel resistance to blundering Canadian policy in 1868-69, the Minnesota expansionists again spread their hawklike wings. "The Red River revolution", shouted the St. Paul Press, "is a trump card in the hands of American diplomacy ... by which, if rightly played, every vestige of British power may be swept from the Western half of the continent." Prominent Minnesotans urged a policy of annexation upon President U. S. Grant and Secretary of State, Hamilton Fish. Fish, in turn, pointing out that "the topographical condition of the country precludes intimate commercial relations between Canada and the Selkirk settlement", brought pressure on the British minister at Washington for the annexation of the Hudson's Bay Company lands to the United States. Inflammatory newspaper material even found its way into State Department reports prepared for the information of the United States Senate. One such article viewed the troubles in the Northwest as "a providential opportunity [for Britain] to settle the Alabama claims with the cession of a country whose destinies God has indissolubly wedded to ours by geographical affinities which no human power can sunder, as He
has divorced it from Canada by physical barriers which no human power can overcome. And why shouldn't mere United States Senators lend the Almighty a helping hand?

In these circumstances, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald was understandably apprehensive. Writing to Charles Brydges in 1870, he expressed his fears and intentions: "It is quite evident to me ... that the United States Government are resolved to do all they can, short of war, to get possession of the western territory and we must take immediate and vigorous steps to counteract them."

To many other Canadians, during the first few years of union, it seemed that, if the West was to be saved and the broad concept of Confederation realized, the infant nation would have to act -- and quickly.

After initial bungling which alienated the French-speaking majority in Red River while encouraging American annexationists, Macdonald did embark on a course of skilfully blended force and diplomacy which pacified the métis, confounded the American expansionists, and brought the Northwest into the Canadian union. An important strand of his policy was the building of the Dawson Route.

* * * * * * *

Travel, trade, and communications between Canada and Red River during the 1850's and early 1860's had been almost entirely via Minnesota. Clearly, if the North-West Territories and Rupert's Land were to become Canadian, there would have to be an all-Canadian transportation route linking East and West.
Influential voices had been raised in support of this concept during the years before Confederation and preliminary action had been taken, both by government and Toronto business people. But private enterprise, it seemed, could not bridge the rock and water expanse between Superior and the Red, and government activity had long since ceased. With the approach of Confederation, however, the question of communications -- sharpened by the obvious threat from the south -- assumed a new importance. Not least among Canadian considerations was that of defending their heritage in the West. In February, 1867, Sir John Michel, Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in North America, addressed himself to the problem. His conclusions were depressing. "The result of this examination shows", he wrote after dismissing all existing routes as impracticable, "that in the event of war ... Fort Garry is effectually isolated from Canada, and that in any case, until canals or railways are constructed, the United States possess the only channel through which all the trade of the Red River settlement must pass." Turning to the idea of a railway via Fort William, Michel pointed to "vast natural difficulties. 1st, A rise of 800 feet [to the height of land] in the first 50 miles. 2nd, 100 [sic] miles sterility and swamp, unfit for settlement." He added that "it is doubtful whether a water communication, safe for defensive purposes, can ever be made from the Settlement to Lake Superior." The peroration revealed the motive behind the memorandum: "On a careful consideration of the
whole question, the opinion I have formed is, that until a safe communication for military purposes is completed between Canada and Fort Garry, either the union of the Hudson's Bay Territory to Canada or the creation of a Crown Colony at the Red River Settlement would be a source of weakness and danger, both to Canada and England."

Michel's pessimistic (but not entirely unrealistic) prognosis was prompted by a petition from a number of Red River settlers and was written in the understanding that "Canada negotiates to take over the territory of the Company, under the protection of Great Britain." Four months later, in his capacity of Administrator of the Government of Canada, Michel approved a report of an Executive Council committee. The report endorsed an appended memorandum from the Commissioner of Crown Lands which urged that a road be constructed from Thunder Bay to Dog Lake and that the level of that lake be raised to facilitate navigation towards Lac Des Mille Lacs. Behind these recommendations was the advice of Simon J. Dawson who, in the matter of communications, proved to be a better guide and prophet than either Gladman or Hind.

On the assumption that the amount expended would form a claim upon the new Dominion, money was drawn from the Colonization Road Fund of Upper Canada and work begun in August, 1867. On 10 August, two work parties disembarked at Fort William. One of them, numbering some fifty men, was led by James W. Bridgland, Superintendent of Colonization Roads.
Its job was to build a good road more or less along the 1859 line surveyed between Depot and Dog Lake. The second, directed by Simon Dawson and consisting of about twenty men, set about constructing a dam to raise the level of Dog Lake. On 16 September, Bridgeland returned to Toronto, leaving John A. Snow in charge of operations. By the end of October, Snow had completed six miles of road. Dawson, in the meantime, had built two barges and prepared a quantity of timber for the Dog Lake dam. So ended the short working season of 1867.

Several months later Dawson compared the Pigeon River and Seine River routes with the old Northwest Company waterway and concluded that "the old canoe route will be, both as to economy of work in rendering it available, and facility of managing and navigating it afterwards, the best."  

The season of 1868 was, however, to bring changes. For one thing, Dawson altered his plan for a route by way of Dog Lake; for another, the Ontario Department of Crown Lands gave way to the federal Department of Public Works. From this date forward the central agency was to direct the charting, construction, and operation of the route. About a decade later, incomplete, and already made obsolete by the ribbons of steel creeping westward from the Lakehead, the Dawson Route was abandoned. In the interim, however, it stood as one of the strangest and most colourful transportation routes of Canadian history -- a stop-gap, patchwork anachronism straddling the era of the voyageur and that of the railway.
Detail of A. L. Russell's 1868 map, compiled from S. J. Dawson's exploratory surveys and maps in the Department of Crown Lands, showing the Dog Lake Trail, Depot, and a portion of the Dog Lake canoe route. This was drawn just prior to Dawson's discovery of the route via the valley of the Matawin River.
In large degree, the communication was the creation of its namesake. Its chief long-term publicist, Dawson was to become the route's first superintendent. And, beginning with the explorations of 1857, he was to maintain continuous and close contact with the area through which it passed until his death in 1902. His long connection with the route and its environs was, in turn, to advance him as a respected exponent of the area. In retrospect, he appears as the leading representative of what was to become Northwestern Ontario and an effective and underrated pioneer of national expansion. And, unlike some of those who are remembered as champions of the Northwest, Dawson earned his spurs on the ground. When he wrote and spoke of the area, he did so out of the experience of travelling it and working with its people. His sympathetic understanding of the métis and the Ojibwa was unusual and striking; his eye for its commercial possibilities was keen; its mines, mosquitoes, muskegs, portages, prairies, waterways, and fur traders were known to him. And his mind and pen were equal to the task of expressing the country and its potential.\(^{19}\)

Much of his experience was gained during the explorations of 1857-59; he was to learn more when, in 1868, he set out in earnest to conquer the difficult terrain west of Superior. The job was a big one, but Dawson was a man of great enthusiasm and considerable ability. A civil engineer and civil servant, his many reports are studded with almost poetic references to the Northwest, references which suggest that the man was inspired
by something approximating an expansionist vision. Here he writes of the Shield country west of Lake Superior: "Go in whatever direction he will, the explorer, on passing over a mountain range, is sure to stumble on a lake.... So numerous are they, that it would be difficult to say whether the country would be better described as one vast lake with ridges of land running through it, or as land intersected by water. On ascending any of the bare rocky bluffs frequent in the country, mountains are seen stretching away in tumultuous and broken ridges to the horizon, with lakes gleaming from every valley which the eye can reach."20 And here he is on the prairie, the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow: "To conclude, there is a beautiful and fertile land of vast proportions, inviting the husbandman to its virgin soil. If we, in turn, invite and interest all influences in the Dominion... to unite in its development and in directing emigration and settlement to it, the day is not distant when a teeming population of millions will find there the means of prosperity and plenty ............ it would seem as if this remote country ... with its winding streams, its clumps of trees, and beautiful green sward, and its herds of untamed cattle, rivals, if it does not surpass, in many places, all the groves, lawns and plantations with which genius and art seek to adorn the habitations of civilized life."21 Here, in a passage worthy of Charles Mair, is Dawson the romantic dreamer (as some historians have styled him), or Dawson the rhetorical politician (he was to represent Algoma
in the Ontario Legislature from 1875-78 and in the Canadian House of Commons from 1878-91); certainly one wouldn't expect such a florid and enthusiastic outburst from a hard-headed government engineer/administrator. That he could combine the qualities of all three types, as well as being a competent wilderness traveller and highly knowledgeable frontiersman, seems not to have occurred to the few writers who have considered him. Last -- and this is particularly evident in his dealing with the Indians -- he was a humane and decent man who exhibited none of the opinionated arrogance of his former colleague, Henry Youle Hind.

Dawson's job was to put together a road, water, and portage route through some 450 miles of remote and extremely rugged wilderness. As the St. Paul Press would have it, he set out to attack physical barriers which God had erected and which no human power could surmount. Perhaps the article might have added, however, that faith can move mountains or that survey lines can be run around them. Dawson, at any rate, begin by extending and refining the 1857-59 surveys of the Red River Exploring Expedition. The old line from Pointe de Meurons to Arrow Lake and the International Boundary was re-examined and dismissed. Three others were considered: a line running north to Dog Lake and roughly paralleling the Kaministiquia River, a second cutting west across high ground from the eighteenth mile of the Dog Lake line to end at Shebandowan Lake, and a third going through the valley of the
Matawin River and joining Shebandowan Lake and Thunder Bay. The last was chosen. It was to run west from the eighth mile of the Dog Lake line to the junction of the Matawin and Kaministiquia Rivers and then via the valley of the Matawin to the outlet of Lower Shebandowan Lake.

Dawson's ultimate object was a forty-mile railroad to span this region, uninterrupted water navigation for 310 miles in the interior lake region (to be made possible by a complex and exceedingly ambitious series of dams and locks), and a ninety-mile rail line from Lake of the Woods to Fort Garry. For the moment, however, he set out to "make a good waggon road from Lake Superior to the waters of the dividing plateau at Shebandowan Lake, improve the navigation from thence Westward in as far as it can be rapidly done, in the first instance, and make a good waggon road from the Lake of the Woods to Fort Garry." This he saw as being "an absolutely necessary and essential step towards making the country accessible, whatever scale of improvement may be adopted in the future, and," he added, "it would have the immediate effect of opening a channel by which immigration could reach the country, while it would, at the same time, draw the trade of the North-West Territories to Canada." By the end of the 1868 working season, Dawson had spent $3,100 on surveys, and had concluded that a good wagon road to Lake Shebandowan (including bridges and a pier at Thunder Bay) would cost $80,000. He had also decided that the level
From H. C. Lloyd's MS. plan. The Thunder Bay road is traced over in yellow; the Dog Lake Trail is traced over in orange.
of Lake Shebandowan should be raised thirty feet by means of a dam at its outlet. This would provide uninterrupted navigation from a point on the "Matawin" (Shebandowan) River, two and a half miles from its head, to the height of land. Dawson thought the dam would cost about $12,000 but called for additional surveys to assess the practicability of his scheme. Most important, with his adoption of a line via the valley of the Matawin and Shebandowan Rivers (see map on following page), Dawson had completed the basic design of the route. To open a "preliminary communication" across the route would cost, he estimated, $247,200. He quickly added that this might appear to be a small sum with which to undertake the opening of the Northwest, "amounting as it does to little more than the cost of eight or ten miles of railway."  

Construction of the Thunder Bay Road began during the summer of 1869. Before that time, however, rather momentous events related to the Dawson Route had taken place at its western terminus. In July, 1868, calamity struck the already troubled Red River Settlement. It came in the form of locusts which devoured the crops. To make matters worse, "the buffalo hunters instead of furnishing their large share of provisions ... arrived starving from their usual hunting grounds." The Settlement was faced with famine and appealed for outside help. The response was generous: money for food was raised by the Hudson's Bay Company, the State of Minnesota, and the citizens of Ottawa and St. Paul. The Government of Canada took a different approach.
Simplified Map

Scale: 8 miles to one inch

Colonization Road line of 1867; work not completed.

Line surveyed by S.J. Dawson in 1868.

MAP NO. 9

Lac des Mile Hacs
Kashabowie Lake
Shebandowan Lake and River
Kaministiquia River
Road completed to this point, 1867
Road extended to Dog Lake, 1868
Site of proposed lamp depot, 1868.
It decided to begin the construction of the westernmost section of the Dawson Route as a relief project -- labourers from Red River to be employed at the rate of about $18.00 per month.

Unfortunately, the project was in some ways ill-considered and in most ways ill-administered. For one thing, negotiations for the transfer of Rupert's Land to Canada had not yet been concluded. In short, the federal Department of Public Works was setting out to build a road in territory where it had no jurisdiction. This did not deter its injudicious emmisaries from behaving as if Assiniboia was already an adjunct of the Dominion. In this, they followed the lead of their minister, William McDougall, who for some time had contended that the Hudson's Bay Company had no title to the area. John A. Snow, the project superintendent, was, however, instructed to ask Governor William McTavish for permission to proceed once he had arrived in Red River. He received McTavish's verbal consent in late October. Nevertheless, the Company rightfully objected to the government's aggressive and extra-legal attitude in letters to the Colonial Office.

Questions of legal right did not, however, blunt the enthusiastic welcome accorded Snow by many of those who foresaw a long, hungry winter. Unfortunately, this good will was soon dissipated at the hands of Snow and his paymaster, Charles Mair. The actions of these two men, ostensibly in the area to forward the well-being of its inhabitants, are difficult to credit. They embarked on a series of blunders which reflected
their arrogance, racial bigotry, greed, and ignorance of the country and its people. They began by almost immediately identifying themselves with Shultz and the "Canadian party". This, in itself, was grounds for suspicion on the part of the métis. Second, they failed to explain clearly the purpose of their mission and brought additional mistrust upon themselves by hiring many of their crew from among a group of recent Canadian immigrants. The crew, which numbered about forty, made matters worse by buying lands from the Indians which were already claimed by members of the métis community. Both Snow and Mair were, themselves, accused of this sharp practice and Snow was shown to have sold liquor to the Indians -- quite possibly in the interests of acquiring land. Two additional aspects of this mishandled project must be recorded: first, that the workers soon became disenchanted with low wages and the high food prices they had to pay at the store of Dr. Shultz (where they were obliged to deal, much to their dislike)\(^34\); and, second, that Charles Mair, a talented journalist and aspiring poet, had letters published in Canada which too often disparaged the French half-breeds while implying his own superiority.\(^35\) In terms of providing relief the project was worse than a failure. It contributed in substantial measure to the métis distrust which culminated in the Riel resistance of the following year.\(^36\) It also indicated that "easterners" such as Mair, Snow, McDougall, and even John A. Macdonald, relied too much on the Nor'Wester, the Globe, and men like Shultz for their
knowledge of the Northwest.\textsuperscript{37}

But Snow and Mair were in Assiniboia to build a road as well as to provide relief. It may even be that the relief aspect of the project was primarily a device to gain a foothold on the territory and begin construction.\textsuperscript{38} Snow commenced operations near the Oak Point Settlement (the Ste. Anne des Chènes of today), about thirty miles east of Fort Garry. He chose this location for several reasons: it was on the line recommended by Dawson; it was already accessible from Red River by means of a prairie cart track; and it marked the edge of the wooded (and swampy) country extending east to Lake of the Woods (see map on next page). Between 9 November, 1868, and 1 April, 1869, Snow's men cut twenty-eight miles of rough trail east of Oak Point and laid fascines across 2½ miles of swampy ground.\textsuperscript{39} The following season -- beginning on 30 June and ending on 6 December, 1869 -- saw little work accomplished. The track was extended to 29½ miles and improved, a depot was constructed at Oak Point, and some further surveying was done. In the meantime Snow gave assistance to Public Works surveyor Colonel Stoughton Dennis who undertook surveys at Oak Point and Red River with disastrous and well-known results. On 6 January, 1870, Snow left Fort Garry, having spent $39,491.51 on construction.\textsuperscript{40} There is a certain irony in his subsequent declaration that, "had it not been for the unfortunate and unforseen occurences resulting in the stoppage of the work, the road, in all probability, would have been
This map (scale: 10 miles to 1 inch), is based on "Map Shewing Line of Route between Lake Superior and Red River Settlement, compiled from S. J. Dawson's Exploratory Surveys and Maps in Dept. of Crown Lands, Ont.", by A. L. Russell, Toronto, 1869.

The map accompanied Dawson's "Report of 1869", in Russell, The Red River....
opened to the Lake of the Woods in the Spring [sic], or at least, early in the ensuing summer. In fact, Snow had only partially completed a little more than one quarter of the Fort Garry Road. In round figures, the improved track had cost $1,300 per mile. Not until 1871 was the Fort Garry Road opened for stage travel. And when work was resumed in 1870, it was conducted without the services of Snow.

On 19 May, 1869, Dawson wrote to McDougall urging "the expediency of proceeding as soon as possible with the work on the road leading from Thunder Bay to the navigable waters of the interior section." On 9 June he was authorized to resume operations but an appropriation for that purpose was not made available until 1 July. Five days later Dawson sailed from Collingwood and by 10 July about 200 men were being organized into gangs to work on the Thunder Bay Road. When the season ended in late October they had, despite a protracted period of heavy rains, built twenty-five miles of road and cut an additional ten miles of rough track. In addition, a bridge had been built across Strawberry Creek (see map on following page), timber had been prepared for the Kaministiquia Bridge, the surveys had been completed to Shebandowan Lake, and a stable and a storehouse had been constructed at Depot.

By this time, too, Dawson had sent a party of Iroquois and Ojibwa Indians to Fort Frances to facilitate the negotiation of a treaty with the natives along the line of route, and had established a police force of six men. He explained the reasons
This map (scale: 4 miles to 1 inch) is based on "Plan Shewing the Height of Land between the waters of the St. Lawrence and Winnipeg on the Red River Route", by H. C. Lloyd (n.d.; Lands and Surveys Branch, plan no. 023-23), and "Plan of Mr. Dawson's Road from Thunder Bay to Lake Shebandowan", in Captain G. L. Huyshe, The Red River Expedition (London, 1871).

Lloyd was an employee of the Crown Lands Department, apparently, and his plan appears to have been drawn about 1872.

MAP NO. 11
for this latter action in a letter of 24 September:

The depot at which the headquarters are at present established, was formerly an Indian camping ground, and has always been a favorable resort with the native population in summer. On our arrival we found at this place two shops in which intoxicating liquors were sold, besides which there were various traders in the neighbourhood who disposed of ardent spirits. This article, so baneful to the Indians, was also sold largely from the steamers whenever they arrived. The demoralizing influences thus produced may be readily conceived. It was difficult at times to find a sober Indian, and I apprehended evil consequences from the presence of so much liquor, easily obtainable, on the workmen on the line, more especially if they should come in contact with inebriated Indians. It, therefore, became a matter of necessity to stop this traffic.46

In the same document, Dawson provided a good description of the western two-thirds of the Thunder Bay Road-line, noting that, "from the eighteenth mile post westward, there is a complete change in the character of the country as regards soil and rock. The Laurentian hills give place to mountains of high and other intrusive rocks .... The soil, over a considerable distance, is of a stiff red clay .... The road-line winds along mountain slopes and through deep valleys without, however, deviating largely from a straight general course."

By the end of October, when all but sixty of the men departed by the last steamer for Collingwood, much work had been accomplished in this difficult terrain. The cost was, however, high. On 12 January, 1870, Dawson was reminded of this in a note from Braun:  "I am directed by the Honourable the Minister of Public Works to acquaint you that it has been reported to the Government that the road, now under construction between Fort William and Lake Shebandowan, is costing $2,000
per mile.... The Minister will be glad to be furnished with an explanatory statement from you on the subject."^47

On the whole, the road work had progressed fairly satisfactorily. The problem of improving navigation across the height of land was, however, more difficult. In line with Dawson's suggestion of the previous summer, an engineering survey party, led by Thomas Monro, was sent to Fort William in August, 1869, to look into this matter. Monro spent thirty-seven days on and around Lake Shebandowan. His object was to see if Dawson's plan of raising the level of that lake by thirty feet was possible. In the end he rejected the idea as impracticable on the grounds that water loss by evaporation, by infiltration, and by leakage at the proposed dam, would be excessive. The whole scheme was, in Monro's view, the result of a "mere explorer dabbling in the business of an engineer."^48 He did, however, put forward an alternative plan which involved raising the level of Shebandowan by five feet, thus deepening its shallow reaches. This was eventually done.

It seems, however, that the high costs of construction at both ends of the route and the generally negative tenor of Monro's comments had raised serious doubts in the minds of some observers. John Page, Chief Engineer of the Department of Public Works, examined both Dawson's and Monro's reports, and then recommended explorations west of Lake Nipigon via the English River to investigate the possibility of an easier route to the Red River Settlement. On 12 May, 1870, the Secretary
of State, on behalf of the House of Commons, commanded that copies of reports on "Dawson's proposed line of Canal or water communication through the North-West Territory" be laid before the House. By this time, however, events in Red River had marked the route as being of potential strategic use; and Dawson had been instructed "to make every possible provision for the passage of a military force... through the untravelled and little-known region lying between Lake Superior and the Red River Settlement."^52

By the time the Manitoba Act of May, 1870, had created a province in what had been Rupert's Land, Dawson was able to report that eighty men were at work on the road and that the Kaministiquia and Matawin Rivers had been bridged during the winter as well as the more considerable of the smaller streams, "so that, practically, the work of bridging may be considered as completed."^53 He added that an additional 170 men would be on the job as soon as steamers, on the opening of navigation, could bring them. But much remained to be done, as was made dramatically clear in the spring of 1870 when the military expedition arrived at Depot.^54

The expeditionary force, composed of Canadian militia supported by British regulars, and commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Garnet J. Wolseley, was part of the Government's answer to métis unrest in the vicinity of Fort Garry and expansionist sentiment in the United States. It was also intended to protect the settlement against possible attack by Plains Indians
(including a substantial number of Sioux refugees from the Minnesota Massacre of 1862), and to show Americans that Britain supported Canada's claim to the Northwest. Sir John, aware of the expansionist temper in Washington and the somewhat remote but possible danger of a Fenian invasion across the 49th parallel, put it this way, "the sending of some of Her Majesty's troops there will show the United States Government and people that England is resolved not to abandon her Colonies, or is indifferent to the future of the Great West." The expedition was to be peaceful rather than punitive; it would parade the flag, flourish the sword, safely usher Manitoba into Confederation, and return home. To many of the rank and file, however, its major purpose was to avenge the "murder" of Thomas Scott, an unruly young Orangeman executed by Louis Riel.

Whatever its purpose, the first task of the Red River Expedition was to get across some 600 miles of wilderness between Thunder Bay and Fort Garry. But when the troops disembarked from lake steamers at Depot (renamed Prince Arthur's Landing by Wolseley), they found the road, which was to run for forty-five miles to Shebandowan Lake, only partially completed and the rest of the route in an almost undeveloped state.

In January, 1870, Dawson had written that the line of portages between Lake Superior and Lake of the Woods would be "in readiness as well-opened portage roads by the time the first Steamers reach Lake Superior on the opening of navigation." He had also promised that the Lake Superior road would be com-
"Red River Expedition. -- Unloading stores at Prince Arthur's Landing."
In Canadian Illustrated News, 2 July, 1870, p. 8
pleted by the end of May. Dawson, however, had an enormous task on his hands during the winter and spring. Aside from constructing long roads over difficult terrain at the eastern and western ends of the route, he had to clear long-neglected portages deep in the interior of the country, place boats on the inland lakes (including a small steam launch on Shebandowan Lake), arrange for the construction and delivery of 150 boats from various parts of Canada for the purpose of troop transportation, and take steps to pacify the rather restless and "powerful" (as Dawson termed them) Saulteux Indians who roved the country *en route.* To achieve these ends Dawson dispatched a Mr. Pether of Fort William to secure good relations with the Indians at Fort Frances and saw to it that large crews of *voyageurs* and axe-men were at work before the first contingent of Wolseley's men arrived at the Lakehead. As soon as was possible Dawson increased the strength of his work crew to 800 -- most of them hired to double as *voyageurs.* But Dawson was plagued by serious and largely unforseeable difficulties. The working season was lamentably short in the country north of Superior, and 120 of his workers, expected at the beginning of the season, were detained when the United States authorities obstructed the expedition at the Sault Ste. Marie canal. Dawson calculated that this delayed work on the Thunder Bay road by two to three weeks. Then there were the forest fires of mid-May which swept along the route destroying some of the crib-work, one bridge, and disrupting the construction gangs.
"So general was the conflagration", wrote Dawson, "that the whole country seemed on flame .... The buildings at the dépôt were saved with difficulty, and nearly all the settlers' and miners' houses in the vicinity of Thunder Bay were burned." The fires were followed almost immediately by heavy rains which made a muddy mess of sections of the road and brought the rivers and creeks to flood levels. Ensign J. J. Bell, of the First (Ontario) Battalion of Riflemen, counted fifteen days of rain in June and eight during the first sixteen days of July. All things considered, it is little wonder that Dawson was not ready to accommodate the 1,400 men and 150 large boats of the Wolseley Expedition.

Undue delay, however, might have destroyed the usefulness of the expedition. And so, faced with the immediate necessity of getting their supplies and 30-foot boats to the head of navigation at Shebandowan, detachments of soldiers laboured shoulder to shoulder with Dawson's work-parties, racing against time to complete the task:

Work we each day and work we well,  
The forest 'round, its tale will tell.  
And roads are cut from Thunder Bay,  
Full six and forty miles away,  
To where the running Matawin,  
Ebbs from the Lake Shebandowan.  
...............................  

Whilst Dawson's features in relief clearly (as if by chance)  
Are seen, with his peculiar step and strangely piercing glance.  

The biggest transportation job involved moving the boats (which varied in weight from 650 pounds to 950 pounds). Dawson's
Wolseley Expedition camp at McVicar's Creek, Prince Arthur's Landing, 1870; from a water colour by William Armstrong.

Armstrong painted a great many pictures of the country between Lake Superior and the Red River. His work is of considerable value to historians interested in that area. He was a civil engineer and was appointed chief engineer of Wolseley's expedition. He also functioned as a news correspondent during that expedition. Many of his water colours of Northwestern Ontario are held by the Toronto Public Library and the Canadiana Gallery of the Royal Ontario Museum, while many others are in private collections.
plan was to load the craft, bottom upwards, on waggons and then to pull them twenty-five miles with teams of horses to the Matawin bridge, where the relatively passable section of road ended. While this was in progress the work crews would be concentrated on the unfinished sections of the line. Twenty-eight boats were sent forward by this means, the horses making the round trip in three days. Wolseley, however, impatient with delay, decided to take the boats up the Kaministiquia River, despite the great difficulties involved, and against the good advice of Dawson. The first brigade of boats arrived badly battered at the Matawin bridge, fourteen days after setting out. Wolseley, nonetheless, persevered in his plan. Between 6 June and 6 July, 101 boats were forwarded to Young's Landing via the river by 556 voyageurs and 471 soldiers (most of whom might otherwise have been employed at road building). A special force of 120 voyageurs took the boats the next eight miles to Brown's Lane and then regular crews rowed, poled, and pulled them seven miles to the Oskondaga River where they were loaded on waggons, hauled four miles by road, and, finally, put back in the river to be floated the last three miles to Shebandowan. The cost in labour, materials, and time was enormous. In transporting stores up one section of river, alone, wrote Ensign Bell, "it took thirteen hours of hard work with oar, pole and tracking line, to ascend, while the empty boats ran down for another load in one hour." Lieutenant Snelling recorded the risks involved: "On my first trip up
Wolseley Expedition on Kaministiquia River, from a painting by William Armstrong.
"Expedition to the Red River in 1870 under Sir Garnet Wolseley. Advanced Guard crossing a Portage." By Frances Ann Hopkins. From an oil painting in the Public Archives of Canada.
the crew were engaged tracking up a dangerous rapid. The stern of the boat gave a swing and striking on a rock was shivered to a thousand pieces. Our first work was to search for the two voyageurs who were on board at the time ... but with great difficulty they were got on shore .... None of the cargo was saved." Dawson, justifiably so, had some comments of his own. He observed that by about 20 June, "it had become necessary to spread so many people along the River, in this toilsome work of dragging boats up rocky channels that, much to my regret, I was compelled to reduce the force on the road." He added that, "the boats suffered terribly, row-locks were lost, and oars in quantity broken, and the tool chests were almost depleted of their contents." He also calculated that it cost $300 to transport each boat via the river as against $20 to $25 by way of road. Finally, he pointed out that on 2 August, seven boats were sent by waggon to Shebandowan in considerably less than two days, and that they arrived "fresh and sound as they came from the hand of the builder." Despite the admiration generally accorded Wolseley, he must be faulted on his river transportation policy. It had yet another result, for the voyageurs, a rough, ready, and independent-minded lot who, as expert rivermen, recognized the foolishness of their long and arduous chore, began to abandon the project in disgust. Among those who left were many local Indians (much needed guides) from Nipigon, Fort William, and Grand Portage.
Calderon's Landing today, on the Matawin River, Dawson Route.

Location of the old Matawin Bridge, Dawson Route.
Detail of "Map of both sides of the International Boundary between Lake Superior and Lake of the Woods", by John Farmer, 1829. The map shows the obstructions along the Dog Lake and Pigeon River canoe routes in considerable detail. It is included, primarily, to indicate the numerous obstructions along the river between Fort William and the mouth of the "Malaway". Wolseley's boat transportation policy did not show sufficient respect for these.
The eastern section of the Dawson Road between Port Arthur and Shebandowan Lake. From Huyse's "Red River Expedition."
Many of those called "voyageurs" by Dawson were actually men of the lumberman's frontier: river-drivers, boatmen, and timber-raftsmen. They came from the St. Maurice, Saguenay, Ottawa, and Trent River valleys and from the borders of Lakes Huron and Superior. There were métis, too, many of them from Penetanguishene and Manitoulin Island as well as a few from Red River. And, while the great days of the true voyageur canoe brigades had passed into history, these men, and the Indians employed from the Lake Superior district, would have seen and likely paddled many a Canôt du Nord. Finally, about 100 Caughnawaga-Iroquois were used, some of whom had paddled for Sir George Simpson.

Wolseley, himself, and a few of his officers, travelled by North Canoe, but the troops went by row-boat. Oars, not paddles, were the order of the day. Nevertheless, many of the skills required by Dawson and Wolseley were those required of the voyageurs of former days, and there certainly were some bona fide canoeemen involved. To this extent the undertaking might be regarded as a genuine voyageur project -- a somewhat bastardized reminder of the old days along the canoe routes.

If the voyageurs had their work cut out for them so, too, did the soldiers. Many of them -- unaccustomed to life on the wilderness frontier, and fancying themselves as glamorous saviors of the Canadian West -- had trouble adjusting to the realities of mud, rain, blackflies, and unadorned hard labour. They expressed their feelings in the words of the expedition song:
The Wolseley Expedition crossing a portage below Kakabeka Falls, from an oil painting by Frances Ann Hopkins, in the Public Archives of Canada.

Mrs. Hopkins, the wife of Edward Martin Hopkins who was personal secretary to Sir George Simpson, accompanied the Wolseley Expedition in 1870.

This painting originally belonged to Lord Wolseley.

See Grace Lee Nute, "Voyageurs' Artist", Beaver, June, 1947, p. 32ff.
'Twas only as a volunteer that I left my abode,  
I never thought of coming here to work upon the road.  

For some of the volunteers it must have seemed a long way from  
Toronto's Crystal Palace (where many of them had fitted out)  
to the muck and mosquitoes of the Thunder Bay road. Among  
their number was Hugh John Macdonald (the Prime Minister's son)  
who noted that, in civilized regions, the road portions of the  
route "would pass for a very respectable swamp". For Macdonald  
the worst of it was, as he put it, "the damned stiff red clay  
that sticks to one's feet like the devil". He went on to note  
that he was "already beginning to swear a little."  

One suspects that his vocabulary was greatly expanded by the time  
he reached Fort Garry.  

The Thunder Bay Road was only the first leg of the long  
and varied route to the West; and by 16 July, the boats patched  
up after their rough river trip, the troops began to push off  
from the sandy beach of McNeill's Bay at the eastern end of  
Lake Shebandowan. For some 550 miles now the route would  
be one of lakes, rivers and portages; and so the six-oared  
boats, manned by eight soldiers and two or three voyageurs, set  
on the trail of the Indian and fur trader. Now they would  
get a real taste of the pays d'en haut: the land of wild rivers,  
glacier-scoured granite, and Black Spruce swamps.  

North from Shebandowan they pulled across Kashabowie  
Lake, portaged over the height of land, and then headed west  
through Lac Des Mille Lacs. From this point, the line of  
travel bent slightly to the south, passing directly across the
the Quetico to converge with the historic border lakes route at Lac La Croix. Leaving La Croix by way of Loon Lake and River it wound north-west via Sand Point and Namakan Lakes to once again strike west across the big water of Rainy Lake. Then came the beautiful valley of the Rainy River and the vast expanse of Lake of the Woods, followed by the Winnipeg River, Lake Winnipeg and, finally, -- six hundred miles from Prince Arthur's Landing -- the Red River and Fort Garry (see map no.12, unbound).

For the soldiers the trip meant hard work spiced with adventure. Threading their way among myriads of confusing islands, camping wherever nightfall found them, carving out portages, and running rapids; the men encountered a whole new set of experiences. Many of them recorded the trip in journals, some of which were later published. Samplings from these accounts provide a vivid picture of the journey as seen through the soldiers' eyes:

Lt. H. W. Snelling (pp. 32-33), Shebandowan to the Height of Land Portage:

as soon as all the arrangements were completed, the boats were fitted out with masts, sails, charts, compass, fishing nets ... also 52 days provisions of salt-pork and biscuits. The first Brigade then embarked and with three cheers we bid them farewell. The second Brigade to which I belonged started two days afterwards, and a favourable wind blowing at the time, the sails were soon hoisted and we were flying through the water at speed of 10 or 12 knots an hour when we arrived at the Kashabowie Portage, 1710 yards in length and encamped for the night. at three o'clock the next morning, we were busily employed conveying our cargo and boats over the Portage but which we found no light work .... we encamped for the night and started at the usual hour,
Scale: approx. 4 miles to 1 inch.

Wolseley Expedition, Line of Route:
Shebandowan Lake to Baril Lake

MAP NO. 13
3 o'clock, the next morning and rowed till 12 o'clock when an halt was made for dinner .... in the evening we arrived at the Height of Land Portage, 1 mile in length, and encamped there. the following day was occupied in dragging the boats and carrying the cargo over.

Lt. H. S. H. Riddell (p. 113), on the method of "dragging the boats":

The boats were then hauled ashore, and the tow lines fastened to their bows. The men then harnessed themselves with their portage-straps and slings to the tow-lines; and the boats, with a few men on either side to keep them on their keels, were dragged over the skids of wood laid down to serve as rollers along the portage.

Lt. J. J. Bell (second paper, p. 103), food and drink en route:

After leaving Thunder Bay fresh meat was rarely seen. Most of the biscuit had been spoiled by the rain ... the only way to prepare the flour was by mixing it with water into a batter and making pancakes in the frying pans. Such fare was not very suitable for men engaged in hard work, and many suffered from diarrhoea .... Occasionally a sturgeon might be had from the Indians in exchange for pork. A supply of blueberries, procured in the same way, formed an agreeable change of diet.

No spirit ration was issued, probably the first expedition undertaken by British troops in which intoxicating liquor was not served out daily .... Absence of liquor was marked by absence of crime, as well as by the wonderful good health and spirits of the men.

Lt. Riddell (p. 116), Lac des Milles Lacs to the head of the French River:

After traversing the Lac des Milles Lacs, for a distance of 21 miles, the next portage, the Baril, was reached. Here we had to drag the boats up a steep incline of about 100 feet, and had very hard work. The Baril Portage, which leads into Baril Lake, is about 400 yards across. Eight miles across Baril Lake ... brought us to the Brulé, or Side-Hill Portage, the scenery round which was very pretty. On leaving the portage the boats were poled down a narrow stream for a mile and a half, when we passed into Lake Windigoostigon, or Cannibal Lake, so called
Scale: approx. 4 miles to 1 inch.

French Lake
French Portage
Windigoostigwan Lake
French River
Pickerel Lake
Baril Lake
Brulé Lake
Lac Des Hille Lacs

HAP No. 14

Wolseley Expedition, Line of Route:
Baril Lake to Sturgeon Lake
The head of the French River (outlet of Windigoostigwan Lake), on the Dawson Route, 1964.
in commemoration of a deed of violence committed there by a band of Ojibways, in the year 1811 .... A row of twelve miles brought us to the entrance to the French River, down which we went at a great pace .... The numerous shoals and rocks in this river made the navigation dangerous in the extreme, and several boats received damage that compelled the officers in charge of them to run inshore and bivouac for the night.

The Journal of the Expedition (p. 83), French Portage and River:

At 2.15 P.M. reached French Portage, which is 2 miles long, very hilly, and swampy [Huyshe called it "two miles long and a truly dreadful portage."].

A small winding stream connects Windegoostigou with French Lake .... About 3/4 mile down it there are falls, around which we cut out a new portage, so as to avoid the long and very bad old one. The new portage is 440 yards long and very steep and rocky .... Below the portage the stream [French River] is deep, very narrow at places, and with such sharp turns that it was difficult to get the long boats round them .... Encamped at foot of old portage on eastern side of French Lake.... In former times when this portage was used as a great highway by the North-West Company, they kept carts on it, and there is still the remains of some old corduroy work to be seen in its worst swamps.

Captain Huyshe (pp. 122-124), French River and Lake:

The new portage path descends a very steep hill, down which the stream finds its way, a little to the east of the path in a series of very pretty cascades .... Next morning, the 26th, we embarked again on the same stream, which now became deep and sluggish, too deep to pole and too narrow for rowing, but very pretty; its banks fringed with alder, tamarack, and pitch-pine, and occasional larger trees of white and red pine. As we dropped lazily down the current, enjoying the luxury of a morning pipe, an occasional young partridge would flutter away through the bushes ... numerous pigeons flitted about, and looked down at us from the lofty pines with wondering eyes.... we had to amuse ourselves by scaring them away from their perches by a loud shout, and then presenting imaginary guns at them as they flew away .... This stream connects Lake Windegoostigon with French Lake, a pretty circular basin 1½ miles in diameter, surrounded by low hills timbered with an extensive forest of red pine.
Lt. Riddell (pp. 116-117), French Lake to Deux Rivières Portage:

The French River flows into the Little French Lake, and another small river [Pickerel River] flows thence into Lake Kaogassikok [now called Pickerel Lake]. While crossing this lake, with a fine breeze behind us, we were overtaken by the mail canoe from Fort William to Fort Francis .... It was manned by two half-naked savages, who gave us their mail bags to look over, and allowed us to sort any letters and papers that there might be for our brigade. They seemed to fully appreciate the position they held, and pointed with great exultation to the small Union-Jack flying on the bow of their canoe, as they paddled swiftly away.

The next Portage was the Pine [Portage des Morts], 27 miles from the French Portage; thence across a small lake to the Portage des Deux Rivières ....

Captain Huyshe (pp. 125-126), Doré Lake to Sturgeon Lake via Deux Rivières Portage and Lake of Two Mountains [unnamed on recent maps]:

A row of a mile across Doré Lake brought us to the next portage, called Deux Rivières, 750 yards long, and very steep and rocky. On first walking across this portage, it seemed as if it would be almost impossible to lay down rollers for the boats up and down such steep hills, but old Ignace and his crew of Iroquois (ten men), assisted by the voyageurs of the three brigades, made a capital road by five o'clock the next evening. At one spot they cut down two huge red pines, large enough to be the spars of a big ship, and, laying them lengthwise, put skids across on notches cut in the pines, and thus made a capital bridge across a ravine, lessening the ascent very much .... From Deux Rivières Portage, the route leads through a narrow winding channel, overgrown with rushes and lilies, into Sturgeon Lake, the most beautiful of the many beautiful lakes yet passed. The sudden contraction of the lake into a river breadth for a few yards amongst islands, and its abrupt opening into wide expanses of water, with deep and gloomy bays stretching into the dark forest as far as the eye could reach, offered a picture of ever-changing beauty. Halfway up this lake we met a large North-West [North] canoe, manned by Iroquois Indians, and found that it contained Mr. Simpson, M.P. for Algoma, and Mr. Pither [Pether, the Indian agent at Fort Francis].
Scale: approx. 4 miles to 1 inch.

Wolseley Expedition, Line of Route

Pickerel Lake (Koqassilikok L.) to

Maligne River

Doré L., Pickerel Lake, Pine Portage, Deux Rivières Portage

Rapids, Sturgeon Lake, Maligne River
Pickerel (Kaogassikok) Lake, on the Dawson Route.
Photo: B. M. Litteljohn

A portion of Deux Rivieres Portage, much as it was during the 1870's.
Lt. Riddell (pp. 117-118), Sturgeon Lake to the Maligne River:

At the mouth of Sturgeon River, leading into the beautiful lake of that name, we saw a sturgeon for the first time .... The King of Fishes did not reign very long in this instance, for he was no sooner seen than an ounce of shot put an end to his existence. The Indian who discovered it was so excited, that he jumped out of the boat into the water, and returned, bearing the prize in triumph. He undertook to prepare it for our supper; and the roe, artistically cooked by one of the officers, was voted most delicious by all who tasted it .... After rowing the entire length of Sturgeon Lake [about 16 miles] ... we arrived at the River Maligne [called the Sturgeon River in some accounts], where there were several dangerous rapids to be run.

Journal of the Expedition (p. 84), Sturgeon Lake:

The route is very winding, and owing to the numerous long bays extending in every direction, it is very easy ... to go astray. Colonel Wolseley's party, in their canoe and gig, kept well ahead of Colonel Feilden's detachment all day, blazing trees at every point and turn of the route in such a manner that the marks can be seen at a considerable distance.

Captain Huyshe (p. 127), on the method of blazing:

We used to select a group of conspicuous trees at a point where the route turned to the right or left, and a couple of men would spring ashore with axes, lop off the lower branches, and strip the bark off for several feet, thus making a mark visible for a mile or more. After this plan had been adopted, the brigades in rear got on much better.

Lt. Riddell (pp. 118-119), the rapids of the Maligne:

At the first rapid, an Iroquois Indian, named Ignace, had been stationed with a band of skilled boatmen, consisting of Iroquois and French-Canadians, for the purpose of steering the boats down .... Ignace commenced his operations by turning everyone out of the boats, except four soldiers left in each to row.

Three pilots, then got into each boat, and with their long paddles and sweeps, steered into the middle of the foaming waters. With a rush, and pulled as hard as the
Scale: approx. 4 miles to 1 inch.

Wolseley Expedition, line of Route

Maligne River to Loon River

Namakan River → Lac la Croix

Loon Lake

Loon River

P. = portage, not opened at time of Wolseley Expedition.
Near the head of the Maligne River, Dawson Route.

Photo: Kenneth E. Kidd

Twin Falls on the Maligne River, Island Portage is to the left. The Maligne was one of the most difficult portions of the route.

Photo: Martha A. Kidd
strong arms at work were capable of, the boats entered the rapids. The slightest mistake on the part of the steersman, and they would have been smashed to pieces on the huge rocks that we passed closer than was pleasant. Everyone worked as if for his life; and the wild cries of the Indians, as they shouted directions to each other in their strange language, made those looking on from the shore feel certain that some accident was going to happen; but the cheers and laughter of the crews, as the boats were pulled into smooth water at the foot of the rapids soon dispelled the illusion.

Captain Huyshe (pp. 128-131), the Sturgeon [Maligne] River to Namakan Lake via Lac La Croix and Loon Lake:

Sturgeon Lake empties itself into Lac La Croix through Sturgeon River, about 18 miles long, with numerous falls and heavy rapids .... Portage de l'Isle, the last of several portages on Sturgeon River, is a very pretty portage on an island, as its name implies. The river divides into two channels and falls over a ledge of rock in the most picturesque cascades .... From Portage de l'Isle a few miles further brought us to Lac la Croix, a long and broad sheet of water, so named by some Jesuit missionaries many years ago, who erected two large wooden crosses on conspicuous islands at the western end of the lake. The crosses have disappeared, but the lake retains its name. The Indians call it 'Nequaquon'. The old canoe route turns off at the north-western end and follows the Riviere Maligne [now called the Namakan River] into Lake Namekan, but this route was pronounced very dangerous for the big boats, the river being full of rapids and sunken rocks and long portages. Mr. Donald Smith's canoe was twice broken during his recent descent of this river, although manned by the best Iroquois. We therefore followed the lake to its western end, and then turned south for a few miles into Loon Lake, and made a bend round, coming into Namekan Lake and joining the old canoe route again.74

With Lac La Croix and today's Quetico Park behind them, the brigades rowed 57 miles down Rainy Lake. The first detachment arrived at Fort Frances on 4 August, having travelled 200 miles in 19 days and crossed 17 portages.75 The remainder
Photo: Martha A. Kidd

Lac La Croix, on the Dawson Route.
Scale: approx. 4 miles to 1 inch

Rainy Lake
Namakan Lake
Namakan River
Sand Point L.
Little Vermillion L.

Line of Route: lac la Croix to Rainy L.

MAP NO. 17
of the brigades stretched out behind it for 150 miles, winding like a huge serpent across the wilderness.

Arrival at Fort Frances brought no rest. The men pushed on immediately with, as one of them commented, "not an hour being allowed to write a letter or wash our clothes". Arrival at Fort Frances also brought a meeting between Colonel Wolseley and Captain W. F. Butler, who had been sent to Red River as an intelligence officer. Butler, later to become a distinguished soldier and author, had gone West via Minnesota but he returned by canoe to meet Wolseley. As the two canoe parties came together, the Colonel, recognizing Butler, called out "Where on earth have you dropped from?" "Fort Garry, twelve days out, sir," was the reply. Butler also advised that the situation at Red River was serious and an Indian outbreak imminent.

West of Fort Frances, the brigades travelled 70 miles down the Rainy River, rowing by day and, in some cases, drifting by night. J. J. Bell (third paper, p. 248) describes the technique and its purpose: "In order to save time the men did not go ashore to camp, but slept in the boats, which were fastened together in twos and allowed to float with the current, two men remaining awake to steer and keep guard." Then came Lake of the Woods, involving a long and arduous row for some and a shorter sail for the more favoured. The original plan of operations had called for a march across "Snow's Road" from the Northwest Angle of Lake of the Woods to Fort Garry; but
MAP NO. 18

Scale: approx. 15 miles to 1 inch
Nenana Lake to Kininger River
Holseley Expedition: Line of Route
The Rainy River, west of Fort Frances, on the Dawson Route.
Wolseley had had his fill of partially completed roads and therefore decided to route his men down the Winnipeg River. Here the rapids, despite low water, were even more dangerous than those of the Maligne, but the ominous warnings were ignored and the river navigated without major mishap. Excitement there was, however, as the soldiers got another taste of white water -- at the expense of several shattered boats. Dawson later, and rather defensively (he was criticized unduly by some members of the expedition), suggested that the Winnipeg River -- because of low water -- offered no more danger than a "duck pond". This was not fair, as the Winnipeg's rapids can be dangerous at any time, and, as any experienced canoeist can attest, swift water can be most dangerous in low water.

A minor, but vivid, legacy of the Winnipeg River descent is Wolseley's own adjective-laden description of running rapids:

The pleasurable excitement of danger is always an agreeable experience, but the enthralling delight of feeling your frail canoe or boat bound under you, as it were, down a steep incline of wildly rushing waters into what looks like a boiling, steaming cauldron of bubbling and confused waters, exceeds most of the other maddening delights that man can dream of. Each man strains for his life at oar or paddle, for no steerage-way can be kept upon your boat unless it be made to run quicker than the water. All depends upon the nerve and skill of the bowsmen and steersman, who take you skilfully through the outcropping rocks around you. But the acme of excitement is of short duration, and the pace is too quick to admit of self-examination. No words can describe the rapid change of sensation when the boat jumps through the last narrow and perhaps twisted passage between rocks, into an eddy of slack water below.

On 20 August, the advance guard arrived at the mouth of the Winnipeg River, and Fort Alexander. The course now lay
Wolseley Expedition: Line of Route
From Lake of the Woods to Fort Garry

Scale: approx. 15 miles to 1 inch.

Lake Winnipeg
Fort Garry
Fort Alexander
Traverse Bay
Island Portage, Winnipeg River, 1870; from a water colour by William Armstrong. The illustration shows a Wolseley Expedition boat running the rapids and a second boat at the foot of the portage trail.
north-west for about 20 miles to Lake Winnipeg's Elk Point, and then south a like distance to the entrance of the Red River. The flotilla of Regulars made an impressive picture, as described by one of the officers: "We sailed that afternoon [Sunday, 21 August] about 25 miles to Elk Island, the prettiest sight you ever saw, 48 boats in a long line sailing away over a fine lake ... the different rigging and the different builds of the boats made it look like an enormous regatta."80

At last, on 24 August — three months after the initial landing at Thunder Bay — the regulars marched on Fort Garry. "We advanced", wrote one of their number, "with great caution in perfect order across the prairie in front of the Fort. We could see no one, but all the gates were shut and we expected every minute to have a volley fired into the middle of us. On we went, right up to the main entrance, pushed the big gates open, and marched straight in to find that Riel had only left a quarter of an hour with a few followers.... We were all much disgusted at having nothing to do. The only people we found in the Fort were a few drunken Indians and half-breeds who were dreadfully frightened. As soon as possible the Union Jack was hoisted, the Artillery fired a Royal Salute, our men gave three cheers for the Queen and presented arms. The band played 'God Save the Queen', and then we got under shelter as fast as we could for the rain had drenched us to the skin."81

Deprived of the battle they had anticipated with great pleasure, the men were disappointed. It had been as Lieutenant Redvers
Buller put it, "a long way to come to have the band play 'God Save the Queen'."\textsuperscript{82}

Battle or no, the Red River Expedition deserves its place in military annals on the basis of logistics. Dawson, reporting to his Minister in 1870, suggested the extent of the problems surmounted when he wrote that, "no boats or any vessel larger or heavier than a bark canoe had ever been used in the vast wilderness of rock, swamp and lake which intervenes between Thunder Bay and Fort Frances." On two previous occasions troops had, in fact, been sent west via Hudson Bay in order to avoid the rugged terrain and turbulent rivers of the region. Nevertheless, the government decreed that Wolseley's force, with 30 foot boats weighing up to 950 pounds, should cross the wilds along Dawson's infant and rough-hewn route.

Observers in both England and Canada, many of whom had prophesied that the troops would never get through, were amazed at the success of the expedition. Historians, a century later, have tended to share their amazement and to laud Wolseley and his men for brilliant and well-nigh impossible accomplishment. In doing so they tend to overlook the important fact that Simon Dawson and his Public Works employees -- 800 of them -- paved the way for the soldiers (not vice versa as some of the military people suggested).\textsuperscript{83} They also seem to have neglected the remarkable logistics of the fur trade. Against the fur traders' standards, as established in the same region, the accomplishment of the Red River force does not loom so large.
Any brigade of Northwesterners that moved at even three times the pace of Wolseley's men would have been despised as being composed of "pork-eaters". Nonetheless, the comparison is not completely valid, and there was, and is, something to be said for the fact that, in 96 days, 1,400 men (carrying full supplies for two months) had travelled about 600 miles on foot and in open boats. They had, moreover, crossed 47 portages, and had carried through their adventure in a harsh and unfamiliar environment without a single loss of life.

The troubles at Red River, and the attitude of the United States, had suggested the necessity of troops at Fort Garry. It was even more necessary to prove that the Dominion was capable of moving a force into the territory across British soil. In crossing the Dawson Route, Wolseley's troops demonstrated this capability. They also inaugurated the new Dominion's first highway to the West. In accomplishing this, "the expedition undoubtedly proved that the Dawson Route, however limited its commercial possibilities, was a valuable political and military asset to the new nation." The success of 1870 marked the brightest day in the brief history of the route. The waterway which tumbled and eddied westward from the height of land had not seen such activity since the days when an estimated 2,000 Northwesterners paddled it each season; nor would it see again the amount of traffic that passed in the spring, summer, and autumn of 1870.

Much of the credit for the expedition's success was due,
as some of the soldiers admitted, to Dawson's tough and experienced **voyageurs**. Without them the troops (British Regulars included) would have been so many babes in the woods. Wolseley was aware of this; and when, in 1884, as General Lord Wolseley of Cairo, he was called upon to produce a plan of operations for the Gordon Relief Expedition in far-off Egypt, his thoughts went back to the **voyageurs** of the Dawson Route. His plan involved ascending the formidable Nile and, accordingly, the call went out for Canadian boatmen — the best to be had in the British Empire. Some 400 of them, including Iroquois Indians and many old hands who had done service on Dawson Route waters, took ship for Egypt in company with a large birchbark canoe specifically ordered by Wolseley. There, in the cataracts of the Nile, they put to use the lessons learned on Canadian waters, thus carrying the traditional skills of the **voyageur** far afield.³⁶ Dr. William Henry Drummond spoke for them:

*Victoria! She have beeg war, Egyp's de nam' de place -- An' neeger peep dat's leeve im dere, got very black de face, And so she's write Joseph Mercier, he's stop on Trois Rivières -- 'Please come right off, an' bring wit' you t'ree honder voyageurs.*

*I got de plaintee sojer, me, beeg feller six foot tall -- Dat's Englishman, an' Scotch also, don't wear no pant at all; Of course de Irishman's de bes', raise all de row he can, But nobody can pull batteau lak good Canadian man*³⁷
FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER THREE


3 Cited in Waite, Confederation Debates, p. 56.


5 Cited in Gluek, Jr., p. 215

6 St. Paul Press, 1 May, 1869; cited in Gluek, Jr., p. 217.

7 St. Paul Press, 8 Feb., 1870; cited in Gluek, Jr., p. 262.


10 The temper of Washington, and its actions, are outlined in Stanley, pp. 58-60; Gluek, Jr., pp. 274-278; and C. P. Stacey, "The Military Aspect of Canada's Winning of the West, 1870-1885", Canadian Historical Review, vol. 21, no. 1, March, 1940, pp. 6-10.

11 Macdonald to C. J. Brydges, 28 Jan., 1870; cited in Sir Joseph Pope (ed.), Correspondence of Sir John Macdonald (Toronto, n.d.), p. 124. Brydges was General Manager of the Grand Trunk Railway, a close friend of the Prime Minister, an agent of the Hudson's Bay Company, and a frequent correspondent of James Wickes Taylor. Taylor, interestingly enough, was an outstanding proponent of Minnesota expansion and a confidential agent of the U.S. State
Department in Red River during the first Riel Rebellion. The relationship between Brydges and Taylor is treated in Gluek, Jr., pp. 187n., 189, 201-202, 275n.

12 Sir J. Michel to Lord Carnarvon, 22 Feb., 1867, "Memorandum on Red River Settlement" (20 Feb., 1867); C.S.P., vol. 1, no. 7, 1867-68, paper 19, p. 20. The remaining quotations in this paragraph are from the same page and source.

13 Ibid., p. 19.

14 During Lord Monck's absences from Canada (30 Sept., 1865 - 12 Feb., 1866 and 10 Dec., 1866 - 25 June, 1867), Michel was Administrator of the Government.

15 C.S.P., vol. 1, no. 7, 1867-68, paper 19, pp. 20-22. Alexander Campbell, soon to become Postmaster-General in the first Dominion cabinet, was Commissioner of Crown Lands. Both the report of the Executive Council (approved 18 June, 1867) and the memorandum of the Commissioner (14 June, 1867) preceded Confederation by about two weeks.

16 Campbell, working from Dawson's figures, estimated that $55,900 would be required to complete the works outlined above.

17 This paragraph is based on Bridgeland's reports to Stephen Richards, Commissioner of Crown Lands, Province of Ontario (4 Oct., 1867) and William McDougall, Minister of Public Works, Canada (2 Dec., 1867), in C.S.P., vol. 1, no. 7, 1867-68, paper 19, pp. 23ff., and on Dawson's "Report on the Line of Route between Lake Superior and the Red River Settlement" (hereafter referred to as "Report of 1868"), in A. J. Russell, The Red River Country, p. 167. The "Report of 1868" is also printed in C.S.P., vol. 1, no. 9, 1867-68, paper 81. Here it should be noted that many of Dawson's reports were published separately or reprinted in other works as well as appearing in the Sessional Papers of Canada. And while the present writer has usually given appropriate references to the Sessional Papers, the page numbers referred to are those of the edition first cited.


19 Dawson awaits a biographer and a biographer must wait on the collection of further Dawson papers. The
beginnings of a good collection are now reposing at the Ontario Archives in Toronto and officers of that institution are in the process of trying to locate and acquire further material. The papers now being catalogued in Toronto, along with Public Works manuscripts at the Public Archives of Canada, and Dawson's numerous reports form the basis of my assessment of the man. There are also some remarks in Bertrand's poorly documented *Highway of Destiny*, pp. 175-176, and in Lewis H. Thomas', "The Hind and Dawson Expeditions, 1857-58".

The available Dawson material is especially weak on the years 1860-66, but several letters in the papers held by the Ontario Archives suggest that his interest in the Northwest continued strong. One of them - N. Hammond to Libert Chandler, 25 Jan., 1860 -- suggests that Dawson was connected with a North West Transport Company (perhaps the North-West Transit Company). Another -- Dawson to J. A. Nicholay, 19 April, 1860 -- proposes that the two men go into the fur trading business in the area west of Fort William. Two days previous to this, Dawson had written to the Nor'Wester in defence of the North-West Transit Company. A letter from John McIntyre to Dawson, 6 Jan., 1861, (McIntyre was the Hudson's Bay Company officer in charge of Fort William) implies that Dawson was expected to visit Fort William that spring. During this period Dawson was resident at Three Rivers.


23 Work was not, apparently, resumed on the Dog Lake road or dam on which a sum of about $14,000 had been expended out of the Upper Canada Colonization Road Fund. In his "Report of 1869" (p. 10) Dawson wrote of using timber prepared for the dam to construct a bridge across the Kaministiquia.

25 Ibid., p. 12.

26 Dawson to H. L. Langevin, Minister of Public Works, 30 June, 1870, in General Report of the Minister of Public Works, 1870 (Ottawa, 1871), p. 129. The working season of 1868 was short; it began in July and was terminated in October.


28 Ibid., p. 18.

29 Ibid., p. 22. It may be of interest to note that it cost $331,979 during 1875 and 1876 to construct the C.P.R. for 32½ miles from Fort William to the junction of Sunshine Creek and the Matawin River. And this did not include the cost of laying the track. See Innis, History of the C.P.R., pp. 89-91.

30 Bishop Taché to the Nor'Wester, 11 Aug., 1868; cited in Stanley, p. 53.

31 In 1868 Snow was addressed by the Public Works Department as "Superintendent, Fort Garry Section, Red River Road" while Dawson held the position of "Superintendent, Lake Superior Section, Red River Road".

32 See C. M. Lampson to Sir Frederic Rogers, 22 Dec., 1868; and Stafford H. Northcote to Sir Frederic Rogers, 2 Feb., 1869, in Ontario Boundary Papers, 1856-1882, pp. 148-152. The Hudson's Bay Company's objections were not directed against the fact of a road being made, but against the Canadian Government's assumption that it was entitled to proceed without prior permission.

33 Mair went west armed with a letter of introduction from the Reverend Aeneas Macdonnell Dawson (another of Simon's brothers) and a revolver and ammunition; Norman Shrive, Charles Mair, Literary Nationalist (Toronto, 1965), p. 57.

34 The men were paid chiefly in provisions.
35 Snow was so unpopular with his construction gangs that at one point a group of workmen dragged him to the bank of the Seine River and threatened to drown him if he continued to treat them unfairly. Mair seems to have been no better liked. How could he be when, in a published letter, he referred to the métis as "a harmless obsequious set of men", likely to be very useful, "when the country gets filled up." Cited in Shrive, p. 70. After another particularly obnoxious letter, Mair was publicly horse-whipped by one of the leading ladies of Red River.

36 Considerable information on the political activities of Snow and Mair is found in C.S.P., vol. 3, no. 5, 1870, paper 12. These activities have also been treated in a number of excellent studies; see especially: Shrive, pp. 52-121; W. L. Morton's introduction to Alexander Begg's Red River Journal; Stanley, pp. 53-58; Shortt and Doughty (eds.), Prairie Provinces, vol. 1, pp. 68-69; Howard, Strange Empire, pp. 84-93; Gluek, Jr., pp. 249-261; and A. S. Morton, pp. 865-867.

37 Macdonald, it should be added in fairness, wrote to McDougall (8 Dec., 1869) urging him to curb his employees in Red River: "You must bridle those gentlemen or they will be a continual source of disquiet to you". Cited in Donald Creighton, John A. Macdonald, The Old Chieftain (Toronto, 1955), p. 44.

38 The General Report of the Minister of Public Works, 1869 (Ottawa, 1870), p. 45, noted that the Government relief project "while furnishing the inhabitants of Red River with the means of earning money, would at the same time be establishing a Public Work in their vicinity of admitted necessity to the Dominion in view of its future acquisition of the North-West Territory."


40 Ibid., p. 23.

41 Ibid., p. 23

42 Colonization roads built in remote localities by the Ontario Government apparently cost $500 per mile at this time. See F. Braun to Dawson, 12 Jan., 1870; in C.S.P., vol. 3, no. 5, 1870, paper 12, p. 65.
While it is perhaps an unprofitable speculation, one wonders if events in Red River might have taken a happier course if Dawson—who seemed to understand and respect both the Indians and métis—had conducted the operations at the western end of the route. In his 1859 report he had written of the métis "they are proud, exceedingly sensitive, and ready to take offence. They will do anything to oblige and fly to anticipate one's wants, but an order sternly given excites hostility at once."


Dawson to H. L. Langevin, Minister of Public Works, 30 June, 1870; in General Report of the Minister of Public Works, 1870 (Ottawa, 1871), p. 130.

Dawson to F. Braun, 24 Sept., 1869; in C.S.P., vol. 3, no. 5, 1870, paper 12, p. 63. Braun was Secretary, Dept. of Public Works. On the subject of Indians, Dawson was well-informed and, in particular, two of his manuscript reports (19 Dec., 1870, and 18 July, 1872) provide a wealth of valuable material. See P.A.C., Public Works Manuscripts, Record Group 11, 9B, 429, vols. 119 and 121, documents 13869 and 27461.

Braun to Dawson, 12 Jan., 1870; in C.S.P., vol. 3, no. 5, 1870, paper 12, p. 65. A connecting road between Fort William and the main road was also being constructed. From the opening of the season until 31 Dec., 1869, $60,056.38 was expended by Dawson. This, however, included the cost of surveying, maintaining law and order, preparing timber for large bridges, transporting workers to and from Collingwood, and taking a hand in Indian affairs.


This paragraph is based on Monro to John Page, Chief Engineer, Dept. of Public Works, 23 March, 1870; in C.S.P., vol. 3, no. 5, 1870, paper 12.


52 Dawson to Langevin, 30 June, 1870, in General Report of the Minister of Public Works, 1870, p. 131.

53 Memorandum of S. J. Dawson, 25 April, 1870; in "Report on the Red River Expedition of 1870", C.S.P., vol. 4, no. 6, 1871, paper 47, p. 3. Two of the bridges were of considerable size, the one over the Kaministiquia being 404 feet long while the Matawin bridge was 275 feet in length. Bridges were also built across Strawberry and Sunshine Creeks, and the McIntyre and Oskondaga Rivers.

54 Colonel Wolseley and the first detachment of the 60th Rifles arrived by steamer at Thunder Bay on 25 May, 1870. The expedition had been refused passage through the American Sault canal by the Grant administration and was, consequently, delayed.


56 Had the Fort Garry road been passable, the troops would have avoided the Winnipeg River and the distance would have been reduced to approximately 450 miles.


58 The military authorities later complained bitterly about the unfinished state of the road. They were, however, warned following Dawson's communication of 17 January: on 25 April, he contacted the military authorities to the effect that "the Thunder Bay road was in an unfinished condition, requiring much labor to be expended upon it before the expedition could finally embark on Shebandowan Lake." See Dawson to Langevin, 30 June, 1870, in General Report of the Minister of Public Works, 1870, p. 132.

59 The erection of dams to extend and improve the "slack water" navigation which stretched for more than 300 miles from Shebandowan to Lake of the Woods was temporarily deferred.
Dawson to Langevin, 30 June, 1870, op. cit., p. 133. Wolseley, while regretting the condition of the road, noted that "Mr. Dawson ... as well as the engineers working under his orders, have been untiring in their exertions to get the road in working order. He has had to contest with great difficulties. Fires have raged twice over considerable portions of it.... Heavy rains have swamped it at other times, carrying away bridges, and rendering it impassable for days." Col. Garnet Wolseley, Correspondence Relative to the Recent Expedition to the Red River Settlement: with Journal of Operations (London, 1871), p. 42. Lt. Snelling of the 60th Rifles noted that the fire "burned through a distance of fifty miles. It lasted a fortnight, and was generally supposed to have been the work of the Indians." "Sunshine and Storm: By a Rifleman", the manuscript journal of Lt. H. W. Snelling, 1870, p. 20; in the collection of Dr. F. N. Shrive, Dundas, Ontario.

It was twenty-five miles by road to the Matawin bridge and forty-five by the river. Furthermore, the river route involved frequent portages (one of them around Kakabeka Falls) and about thirty miles of intermittent and rock-infested rapids.


Dawson's comments are from "Report on the Red River Expedition of 1870", p. 20.
Beaver, winter, 1963, p. 37. Not all of Wolseley's men became road builders. While the Colonel later argued that the Regulars and volunteers performed 6,274\frac{1}{2} days of labour on the road from 27 May to 16 July (Correspondence Relative to the Recent Expedition, p. 42), it seems that much of this work involved looking after their own interests. Dawson ("Report on the Red River Expedition of 1870", p. 15) observed that some companies of the 60th Rifles (Regulars experienced in building fortifications at Quebec) did good service, but that the main body of the force remained at Thunder Bay or were engaged in forwarding boats and provisions. Furthermore, a heavy drain was made on Dawson's civilian staff, especially in taking the boats up-river. On the whole, it is clear that the Wolseley Expedition delayed, rather than expedited, the construction of the Dawson Route.

69 McNeill's Bay was named for Lt.-Colonel McNeill, V.C., a staff officer in charge of the Shebandowan Lake landing.

During the past several years a great deal has been done to locate the various landings, camping places, and portages along the Dawson Route. K. C. A. Dawson, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Lakehead University, has been especially active in this regard and his unpublished "Survey of the Dawson Road, Prince Arthur's Landing to French Lake, 1965-1966" (prepared for the Ontario Department of Tourism and Information) has been useful in the preparation of this account.

70 Because many of the local Indians had abandoned the expedition, good guides were in short supply (despite the fact that 315 of Dawson's voyageurs accompanied the troops). Consequently the brigades, each made up of six boats, sometimes were poorly guided or had no guide at all. Many of them lost their way, especially on Lac des Mille Lacs where the Toronto Globe correspondent meandered about among the hundreds of islands for two days before he arrived at the Height of Land Portage -- the point from which he had started!

71 This account of the Wolseley Expedition is based largely on the following primary sources: Dawson's reports and communications with the Department of Public Works contained in the Sessional Papers of Canada and the Public Works manuscripts at the Public Archives of Canada; Tennant, Rough Times; Snelling, "Sunshine and Storm"; the manuscript journal of Lt. Josiah-Jones Bell, Ontario Battalion of Riflemen, 1870 (collection of R. Murray Bell,


72 Tennant (p. 46) adds: "Leaving Shebandowan the men's rations consisted of fat salt pork (sow belly), beans, hard tack or flour, a scant supply of sugar and all the black tea you could drink. Cold tea for drinking was kept in the boats. Teetotalers by order-in-council." The experiment of doing without liquor was "based upon the experience of lumbermen in Canada, who are never allowed spirits, but have an unlimited quantity of tea. It was asserted by some of the older officers that it would be a failure, but it was not." Bell, second paper, p. 103.

73 Old Ignace seems to have been Ignace Mentour, a veteran Iroquois canoeman of Sir George Simpson's crew. Deux Rivières Portage, still a fairly difficult carry, was the second of three major obstacles found within the present confines of Quetico Provincial Park. The others were the "Great French Portage" and the swift Maligne River.
At various times, Lac La Croix was left by three major routes: the fur traders used both the Namakan River and the Loon River canoe trails; Wolseley followed the Loon River; and the completed Dawson Route followed the Nequauquan Portage (now called the Dawson Portage), two miles and sixty chains in length.

It may be instructive to note that a good six-man crew of fur-trade voyageurs travelling by North canoe with a cargo of 3,000 lbs (goods and provisions) would have done this 200 mile stretch in about 1/4 of the time taken by Wolseley's men.

Butler, The Great Lone Land, p. 168.

By the time the troops reached Lake of the Woods, part of the Fort Garry road was passable and a bridle path had been cut the rest of the way. The Department of Public Works had pushed construction during the spring of 1870 and Wolseley's name had been attached to an advertisement for labourers -- with little success. Stanley, pp. 136-137. J. J. Bell suggests that the above steps were taken as a ruse to lead Riel to expect the troops via the land route (third paper, p. 248). Some soldiers did use the overland route; Tennant (p. 58) makes this clear: "No. 7 Company of the Ontario Rifles reached Fort Garry later after 27 August, over the Dawson Route from the northwest angle of the Lake of the Woods, by a short cut to Winnipeg of 90 miles. At that time the end of this road was little more than a path cut through the bush, and across muskegs."

The Winnipeg drops more than 300 feet along its course of roughly 150 miles. In Wolseley's day, before the construction of dams, there were 25 portages en route.


"Letter from an Officer of the 60th Rifles on the Red River Expedition"; cited in Snelling, p. 41.

Ibid., pp. 44-46.

Even C. P. Stacey, in "Military Aspect of Winning the West" (the best short account of the expedition), has tended toward this position.

While the expeditionary force has been too roundly praised for its feats of travel and transportation, several factors bearing on its performance warrant examination. First is Wolseley's unfortunate and ill-advised decision to move the boats up the Kaministiquia, Matawin, and Shebandowan Rivers. This undoubtedly cost the troops a great deal of time. But even if the road from Thunder Bay had been used, there would have been delay. Any judgment of the expedition's speed and efficiency must, therefore, be based on the navigable portions of the route, say, from Lake Shebandowan to Fort Frances. Here the troops compare very unfavourably with the voyageurs of the fur trade period. There are, of course, reasons for this. A 30 foot, oak row-boat, when rowed by six men is a slightly slower craft than a 25 foot bark canoe paddled by the same number. Second, the soldiers didn't know the country and were, in some cases, poorly guided. Part of the fault for this lies, again, with Wolseley who alienated many of the local Indians with his river transportation policy. Third, the soldiers carried far more in the way of rations than would a voyageur travelling the same distance. The boats carried about two tons of supplies and ammunition plus approximately 500 lbs of personal gear; a North canoe usually carried from a ton and a half to two tons of goods. Fourth, the boats were heavy and cumbersome on the portages. A North canoe could be carried by two strong men; the Wolseley Expedition boats had to be skidded by ten men (often crews joined together and hauled them with ease). On the other hand, the Red River Expedition was accompanied by 315 voyageurs and an additional 185 were engaged in handling reserve stores — no small help.

Stacey, "Military Aspect of Winning the West", p. 11.


Drummond, "Maxime Labelle — A Canadian Voyageur's Account of the Nile Expedition"; cited in John Murray Gibbon, Steel of Empire, p. 156.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE DAWSON ROUTE; ITS USE AND SIGNIFICANCE, 1871 - 1878

The line of communication between Fort Garry and Prince Arthur Landing is now generally recognized as the summer route to the Province of Manitoba .... Until these navigable waters were improved and made accessible ... the whole travel to Red River ... passed, as a necessity, through the State of Minnesota.¹

Report of Minister of Public Works, 1873

All the passengers without exception ... are now regretting much that they did not go by the American road .... it would be most unjust and cruel to allow and encourage families to travel over this road while it remains under the incompetent management of Carpenter & Co.²

Letter of travellers to Prime Minister, 1874

Although it seems at the present day almost absurd that the idea should have been entertained that the commerce between east and west could be carried over this route, yet it served a useful purpose for a time ....³

W. McInnes, Geologist, 1897
In 1870, the Dawson Route was in a rudimentary state. Nevertheless, except for the Fort Garry Road portion, more people passed over the route in 1870 than in any subsequent year. This may seem surprising in view of the substantial improvements made during the period 1871-1875. The explanation lies in three facts. First, by 1872, the communication via Minnesota had been greatly improved; after that date, its comfort and efficiency were never seriously challenged by the Canadian route. Second, railway and steamboat travel between Ontario and Manitoba by way of the United States continued to improve during the 'seventies. Advances along the Dawson Route came more slowly; the comfort and efficiency gap was widened. Third, by 1871, surveys for a Canadian transcontinental railway had begun. A portion of the rail line -- available for travel in all seasons -- would connect Fort William with Fort Garry, thereby rendering the Dawson Route completely useless for through transportation. And the Dominion government, by agreement with British Columbia, had, by 1871, committed itself to build the railway. Given these circumstances, and the advantage of hindsight, it seems clear that the days of the Red River Route were numbered even before it was opened to public travel.

But the administration of Alexander Mackenzie (1873-78) did not approach railway construction with the same gusto as did that of John A. Macdonald. In the interests of economy, Mackenzie considered revitalizing the Dawson Route (after 1874)
by making it a temporary adjunct of the growing rail line. His efforts were of little avail. For a time the two transportation systems were developed side by side west of the Lakehead. This effort in the direction of economy, interestingly enough, involved considerable wastage of public funds. By 1875, there was no gamble involved in picking the winner.

The railway supplanted the waggon-road and water route. The latter was, in fact, born about thirty years too late. In 1840 it would have stood as an effectual connection with Red River, and its usefulness would have lasted for a considerable time. By 1871, it was -- except for particular and severely limited purposes -- already obsolete.

* * * * * * *

The development of the Dawson Route was impeded, even though its importance was emphasized, by the activity of the Red River Expedition. Once the troops had passed, however, systematic operations on works of a permanent nature were resumed. By autumn, 1870, the Thunder Bay road was open through to Lake Shebandowan and the following spring teams drawing a ton of goods were making the round trip in three and a half days. At the western end of the route serious work was begun on the Fort Garry road -- minus the misbegotten attentions of John Snow, who had left the area in Jan., 1870. These improvements no doubt expedited the return of the regular troops who, during the autumn (1870), crossed from Fort Garry to Thunder
Aerial view of the Dawson Route immediately west of the Northwest Angle of Lake of the Woods, showing the extensive muskegs in that area.
Bay in just over a month (at about three times their previous speed).

It was during the season of 1871 that the "emigrants" to Manitoba, for whom the system was largely designed, began to use the Dawson Route. Because no private firm would risk providing transportation services, the Dominion Government assumed the responsibility "for carrying mails and passengers over the said route." As a temporary expedient, it was decided to place some of Wolseley's row boats, along with six steam launches, on the navigable sections of the route. The launches (32 feet long with a 7 foot beam) were delivered and distributed along the route during spring and summer, 1871. At the same time buildings to shelter the passengers were made available along both road portions of the route (tents were primarily used in the interior), more than 100 "voyageurs" were located at the portages and difficult water sections, and work was begun on two large side-wheeler steamers at Fort Frances.

The "Emigrant Transport Service" began operations on 15 June, 1871. The advertisements announced an adult fare of $25 between Fort William and Fort Garry, "children under 12 years, half price. 150 lbs of personal baggage, free. Extra baggage, $1.50 per 100 lbs. No horses, oxen, wagons, or heavy farming implements to be taken." The mode of conveyance was described: "45 miles by waggon, from Fort William to Shebandowan Lake. 310 miles broken navigation, in open boats and steam launches, from Shebandowan Lake to north-west angle
of the Lake of the Woods. 95 miles by cart or waggon, from north-west angle ... to Fort Garry." It was also made clear that passengers were expected to provide their own food, which could be purchased at cost price from government depots at Shebandowan, Fort Frances, and the Northwest Angle.

Public response was not overwhelming. During the 1871 season, 604 persons (about a third of them Red River Expedition volunteers returning to the East) used the Dawson Route.

There were problems, and Dawson was aware of them. In his report to the Minister of Public Works (1 July, 1873), he wrote that "notwithstanding boats and steam launches, the difficulties to be encountered were formidable. The portages were at first in the condition in which they were when the military expedition had gone through, and in the navigable reaches, long sections had still to be passed with the oar. The dam at French Portage had not been built, and the water falling low, there was extreme difficulty at that place. The stormy Lake of the Woods proved a terrible drawback to the small boats, and emigrants were often detained at Hungry Hall, a place at the mouth of Rainy River where voyageurs and starving Indians stop before venturing on the Grand Traverse."

On the brighter side, the work of gravelling the roads and improving portages went on, and by the close of the 1871 season the emigrants could cross the route with a fair degree of comfort. Also on the credit side was the increasing speed of travel. The return of the Canadian militia brigades set a
new record for the route; they left Fort Garry on 10 June and arrived in Toronto on 14 July, accomplishing their trip in less than one-third of the time required for the original westward journey of the previous year.

This was not all, however, for the Dawson route saw additional action in the year 1871. William Barnard O'Donoghue, the absurd — if not lunatic — Fenian "general", was at the root of it. On 5 Oct., along with a rag-tag "army" of thirty-odd privates and no less than three other "generals", he invaded Manitoba at Pembina. The invasion was quickly brought to an end with the aid of 30 United States Infantrymen, but rumour had it that there would be further trouble. The results, for the Dawson Route, are narrated by its superintendent:

On the evening of the 16th October last [1871], while proceeding up Shebandowan Lake, I met a messenger with despatches from His Excellency the Lieut.-Governor of Manitoba, informing me that a Fenian raid had been made at Pembina, and that he had applied for troops.

At that time, the voyageurs were about to be withdrawn for the season, and the steam launches dismantled and laid up for the winter. Orders were immediately sent along the line for all the men to remain at their posts .... The troops [numbering about 200] reached Prince Arthur's Landing on the afternoon of the 24th October .... by 4 p.m., on the 27th, the whole force had reached Shebandowan. On the night of the 28th, the rear detachments encamped at Kashaboïwe, and the front at Baril Portage. The weather had now become so intensely cold that I was apprehensive of the smaller lakes freezing up. The water froze on the oars, and the boats were heavy with ice and snow. Troops and voyageurs, nevertheless, pressed on with alacrity, and by one o'clock p.m., on the 1st of November, were clear of French Portage .... The weather still continued cold and stormy, with snow falling at intervals, and in coming round by Loon River ... ice was encountered in the shallow parts. Soldiers and voyageurs were, however, equal to the occasion, and bore up cheerfully under the severe toil involved in drag-
ging boats, carrying part of their loads on their backs, and wading in congealed water. 8

On 11 November, the troops met Colonel W. O. Smith near the mouth of the Rainy River, 9 and, after being delayed by heavy winds, the boats crossed the Grand Traverse of Lake of the Woods to arrive at the entrance of the North-West Angle Bay. The diary of Captain Thomas Scott, the expedition's commander, picks up the story on Lake of the Woods:

The majority of the boats sailed to within fifteen miles of the North West Angle, and the remainder were towed by the tugs. Camped there for the night on an island. From thence as far as the eye could reach in the direction of the Angle was one sheet of ice.

November 12th. -- A storm last night fortunately broke up some four miles of ice, and we started in the morning passing through the broken ice, and then cut through solid ice for a distance of three-quarters of a mile, a Hudson Bay Co's boat leading .... The ice gradually increased in thickness, and finding it impossible to take the boats farther, we landed on an island, some eight miles from the Angle. One of the tugs, which had been previously sheeted with iron, made an attempt to cut through the ice, but was unsuccessful, getting completely wedged in.

November 13th. -- At 1 pm to-day the troops started to march on the ice towards the Angle .... Several of the men were exhausted when within three miles of the Angle, but they were carried on hand sleighs; piercing cold weather all day. 10

At 5 a.m., on 14 November, the Manitoba Expedition started across the Fort Garry Road. Despite heavy snowfalls and intense cold, it marched into Fort Garry four days later. With understandable pride, Colonel Smith wrote the Adjutant General (23 Nov.):

"It is a satisfaction to reflect that scarcely a month has elapsed between the issue of your orders for the organization of the force and its arrival at Fort Garry; especially when
bearing in mind that a distinguished officer of H.M. Regular Forces, pronounced the route as being ... impracticable to troops, after the middle of September, and that high encomiums have been passed on an expedition for accomplishing a march during the long and pleasant days of summer over the same ground which H.M. Dominion troops have now traversed during the brief daylight of an almost Arctic winter."

But the expedition had not simply demonstrated the prowess of the Dominion troops. It also underlined the improvements to the Dawson Route and one of its great liabilities. Scott and his men had travelled from Fort William to Fort Garry in twenty-five days; Wolseley's advanced detachments had required ninety-two days to cover the same distance. Scott's men, however, had the great advantage of marching across completed roads at both ends of the route as well as enjoying the services of tugs on Shebandowan Lake, Lac La Croix, Rainy Lake, Rainy River, and Lake of the Woods (the remainder of the tugs were inoperative because of the extreme cold). Scott had another advantage in the much smaller size of his force (275 men as compared to approximately 1,400). But the weather had been against Scott. If his arrival at Thunder Bay had been delayed even by a few days, the story of the Manitoba Expedition would have been very different indeed. As it was, some of Dawson's voyageurs had to be sent home by way of St. Paul at considerable expense while the remainder barely made it back to Prince Arthur's Landing in time to board the last steamer to Collingwood.
Two views of a broken Dawson Route dam at the outlet of Windigoostigwan Lake (head of the French River). The seasonal nature of the route was one of its chief limitations.
The Dawson Route was, and remained, vulnerable to seasonal changes and the vagaries of the weather. For half the year it was virtually useless.

The expedition did, however, demonstrate the growing possibilities of the route for military purposes. And with the close of the 1871 season, it seemed as if the communication was to justify itself in terms of military, rather than emigrant transportation. There were, in fact, four recognized routes which civilians could travel between Ontario and Red River in that year. Three of them passed through the United States. The fastest (Toronto to Collingwood, by steamer to Duluth, then to Fort Garry by railway, stage-coach, and Red River steamboat) involved only eleven days, and all three offered more in terms of comfort. The fourth line of travel was via the Dawson Route. "This", writes James J. Talman with notable restraint, "was the route for young unencumbered men."

The season of 1872 brought continued work on the route, and some distinguished travellers, among them Sandford Fleming, George M. Grant, and Colonel P. Robertson-Ross. Three larger steam launches, along with six open barges, were distributed along the waterway. Dams were built at the outlet of Kashaboiwe Lake and at French Portage, and a third at the outlet of Kaogassikok (Pickerel) Lake which raised the level six feet, thereby making the Pickerel River navigable. Work was continued on the Nequaquon (Dawson) Portage and waggons were placed on
the improved Brulé and French Lake portage roads. Construction gangs -- including Ojibwa Indians who were, in Dawson's words, "among the best and steadiest laborers we have had" -- were kept busy on the Fort Garry Road. And, "commodious buildings for the accomodation of immigrants" were erected at various stopping places along the route.¹⁵

Less impressive was the progress on the two big side-wheelers designed for service on Rainy Lake and Lake of the Woods. The construction of these vessels, one of which was to be 100 feet long and the other 120 feet in length, had been entrusted to James Dick and Company, of Toronto. The Company's experiences in the Northwest were not happy. Dawson tells the story:

Soon after the opening of navigation [spring, 1871], the contractors began to send forward mechanics, material and supplies, from Thunder Bay to Fort Frances .... The journey of their people to that place was slow, and attended with many mishaps .... They were not accustomed to the management of fires in the woods ... and some of their provisions and tools were burned by the fires which they themselves had left smouldering on the portages. Arrived at Fort Frances, new troubles awaited them .... They could not find tamarac for timbers.... They saw painted savages in alarming numbers enjoying their scalpdance and dog feasts, and thought they wanted to stop them from taking timber .... Finally, they collected some timber, laid down a keel, and put up several of the frame timbers for the Rainy Lake steamboat; but these timbers, being of an inferior description, were rejected by the Inspector. The whole party then struck work and returned to Lake Superior, and thence to their homes.¹⁶

Or, as Dick later put it, "I got my provisions burned up by fire, and the Indians frightened my men away ... and I had to give the contract up." James Dick and Company's contract was cancelled and, during the 1872 season, the work was continued
by Department of Public Works men with the aid of sub-contractors. Completion of the big steamers had to wait for another year.

1872 also brought an adjustment in fares. The tariff for adults was reduced from $25 to $15; children under 12 were charged $8 instead of passing free of charge. 150 pounds of baggage could still be taken free, but the charge for each 100 pounds of extra luggage was increased by 50¢ to $2.18 Despite these relatively low fares and the improvements in the transportation facilities, only 475 persons used the route. Of these, a mere 100 could be classed as emigrants; the remainder consisted of 230 troops proceeding to Fort Garry, 108 discharged volunteers returning to the East, 13 boundary surveyors, and 14 members of officers' families.

This meant that in the first two seasons of the "Emigrant Transport Service", about 1,080 persons (many of them soldiers) had crossed the route.19 The better facilities of the American transportation lines and their lowering of rates, in 1872, did much to draw traffic away.

But what of the cost? Before the opening of the 1871 season, Dawson estimated that the expense of establishing and maintaining the line during the forthcoming summer would be $67,729. The only permanent works included in this estimate were improvements on portages, in the amount of $6,000.20 In fact, the total sum expended during the fiscal year beginning 30 June, 1871, (including expenditure on permanent works) was $305,577.84. The total revenue was $12,492, leaving a
difference, in round figures, of $293,000. The net cost during the fiscal year 30 June, 1872, to 30 June, 1873, was, again in rough figures, $260,000. In short, with the opening of the third season of the "Emigrant Transport Service" in spring 1873, 1,080 people had used its facilities and roughly $550,000 (after income) had been expended on it.

Dawson was only moderately discouraged by this turn of affairs. His comments during the summer of 1872 reveal a mixture of disappointment, satisfaction, and hope for the future:

The low tariff recently adopted on American lines may ... prevent great numbers from coming; but in any case, to have the means of transport at all effective, the cost of keeping open the line could not be greatly reduced.

The opening of the Red River route has already had an important influence in the development of the country from Lake Huron westward. At the time the works were commenced, there were no industrial occupations of any kind except fur trading and fishing going on, on the north coast of Lake Superior.

The mines which had been commenced many years previously had been abandoned, and the forest lands excited but little interest.

This state of things is now completely changed. A vast extent of mineral lands and timber berths have been sold by the Government of Ontario. Mines are being opened, saw-mills put in operation, and the thriving village of Prince Arthur's Landing has sprung up at Thunder Bay. That all this is due to the opening of the Red River route and the chartering of lines of steamers by the Government in connection therewith, there can be no doubt.

If the navigation could be rendered continuous between Shebandowan Lake and the north-west angle of the Lake of the Woods, with a railroad from Thunder Bay to the former place, and a like work extending from Fort Garry to the latter, the Red River route would be in a state to defy competition in the transportation of heavy articles, but
"Thunder Cape or Sleeping Giant, from Prince Arthur's Landing. Teams starting for Fort Garry, August 4, 1873." From a pencil sketch by W. A. Johnson.
this would involve lockage to the extent of 450 feet, and the building of 150 miles of railroad.23 Dawson's concept of wedding rail lines and locks to the route was soon to be elevated to the status of government policy. For the moment, however, nothing was done.

But 1872 saw other voices raised in connection with the Dawson Route. The Globe of Toronto, while stressing the importance of an all-Canadian route to the west, lambasted the government's administration of the transport service, and called for private enterprise to take a hand in the forwarding of passengers and goods.24 George Grant, who found "the mode of travelling ... novel and delightful", argued that, while "the road has proved on two occasions to be a military necessity for the Dominion .... as a route for trade, for ordinary travel or for emigrants to go west, the Dawson road is far from satisfactory."25 Finally, Sandford Fleming added his weighty opinion. "It is", he wrote to Langevin, "a splendid line for tourists who have plenty of time and no objections to rough it, but, unless there is some great political reason, it seems a mistake to take through emigrants in its present unfinished condition, more particularly women and children. They suffer so much and meet with so many delays it will give the road a bad repute .... I may be wrong, but I should say each emigrant costs 10 times the amount received. This is my honest impression but it does not in the slightest detract from the great value of the Dawson road as a military work and the credit which is due to Mr. Dawson from his connection with it."26
Fleming and Grant travelled by canoe and were not so dependent upon the transport system services as were the emigrants. Nevertheless, Grant recorded some interesting experiences along the route. After running the Maligne rapids, he tells of hitching a ride behind one of the steam launches:

At eleven o'clock we reached Island Portage, having paddled thirty-two miles — the best forenoon's work since taking to the canoes — in spite of the weather. Here a steam launch is stationed; and, though the engineer thought it a frightful day to travel in, he got ready at our request, but said that he could not go four miles an hour as the rain would keep the boiler wet the whole time. We dined with M----'s party, under the shelter of their upturned canoe, on tea and the fattest of fat pork, which all ate with delight unspeakable .... At two o'clock, the steam launch was ready. It towed us the twenty-four miles of Lake Nequaquon [Lac La Croix] in three and a quarter hours.

Next came Loon portage; then paddling for five miles; then Mud portage, worthy of its name; another short paddle; and then American portage, at which we camped for the night .... Tired enough all hands were, and ready for sleep, for these portages are killing work.27

The season of 1873 saw the end of the Loon River exit from Lac La Croix which Grant's crew had found so difficult. It was replaced by a three and a quarter mile portage (the "Dawson Portage") which shortened the Red River Route by more than 20 miles. This was one of several important improvements. Others included the completion of a 600 foot wharf at Thunder Bay; the launching of the "Lady of the Lake" on Rainy River and the other large side-wheeler on Rainy Lake; the construction of a 320 foot dam at the Maligne Rapids; and the placing of three more wood-burning launches (45 feet long, with a 10 foot beam) and a few decked barges along the line. In addition, buildings
Creek south of Deux Rivières Portage and Lake of Two Mountains, 1962. This creek was flooded by a dam at the head of the Maligne River in order to facilitate steam-tug navigation to the foot of the portage.
The illustration — from George M. Grant, *Ocean to Ocean*, rev. ed. (Toronto, 1925), p. 50 — shows one of his party's canoes running a rapid on the Maligne River in 1872.
Steamer "Keenora" on the Rainy River, about 1900. The Dawson Route steam boats were side-wheelers.
of sawn lumber were erected on the Thunder Bay Road and log huts put up at interior locations such as the Maligne River. With these improvements the whole route was made navigable for the steam tugs except for 10 miles on the Maligne. To improve matters further, the adult fare was reduced to $10 and 200 pounds of baggage allowed free of charge. Dawson was able to boast that, after August (when the "Lady of the Lake" began the run across Lake of the Woods), passengers were sent from Thunder Bay to the Northwest Angle in six days! He also estimated the yearly cost of maintaining the route and transportation service at $190,000. The Minister of Public Works elaborated on this estimate, remarking, rather ominously, that "the amount of travel has not kept pace with expectation, and the cost of maintaining the route appears in striking contrast with the extent of travel."²⁸

A possible way out of this unhappy situation was to admit private enterprise to the operation of the transport service. Dawson made the suggestion (already broadcast by the Globe) in 1873, and with the opening of the 1874 season the steamers, way-stations, and other plant had been made available to W. H. Carpenter & Company which contracted to carry passengers over the route in ten or twelve days for the sum of $10 per adult.²⁹ The Company had been awarded an annual subsidy of $75,000, and given temporary charge of a transportation system which, by 30 June 1874, had cost the Government of Canada approximately one and a quarter million dollars to
The Fort Garry Road at Oak Point, from Grant's *Ocean to Ocean*, 1873 edition.
open, improve, and operate. According to Dawson, the route had been turned over to the contractor in good condition. Carpenter thought otherwise. Among other things, he noted that four of the steam tugs along the route were found sunk and another (at French Portage) burned, that the Maligne dam was not holding back sufficient water, and that the Nequaquon portage-road "was execrable and teams sank down nearly to their bellies in the mud." Unfortunately for Carpenter, he had embarked on a difficult and thankless course, and while he carried the largest number of travellers yet in the season of 1874 (1590 persons), few of them arrived at Fort Garry in a happy frame of mind. The season began badly, with 200 misinformed passengers waiting at Prince Arthur's Landing before the scheduled opening of the system. In June and July it got worse when 300 people were detained on the route for thirty days (owing to the bad state of the boats and roads). The situation was not eased when the way-station at Height of Land Portage was accidentally burned to the ground in mid-summer. Furthermore, the employees along the route were too often unhappy, impolite, or worse. A letter to the Prime Minister (dated 30 June from the Northwest Angle, and signed by 280 persons) noted that "many of the men employed on the road are rough swearing characters who have not the civility to restrain themselves from giving expression to the most unseemly oaths even in the presence of women and children." An article in the Nor'Wester stated that the
Steamer landing, Dawson Route, Northwest Angle of Lake of the Woods, 1875. Travellers were sometimes delayed at this scenic spot for some time.
"Teamsters at dinner, Dawson Road." It is not clear whether this is on the Thunder Bay Road or the Fort Garry Road. Date of photo not given.
emigrants considered one of the station masters "a brute", that the men at the Height of Land were "mean and surly", and that those at Baril Lake tossed travellers' baggage into a barge containing eight inches of water. At French Portage the situation was no better: "Considerable baggage had accumulated at the west end of the portage", wrote one traveller, "and the men stationed for that work appeared very indifferent about the interests of the travelling community. One Englishman said he would sooner be hanged in England than die a natural death on the Dawson Route. The freight was all helter skelter about the landing, and no wood having been prepared for the tug, necessitated our remaining two or three hours."

Sleeping accommodation, too, left much to be desired. Many of the way-stations were little more than log huts -- most of them, apparently, filthy. This unpleasant fact was recognized by Dawson and by Carpenter who, in September 1874, wrote to the Minister of Public Works suggesting that "at all night stations a building capable of accommodating at least a hundred persons should be erected and with such partitions as would allow married persons and young women at least privacy as at present all are huddled into one building and many of them totally unfit for human habitation."

Food was another problem. A trip across the route was supposed to last twelve days at the outside and the contractor was obliged to furnish meals at thirty cents. The theory was fine, but the reality was, at times, grim. Unusually bad wea-
ther, or a breakdown of one of the tugs, frequently made a farce of the schedule -- and of the food supply. It sometimes followed that travellers were stranded for days in the wilds and were even forced to beg or purchase food from the Indians. The complaints came fast and furious. One of them contained a pertinent question: "Is this", it asked, "the way to treat people ... who have left comfortable Canadian homes and are now seeking to better their condition in the new country towards which they are travelling [?]."37

Some writers, by way of comparison, painted the wild beauty of the route in glowing colours. One of them wrote of crossing Sturgeon Lake on a fine moonlit night: "the engineer put on all steam, the fresh fuel causing a continual shower of sparks to play around, the moon shining upon the silvery lake. Passing alongside islands, and running narrow, in some places so narrow that the hindmost boat would swing against the land, the entire scene was particularly weird and romantic."38 Most such enthusiasts were, however, men who had no families tagging along, and who looked upon their trip as an adventurous outing. For those in a less enviable position, it was rough going on the Dawson Route. With this in mind, and considering the far better rail facilities via Minnesota (plus the presence of enterprising American travel-agents at Thunder Bay), it is easily seen why the route was not a paying proposition.

But Dawson was not easily discouraged and the construction of permanent works went forward during 1874. Boulders were
Sturgeon Lake, Quetico Provincial Park, on the Dawson Route. Some travellers recorded the wild beauty of the Dawson Route.
Rapids below Tanner's Lake, on the Dawson Route. This was one of the obstructions overcome by dam-building on the Maligne River. This photograph is not to be reproduced in any form.
blasted out of the Long Sault of Rainy River. On the Maligne, three dams were built above Island Portage and "The Lily of the West" launched on the flooded section to steam back and forth across Tanner's Lake. The architect of the route could now point with pride to the fact that "steam is now used as the propelling power, on all the lakes and rivers of the route." By 1875, however, the Dawson Route, tugs and all, was clearly limping along on borrowed time. It had, in large degree, become obsolete when the Northern Pacific trains began to run regularly between Duluth, Minnesota, and Moorhead, on the Red River, in 1872. Three years later most travellers bound for Manitoba were going through the United States. The Rainy Lake steamer might now be able to run up and down the deepened reaches of the Long Sault, and Carpenter & Co. might transport almost 2,000 people, but Dawson's far reaching hopes for his route were ended. On 21 May, 1875, he briefly listed his services to the Department of Public Works and resigned. D. M. Grant, his former paymaster, succeeded him as Superintendent of the Red River Route and presided over its disintegration.

From this point most of the references to the route have an aura of decay about them. By 1875, the fleet of 14 tugs, plus barges and boats -- of which Dawson had written with evident pride -- was falling into disrepair. On the night of 10 July, the "Peerless", tied up at the western end of the French Portage, was completely destroyed by fire. In the same month Grant reported passing Pine Portage, where
MALIGNE RIVER, SHOWING RAPIDS AND DAWSON ROUTE DAMS

Scale: 2 miles to 1 inch

HAP NO. 20

Dam constructed in 1873 to raise level 9 feet, thereby flooding upper rapids and raising level of creek running between Deux Rivieres Portage and upper Sturgeon Lake. The dam was 320 feet long.

Three dams, constructed and improved during 1873 - 74 - 75 to raise water twelve feet above lowest level, thereby flooding Tanner's Rapids and providing ten miles of steam tug navigation above the dam. The longest of these (about 300 feet) was constructed by Ignace Montour and was severely damaged during the spring run-off of 1875.
there was a "log shanty for cooking & dining room and small
log shanty for store house and emigrant house, both buildings
being a disgrace to the Route", and racing the steam tug
"Caraboo" across Doré Lake by canoe. It is a sad commentary
on the state of the "Caraboo" that Grant (on a sheet of water
just over a mile long) beat it by 45 minutes! During the
same season, Henry Mortimer, surveying for the C.P.R., added
his comments on the fleet: "The freight boats are in the most
dilapidated condition, and I fear few of them will out-live
next season's service.

"The tugs upon Rainy River, Lake Namenkan, River Maligne
and Sturgeon Lake are mere playthings ... the slightest raise
of wind prevents them from putting to sea .... There is not
one covered passenger boat on the whole route, and travellers
are exposed to every inclemency of the weather." Of the way-stations it could be said that those on the
Thunder Bay and Fort Garry roads were barely adequate. Those
in the interior were not. At French Portage, passengers had
to sleep on the barge because of the miserable accommodation
A boiler from one of the Dawson Route tugs, at the head of the Maligne River. Partial remains of this vessel can still be seen.
A boiler plate from one of the Dawson Route steam tugs.
C. P. Stacey ("Military Aspect of Winning the West") refers to the "diminutive steam-launches" along the route, noting that "some of these quaint craft appear in the illustrations to G. M. Grant's Ocean to Ocean (Toronto, 1873)." One of the illustrations is shown above, but it appears, to the present writer, to be more in the nature of a cartoon than a dependable representation. In 1873, even the smallest steam launches were evaluated at $1,100 by Dawson, while the larger ones (about 40 feet long by 10 feet in beam) were evaluated at $2,250. William Armstrong shows the boilers installed in a horizontal position rather than a vertical one as indicated above.
Kashabowie Station, the Dawson Route, from a water colour by William Armstrong. This provides one of the few useful illustrations of a tug. The boiler of a second tug can be seen on the tripod preparatory to being installed in the hull which is tied to the dock.
provided by the "low huts" at the eastern end of the trail. At Deux Rivières Station there were "two log shanties for cooking and stables, altogether unfit."43 The overnight station at the Maligne (destroyed by fire in Feb., 1877) was composed of more log shanties as was that at Island Portage. "Sheds roofed with bark" were available at the Northwest Angle.44

The portages and roads, too, left much to be desired. Peter O'Leary described the Dawson Portage as being very rough in places "and more of it through swamp."45 In the Public Works Reports of both 1875 and 1876 the two major roads were reported as being in "fair" condition -- the travelling public found more pungent adjectives to describe them.

In general, the operation of the transport service was roundly criticized. "The people", as the Nor'Wester put it, "do not propose to pay Carpenter and Co. or any other men $75,000 for hiring a few people to curse, swear and sell bad pork."46

Criticism, decay, and inefficiency did not, however, close the route immediately. In 1875, the cylinders of all the tugs were restored, repairs on the Maligne dams were begun, and an addition was made to the Thunder Bay wharf thus enabling it, wrote Grant, "to accomodate the large quantities of freight now landed for the Railway Contractors, for the Survey parties, and for local use."47

The Nor'Wester, however, had been right. The people -- or at least their government -- did not propose to pay
Views of the remains of a Dawson Route dam on the lower Maligne River, near Island Portage.
Carpenter & Company another $75,000. On 29 April, 1876, the contract was cancelled even though the firm was allowed to continue limited operations during the following season.\textsuperscript{48}

By July 1876, Grant was writing that "when the Railway is completed to River Savane flowing into Lac des Mille Lacs, a result to be looked for during the fall of 1877, the expenses of keeping up the route will be greatly reduced. The tugs on Lakes Shebandowan and Kashabowie will then not be required and can be sent westwards."\textsuperscript{49}

Less than a year later, Sandford Fleming was discussing the transfer of the line to the Canadian Pacific System, and, in March 1877, an Order-in-Council placed it under his control. The transportation facilities of the Dawson Route, after a brief six-year existence, had been withdrawn from public use.

It is quite conceivable that the Dawson route would have continued on its inefficient way, despite American rail competition, had not the C.P.R. bridged the gap between Lake Superior and the Red River Valley. It was, after all, the only all-Canadian highway to the west, and thereby had some worth in terms of national self-esteem. It was also of value as a military route and for the purposes of local settlement and economic development.\textsuperscript{50} And some pioneers did travel it on their way to the prairies. But the growth of the Canadian Pacific Railway ended its usefulness in all areas except that of local transportation. There was little difficulty in choosing between a trip which involved being jolted over 140-odd
miles of rough road, and travelling 310 miles of broken navigation in open boats, and one which involved a swift, sheltered, and comfortable rail ride. It was politically unwise, too, for the Liberal government of Alexander Mackenzie (1873-78) to continue sinking money into the unpopular route -- especially when it was facing a major depression and was already committed to large-scale expenditures on the C.P.R.

The Dawson Route had to give way to the railroad. But it is worthy of note that the route, almost from 1871 (when the C.P.R. surveys got under way), played a part in the building of its successor. Simon Dawson had, himself, been a constant advocate of rail lines joining Prince Arthur's Landing and Fort Garry to the central (navigable) section of the route. He also concerned himself with the idea of a continuous rail line and proposed a route coming west from the Lakehead, touching the northern portion of Quetico Park, and then proceeding northwest to Winnipeg via the narrows of Lake of the Woods (about twenty-five miles south of Kenora). That he thought of the railroad in connection with the Red River Route is made clear in his report of 5 July, 1874:

In view of the probable early construction of a railroad across the country, intervening between Fort Garry and the Lake of the Woods, it is a matter of consideration how far it may be advisable to extend the present road, or to improve it beyond the keeping it in repair.

I may further remark, that the surveys made and the information gained in connection with operations on the Red River route, have gone far to establish the fact, that the ground is practicable for a railroad from Thunder Bay to Fort Garry, in a generally direct course; and among the advantages that may be claimed for this route
are the following:-

It would be by about fifty miles the shortest that could be adopted, and it might be easily and expeditiously constructed, in as much as the present line of communication would afford the means of carrying men, material and supplies to numerous points, at all of which the work could be simultaneously carried on .... Each section could be brought into operation as soon as made; the present cost of maintaining the Red River route would be done away with, step by step, as the work advanced .... The line would run much further south ... than any line so far explored between the same points.

To a large degree, these were prophetic words, for they suggested the ultimate fate of the Dawson Route. But they did not outline the eventual route of the Canadian Pacific Railway. This was the job of the railroad surveyors, headed by Engineer-in-Chief Sandford Fleming. Both Dawson and Fleming, of course, reported to, and were directed by, the Department of Public Works whose hard-working and vigilant Minister was Prime Minister Alexander Mackenzie.

The matter of the rail-line west of Thunder Bay was not quickly laid to rest. It was, in fact, to become a thorn in the side of the administration and the subject of several parliamentary inquiries. And the problems surrounding it were intimately connected with Dawson, the Red River Route, and -- to a lesser extent -- William Carpenter.

In his report of 1869, Dawson had advocated "a railroad from Lake Superior to the navigable waters of the Summit region, navigation rendered continuous, by means of lock and dam, from the terminus of the same to the North-West angle of the Lake of the Woods, and a railroad from the latter point to the Red
River Settlement." His remarks of 1874 were merely a refinement of this earlier expression. In 1869, however, surveys for the rail line had not begun and the government of John A. Macdonald had not yet committed itself to a transcontinental line. When, a year later, it did commit itself, it did so on the basis of rapid construction by private enterprise. There was little or no room in this approach for Dawson's concept. By 1874 both the administration and the approach to railway construction had changed. The time was right for a restatement of the 1869 proposal. It proved attractive to Alexander Mackenzie, who was opposed to rapid construction of the transcontinental line and who subscribed to a policy of utilizing available stretches of water communication as a temporary measure in the interests of economy. Development would be gradual. Water routes would be improved. Long portage railroads, designed to fit into the overall concept of a continuous trunk line, would link the navigable stretches. As funds became available the waterways would be replaced or augmented by the extension of rails. At the same time, the adjacent water communications would be useful in facilitating the construction of the remaining stretches of railway. This policy was enunciated in 1874 and was accepted (one gathers, with certain reservations) by Sandford Fleming.

Fleming's 1874 plan for the Dawson Route area was in line with this policy and was shaped, to a significant degree, by the advice of Simon Dawson. A rail line would be built
from Fort William to Lake Shebandowan, then via Windigoostigwan Lake and Sturgeon Falls (on the Seine River), to cross the Narrows of Lake of the Woods (see map on following page). The Dawson Route would serve as a temporary extension of the railway west of Shebandowan. It would also be useful, along with the Seine River waterway which connected with it at Rainy Lake, as an aid in the construction of the rail line between Shebandowan and the Narrows. As Mackenzie later put it, "we fully expected ... to reach Sturgeon Falls, for the express purpose of using the water." 53

To explore these possibilities further, Fleming sent survey parties into the area in 1874. By the summer of that year one of the parties had explored the country west of Sturgeon Falls and reported unfavourably on it. 54 Nonetheless, a line via the Narrows of Lake of the Woods was still being debated as late as 1877. 55 A second party, led by Henry J. Mortimer, examined the Dawson Route during the autumn of 1874. Mortimer's instructions from Fleming were to look into the possibility of improving the route for the purpose of more efficient freight transportation. 56 Mortimer reported on his survey in 1875, recommending that light rail tramways be installed on the portages, and he and Fleming subsequently discussed additional methods of improving navigation along the route. 57 There was nothing new in this trend of thought; it was simply an echo of proposals long since put forward by Dawson. This time, however, Dawson's ideas were also supported by William
Carpenter who later claimed that he had recommended tramways and other improvements to Fleming, and that Mortimer had been sent out on the basis of his recommendation. The original idea was, however, Dawson's, and the real impetus came from Fleming, who, on 29 September, 1874, wrote to Mackenzie, urging that the communication "at once be rendered as efficient as possible for present purposes and for permanent use during the seasons of navigation as a freight route." He also made it clear that he did not envisage an improved route as a long-term substitute for the rail line: "I feel convinced that the Dawson Route improved and employed to the fullest capacity will be utterly inadequate for the freight traffic that will be, and hence the importance I attach to the construction of that portion of the Pacific Railway between Red River and Lake Superior, of such character as will specially adapt it for the heavy traffic which will soon seek this channel." Fleming estimated the cost of improving the Dawson Route at $250,000, and added, "the expenditure proposed would ... so far perfect the Dawson Route as a line of steam communication as would make it really serviceable for all kinds of traffic, until the completion of the Railway between Lake Superior and Red River. On the completion of the railway a classification of the traffic would naturally follow. The Dawson Route would continue to be of value as a means of transporting way freight, while passenger and other traffic would find their way by rail." In Fleming's view, there was to be parallel construction
west of Thunder Bay, including the construction of canals along the Red River Route. This would result in two separate lines of communication. His proposal, however, was based on the assumption that the water route would serve the construction of the rail line. This assumption was to become highly questionable in the light of subsequent events. Nonetheless, it was on this basis that Contract 13 -- for the construction of forty-five miles of railroad between Fort William and Shebandowan -- was let in April, 1875. Two months later, work on the Fort Frances Canal was begin. Hugh Sutherland was placed in charge of the works armed with a ground plan provided by Fleming and prepared by Mortimer. The canal was to be about 800 feet long by about 40 feet wide and blasted out of solid rock. It was never completed. And, by the time the project was abandoned, in 1878, the worthless Fort Frances Canal had cost $288,278.51.

The canal project died with the Dawson Route. The cause of death was evident in the growth of the Canadian Pacific Railway and in other rather obvious ailments which might have been recognized by 1875. The autopsy was performed by the Senate committee of inquiry which justifiably wondered why competent diagnosis -- even if it couldn't cure the ills of the route -- might not have saved the tax-payers a bit of suffering. The criticism appears to have been well taken.

In the same year that the canal project was begun and Contract 13 let, Fleming had further surveys made of the country
Fort Frances, 1901; the unfinished canal is seen at the right.
Fort Frances, 1901: the canal (obscured behind the buildings) was designed to accommodate steamboats such as the one shown.
One of the survey parties set out to ascertain whether or not the waters of Lake Shebandowan and Lake Windigoostigwan, along with the intervening lakes (Kashabowie, Lac Des Mille Lacs, and Baril), might be brought to a common level in order to obtain unbroken navigation. Dawson and Monro had already addressed themselves to this problem and rejected the idea. Fleming's conclusion was, predictably, similar to Monro's: "The cost of rendering the navigation continuous between Lakes Shebandowan and Windigoostigan would be very heavy, much greater indeed than any advantage would justify." A second party went over the ground between Sturgeon Falls and Rat Portage; its findings led to the definite rejection of the southern route.

The potential utility and efficiency of the Dawson Route, about which Fleming had expressed hope, were profoundly affected by the results of these surveys. First, it was decided to abandon the project of improving navigation at the eastern end of the route. Second, because the railroad would not pass through Sturgeon Falls, the projected usefulness of the Dawson Route/Seine River access to the construction area was destroyed. Two more nails had been driven into the route's coffin. But there was to be no coffin for the C.P.R., and a third survey of 1875 indicated that, "a good line at comparatively moderate cost could be had in a direct course from Eagle Lake via Wabigoon River to Lac Des Mille Lacs, and
thence to Thunder Bay, intersecting the line of Contract No. 13 at Sunshine Creek, 15 miles east from the eastern end of Lake Shebandowan." Accordingly, in 1875, the northern line was adopted, work was stopped on Contract 13, and the section originally let under that contract was reduced to the portion (about 32 miles long) from Fort William to Sunshine Creek.

Work was not stopped, however, on the Fort Frances Canal, except for a few months during the winter of 1875-76. The most expensive of all single improvements on the Dawson Route was continued while the remainder of the system grew more and more dilapidated. The reason for this extraordinary circumstance -- and it was a weak reason -- was given before the Select Committee of the Senate in 1878. Marcus Smith, the Acting Chief Engineer of the railway in Fleming's absence, was the witness. Early in his testimony he established two geographical facts: first, that the railway connected with the Dawson Route at Port Savanne (which had water access to Lac Des Mille Lacs) and, second, that a chain of rivers and lakes (the Manitou-Wabigoon chain) linked the Dawson Route to the new northern line which was otherwise almost inaccessible. The presumption was that, in view of these facts, the Fort Frances Canal would be of use in affording access to the rail line. Other facts of geography, however, did nothing to strengthen this argument. First, Port Savanne was separated from Fort Frances by nine portages and about 180 miles of water which dropped some 400 feet between the two points. Why, then,
build a canal in the centre of the route while these obstructions remained? Even effective access from the east was hampered by the Manitou Rapids and Long Sault Rapids of Rainy River. At any rate, there was no good economic reason for linking Rainy River to Rainy Lake, unless effective transportation was available right through to Port Savanne. Finally, the Manitou-Wabigoon chain provided only canoe access and involved eight or nine portages. The Fort Frances Canal merely eliminated one short portage from the canoe route extending between Rainy River and Wabigoon Lake. Three exchanges between Smith and the Committee members serve to illuminate the lock question as well as throwing considerable light on the fate of the Dawson Route:

Q. I ask you whether you consider it is economical and expedient to build this one large lock at Fort Frances simply to connect with a canoe route? --- I would not recommend a lock to be built simply for that purpose.

Q. Is the Committee to understand you to say ... that for the purposes of commerce the lock will not be of any use whatever in connection with the Pacific Railway? --- I should not think for through commerce, but for local commerce it might be useful. The moment the railway is finished, of course, it is of no use at all for through commerce.

Q. Supposing that the line was completed from Lake Superior to Savanne, and the western section was completed from Rat Portage to Selkirk, and some years intervened before the intervening section was built, would the lock be of any use then? --- That depends upon whether the Dawson Route could be made available for commerce so as to send it through that way rather than round by rail through St. Paul's [sic]. I have not taken it much into consideration, but it appears to me it would not be a route that could compete with railways. It has not been used for public conveyance for two seasons past, but it
has been used by parties constructing the lock and by surveyors. For passengers who can tranship themselves it might be used in the summer months, but for heavy freight there would be too many portages, and the handling of it would cost too much. If the climate was such that the navigation would be open all the year round it might have been well to improve the portages and work them with tramways and stationary engines by cradling the boats and taking boat and all over. But the objection to that is the climate. Six months of the year the navigation is locked up and it cannot be used, while the plant is idle and there is the expense of looking after it.

As Grace Lee Nute has noted, canal building helped to provide a few buoyant years to the vest-pocket economy of Fort Frances, as well as contributing several settlers who remained after the project was abandoned. But no steamboat, nor any other vessel, has ever by-passed Koochiching Falls by way of its granite chamber. For ninety-one years it has stood as a monument to a mistake. Like a tombstone of the same material, it also remains as an appropriate reminder of the demise of the Dawson Route. The Select Committee of the Senate made a much smaller mistake in its summation, and that was one of spelling: "the expenditure upon the Fort Francis [sic] Lock, whatever the amount may be, will prove to have been injudicious and altogether unprofitable to the Dominion."

Those who may share the writer's admiration for Dawson may also be relieved to note that he had resigned his position as Superintendent of the Red River Route before work on the canal was begun. Moreover, the canal project was provided with its own superintendent in the person of Hugh Sutherland who reported direct to the Department of Public Works at Ottawa.
And while Dawson, in 1872, had recommended the construction of a canal at Fort Frances, he had done so in the expectation that it would serve the building of a railroad stretching from Shebandowan via Sturgeon Falls to the Narrows of Lake of the Woods. 72

The episode of the Fort Frances Canal, and the related confusion about the location of the rail line, mark an unhappy chapter in the relationship of the Dawson Route to the Pacific Railway. There were, however, brighter moments. The route was often used by C.P.R. surveyors after 1871; and even the side trail through Manitou and Wabigoon Lakes was lightly travelled by railroad engineers and their assistants. In addition, there is some evidence that the route, and the Public Works employees along it, contributed in other ways to the construction of the railway. In 1875, for example, squared timbers were prepared and transported to the Kaministiquia River for construction of a wharf at the railway terminus. The following year, Grant reported that large quantities of freight were being landed at the Thunder Bay wharf for use by the railway contractors and survey crews. And, while rails and other heavy freight destined for Manitoba went via Duluth,73 the Thunder Bay Road was of service to the railroad builders working in the Fort William-Port Savanne area. In this limited sense W. McInnes, writing of the Dawson Route in 1897, was correct: "when its abandonment was inevitable it rendered valuable service in facilitating the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway."
Indeed without this route for the carriage of men and supplies the building of the road would have been a much more arduous undertaking." 74

In August 1876, the first locomotive engine was landed at Thunder Bay. By this time rails, running north-west from Fort William for 24 miles, had been laid, and railway gangs were rapidly building eastward from Selkirk, Manitoba. Even so, there were last fond hopes for a resurgent Dawson Route. "The examples of all great parallel rail and water routes on this continent", wrote one optimist, "suggest the probability of the much abused Dawson route, now regarded as but the humble precursor of the railway, becoming in the end the almost unrivalled carrier of the trade of the great North West." 75

His words were wasted, and by November 1878 one Thomas Watts commented that "there are thousands of dollars worth of valuable property belonging to the government scattered over the whole distance as it was thrown aside when they [Carpenter & Company] left, now lying at the mercy of whoever likes to help themselves." 76 Five months later the hulls of the three steam launches at Port Savanne were "perfectly useless" and the route was "abandoned". 77

* * * * * * *

The Dawson Route was abandoned for many reasons. One of them had to do with changes in government and related changes in policy. Begun as a preliminary and useful instrument of nation-building under the administration of Macdonald, the route
"Prince Arthur's Landing, 25 July." From a pencil sketch by Sidney Hall in the Public Archives of Canada. The sketch was done in 1881 and shows the C.P.R. line and locomotive.
attained its modest apogee of efficiency under that of Mackenzie. Development of the route was in harmony with Mackenzie's railway policy, even though its part in that policy was questioned and censured before he left office. But development of the route was not in harmony with Macdonald's post-1878 railway policy. And, by the time he was returned to power, the route -- in view of the rail lines already constructed -- had outlived its earlier usefulness for the cause of national expansion. In 1870, the route had provided a needed communication with Manitoba, thus serving the requirements of the hour. In 1878, the requirements of the hour -- witness the howls emanating from British Columbia -- could only be satisfied by rail communication. The policy framed to meet those requirements had no room in it for development, or even maintenance, of the Red River Route.

A more elemental (in both senses of the term) reason for the route's abandonment lay in the fact that it was of seasonal use only. It depended largely on water transportation, and the waters of Northwestern Ontario freeze early and thaw late. In 1872-73, for instance, the harbour at Prince Arthur's Landing closed on 15 December and did not open until 9 May -- the latest opening of all seventeen Ontario and Quebec harbours listed. There were, moreover, inland waters to contend with. In some seasons these were not clear of ice until 24 May. The normal length of the inland season of navigation was from early June to late October. During the other seven months of
the year the route stood idle -- except for the continuing work of maintenance.

The need to secure Manitoba, and the consequent military expedition, first drew public attention to the Dawson Route. But its broader purpose was to provide a civilian line of communication of particular use to those emigrating to the West. In this regard, the cost of operation was 'way out of proportion to the number of people transported. By 1878 -- as nearly as can be reckoned -- only about 5,000 members of the civilian population had used the route. Many of them crossed only a portion of it. The net cost to the government by that time (including the expense of the Fort Frances Canal, and the subsidies to Carpenter and Company) was in the neighbourhood of one and a half million dollars. Sandford Fleming's estimate that "each emigrant costs 10 times the amount received" was conservative. It cost more like twenty-five times the amount received, or about $300 per emigrant. Josiah Plumb likened the amphibious route to "a non-descript animal, the Ornythorincus Platypus"; which, he noted, was slow of motion, but had an enormous bill. One of the reasons for the high cost of transportation was the excessive duplication of manpower and physical plant along the route. On each road section (including short portage roads), separate teams of horses or oxen were required -- along with stables, harness, and waggons. Because of the slow pace of travel, there had to be numerous "emigrant houses" scattered along the
Prince Arthur's Landing, the eastern terminus of the Dawson Route, date of view, 1872. From a water colour by William Armstrong.
route, as well as storehouses and workers' accommodation at each of the ten major portages and on the two long road sections. The staff, too, was expensive. During the season of 1873, for example, 200 workmen (exclusive of the engineers of the steamers and tugs) were on the job. This figure does not include the teamsters who handled forty teams of horses and twelve yoke of oxen along the line. In addition, there were the row boats, the big 55 foot barges, the tugs, and the steamers. Each stretch of water required distinct vessels and, at the peak of its operation, the Dawson Route fleet numbered no less than 14 tugs, 2 large paddle-wheelers, and dozens of boats and barges.

A further reason for the route's failure lies in the rapid pace of railway building in Minnesota. In 1872, there were about 8,000 men working on rail lines to the south; and, in the same year, trains began running between Duluth and Moorhead, which was situated on the navigable waters of the Red River. With this accomplishment, the Minnesota route again moved ahead of that via Canada. The Dawson Route could not compete with it either in terms of speed or in terms of comfort.

Added to this was the fact that the Canadian route was not designed to accommodate large or heavy articles of freight. Its ten portages and two roads made it necessary to handle freight items no less than twenty-four times. This, in itself, was a severe limitation. Captain James Dick, who had taken
A Dawson Route barge (length, 55 feet; beam, 10 feet) submerged in three feet of water, Doré Lake, Quetico Provincial Park.
heavy machinery over the route, was questioned about its capabilities in 1878. He was brief, but to the point:

Q. Supposing you were asked to make a contract to carry goods from Port Savanne down to Fort Frances, what would you take per ton to do it? --- I would require a pretty round sum.

Q. Is it not a feasible route for commercial purposes? --- No; not as it is now.

Q. If you started from Ontario with merchandise for Winnipeg, would you think of taking this route? --- Oh, no.

Finally, there was the great fact of the Canadian Pacific Railway. By 1875 -- despite Mackenzie's piece-meal policy -- it was clearly only a matter of time, and not a great deal of time, before it displaced the Dawson Route. Completed between Fort William and Winnipeg in 1882, it rendered the route utterly obsolete except for the very limited purposes of local travel and colonization. One might even argue that the Dawson Route, growing up as it did during a period of exuberant railway construction, was an anachronism from the day it opened.

* * * * * * *

Considered as a business venture, the route was a dismal failure. As an emigrant route -- even though some thousands of pioneers travelled its trails, roads, and waters -- it cannot be termed successful. In the surveying and construction of the C.P.R. it played a useful, but minor role. To some degree, although it is difficult to measure, it served to focus attention on, and stimulate settlement and economic development in the areas around Thunder Bay and Fort Frances. Judged by
other criteria, however, it claims an important place in the story of Canadian development. For one thing, at a time when the nation was, with difficulty, trying to shepherd Manitoba into Confederation, and when relations between Canada and the United States were decidedly strained, the embryo Dawson Route provided an all-Canadian way to the West. In this strategic sense, it was a valid and concrete instrument of nation-building.

In the physical sense, the route left much to be desired. Dawson utilized, as effectively as he could, the long-used waterways west of Thunder Bay. But, for the type of traffic which he envisaged in his more hopeful moments, and which the times demanded, the waterways were inadequate in their natural state. This problem was partially overcome by the construction of the two road sections. Nevertheless, to fulfil Dawson's hopes, and to make the route competitive with those via the United States, an extensive and expensive system of locks and canals would have been necessary. Lacking such improvements, the scope of the route was severely limited. Dawson's utilization of the water stretches, however, cannot be ignored. To a degree, he did succeed in reviving and extending the tradition of water communication with the West. Especially in the movement of troops, this was a useful exercise.

The old voyageur's canoe route was altered, of course, by the construction of the two lengthy roads. Built through stretches of extremely difficult country, both of these roads continued in use long after the waterways once again faded from
Sections of the Fort Garry line have been improved and are now travelled as a secondary road. The Thunder Bay Road, virtually unaltered, served the people of Northwestern Ontario for many years after 1878. Today — known as Highway 11A, or the Dawson Road — it continues to lead west from the Lakehead, following much the same line as that surveyed by Simon Dawson ninety-nine years ago. That the line was well selected is further demonstrated by the fact that portions of the Trans-Canada Highway and the Canadian National Railway follow it through the valley of the Matawin.

These considerations could not, of course, influence critics of the route during the 1870's. Theirs was not the privilege and responsibility of placing and assessing the communication in the continuum of Canadian history. In the long view, however, and considering the Dawson Route in all its aspects, it appears to have served Canadians well. Constructed across difficult terrain, it deserves to be remembered as a human triumph over geography.

But the Dawson Route was not simply a physical entity -- a practical resource for the movement of people and goods. Utilizing the historic waterways which had carried fur traders to the farthest corners of the country, it was an expression of Canada's determination to preserve those far corners for Canadians. Begun in the year of Confederation, it was the Dominion's first concrete gesture in defence of our western inheritance. The building of the railroad was a grander gesture,
The valley of the Matawin River, showing portions of the Trans-Canada Highway and Canadian National Railway, which follow the old line of the Dawson Route in this area.
but the essence of that willingness to marshall the resources of the nation for an expansive national purpose can be discerned in Simon Dawson and the route which justly bore his name.

In retrospect, the creation of the Dawson Route seems to have embodied, as strikingly as any other venture, the expansive ethos of Confederation.

2 Letter of complaint from approximately 280 Dawson Route travellers (stranded at the Northwest Angle) to Prime Minister Alexander Mackenzie, 30 June, 1874. P.A.C., Public Works MS., vol. 125, no. 42832.

Unless otherwise noted, all manuscripts cited are from the Public Works collection, Record Group 11, Series 9B, Subject File 429; only the volume and document numbers vary. In view of this, only the volume and document numbers will be given in footnotes.

The most important sources used in preparing this chapter are: the MSS mentioned in the preceding paragraph, vols. 117-125; P.A.C., Public Works MSS, Record Group 11, Series 9C, Subject File 50, vols. 78-81; the Reports of the Minister of Public Works including appendices, many of them by Simon J. Dawson (these are found in the Sessional Papers of Canada as well as in the separately published volumes which have been generally used here); the "Simon J. Dawson Papers" and "W. H. Carpenter & Co. Letter Book, 1874-1885", in the Ontario Dept. of Records and Archives; the Report of Select Committee of Senate on Fort Frances Lock; the "Reports on the Canadian Pacific Railway" in Reports of the Minister of Public Works; Sandford Fleming, Report on Surveys and Preliminary Operations on the Canadian Pacific Railway up to January, 1877 (Ottawa, 1877); Canadian Pacific Railway, Report of Progress on the Explorations and Surveys up to January, 1874 (Ottawa, 1874); P. Robertson-Ross, Col. Commanding the Militia of Canada, "Reconnaissance of the North West Provinces and Indian Territories", in C.S.P., vol. 6, no. 5, 1873, paper 9; "Lieut.-Colonel W. O. Smith's Report on the Manitoba Expedition of 1871" and "Captain Scott's Report and Diary", in C.S.P., vol. 5, no. 5, 1872, paper 8; George M. Grant, Ocean to Ocean, Sandford Fleming's Expedition Through Canada in 1872 (Toronto, 1925), first published in 1873; J. C. Hamilton, The Prairie Provinces, Sketches of Travel from Lake Ontario to Lake Winnipeg (Toronto, 1876); James Trow, A Trip to Manitoba (Quebec, 1875); Peter O'Leary, Travels and Experiences in Canada (London, 1875); Ontario Government, North Western Ontario: Its Boundaries, Resources and Communications (Toronto, 1879); Canada, Parliament, First Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in Reference to Ex-
penditure on the Canadian Pacific Railway between Fort
William and Red River (Ottawa, 1879); Sandford Fleming,
Progress Report on the Canadian Pacific Railway, Exploratory
Survey (Ottawa, 1872).

Of the many secondary sources, a few are of special
use: Walpole Roland, Algoma West (Toronto, 1887); Innis,
History of the Canadian Pacific Railway; Glazebrook, A
History of Transportation in Canada; C. P. Stacey, "The
Second Red River Expedition, 1871", Canadian Defence
Quarterly, vol. 8, no. 2, Jan., 1931; and James J. Talman,
"Migration from Ontario to Manitoba in 1871", Ontario
History, vol. 43, no. 1, Jan., 1951.

3 W. McInnes, "Report H: On the Geology of the Area
Covered by the Seine River and Lake Shebandowan Map Sheets", p. 12H.

4 In 1878 a Select Committee of the Senate inquired
into public funds expended on the useless Fort Frances
Lock. The construction of this facility was the prime
example of the wastage involved in parallel construction.
The evidence given before this committee provides much in­
formation on the Dawson Route and its relationship to the
construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. See Report
and Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Select Committee
of the Senate, Appointed to Inquire into all Matters Re­
lating to the Fort Frances Lock (Ottawa, 1878); hereafter
referred to as Report of Select Committee of Senate on
Fort Frances Lock.

5 "Confidential Report and Memorandum of Sub Committee
of the Privy Council on the Subject of Opening up Communi­
cation between Fort William and Fort Garry", 27 Dec., 1870,

6 Report of the Minister of Public Works, 1871
(Ottawa, 1872), p. 43.

7 An interesting account of this Fenian "invasion"
is given in John Peter Turner, The North-West Mounted Police,
vol. 1 (Ottawa, 1950), pp. 72-77; see also Stacey, "The
Second Red River Expedition, 1871".

8 Dawson, "Report of 1872", in General Report of
the Minister of Public Works, (Ottawa, 1872), p. 132.
Colonel Smith had preceded the troops, travelling via Minnesota, in order to expedite their travel over the Fort Garry Road. He was delayed at the North West Angle because C.P.R. surveyors had taken the boats which had been left there for his use. C.S.P., vol. 5, no. 5, 1872, paper 8, p. 81.

C.S.P., vol. 5, no. 5, 1872, paper 8, p. 84.

The comments of the military men who crossed the route throw additional light on the character and capabilities of Dawson. Wolseley (The Story of a Soldier's Life, vol. 2, p. 192) referred to him as "an able and hardworking public servant" who was handicapped by "some ne'er-do-well friends of politicians then in office" sent to assist him. Smith referred to "his great experience and the indefatigable exertions used by himself and his staff"; Captain Scott wrote of "the valuable aid rendered by Mr. Dawson in every possible way .... He worked most energetically ... and by his personal exertions in this respect contributed much to the success of the expedition." See C.S.P., vol. 5, no. 5, 1872, paper 8, pp. 82, 85. Col. Robertson-Ross (C.S.P., vol. 6, no. 5, 1873, paper 9, p. cviii) referred to him as an "able engineer".

The four routes were recommended by the North West Emigration Society in a circular reprinted in the Huron Expositor, 26 May, 1871; cited in James J. Talman, "Migration from Ontario to Manitoba in 1871", pp. 37-38.

In 1872 Fleming was Engineer-in-Chief of the C.P.R. surveys and Grant was a presbyterian minister from Halifax. Both were to become distinguished Canadians. In 1888, Fleming was made president of the Royal Society of Canada after a career of accomplishment in the fields of science, literature, and Imperial relations. Grant, as principal of Queen's University after 1877, was to become the nation's leading educator and an outstanding figure in the political world. Colonel Robertson-Ross was commander of the Militia of Canada. The three men travelled the Dawson Route together and Grant's, Ocean to Ocean, gives a fascinating account of their journey.

Huts and tents still served in many places.

Dawson maintained that the cost to emigrants going through the United States in 1871 had varied between $60 and $100 per head. He added, however, that the cost had been reduced to $24 in 1872, arguing that the fare had been reduced because of the low fares on the Dawson Route. Talman's ("Migration from Ontario to Manitoba in 1871", pp. 35-38) figures, however, throw doubt on Dawson's. Talman indicates that one group of settlers travelled to Manitoba, via Minnesota in 1871, at a cost of $27 per head, plus food. He also indicates that, in general, the cost of travelling via the United States was not much higher than that of travelling via the Dawson Route.


The net sums expended on the Dawson Route during its first years are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1867-68</td>
<td>$14,000.00</td>
<td>(Dog Lake Road and dam)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868-69</td>
<td>$19,113.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868-70</td>
<td>$39,491.51</td>
<td>(Snow's Road)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1869-70</td>
<td>$94,420.28</td>
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<tr>
<td>1870-71</td>
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<tr>
<td>1871-72</td>
<td>$293,085.84</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872-73</td>
<td>$259,803.27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total expenditure (after income) to 30 June, 1873: $834,158.99

Dawson, "Report of 1872", pp. 129-137. There is, no doubt, a pardonable degree of exaggeration in Dawson's assessment of the importance of the route. The minerals along the north shore of Superior had, for example, drawn
developers as early as the 1840's and in the early 1860's there was considerable activity around Thunder Bay.

24 Toronto Globe, 24 Sept., 1872.

25 Grant, Ocean to Ocean, pp. 73-74.


27 Grant, pp. 54-55.


29 Passengers under fourteen years of age went for $5 and children under three were taken free.

30 Hamilton, The Prairie Provinces, pp. 131-132. See also General Reports of the Minister of Public Works.


33 Nor'Wester, 29 June, 1874.

34 James Trow, A Trip to Manitoba, p. 17.


37 P.A.C., Public Works MS., vol. 125, no. 42832. The Public Works MS. collection contains many letters of complaint, both from travellers and Public Works employees, concerning Carpenter's operation. This evidence lends support to the implication inherent in H. A. Innis' remark (History of the Canadian Pacific Railway, p. 92n.): "The
bonus system applied to the Dawson route made it advantageous for the contractor to discourage people from travelling by that route." This view was expressed by Louis Masson (supported by John A. Macdonald) on the floor of the House of Commons in 1876. See Canada, House of Commons Debates, vol. 2, 1876, pp. 450-454.

38 Trow, p. 18.


40 It is instructive to note that, while Carpenter & Co. carried 1,877 people on the route during the season of 1875, only 193 went right through to Winnipeg. Of the remainder, 50 came east from Winnipeg to Thunder Bay, another 379 travelled part of the route on the way east, 1,152 people travelled a portion of the route going west and of the latter group 103 stopped at Rat Portage (Kenora) or Shoal Lake, no less than 427 went as far as Fort Frances, and many went only as far as Kaministiquia. The route had become one of local transportation and settlement.


42 Henry I. Mortimer, "Report on Survey of the Portages on the Red River Route", in Sandford Fleming, Report on Surveys and Preliminary Operations on the Canadian Pacific Railway up to January 1877 (Ottawa, 1877), p. 211, Appendix P.

43 Grant's report, 23 July, 1875.


45 Peter O'Leary, Travels and Experiences, p. 130. O'Leary has been used sparingly in this account as he strikes the writer as something of an anglophile ass -- and none too accurate to boot.

46 Nor'Wester, 2 August, 1875.


48 During the season of 1876, 605 passengers and 550 tons of freight were moved over the route -- or portions
of it. P.A.C., Public Works MS., Record Group 11, Series 9C, Subject File 50, vol. 80, no. 65244.

One gathers from the Public Works MSS that a passenger service between Thunder Bay and Fort Frances was operated on a semi-monthly basis and that the bulk of activity was in connection with the C.P.R. surveys and development, and the construction of the Fort Frances Canal. Some militia stores were also transported across the route. See Public Works MSS, vol. 80, nos. 57172, 57387, 58526, 58887, 60456, and 61381.


The Dawson Route, after 1872, served the Winnipeg garrison "as a regular line of communication, by which new drafts could be received and time-expired men withdrawn to the East." C. P. Stacey, "Military Aspect of Winning the West", p. 15. In addition to soldiers, 197 men of the newly-formed North-West Mounted Police crossed the route in 1873.


Mackenzie's policy was first expressed in 1874 before his constituents at Lambton; it was reiterated many times during debates in the House of Commons. See especially: Canada, House of Commons Debates, vol. 2, 1876, p. 450ff., and House of Commons Debates, vol. 3, 1877, p. 1319ff.


Ibid., p. 51. Dawson's proposed line from Shebandowan to Sturgeon Falls was very close to that later surveyed by the Ontario and Rainy River Railway Company (incorporated in 1886). The Canadian Northern built along this section and the rail line was opened in 1902 (between Fort Arthur and Fort Frances). It is now part of the Canadian National Railway system.

55 First Report on Public Accounts ... between Fort William and Red River, p. 49. See also the testimony of E. G. Garden, and James Rowan, in Report of Select Committee of Senate on Fort Frances Lock, pp. 50, 64-67. The re-routing of the rail line from the Sturgeon Falls-Narrows of Lake of the Woods line to that via Wabigoon Lake and Rat Portage was questioned during this inquiry. Dawson gave an effective defence of his southern line and expressed considerable doubt concerning the ability and motives of the railroad surveyors (pp. 50-52, 68-69).

One is left with the impression that Dawson's line deserved more careful attention than it received, and that the railroad surveyors were not all they might have been. Fleming later noted that "there were not a sufficient number of thoroughly efficient and practical men in the country to aid me in carrying out the work of preliminary operations in what might be deemed the best way." C.S.P., vol. 15, no. 9, 1882, paper 48cc, p. 5.

56 Testimony of Henry Mortimer, 18 April, 1878, Report of Select Committee of Senate on Fort Frances Lock, pp. 40-41.

57 Ibid., pp. 41-43; see also Mortimer's report in Fleming, Report on Surveys, 1877, p. 211ff. Shortly before the Senate inquiry, Mortimer made an estimate of costs necessary to improve the Dawson Route effectively (exclusive of the Fort Frances Lock, which was then well on the way to completion). He arrived at a figure of $341,235. This included the cost of purchasing new plant (including five new tug boats) as well as that of improving portages, repairing dams, and excavating canals to replace Brule and Baril portages.

58 Testimony of William Carpenter, 15 April, 1878, in Report of Select Committee of Senate on Fort Frances Lock, pp. 37-38.

59 Cited in Canada, Parliament, Memorandum Addressed to the Honourable the Minister of Railways and Canals by the Engineer-in-Chief of the Canadian Pacific Railway (Ottawa, 1880), appendix 8, p. 31.

60 Ibid., p. 31

61 Ibid., p. 34

62 Testimony of Hugh Sutherland, 10 April, 1878, in Report of Select Committee of Senate on Fort Frances Lock, pp. 20-21.
64 Report on Surveys, 1877, p. 53.
65 Ibid., p. 53.
66 Ibid., pp. 53-54.
67 Testimony of Henry Mortimer, 18 April, 1878, in Report of Select Committee of Senate on Fort Frances Lock, pp. 43-44.
68 Report on Surveys, 1877, p. 53.
69 Report of Select Committee of Senate on Fort Frances Lock, pp. 2-4.
70 Grace Lee Nute, Rainy River Country, pp. 50, 62. There were about 400 people living at Fort Frances in 1878. Sutherland's testimony, in Report of Select Committee of Senate on Fort Frances Lock, p. 24.
71 Ibid., p. v.

The writer has discovered no evidence of venality in connection with the Fort Frances canal project. Mackenzie did not share what might be called the largesse of Macdonald and Langevin.

72 Dawson, "Report of 1872", p. 137; see also Dawson's testimony, 4 April, 1878, in Report of Select Committee of Senate on Fort Frances Lock, p. 55.
73 P.A.C., Public Works MS., vol. 80, no. 60456.
74 W. McInnes, "Report H", pp. 12H-13H.
75 J. C. Hamilton, The Prairie Provinces, p. 128. Hamilton, an active member of the Royal Canadian Institute, was a Toronto author and lawyer. There were other last-minute advocates of a revitalized Dawson Route, but they were few in number. One of them was Hugh Sutherland who, in 1878, submitted a proposal to the Minister of Public Works. His plan called for extensive improvements (at
an estimated cost of about $150,000) designed to convert
the communication into a freight route. See Report of
Select Committee of Senate on Fort Frances Lock, pp. 31-37;
and Sutherland's testimony before a second committee of
inquiry, 2 May, 1878, in Canada, Journals of the House of
Commons, vol. 12, 1878, p. 163. See also Ontario Govern-
ment, North Western Ontario: Its Boundaries, Resources
and Communications, pp. 6-7.

76 Thos. Watts to the Hon. C. Tupper, 25 Nov., 1878;
P.A.C., Public Works MS., vol. 81, no. 77713. Tupper was
Minister of Public Works in the Macdonald administration
which was returned to power in autumn, 1878. From 1879
to 1884 he was Minister of Railways and Canals.

77 Letter of W. L. Bill, 24 April, 1879; P.A.C.,

78 See Canada, House of Commons Debates, vol. 2,
1876, p. 450ff.; and Canada, House of Commons Debates,
vol. 3, 1877, p. 1319ff.

79 General Report of the Minister of Public Works,
1873, p. 181.

80 Testimony of J. Walter Dick, in Report of Select
Committee of Senate on Fort Frances Lock, p. 17.

81 Macdonald recalled his original intention during
a Commons debate of 1876, noting that, "the Government
discovered that if they were ever to secure immigrants for
the British North West, it must be by a route of their own,
so they at once commenced the construction of the Dawson
Road, holding it in their own hands because it was a new

82 The number of passengers was not -- to the best
of the writer's knowledge -- published for the seasons of
1873 or 1877. By 1877, of course, the system was virtually
defunct. On the basis of comments in the General Report
of the Minister of Public Works, 1873, an estimated figure
of 400 civilian passengers in 1873 has been interpolated.

83 A rather challenging aspect of this inquiry has
been to try to arrive at an accurate figure of net expendi-
ture on the Dawson Route. The writer has found, to his
sorrow, that this is no simple matter, and the figure given
must be taken as approximate. It has been calculated from
the reports and manuscript documents of the Department of Public Works and has been checked against other sources.

These primary and secondary sources provide food for thought and are conducive to confusion. Innis (History of the Canadian Pacific Railway, p. 86n.) notes that, "the road was abandoned after an expenditure of an annual average of $220,000 during the six years of its operation." His assessment, however, is apparently derived from remarks made by Mackenzie during a debate of 1876 (see House of Commons Debates, vol. 2, 1876, p. 452). Mackenzie's figures do not appear to include the subsidy to Carpenter or the cost of the Fort Frances Canal, both of which the writer has included in his total. Gibbon (Steel of Empire, p. 174) notes of the route that, "the government spent over one million three hundred thousand dollars in keeping it open pending the construction of a railway." Short and Doughty (eds.) (Canada and Its Provinces, vol. 19, p.288) argue that "the Dominion government spent something like a million and a quarter on the road." This figure is echoed in a good short article by Margaret Arnett MacLeod ("The Dawson Route", Winnipeg Free Press, magazine section, 3 August, 1940, p. 3).

The above appear to be in essential agreement. The same cannot be said for two of the more or less primary sources consulted. Langevin in a retrospective account of his Department's activities (General Report of the Minister of Public Works, 1867-82, p. 652) makes a quite incredible statement: "The total cost of the road from its opening to 30th June, 1882, was: $209,195.38." James Trow's observation (House of Commons Debates, vol. 3, 1877, p. 1328) that Macdonald's administration spent $1,500,000 on the route before going out of office in 1873 is not much closer to the truth.

The 1878 evidence of Simon Dawson (Report of Select Committee of Senate on Fort Frances Lock, pp. 54-55) was, by way of contrast, accurate within limits: "The total expenditure on the Dawson route ... from its first commencement, to the 30th June, 1874, apart from Carpenter's contract, was $1,294,887.82 .... Revenues paid and accounts accrued amounted to $233,615.38." This figure, however, does not appear to include the $39,491.51 (net) expended by John Snow up to January 1870 (Snow did not report through Dawson to the Department); nor does it include the roughly $150,000 subsidy to Carpenter during his two years on the route; nor does it include the $288,278.51 spent on the Fort Frances canal. In addition, the government appropriated $25,000 to maintain communications across the route in 1876 (Stacey, "Military Aspect of Winning the West", p. 21). The writer has been unable to locate a figure
for the fairly substantial repairs and improvements carried out under the supervision of D. M. Grant after June, 1875. No figure for the work carried on by Grant has been included in the writer's calculations. With the abandonment of the Fort Frances Canal project in 1878, it had cost the Government of Canada roughly $1,500,000, after income, to construct, maintain, and operate the Dawson Route.

Josiah Burr Plumb was to become Speaker of the Senate of Canada in 1887. In 1877, when he made his comment, he was a Conservative M.P. and a close associate of John A. Macdonald. He was a strong critic of Mackenzie's railway policy, and of the Dawson Route. He chaired a committee of inquiry which investigated expenditure on the C.P.R. in 1879; see First Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in reference to Expenditure on the Canadian Pacific Railway between Fort William and Red River.

Dawson ("Report of 1874", p. 181), noted the extraordinary railway building activity in Minnesota. "This activity ... shews", he wrote, "the necessity of more comprehensive improvement on the Canadian route, if it is to be maintained as a line of communication to command the share of traffic which its natural advantages should give it."

In particularly low water, or when one of the dams broke (as happened on several occasions), the number of portages increased to as many as fifteen.

Testimony of Captain James Dick, 13 March, 1878, in Report of Select Committee of Senate on Fort Frances Lock, p. 10.
SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following bibliography is highly selective. It gives most space to materials bearing directly upon the construction, use, and significance of the Dawson Route, as well as the route's relationship to the Canadian Pacific Railway. Readers will find, however, that other works consulted are dealt with in a number of extensive footnotes which have been written to serve as bibliographical essays. Where considered useful, entries have been annotated.

Unpublished Materials:


Ontario Department of Public Records and Archives. The Simon J. Dawson Papers. These papers have not yet been catalogued and may be called the "Dawson Papers" as they include considerable material on some of Simon Dawson's brothers.


Public Archives of Canada. The microfilm of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, 1670-1870.

---------. Public Works MSS, Record Group 11, Series 9B, Subject File 429, and Record Group 11, Series 9C, Subject File 50. The volumes in these series include some 5,000 pages of material relevant to the Dawson Route.

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--------.  *House of Commons Debates.* Vol. 2, 1876.

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--------.  *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada.* The relevant volumes for the years 1857-1860 have been examined. These include reports submitted by members of the Red River Exploring Expedition.

--------.  *Memorandum Addressed to the Honourable the Minister of Railways and Canals by the Engineer-in-Chief of the Canadian Pacific Railway.* Ottawa, 1880.


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Simplified map: THE DAWSON ROUTE AND ADJACENT WATERWAYS

Scale: 32 miles (approx.) to one inch
Simplified Map: PHYSIOGRAPHY ALONG THE DAWSON ROUTE

LEGEND:
- wooded swamps and open muskegs
- height of land
- Quetico Provincial Park (after 1913)
- clay pockets
- edge of Precambrian Shield
Simplified map: LAKE SUPERIOR TO THE HEIGHT OF LAND

Scale: 8 miles to 1 inch

LEGEND:
- Dawson Route
- Dog Lake Route
- Pigeon River Route
- Height of Land
- Portage
LEGEND:
1 Rainy River  5 Maligne River
2 Rainy Lake  6 Lac Des Mille Lacs
3 Namakan Lake  7 Dog Lake
4 Lac La Croix  8 Kaministiquia River

Simplified map: CANOE ROUTES WEST OF LAKE SUPERIOR

Scale: 20 miles to 1 inch
Wolseley's departures from the ultimate line of the Dawson route are indicated in yellow.