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Creating Canadians: A Socio-Cultural Study of the North-West Mounted Police, 1883-1887

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Creating Canadians: A Socio-Cultural Study of the
North-West Mounted Police, 1883-1887

By: Sophie Chevalier-Forget

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the MA degree in History

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Abstract

Title: Creating Canadians: A Socio-Cultural Study of the North-West Mounted Police, 1883-1887

Author: Sophie Chevalier-Forget

Supervisor: Dr. Serge Durflinger

Submission: November 2010

There is no other organization quite like the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and its precursor, the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP). Created in 1873 to establish a lawful government presence in the newly acquired territories of the North-West, the organization grew from 300 to 1000 men between the years of 1883 and 1887. Facing such important challenges as the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway and the 1885 Northwest Campaign, the historiography has found that the organization had succeeded in enforcing the law, lending credence to the romantic myth of the mounted police. This research seeks to understand who joined the mounted police, and how their time in the force influenced the organization. This quantitative study looks at the birthplace, provincial provenance, religion, age, and time spent in the force to understand the enlisted men and commissioned officers who became “Mounties”. Recruiters sought out English-speaking farmers from Ontario, but men from all walks of life, including medical professionals, labourers, and even a circus clown, joined the organization. The constables and non-commissioned officers were primarily unskilled workers. In the end, the majority of these men served less than a single service term, making their time in the force more like temporary employment than a career. While political patronage influenced the appointment of commissioned officers, efforts were

made to ensure a representation of men from all Canadian provinces and territories.

Most officers had previous military experience and enjoyed many more benefits than the enlisted men, including a pension system, which helped explain why almost 80 percent made a career of the mounted police. This study, based on an exhaustive review of over 1200 personnel files, will reshape our understanding of who these Mounties were and contribute to the history of law enforcement in western Canada.

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Introduction: “An Assorted Lot Greatly in Need of Specific Instruction”¹

The rugged red-coated Mountie, with Stetson hat and trusty steed, has been a popular image both in Canada and on the international scene. Prevalent sayings, such as “the Mountie always gets his man”, have popularized the image of the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP), a paramilitary organization founded in 1873. Moreover, this image of the mounted police patrolling untamed western Canada has become a mainstay in our cultural iconography, with comic books, popular novels, television, and movies relying on this Canadian institution in order to depict a moral and law-abiding country.

Ten years after its creation, the NWMP was an even more entrenched fixture on the western landscape. An idealized institution and its membership form the heart of this socio-cultural study, which analyzes the personnel files of more than 1200 officers and men enlisting from 1883 to 1887. The nature and role of the NWMP, and the patterns of enlistment in the force help us understand the early history of western development and of the government’s most important institution there. Men signed on for a specific term of service, generally five years, although many left the force before their time had expired through desertion, dismissal, or the purchase of the remaining time within a service contract. Rare was the career that would last more than twenty years, and rarer still was the constable who eventually reached the commissioned ranks. Yet these are the men who, during a critical period in the history of the west, helped create the institution through which a mythology emerged.

¹ William and Nora Kelly quoted from William and Nora Kelly, *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police A Century of History* (Edmonton Hurtig Publishers, 1973), 87

This thesis seeks to study the members who first made contact with the western frontier and applied Canadian law. The NWMP shaped and was, in turn, transformed by the western environment. This research is about those men who were agents of government; it is about people, cultural encounters, and transition. Some engaged men were British born, many with military experience throughout the British Empire. Others were recruited from the eastern provinces. A majority of constables and non-commissioned officers had no police or military experience, and many joined by petitioning politicians and other men of influence. As such, engagement, especially within the officer cadre, was highly prestigious, even at the organization's inception. Such a variety of the men's past experiences, motivations to join, and occupations, from clerks to farmers, reveals a different aspect of this paramilitary organization than commonly featured in popular culture. Exploring the social and cultural backgrounds of NWMP members brings new perspectives to an internationally recognized, composite Canadian institution.

Chronologically focused, this thesis will concentrate on the years 1883 to 1887. In 1883, the NWMP faced increased criminality and social turmoil tied to the construction of the railway and rapid migration, which led the organization to increase its ranks to face growing demand. These years also chart the lead-up and denouement of the 1885 Northwest Campaign, and its political and socio-cultural ramifications. The end of 1887 has been seen as crucial for the NWMP/RCMP by some historians, including R.C. Macleod and John Peter Turner, who cite it as the moment that the mounted police

regained control over the western prairie.² The steady influx of members during those years allows for an analysis of the membership and how engagement and recruitment were eventually modified due to high turnover in its ranks. This thesis will argue that enlistment in the NWMP attracted men from various walks of life, but mainly English-speaking farmers from Ontario, who joined for a very temporary and brief service term. Life in the mounted police was short and difficult for these men, and a direct contrast to the careers that were established for commissioned officers.

Most of this research concentrated upon the individual NWMP member files, which document the socio-cultural backgrounds of enlisted men. While this thesis is primarily a quantitative analysis, these records were contextualized by reference to the Annual Reports of the NWMP, tabled in Parliament each year since 1873, and to statistical findings of the 1881 and 1891 Censuses. In addition, numerous historical studies informed this research in two specific ways: to provide context to the early history of the NWMP and to explore methodologies and findings of socio-cultural studies of other Canadian military organizations or campaigns.

All files of individuals enlisting in the North-West Mounted Police from 1 January 1883 to 12 December 1887 were reviewed, netting a total of 1240 member files, 42 of whom were commissioned officers. As each new applicant, including those who had previous service, received a sequential regimental number, these men were easily identified. What is more, it is important to note that members who were in service prior to 1883 and who may have re-engaged during the time period of 1883 to 1887 were not included. This is solely a study that charts the members who were new to the

² R.C. Macleod, *The North-West Mounted Police and Law Enforcement, 1873-1905* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 124 and John Peter Turner, *The North-West Mounted Police, Volume II* (Ottawa: The King's Printer, 1950), 321.

organization, or who re-enlisted after having left the organization for at least thirty days between terms of service. Each file was analyzed and coded according to name, regimental number, engagement/discharge date, discharge rationale, age, birthplace, residence, occupation, and religion. Where the information was available, their default record, anecdotes, and awards were also noted. The majority of this information was gleaned from three forms that were found in about 80 percent of files from the time period.

Each applicant completed the “Application for Engagement in the N.W.M Police force”, and it recorded the individual’s name, address, age, and previous occupation. It also asked the applicant if they had previous military experience and if they could ride and take care of horses. The medical examination, form number 65, was completed by the physician reviewing the applicant, and listed the age, height, weight, and overall physical attributes of the individual, as well as his previous occupation. Lastly, form number 59 was a gathering of demographic information, including the height, age, weight, occupation, residence, previous service, religion, and next of kin of the applicant. A small number of forms, as well as whole files, were missing on members. This was likely because of a fire in 1897 in Ottawa, which destroyed many NWMP files documenting the years 1873 to 1886.

The NWMP was entrusted with the Canadian government’s mandate to ensure order and peace during western development. A group of 300 men and an officer cadre made its way west from Fort Dufferin, Manitoba, reaching present-day southern Alberta in September 1874 after an arduous march. Reaching a prairie frontier with few fixtures of the nascent Canadian dominion, the men of the NWMP became the main representatives of government in the region, agents of national authority as historian

R.C. Macleod has argued.³ This national authority was initiated to smooth the process of settlement and expansion into the territories which had been recently acquired from the Hudson Bay Company, areas already populated by various Aboriginal groups and Métis. The “Indian Wars” in the United States greatly influenced the way Canadian lawmakers would approach prairie development. By the 1870s, the United States was spending more than \$20 million annually on the “Indian Wars”, while the total Canadian government budget was not quite \$19 million.⁴ In a broader context, the acquisition and peopling of the prairies was a major element in Canadian Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald’s dream of a nation from sea to sea. As such, Ottawa hoped that the mounted police would facilitate a process of purchasing land rights from Aboriginal groups through a treaty-making process. Once completed, the migration of thousands of settler families of European origin would form the basis of western Canadian society.

With only about 300 members to police an area spanning approximately two hundred thousand square miles, the members of the NWMP hoped to use tact and diplomacy in establishing confident and positive relationships with indigenous peoples. For example, the force history points to the relationship between Superintendent James Morrow Walsh and Sitting Bull, or even the 1877 Blackfoot Treaty, signed under Commissioner James Macleod, as indication of the NWMP’s good standing with Aboriginal groups. Many stories existed of cooperation in the pursuit of justice, and Justice Minister Sir Antoine-Aimé Dorion had previously stated the Mounties’ mission was “to give confidence to peaceable Indians and intending settlers”.⁵ However, the

³ Macleod, *The NWMP and Law Enforcement*, 168.

⁴ Macleod, *The NWMP and Law Enforcement*, 3.

⁵ Andrew Graybill, *Policing the Great Plains: Rangers, Mounties, and the North America Frontier, 1875-1910* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 33.

treaty system instituted by the government and the disappearance of the buffalo had significant negative repercussions on traditional Aboriginal ways of life, as did encroaching Euro-Canadian settlement.⁶

By the mid-1880s, correspondence between the NWMP and NWMP Comptroller Fred White clearly showed that the luster of the red coat was no longer of help in negotiating with Aboriginal and Métis groups. As of 1883, Prime Minister Macdonald served also as the Minister of the Interior, which overlooked the NWMP, as well as Superintendent General of Indian Affairs. Accordingly, the NWMP became inextricably linked with a department that was much reviled by the native bands. Historian Jim Wallace argued that there was a significant “difference in attitude” between the NWMP and the Indian Department, as the Mounties, who had been present and visible on the western plains for almost a decade, understood more fully the issues inherent in the transformation of native people into sedentary farmers, which was catastrophic for these people.⁷ Inhabitants of the west were far more understanding and sympathetic to the Métis and Cree, who saw in such treatment the development of “eastern domination and eastern indifference”.⁸ The Canadian government was not fulfilling its treaty obligations, and the native and Métis populations were sick and hungry, with their pleas falling on deaf ears.

Both Macleod and Jim Wallace noted the increasing militancy of starving natives, and the numerous examples of NWMP members being unable to arrest natives

⁶ Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser, *Loyal Till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion* (Calgary: Fifth House, 1997), 66

⁷ Jim Wallace, *A Trying Time: The North-West Mounted Police in the 1885 Rebellion* (Winnipeg: Bunker to Bunker Books, 1998), 9

⁸ Doug Owram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 177

within their tribes.⁹ NWMP Superintendent Leif Crozier noted in 1885 that while “the Indians are peaceably disposed, I have no confidence in their remaining so, when we have again to execute upon them some process of law, unless the policy of the Indian department towards them is in some measure amended.”¹⁰ As restlessness in the Northwest turned to outright conflict, the Canadian militia and a later influx of enlisted members initially answered the demands of the NWMP for more personnel.

The 1883 and 1884 NWMP Annual Reports listed approximately 500 members. In early 1884, these newly enlisted men did not go through any specific training, as “police demands upon us have left no men to instruct” and “recruits as fast as engaged [were] drafted away to one post or another”.¹¹ When fighting officially broke out on 26 March 1885 between government forces and a small number of Métis and Cree at Duck Lake, the NWMP had a total strength of 562 men in the west.¹² The government responded to the outbreak of violence by sending Major General Frederick Middleton with what would amount to approximately 5,000 troops over the newly constructed Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR).¹³ Less than two months after the battle at Duck Lake, Métis leader Louis Riel surrendered to Middleton at the Battle of Batoche. Cree Chief Poundmaker surrendered on 26 May 1885 and Cree Chief Big Bear did likewise on 2 July 1885, effectively ending all resistance.¹⁴

During the campaign, the NWMP had been tasked with law enforcement, while also providing half of its members to support the militia in suppressing the rebellion.

⁹ Wallace, *A Trying Time*, 16 and Macleod, *The NWMP and Law Enforcement*, 22.

¹⁰ Superintendent Leif Crozier to Commissioner Acheson Gosford Irvine, June 25 1884, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), RG 18, Volume 1015, File 1137.

¹¹ *Report of the Commissioner of the North-West Mounted Police Force, 1884*, 22

¹² Turner, *The North-West Mounted Police*, 221.

¹³ Wallace, *A Trying Time*, 1.

¹⁴ Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal Till Death*, 169 and 191.

Due to these taxing demands on its resources, the NWMP was allowed, as of May 1885, to recruit an additional 600 members. Over the next three years, the strength of the force remained at approximately 1,000 enlisted men throughout the Northwest Territories, effectively doubling the size of the NWMP.¹⁵ While impressive, these numbers do not take into consideration those members who had left the force and had to be replaced by new recruits. Still, the heavy recruitment in so short a time has allowed for a rich research sample for this thesis.¹⁶

Both popular authors and historians have taken on the study of the NWMP, but none have provided a complete socio-demographic analysis of the force's members. With ever-growing interest in the small western force, in 1906 Captain Ernest J. Chambers sought to paint what he saw as a realistic portrait of the men of the force. Chambers had access to top NWMP officials, including Comptroller Frederick White, a public servant who served as the liaison between the Commissioner and the Minister for over 20 years. Chambers also solicited the oral testimony of serving and veteran NWMP officers to create a counterbalance to the "spicy collection of stirring adventures, more or less apocryphal in character" that already existed in 1906.¹⁷ Chambers presented his reading audience with what was largely an authentic portrait of the creation of the NWMP, based on the Annual Reports and first-hand accounts that were not yet available to the public.

In essence, his work set in motion the largely hagiographic history that exists on the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, focusing on the early years of the force and its

¹⁵ *Report of the Commissioner of the North-West Mounted Police Force 1887*, 97

¹⁶ William Beahen and Stan Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies: The North West Mounted Police 1886-1900* (Regina: Centax Books, 1998), 171

¹⁷ Ernest J. Chambers, *The Royal North-West Mounted Police: A Corps History* (Montreal: Mortimer Press, 1906, reprinted, Toronto: Coles Publishing Company, 1972), 11

well-known cast of characters. R.C. Fetherstonhaugh's *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police*, published in 1938, sought to "emphasize the adventures of the officers and men rather than the details of organization and administration", framing this history in terms of a heroic western saga.¹⁸ The "arduous work" of the NWMP, and later the Royal Northwest Mounted Police (1904-1920) and RCMP (1920-present), was a common theme, and while there were some "blunders", the author found that "if Canada merits the distinction... of being among the most law-abiding countries in the world today, a share of the credit must go to" the RCMP.¹⁹

With the majority of works on the history of the NWMP written along western and romantic themes, the Commissioner of the RCMP, Stuart Taylor Wood, commissioned John Peter Turner to write an official history. Turner had access to all existing records. Published in 1950, Turner's two-volume *The North-West Mounted Police* primarily relied on the Annual Reports of the NWMP, the early years of which were abundant with case histories and statistics on the mounted police. Turner's time frame ended in 1893, as he focused solely from the famed March West to the changes to the force engendered by the Northwest Campaign, with particular emphasis on the Commissioner of the NWMP from 1886 to 1900, Lawrence William Herchmer. Herchmer, a pivotal character for the period, was British born with a military education, but who lived much of his life in Canada. Prior to his appointment, Herchmer had been a farmer in Ontario as well as an Indian agent and brewer in the territories. While his brother, William Macaulay Herchmer, was a Superintendent in the force, Lawrence Herchmer had no previous service in the NWMP prior to his appointment as

¹⁸ Robert Collier Fetherstonhaugh, *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police* (New York: Carrick & Evans, 1938), xi.

¹⁹ Fetherstonhaugh, *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police*, 66, 161, 285.

Commissioner. Turner echoed the prevalent celebratory view that in “taming the Canadian West the force had carried out an undertaking having no like or equal in accomplishments and human attributes”.²⁰

Ron Atkin’s *Maintain the Right* was published in 1973, the centennial year of the RCMP. Atkin’s narrative explores the common themes of this organization from 1873 to 1900, including the March West, to establishing friendly relations with Aboriginal groups, the 1885 Campaign, the reforms put in place by Commissioner Herchmer, and Herchmer’s eventual fall from favour. Atkin wished to write an “unvarnished” history of the NWMP, hoping to write a story about the men of the “mounted”.²¹ Written for a wider, non-academic audience, Atkin’s narrative did highlight some of the problems of the force. However, like most works on the history of the NWMP, Atkin concluded that the force had overcome its difficulties to lay the foundations for a peaceful society in the west.²²

Stan Horrall, historian of the RCMP, also published in the centennial year what remains one of the main reference books on the history of the organization. *The Pictorial History of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police*, while also written for the general public, was the result of an impressive research effort exploring the early days of the force until the early 1970s. Elements that up to then had not been addressed in the historiography of the RCMP, such as the innovative leadership of Commissioner James Howden MacBrien and the creation of police dog, air, and marine services, were presented in

²⁰ Turner, *The North-West Mounted Police*, Vol II, 576

²¹ Ron Atkin, *Maintain the Right: The Early History of the North West Mounted Police, 1873-1900* (New York: John Day, 1973), 15

²² Atkin, *Maintain the Right*, 16

detail. Horrall's objective was to write something akin to an encyclopedia on the history of the force, and he generally succeeded.

Horrall's work was published the same year that William and Nora Kelly wrote *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, A Century of History*. William Kelly was a retired Deputy Commissioner of the force, having spent his career largely in the RCMP's security service. He and his wife Nora would publish several books on various facets of the organization, including a first-person account of his early years in the RCMP, the *Musical Ride*, and a book solely on the breeding and use of equitation in the RCMP.²³ The Kellys continued a long tradition of works written specifically for public consumption. It would only be in 1976 that a robust academic treatise on the history of the RCMP would appear, a PhD dissertation by Rod Macleod, which was published as *The North-West Mounted Police and Law Enforcement, 1873-1905*.

Over 35 years since its original publication, Macleod's text remains unchallenged for its in-depth research and breadth of analysis. In exploring the NWMP's history from 1873 to 1905, Macleod sought to chart its successes and downfalls, concluding that the force, even with a great amount of power as both police and magistrates, still used this "benevolent despotism" to positively and effectively enforce law and order. Macleod also interpreted many of his research findings in socio-economic terms, arguing that the force perceived most crimes as emanating from the lower classes,

²³ Nora and William Kelly have published several books on the RCMP, including *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police A Century of History, 1873-1973* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1973), *Policing in Canada* (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada. Maclean-Hunter Press, 1976), *The Horses of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police A Pictorial History* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1984), and *Policing the Fringe A Young Mountie's Story* (Regina: Centax, 1999). William Kelly also wrote *The Mounties as They Saw Themselves* (Ottawa: Golden Dog Press, 1996) and *Policing in Wartime One Mountie's Story* (Regina: Centax, 1999)

with members of the mounted police seeing themselves as “social superiors”²⁴ Macleod found that the members of the NWMP wielded significant influence on the formation of society in the west. He concluded that “most of the credit for the development of the force belongs to its officers and men who, left largely to themselves, did what they thought was necessary to build a just and orderly society.”²⁵ Building on Macleod’s findings, this thesis offers a quantitative and qualitative study of these men, something that had not yet been attempted in the historiography.

Interest in the history of the RCMP was awoken once again in the mid-1990s, as the force’s 125th anniversary approached. David Cruise and Alison Griffiths set out to explore the complete history of the RCMP, but instead concentrated their research on the “swashbuckling, glorious, near-tragic, humorous, and often poignant”²⁶. Their narrative was informed by first-person accounts. Similar to their approach was the research conducted by Stanley Horrall and William Beahen in *Red Coats on the Prairies*. Beahen composed much of the first section of the work, an overview of the NWMP from 1886 to 1900 under the command of Commissioner Herchmer. Under Herchmer, much of the NWMP’s administrative structure was created, including the Commissioner’s standing orders in 1886 and the 1889 Administration Guide to govern all operational and administrative actions.²⁷ The second section, largely penned by Horrall, was an exploration of the men’s lives during the period. Horrall took a sampling of officers and men, and explored their daily lives, interactions, and various backgrounds, spending much of his time on the enlisted members in the post-1890 period. In the end, both

²⁴ Macleod, *NWMP and Law Enforcement*, 88

²⁵ Macleod, *NWMP and Law Enforcement*, 168

²⁶ David Cruise and Alison Griffiths, *The Great Adventure: How the Mounties Conquered the West* (Toronto: Viking, 1996), ix

²⁷ Beahen and Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 10

halves were influenced by the significant shadow of Commissioner Herchmer, a mercurial character who played a pivotal role in transforming the organization from its early paramilitary foundations to an organization capable of closely resembling modern policing.

In general, works published on the organizational history of the RCMP relied heavily on the published accounts of the officers and men who populated its ranks from its creation in 1873.²⁸ Superintendent Samuel Benfield Steele took to his memoirs to detail and firmly establish his legacy in the history of western development.²⁹ Steele was a witness to some of the largest events in the early history of the Canadian west, including the 1870 Red River Rebellion, the creation of the NWMP and the March West, as well as the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the 1885 Northwest Campaign, and the Klondike Gold Rush. Steele's description of these events largely influenced the historical record, including the work of guide and interpreter Jerry Potts. Potts, first hired during the March West, was a hallowed and respected character in Steele's and several other works, although his character would be questioned by the Treaty 7 Elders in an exploration of the treaty negotiated between the NWMP, government representatives, and the Blackfoot Confederacy.³⁰

The 1916 memoirs of Superintendent Richard Burton Deane, often a thorn in the side of Commissioner Herchmer, serve as both a supplement to existing publications,

²⁸ This is but a brief overview of the memoirs published during the time period of interest to this thesis. Many other memoirs were published by members of the NWMP, RNWMP, and RCMP, including Cecil Denny, *The Law Marches West* (Toronto: J. M. Dent, 1939, reprinted, 1972),

²⁹ His memoirs were used to an almost unquestioned extent by Robert Stewart in *Sam Steele: Lion of the Frontier* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1979)

³⁰ Samuel Benfield Steele, *Forty Years in Canada: Reminiscences of the Great North-West with some account of his service in South Africa* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1972), 276 and see Treaty 7 Elders and Tribal Council with Walter Hildebrandt, Dorothy First Rider and Sarah Carter, *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 69 and 126

but also as a counterpoint to official records. Deane filled his memoirs with the cases and men he encountered, as well as his strongly argued opinions for significant change in the organization. Upon his engagement in 1883, the force dealt with its members and addressed its duties in what Deane described as a “go as you please” fashion, with no structure in place until he was tasked by Herchmer to write the standing orders which were put in place in the late 1880s.³¹ The regulations were necessary, Deane believed, to the running of such an organization. In fact, he believed in 1912, after his discharge, that “Canadians... may as well face the unquestionable fact that the force is now on the down-grade and should be abolished before its reputation is long gone”.³² This last statement was inspired by what Deane saw as lowered standards and expectations for members in the NWMP, even more so than the men who were engaged between 1883 and 1887. Deane certainly had little esteem for later members of the NWMP, a point of view echoed by Sergeant John Donkin.

John Donkin was an English immigrant who had come to Canada because of what he described as the “advertising genius who had induced him to emigrate”.³³ In providing his first-hand account of a sergeant’s service in the NWMP, published in 1889, Donkin explained that there were all sorts of men that made up its ranks. Yet, “there were none of the questionable characters, men, who crept in after the Rebellion, when recruiting parties went through the slums of Ontario towns”.³⁴ Donkin dramatized and personalized, like his fellow memoirists, a force that had already captured the imagination of people around the world.

³¹ Richard Burton Deane, *Mounted Police Life in Canada A Record of Thirty-One Years’ Service* (Toronto: Cassell, 1916), 5.

³² Deane, *Mounted Police Life*, 9.

³³ John C. Donkin, *Trooper and Redskin in the Far North West Recollections of Life in the North West Mounted Police, Canada, 1884-1888* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1889), 5

³⁴ Donkin, *Trooper and Redskin*, 37

The 1885 Northwest Campaign remains a topic that is fraught with various interpretations in the historiography, especially on the role of the NWMP in the lead-up to and during the campaign. Desmond Morton, in *A Military History of Canada*, argued that the “prestige and self-confidence of the NWMP had largely dissolved by 1883” and the 1885 conflict “brought little glory.”³⁵ These claims would be contested by several historians, most notably Jim Wallace and Don Klancher. Wallace, a retired member of the Canadian Armed Forces, wrote several tomes on the history of the NWMP, including the March West of 1874 and the establishment of Canadian sovereignty in the Yukon.³⁶ Wallace found that 10 percent of the men in the Northwest Field Force, and 15 percent of all casualties, were members of the NWMP, figures which he believed would refute claims that the NWMP’s participation had been “insignificant”.³⁷ Secondly, Wallace traced the intricate military history of the NWMP during the Campaign, and examined, for example, what was seen as Superintendent Leif Crozier’s defeat at Duck Lake, as well as Inspector Francis Dickens’s escape from Fort Pitt. Wallace was careful to portray the individuals fairly, but in shedding light on the reviled characters of the NWMP, he shifted the blame on other individuals, such as the Lieutenant Governor of the Northwest Territories, Edgar Dewdney, and Major General Middleton.

Donald Klancher, a retired Inspector of the RCMP and author of several books on the history of the mounted police, similarly took on the topic of the Northwest

³⁵ Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1999), 100.

³⁶ Jim Wallace, *A Double Duty The Decisive First Decade of the North West Mounted Police* (Winnipeg: Bunker to Bunker Books, 1997) and Jim Wallace, *Forty Miles to Bonanza The North-West Mounted Police in the Klondike Goldrush* (Calgary: Bunker to Bunker Books, 2000).

³⁷ Jim Wallace, *A Trying Time The North-West Mounted Police in the 1885 Rebellion* (Winnipeg: Bunker to Bunker Books, 1998), preface and 105.

Campaign.³⁸ Basing his work on correspondence, memoirs, and sessional papers, Klancher retraced the campaign from start to end. His book is characterized by lengthy passages taken from the primary sources, as Klancher hoped the official record, as well as the compilation of an official nominal roll of all NWMP members participating in the campaign, would speak to the important contributions of the force. As Klancher concluded “the true worth of the NWMP in coping with the rebellion [would] likely never be appreciated.”³⁹ Essentially, Morton, Wallace, and Klancher typified the historiography of the NWMP during the campaign, which characterized the force as either an organization lost in defeat, or, in an attempt at historical redemption, as an essential participant to an important event in Canadian history.

This very popularization of the mounted police, and the historical interpretation and evolution of the image of the force, has been at the heart of two important studies. In *Visions of Order*, Keith Walden identified the problem clearly in his preface, as he found “the vast amount of basically repetitive material about the Mounties” was ripe for analysis.⁴⁰ Walden argued that the mounted police represented an internationally recognized symbol of law, justice, truth, morality, and order, and fulfilled the particular western requirement to answer these societal requirements. Writing in 1982, Walden was also influenced by the upheavals of the McDonald Commission, which investigated perceived illegal activities by the RCMP’s Security Service, as he argued that the image

³⁸ See Roger F Phillips and Donald J Klancher, *Arms and Accoutrements of the Mounted Police, 1873-1973 The First One Hundred Years* (Bloomfield, ON: Museum Restoration Service, 1982); Donald J. Klancher and J D Hearfield, *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police A Bibliography* (Ottawa: RCMP, 1979), Donald J Klancher, *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans’ Association, 1924-1999* (Kamloops, BC: Mounted Police Research and Consulting, 1999), Donald J Klancher, *Insignia of the Canadian Mounted Police, 1873-1998* (Kamloops, BC: Mounted Police Research and Consulting, 2009)

³⁹ Donald J Klancher, *The North West Mounted Police and the North West Rebellion* (Kamloops, BC: Goss Publishing, 1999), 69

⁴⁰ Keith Walden, *Visions of Order: The Canadian Mounties in Symbol and Myth* (Toronto: Butterworth’s, 1982), vii

of the mounted policeman would be transformed by these events and society's changes in a post-1960s world.

While Walden wrote a more philosophical treatise, Michael Dawson instead looked at the various ways the mounted police myth permeated cultural pursuits. In *The Mounties from Dime Novel to Disney*, Dawson charted the evolving image of the force, with its eventual embrace by English Canadians as a symbol of the "Anglo-Saxon ideal" and Canadian superiority over the United States.⁴¹ Ironically, it was largely due to American interest that the Mountie image grew in popularity. Dawson dedicated a considerable amount of time exploring the Mountie myths created by Hollywood studies, relying heavily on Pierre Berton's seminal *Hollywood's Canada: The Americanization of our National Image*, as well as the much publicized "deal with Disney" to protect the RCMP's image in the mid-1990s.⁴² Overall, Dawson made an excellent addition to the gradually growing historical research that is now focused on smaller facets of the NWMP/RNWMP/RCMP, rather than holistic overviews that were present in the early to mid twentieth century.

In 1998, William Baker edited a collection of articles by leading Canadian academics, including Hugh Dempsey, R.C. Macleod, and Desmond Morton, as well as RCMP historians William Beahen, Stanley Horrall, and Carl Betke. These articles were diverse explorations of themes in the early years of the North-West and Royal North-West Mounted Police. The volume explored aboriginal relations, the reality of law enforcement, interaction with social groups, culture and image, and the transformation

⁴¹ Michael Dawson, *The Mountie from Dime Novel to Disney* (Toronto: Between the Lines Publishing, 1998), 53 and 67

⁴² Pierre Berton, *Hollywood's Canada: The Americanization of our National Image* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975).

of the force that in essence mirrored the transformation of prairie society. The articles moved away from the “episodic, nostalgic, eulogistic, antiquarian, non-scholarly, romantic and heroic historiography”.⁴³ Morton explored the “benevolent despotism” exerted by the force in its early years, while Macleod found the mounted police spent its efforts at controlling more violent behavior and shied away from enforcing laws “of a moral nature”.⁴⁴

In 2007, University of Nebraska professor Andrew Graybill published *Policing the Great Plains: Rangers, Mounties, and the North-American Frontier, 1875-1910*. Graybill applied the borderlands approach to his research, which looks past human-constructed international borders and instead researches Canadian-American themes through specific geographic sectors. In his comparative analysis of the mounted police and the Texas Rangers, Graybill did find that the NWMP “resorted to far less violence”, due to the members’ “elite class backgrounds”, which is refuted in the research at hand, and the “timing of Anglo settlement in the Canadian west.”⁴⁵ Graybill echoed R.C. Macleod’s earlier arguments that the mounted police had accomplished much in the way of setting up western settlement in Canada. Graybill also argued against what he termed Desmond Morton’s view of a “reckless and cowardly” force during the Northwest Campaign in 1885, as well as the interpretation of John Jenning in his unpublished doctoral thesis that had called the “contributions of the mounted police insignificant.”⁴⁶

⁴³ William Baker, “Twenty-five Years After: Mounted Police Historiography Since the 1973-74 Centennial of the Force”, in William Baker, ed., *The Mounted Police and Prairie Society, 1873-1919* (Regina. Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 1998), vii

⁴⁴ Desmond Morton, “Cavalry or Police. Keeping the Peace on Two Adjacent Frontiers, 1870-1900”, and R.C. Macleod, “Crime and Criminals in the North-West Territories, 1873-1905”, in William Baker, ed., *The Mounted Police and Prairie Society*, 4 and 94.

⁴⁵ Graybill, *Policing the Great Plains*, 21

⁴⁶ Graybill, *Policing the Great Plains*, 90. Graybill refuted arguments from Desmond Morton, *The Last War Drum The North-West Campaign of 1885*, (Toronto: Hakkert, 1972) as well as John Nelson

In the end, Graybill's use of the borderlands approach, as well as an economic model in understanding government and policing actions in the US and Canada, made his book a significant addition to the existing historiography

Also in 2007, Carleton University professor Zhiqiu Lin explored the sociological aspects of the Alberta and Saskatchewan Provincial Police forces. These policing organizations were formed in 1917 when the RNWMP and Canadian government did not renew contracts with the provincial governments, and were eventually absorbed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in 1928 (Saskatchewan) and 1932 (Alberta). While Lin's research scope falls outside of the time period of the present study, his model was an informative foray into the sociological context of policing organizations in Canada.

One could also turn to existing studies of other military organizations and campaigns to serve as models for a socio-cultural study. Jean-Pierre Gagnon, in *Le 22e Bataillon (Canadien-Français) 1914-1919* took as his starting point the historiographical debate about French-Canadian participation in the First World War. French Canadians were often portrayed in the historiography as having a low participation rate, and little research had been crafted on the social conditions of those French-Canadian soldiers who did join the war effort overseas.⁴⁷ One of the first writers to study the social aspects of the Canadian Forces, Gagnon's quantitative study explored not only the demographic profiles of these members, but also their training, recreation, and trench life, as well as the humour, music, and overall psychological impact that provide a well-rounded image of men in warfare. Gagnon dedicated the last two chapters of his work to the social

Jennings, "The North West Mounted Police and Indian Policy, 1874-1896" PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1979

⁴⁷ Jean Pierre Gagnon, *Le 22e Bataillon (Canadiens Français) 1914 1919* (Quebec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval et Ministère de la défense nationale, 1986), ix

profiling of the men of the 22nd, as he explored the ages, religion, birthplace, and residence of enlisted men, volunteers, non-commissioned officers, and officers. Unfortunately, the impressive statistics Gagnon has put together are presented without reference or any discussion of his methodology, elements which would have strengthened his narrative. Still, Gagnon provided excellent context in presenting his research findings, something that was lacking in a later study on the Canadian navy by David Zimmerman.

Zimmerman selected the Second World War period to study the Royal Canadian Navy, as “superficial evidence suggest[ed] that” this was where one could “see the emergence of a Canadian navy identity.”⁴⁸ Zimmerman studied the ages of the men and naval officers, their residence and birthplace, religion, occupation, and education, which were broken down by regional enclaves. However, his methodology was problematic. A random sampling was taken from personnel cards that contained demographic information; yet, Zimmerman never explained how random his selection was, nor how he approached cards which were not complete in information. Moreover, Zimmerman did not contextualize his research within the time period or the larger Canadian populace.

Carman Miller avoided such methodological problems in his research on the socio-economic makeup of Canadian troops who volunteered during the South African war at the turn of the twentieth century. Miller began his research with its limitations, namely, that his research rested “on the notion that socio-economic circumstances partially explain men’s behavior” and that “an examination of these circumstances can

⁴⁸ David Zimmerman, “The Social Background of the Wartime Navy: Some Statistical Data”, in Michael L. Hadley et al., eds, *A Nation’s Navy: In Quest of Canadian Naval Identity* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), 256

clarify the place and relative importance of some socio-psychological factors less susceptible to measurement.”⁴⁹ Miller based his research on the attestation papers of these soldiers, supplemented by 1901 census data and North-West Mounted Police files, leading to information on 5,825 soldiers out of a total of 7,368. Miller did not make a random sampling, and instead omitted data when it was not available. The statistical, quantitative model supported Miller’s findings that the most support and participation for the war came from “urban, white collar and British born” men, while “the young, Canadian born and blue collar workers” had “more mixed motives” such as a “sense of adventure, patriotism, and economic inducement.”⁵⁰ Miller’s empirical approach has significantly influenced the methodology of this particular study.

This thesis is organized in three separate chapters. In Chapter One, the demographic overview of the officers and men of the mounted police will be presented, including their age at enlistment, their birthplace, and residence. Special attention will also be paid to the various discharge rationales, as these are at the heart of explaining the temporary nature of service in the mounted police. This chapter will also address discipline within the ranks, as the NWMP fined and imprisoned its members for a litany of offences. The second chapter will independently assess the discharge rationales and demographics of members once individually calculated by birthplace, residence, and occupation. The findings of these two chapters will also be contextualized against the societal makeup of Canada as gleaned in the 1881 and 1891 census. The third chapter

⁴⁹ Carman Miller, “A Preliminary Analysis of the Socio-economic Composition of Canada’s South African War Contingents”, *Histoire sociale – Social History*, Volume 8, Number 16, November 1975, 219.

⁵⁰ Miller, “A Preliminary Analysis”, 237

offers a comparative analysis of the commissioned officers, as opposed to the enlisted men.

This holistic review of the men of the mounted during the mid 1880s will help portray an organization that was filled with men working on a temporary and brief basis. Problems of retention and recruitment were at the forefront of the administration's efforts, but the time period 1883 to 1887 helps create a view of the men of the mounted that is vastly different from romantic myth and folklore.

Chapter 1: Harsh, Temporary and Transient Service

The establishment of the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) and its dispatch west led to a growth in population in the North-West Territories, and the mounted police were at the heart of the region's transformation. Therefore, any study of the men of the mounted police is also a study of the early settlers in the lands recently acquired from the Hudson Bay Company. This chapter will present an overview of the more than eleven hundred men who enlisted in the NWMP between the years 1883 and 1887. While a heroic myth surrounds the men of the force in this era, the reality is much different than that of the sweeping, romantic image of the organization portrayed in popular culture. R.C. Macleod has already established that the mounted police were effective in the maintenance of law and order during the time period.⁵¹ The present study looks at the members themselves, and finds that, in large part, the men were ordinary individuals with no formal training who decided to join an unproven, small organization for a brief time period. In fact, it is astonishing that the organization was so effective in enforcing laws and regulations when it had to deal with an ever-changing and untrained work force.

Since its inception in 1873, the NWMP had relied on annual recruitment drives to fill its ranks. By 1883, members were still being selected mainly from eastern Canada, with relatively few taken from the west. Men enlisting between 1883 and 1887 needed to be between the ages of twenty-two and forty, to be "active able-bodied men of thoroughly sound constitution", produce a "certificate of exemplary character", read and

⁵¹ R.C. Macleod, *The North-West Mounted Police and Law Enforcement, 1873-1905* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976).

write in either English or French, be a minimum height of 5 feet 6 inches, and weigh a maximum of 175 pounds. In 1887, the height minimum rose to 5 feet 8 inches, and the age of the enlisted member was to be studied on an individual basis.⁵² Besides asking if a member had previous military or equine experience, there were no further requirements for a recruit, nor were any expectations discussed at the onset of engagement. Men joining the force were to perform the work required of a mounted policeman, in return for wages, lodging, food, and medical care. It was hoped that these ideal men, who were granted 160 acres of land at the completion of their service term, would form the basis of Canadian western society. Thus, just as the Government sought “reliable men” to go west and settle homesteads to create a “society worthy of the British Empire”⁵³, so did they set similar goals for the men who would be enlisted in the mounted police. While these limited hiring controls were broadly in place during the enlistment drives of the time period, it will be shown that some men did not meet these requirements. An overview of the men’s occupations, ages, religion, and place of origin shows little resemblance to the romantic, ideal “man of the mounted”.

Occupational History

While there were no set requirements for the occupation and backgrounds of men joining the mounted police, Commissioner Acheson Gosford Irvine and later Commissioner Lawrence William Herchmer championed the enlistment of farmers’ sons, who appeared hardworking and who could, it was believed, efficiently learn the

⁵² William Beahen and Stanley Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies The North-West Mounted Police, 1886-1900* (Regina. Centax Books, 1998), 172.

⁵³ Doug Owsram, *Promise of Eden The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 103-104 and 126

tasks of the mounted policeman. Out of the 1198 member files of enlisted men surveyed for the present study, 1145 files had information on previous occupation of members. Of these, the largest pre-enlistment occupation belonged to farmers. Throughout the five-year period, 235 farmers were engaged in the force. While excluding the fifty-three members whose previous occupations were not identified, this represents 20 percent of all enlisted men.⁵⁴ In comparison, the 1891 Census had counted 761,839 farmers and 408,738 farm labourers, which accounted for approximately 12 percent of the population.⁵⁵ This statistic shows that the mounted police in fact may have had a greater concentration of farm labourers as compared to the greater Canadian population of the time.

Interestingly enough, former soldiers were only the second most common occupation for those joining the ranks. Due to the paramilitary nature of the NWMP, former soldiers proved to be desirable candidates for recruiters. One hundred and nineteen members were considered professional soldiers, or more than 10 percent of new recruits. Other members cited military service outside their main former occupation, and are calculated separately. These one hundred and nineteen men include those who listed experience in various military occupations. Among them were twenty-nine who listed their occupation in the British Navy, three students of the Royal Military College, one bugler, one trumpeter, and one master gunner. These soldiers came from various Canadian and British regiments. However, there were also six members from the American, two from the French, and one from the Russian armed forces. Foreign

⁵⁴ All statistical data has been gathered from the member files of the North-West Mounted Police, held at LAC, Record Group 18, Volumes 10039 to 10042. See the appendices for an overview of the statistics gathered from these files

⁵⁵ Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *General Report of the Census of Canada, 1891*, Volume III (Ottawa, 1893), 185

nationals easily joined the ranks of the mounted police, as will be demonstrated below in a discussion of the birthplace of members

Another important skill required of all members joining the force was the ability to ride and care for horses. Ninety-nine members listed occupations that were specifically centered on equine care, including thirty-two teamsters, thirty grooms, six stable hands, six horse keepers, five saddlers, five coachmen, four harness makers, four horse trainers, two footmen, one breeder, and one farrier.

General labourers were the fourth largest group represented in the enlisted ranks. Totalling seventy-six members, they accounted for almost 7 percent of all enlisted men. This does not taken into account other labourers who identified their particular skill set and profession, such as lumbermen, carpenters, bricklayers, and coachmen. The use of such a general term upon enlistment leads one to conclude that these individuals were itinerant workers with no particular trade. Such an image also fits the overall finding that employment with the mounted police was merely temporary.

Men who had previous experience as clerks were the fifth-largest group represented. Seventy-three out of the 1145 men had served in a variety of administrative office tasks. This white-collar work was an obvious deviation from what the men were expected to accomplish out west. After all, Commissioner Irvine had specifically instructed that the recruiters should seek men with calluses to show their experience with manual work, something that was expected of all mounted policemen during the time period.⁵⁶

Next were those with specific trades, including blacksmiths, at thirty-eight members, and carpenters at thirty-six. These skilled labourers were actually often

⁵⁶ Beahen and Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 171

employed within the NWMP to undertake the same occupations they had prior to joining the organization. In addition to their policing duties, these men could earn an extra fifty cents per day for performing duties linked to their previous trades. This was mostly due to the dearth of skilled tradesmen in the west at this time, the need for the force to be self-reliant, and the fact that the NWMP had to build and maintain the necessary infrastructure to allow them to police the Northwest Territories.⁵⁷

With the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) in 1885, twenty-eight former “railroaders” joined the NWMP. The men that joined from the CPR were already in the west, thereby saving the government the money required to transport them. Several other occupations that sprang up in the west fed the NWMP, including twenty-eight lumbermen, twelve ranchers, seven cattle drivers, five herders, and nine miners.

As demonstrated, a variety of workers joined the NWMP. In addition to those enumerated above, there were eighteen painters, seventeen bakers, fifteen butchers, eleven machinists, eight millers, seven printers, six boilermakers, and five plumbers. Other occupations in the single digits included shoemakers, surveyors, bricklayers, cabinet makers, cooks, barbers, fishermen, telegraph operators, grocers, watchmakers, billiard makers, cigar makers, scouts, servants, soap makers, upholsterer, and even one man who had worked in a travelling circus.

Miscellaneous occupations were also represented. There were thirty students, and an additional eleven who were medical students. There were fourteen bookkeepers, nine druggists, fifteen engineers, twelve employed in various commercial enterprises, six bankers, three civil servants, three law students, two chemists, and three

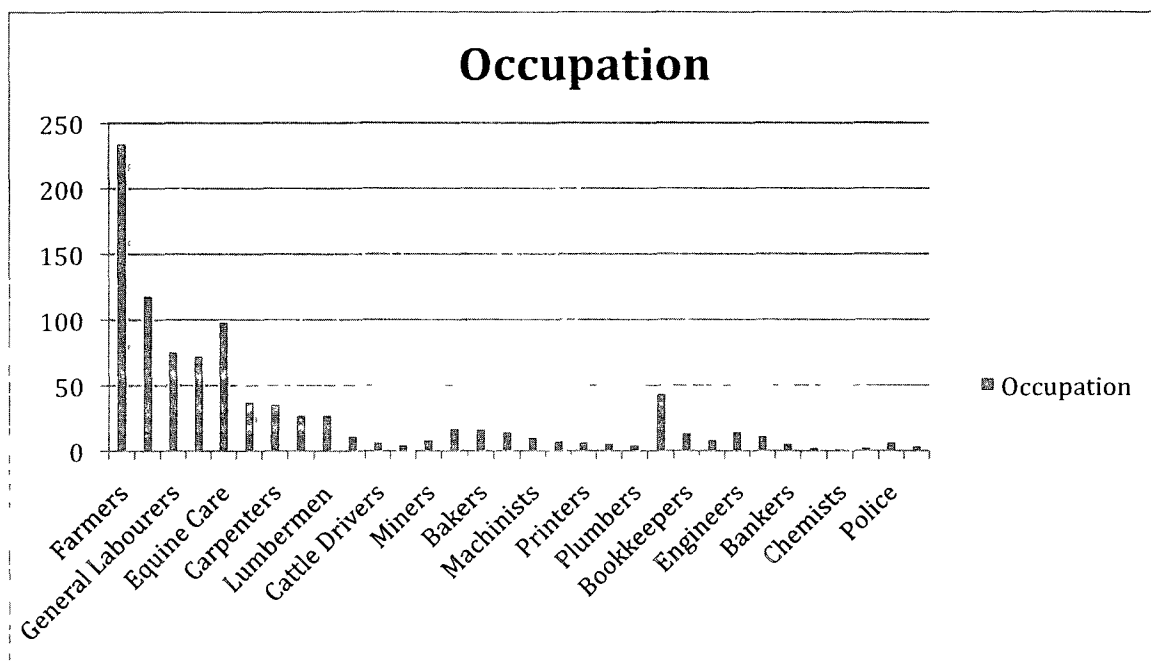
⁵⁷ Beahen and Hovell, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 182

schoolmasters⁵⁸ There were, in the low single digits, accountants, architects, lawyers, business students, scholars, and a veterinarian Slightly out of place for the mounted police was the florist who joined for a five-year term of service⁵⁹ Defying the stereotype, men with strong educational backgrounds, who likely had no military or physical labour experience, were nevertheless well represented within the ranks of the NWMP in the mid 1880s

Clearly, there were no set previous employment trends for the men who joined It can be deduced from such findings that the vast majority of men joining the organization had no contributing experience or relevant training upon enlistment Only 10 percent of all enlisted men had military instruction, and far fewer had any policing experience There were a total of six policemen who joined, two from the London Metropolitan Police, one from Madras Police, one from the Natal Mounted Police, one from the Royal Irish Constabulary, and one from the Dublin Police There were also four firemen, and sixteen former members of the NWMP who rejoined the organization between 1883 and 1887 These former members had each served a previous service term between 1873 and 1883

⁵⁸ While the term 'chemist' could also be used to describe a 'druggist' during the time period, this paper has made the conscious choice to use the specified terminology from the files, rather than presume the profession of the member

⁵⁹ William Herbert Soare Regimental Number 1889, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10042



In total, less than 1 percent of those who joined during the time period in question had previous policing experience. Certain occupations, such as the skilled labourers, proved invaluable in making the force self-sustaining in the developing west. On the other hand, it also presented the organization with a significant challenge in terms of training over one thousand men in a five-year period. No formal instruction had existed prior to 1885. In that year Commissioner Irvine created “Depot” division in Regina, where all recruits would receive training based on the Royal Irish Constabulary model.⁶⁰

As a product of the time period, there still were numerous men who had previous military experience. On the enlisted forms completed by all new recruits, the mounted police requested both information on their occupation, and if they had completed any military service. Once all those who listed a professional military occupation are removed, there were still 433 men who listed some form of previous experience in the

⁶⁰ Beahen and Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 12.

military. This represents about 42 percent of all members studied. This number could also have been slightly higher, as there were several forms on which the section on military experience was left blank, without any affirmative or negative response. While previous military service did not necessarily lend itself directly to the work accomplished by the force, some military background obviously proved helpful in surmounting the harsher realities of mounted police life in the mid 1880s.

Birthplace and Last Residence

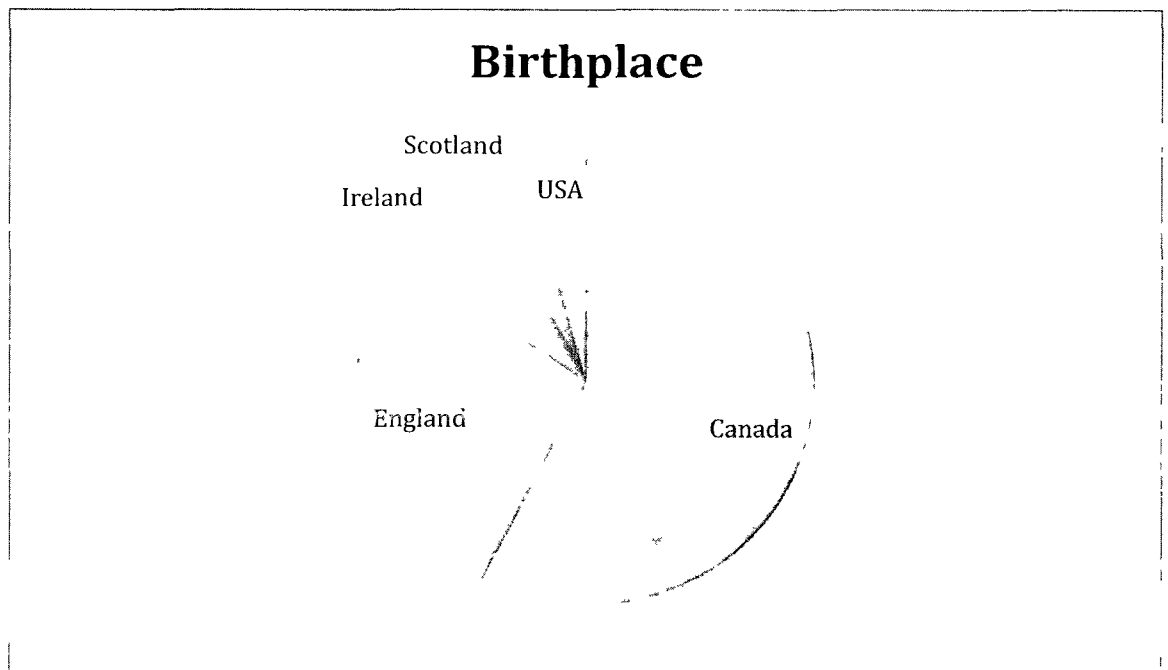
In addition to listing previous military experience, the forms used by recruiters sought to record the birthplace for enlisted men. Not surprisingly, 594 of the enlisted men, or over 56 percent, were born in Canada. Coming second to those born in Canada were those born in England, 277 total members, Ireland, seventy-five members, and Scotland, thirty-nine members. Accordingly, 37 percent of all enlisted men during the time period were born in the British Isles. R.C. Macleod found an increase in British-born recruits between 1877 and 1888, finding them more desirable to the authorities as they usually stayed longer in service with the mounted police.⁶¹ Of course, there were other immigrants who eagerly joined the NWMP. As recruits, the men were required to take an oath to Queen Victoria, which quelled any official concerns over hiring men born in different countries.⁶² There were forty-six men who were born in the United States, as well as a handful from France, Australia, Denmark, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Norway, Spain, and South Africa. Some of these men had previous military

⁶¹ Macleod, *The NWMP and Law Enforcement*, 82.

⁶² Horrall and Beahen, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 171.

service in their home country, and sought to join the NWMP upon arrival in Canada.

Others had already been in Canada for a number of years.



Representing 69 percent of all files, 826 men entered information on their previous residence. Recruiters had been given specific instructions to look for hardy farmers and sons of farmers from Ontario, as Commissioner Herchmer, himself a farmer from Ontario, had written that “it is [to] the farmers’ sons raised in the Dominion that I should like to look for the majority of our recruits; this recruit understands the care of horses and is accustomed to hard outdoor work, to the climate and to taking care of himself in any situation.”⁶³ Herchmer’s orders are partly reflected among those who were engaged during the time period. Of these, 491 were from Ontario, or 59 percent of applicants citing the appropriate information. Surprisingly, in his memoirs, former NWMP constable John Donkin had derided the men of “questionable characters” who

⁶³ *Report of the Commissioner of the North-West Mounted Police Force, 1886* (Ottawa: MacLean, Rogie & Co., 1887), 11.

joined after 1885 from “the slums of Ontario towns”.⁶⁴ Despite this, such men made up the majority of those enlisted during the time period, and it will later be shown that the majority from Ontario were indeed farmers. These Ontario residents were specifically targeted through recruitment drives, but they could also have solicited service in the mounted police. While greater than half of Ontario’s working men were farmers, new land was hard to come by after 1854.⁶⁵ Therefore, men who were unable to inherit or purchase property in Ontario might have sought service in the force in order to gain a land grant and establish themselves in the North-West Territories.

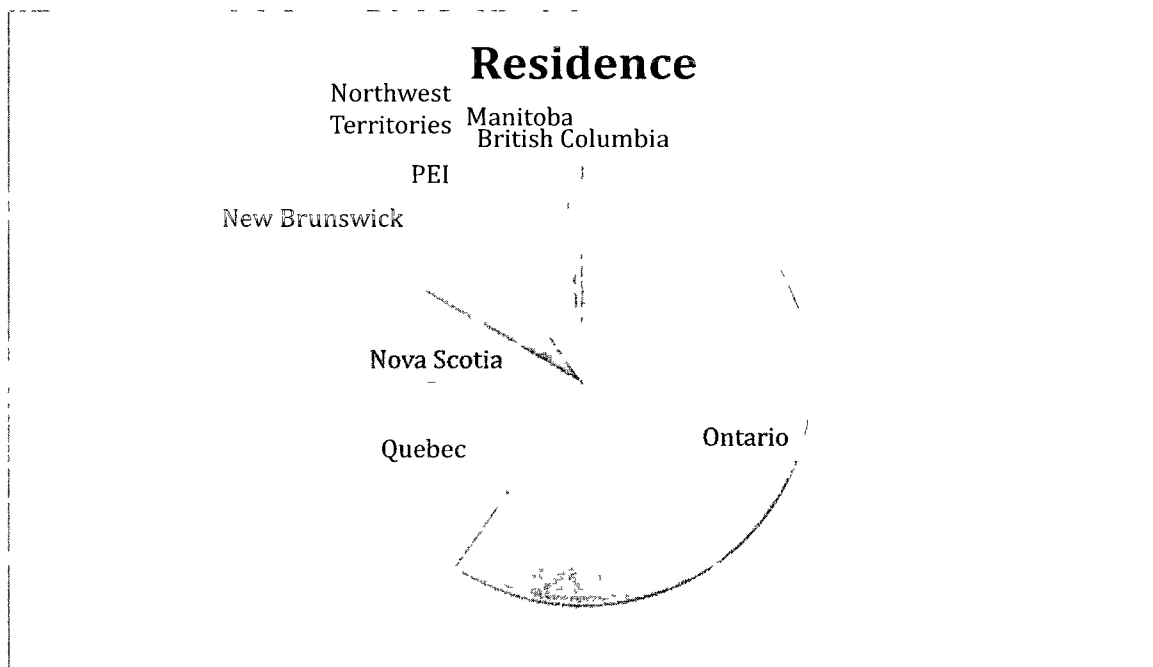
Also from Central Canada, 130 were from Quebec, accounting for almost 16 percent of men engaged by the NWMP. Regrettably, the forms completed during enlistment and service did not specifically identify the primary language of applicants, thus limiting any findings on the French- and English-speaking duality within the NWMP. However, it is interesting to note that only three files had documentation completely answered by applicants in French.⁶⁶ While a mere three members are very few compared to the eleven hundred files reviewed, these do show that the NWMP did hire according to its initial standard to enlist either “French- or English-speaking” members. Still, it is possible, perhaps likely, that these three French speakers also had some working knowledge of English. The Atlantic Provinces were well represented, with sixty-nine from Nova Scotia, fifty-seven from New Brunswick, and two from PEI. There were thirty-nine from the Northwest Territories, twenty-eight from Manitoba, and

⁶⁴ John G. Donkin, *Trooper and Redskin in the Far North-West: Recollections of Life in the North-West Mounted Police, Canada, 1884-1888* (Toronto: Coles Publishing, 1973), 26

⁶⁵ Gordon Darroch and Lee Soltow, *Property and Inequality in Victorian Ontario: Structural Patterns and Cultural Communities in the 1871 Census* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 6 and 163

⁶⁶ “Philippe Casault”, Regimental Number 1342, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10041, “Felix Champagne”, Regimental Number 1769, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10042, and “Maxime Depres”, Regimental Number 1784, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10042

ten from British Columbia. In time, however, the government grew to favour men for whom the cost of transportation to bring them to their areas of operation was significantly less than for those from eastern Canada. Moreover, eastern political influence was more limited in the selection of candidates, a subject discussed in greater detail below.⁶⁷

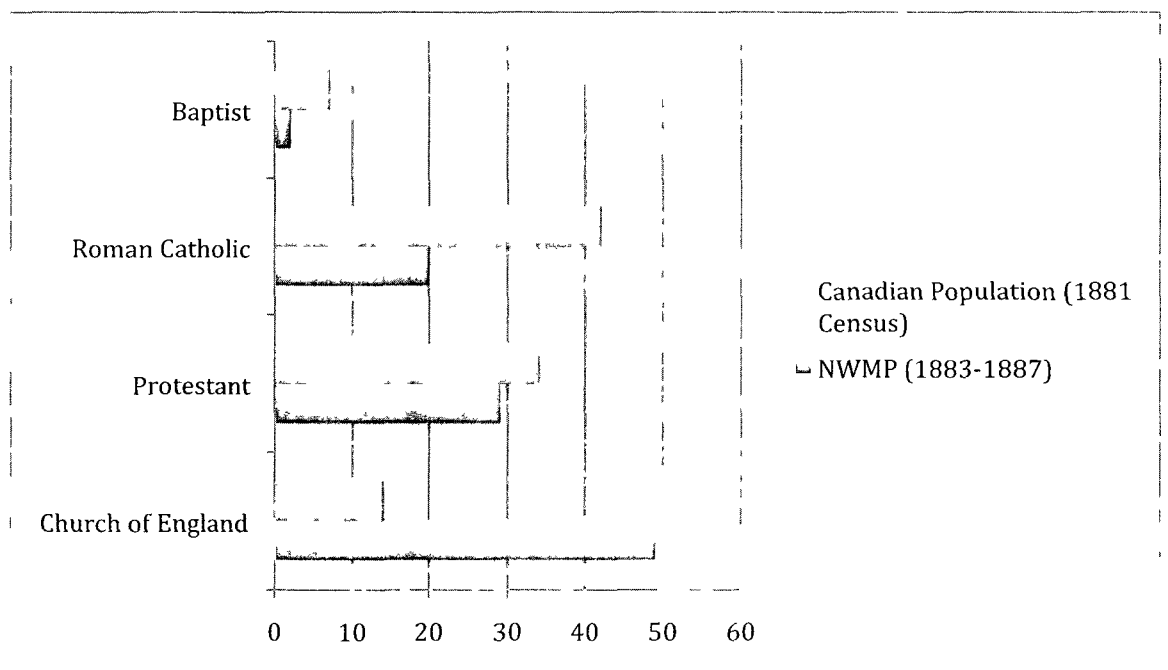


Religion and Age

Religion mirrored the trends that existed in the birthplace and residence of enlisted men. Out of the 894 member files with information on religious affiliation, over 440 were practicing members of the Church of England. This represented 49 percent of all enlisted men. There were 262 members who fell within the wider scope of Protestantism, for 29 percent of members, including 139 Presbyterians, ninety-one Methodists, twenty-five Baptists, and sixteen Episcopalians (American Anglican). The

⁶⁷ Macleod, *The NWMP and Law Enforcement*, 96.

Roman Catholic faith had a total of 179 members, or 20 percent of reviewed files. Less numerous were the minor religions encompassing 2 percent of files, including seven men who practiced Lutheranism, the four Wesleyan congregants, and the single Quaker and Unitarian. These statistics were not representative of the wider Canadian population. The 1881 Canadian Census individually recorded all religious faiths and their followers throughout Canada. Accordingly, it can be established that there were disproportionate numbers of Anglicans and the Protestant faith in general in the NWMP, and far fewer Roman Catholic, Baptist, and Methodist followers. This was likely due to the fact that the NWMP recruited heavily from first- and second-generation English families, thus explaining the high concentration of Church of England congregants, and less from French Canadians and Irish-Catholic immigrants. There appear to have been no Jewish adherents enlisting during this time period.



Contrast of Religions between Canadian Population (1881) and the NWMP (1883-1887), in percentage

The NWMP also attracted younger men, due to the age and marital restrictions in place, as well as the nature of mounted police life. Over 68 percent of those surveyed were aged between twenty and twenty-five when they joined the organization. In direct comparison, the 1881 Census counted only 11 percent of all Canadians between those ages.⁶⁸ Another 16 percent were aged between twenty-five and thirty, while about seventy out of 1162 files with information recorded were under the age of twenty. There were eighty-one men who were aged between thirty-one and thirty-five, and twenty-eight joined between the ages of thirty-six and forty. There were also some exceptions to the age limits, as there were two forty-two year old men who were engaged, as well as one fifty-two year-old, John Brennan. Brennan, a career British soldier who had been awarded the Afghan Medal, had lied on his application, stating that he was thirty-four. It was only three years into his service that his real age was discovered. The NWMP then declared him “useless and worthless”, and invalidated him.⁶⁹ Brennan’s case was very particular, as Commissioner Herchmer personally interceded to have him removed from the organization. This decision might have been based more on seeking an excuse to remove him, rather than on his age.

Length of Service and Discharge

Overall, the statistics presented on the length of service and rationales for discharge clearly indicate that enlistees rarely saw the NWMP as a career. While these numbers are surprising, they are comparable to the rates seen for the time period in the Royal Irish Constabulary, as well as the municipal police forces in Hamilton and

⁶⁸ Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *General Report of the Census of Canada, 1880-81*, 54-55

⁶⁹ “John Brennan”, Regimental Number 1618, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10041

Toronto.⁷⁰ These forces experienced high turnover due to low pay and poor uniforms, and it was found that these young men had, in the words of historian John Weaver, “little opportunity to have formed a strong attachment to a trade”, and found it easy to move on to different occupations and economic pursuits.⁷¹

In the NWMP, only 4 percent of all cases were pensioned, while the majority served for approximately one five-year term before their service term either expired or was cut short due to a purchase or desertion. Upon taking office in 1886, Commissioner Herchmer had decided to institute a pension system to decrease turnover and increase the retention of “good men.”⁷² By looking at the men who joined shortly before and during his term of office, it would appear that his efforts took a long time to take effect on the organization.

Once engaged, the average member served approximately five years, which was the basic length of service imposed on each new recruit. Interestingly enough, there were more men who served less than five years than those who served for five years or longer. Sixteen members served less than one month. Serving fewer than 180 days were eighty-nine men, and ninety-three served less than one year. There were 145 men who served less than two years, 122 less than three years, and 179 between four and four and a half years. When added together, 644 men served less than five years, or about 56 percent of the 1145 files with information on length of service. Only 285 men served out the full five-year service but no longer. Extended service within the enlisted ranks was a rarity.

⁷⁰ See Greg Marquis, “Policing Two Imperial Frontiers: The Royal Irish Constabulary and the North-West Mounted Police”, in Louis A. Knafla and Jonathan Swanger, eds, *Laws and Societies in the Canadian Prairie West, 1670-1940*, (Vancouver. UBC Press, 2005), John C Weaver, *Crimes, Constables and Courts Order and Transgression in a Canadian City, 1816-1970* (Montreal. McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995), and Greg Marquis, “Working Men in Uniform: The Earl 20th Century Toronto Police”, *Histoire sociale – Social History*, Volume 20, November 1987, 259-277

⁷¹ Weaver, *Crimes, Constables and Courts*, 130

⁷² Beahen and Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 184.

Only 111 men served more than five years and less than ten years of service, or about 10 percent

Obviously, few enlistees made a career in the mounted police. Only twenty-eight men served between eleven and fifteen years of service, twenty-nine between fifteen and twenty years, and twenty-nine between twenty and twenty five years. There were twelve who served between twenty-five and thirty years, one with more than thirty years, and seven who served more than thirty five years. There was also one member, William Angus Cunning, who served forty-four years. Cunning's length of service can also be credited to the fact that he was commissioned from the enlisted ranks, and made inspector⁷³

The statistics clearly demonstrate that time within the force was temporary and often used as a stepping stone to a more permanent career elsewhere. Commissioner Herchmer himself noted in the 1886 NWMP Annual Report that

The short term of five years does not permit us to keep these trained men a sufficient time in the service, the best and smartest generally, after one period, decline to reengage, as there is nothing to look forward to, at the expiration of five years they are generally young men feeling able to turn their hands to anything⁷⁴

Retention was a significant problem for the organization. With constant turnover and inexperienced recruits, the mounted police was frequently accepting new members with fewer senior members in place to assist with overall law enforcement. Retention problems were not a new phenomenon for the time period, as over half of recruits from

⁷³ "William Angus Cunning", Regimental Number 2006 and O 220, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10042

⁷⁴ *Report of the Commissioner of the North West Mounted Police Force 1886* 11

1873 had left within two years.⁷⁵ Upon becoming Commissioner, Herchmer decided to establish a system of pensions that would entice men to stay. However, this system was only put in place in 1889, and it would take several years before the transitory nature of mounted police service would change.⁷⁶

Members who served more than fifteen years with a good conduct rating were eligible for pension. Of the men studied from 1883 to 1887, only fifty-four were pensioned, constituting 4 percent of service files for whom such information existed. These fifty-four men had conduct described variously as exemplary, very good, good, and fair. This statistic becomes even starker when it is compared to the 3 percent of men who died in service and the 7 percent who were dismissed. The most common discharge rationale was for the expiration of a term of service. Out of the overall number of 1198 enlisted men, only 434 served until their term of service expired, for a total of 36 percent of all men. This included those who re-engaged for further terms of service.

Shockingly, 25 percent of all enlisted men deserted. The reasons for desertion were wide ranging. For example, John James McOrmond was a farmer from Scotland when he joined the mounted police. Upon arrival in the Northwest Territories, McOrmond was found to be “medically fit only for clerical duties”, and he chose to desert less than six months into his service term.⁷⁷ John Christopher Harstone had been promoted to corporal and placed in charge of Maple Creek detachment when he deserted after four years of service. His desertion came as a surprise, and it was later blamed on a gambling problem. Ironically, Harstone had been a twenty-two year old bookkeeper

⁷⁵ C.K. Talbot et al, *Canada's Constables: The Historical Development of Policing in Canada* (Ottawa: Crimcare, 1985), 57.

⁷⁶ Macleod, *The NWMP and Law Enforcement*, 164.

⁷⁷ “John James McOrmond”, Regimental Number 1006, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040.

when he had joined the NWMP.⁷⁸ Robert Bewick Quelch had shown promise within the ranks of the NWMP, and was promoted to corporal in 1886. Four months later, he was demoted for making false statements, and imprisoned for twelve months for “causing a disturbance in camp”. It was after his prison term was completed that the thirty-six year-old Quelch deserted from his posting at Golden City in British Columbia.⁷⁹

Commissioner Herchmer understood that desertion was a significant problem, one with the potential to cripple his force. Regulations amended in 1875 and later in 1886 called for upwards of a year of imprisonment for deserters, and fines ranging from a month’s salary (which averaged fifteen to forty-five dollars), to \$100 if the member was apprehended outside of the Northwest Territories.⁸⁰ The organization actively sought deserters within eastern and western Canada. However, Herchmer wisely understood that deterrence was not the only method to address desertion. He sought to improve the lives of members by opening recreational clubs and canteens, and as indicated above, also instituted a pension system. Herchmer was learning from the desertion problem faced by the militia. Often blamed on bad wages and living conditions, the Canadian militia had upwards of a 10 percent desertion rate on an annual basis.⁸¹ Herchmer also wished to make it easier to purchase a discharge. By purchasing a discharge, members were given a set sum to pay for the months that remained in their service term.⁸² But not all members were in a financial position to purchase their discharge, of course, and desertion often seemed their only recourse.

⁷⁸ “John Christopher Harstone”, Regimental Number 921, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040.

⁷⁹ “Robert Bewick Quelch”, Regimental Number 882, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10039.

⁸⁰ Beahen and Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 233.

⁸¹ Beahen and Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 242.

⁸² Beahen and Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 232.

William Niven, who had joined in 1883, requested to purchase his term of service three years later, as his mother was widowed and struggling financially. When he did not hear back about his request, he deserted from the force.⁸³ Similarly, Leon F. Dufourcy made application to purchase after he found himself “not suited for police duties”. While waiting for a response on his request, the twenty-year old former student deserted, after less than two years of service in the Northwest.⁸⁴ Alexander Henderson, a stonemason from Scotland, had almost three years of service when he deserted from the mounted police. The thirty-two year old had been granted leave to attend to urgent family matters in Scotland, but he never returned at the end of his leave period. Henderson later wrote to the mounted police to obtain a pardon, which was not granted.⁸⁵ According to the file for Charles Valentine Barrington, “pardons were granted solely to members of the Imperial Army, and then only when they returned to their regiments.” Barrington, a twenty-one year old clerk, had applied for a pardon after he deserted three months into his service term. He had made his application for a pardon through the British Embassy in Washington D.C., but his request was also denied.⁸⁶ These men had sought pardons because the NWMP Act specified disciplinary action and punishment for deserters that extended beyond their service dates. These examples demonstrate clearly how difficult it was to legitimately leave the force, even when rationales existed to allow members to purchase their discharge. Then again, there were many other members who simply found themselves unsuitable to the life of a mounted policeman, and who decided to desert.

⁸³ “William Niven”, Regimental Number 876, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10039.

⁸⁴ “Leon F. Dufourcy”, Regimental Number 998, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040.

⁸⁵ “Alexander Henderson”, Regimental Number 1033, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040

⁸⁶ “Charles Valentine Barrington”, Regimental Number 890, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10039.

Clarence A. Fisher joined the NWMP in 1885, a twenty-nine year-old horse keeper from Quebec. He deserted the following year from his posting in Calgary, was arrested approximately one year later, and was sentenced to a year in jail with hard labour. While in prison, he located a key and escaped from his leg irons. While running away, fellow constable John Charles Von Hemert shot him. Fisher recuperated from the gunshot wound in Regina, and after his release, rejoined the NWMP at Regina. While on a leave pass to Winnipeg, he deserted once again and fled to the United States.⁸⁷ The US border also played a factor in numerous other desertion cases. William Hart joined the NWMP in 1883 at the age of twenty-nine. The former soldier was accidentally shot during a kit inspection in 1884, and was given leave after his hospital stay. While visiting Winnipeg, he deserted to the US. Four months later, he was found in Manitoba and sent to Regina where he served a one-year prison term.⁸⁸ While the NWMP Act officially limited prosecution for desertion after a period of one year dating from the original expiration of their service term, the force still kept an eye out for any deserters. John Albert was a twenty-four year-old farmer from Ontario who joined the NWMP in 1884. One year later, he fled to the United States, and was not found. In 1887, he re-joined the force using the name “James Anderson”. He was identified a few days later as John Albert, and sentenced to six months in prison. After his imprisonment, he carried out the remainder of his service contract with the NWMP. However, in 1889, he met a woman and deserted with her to Ohio. In 1896, he returned to Canada and surrendered. He was once again imprisoned, this time for nine months, and then officially discharged. A few years later, he resurfaced in Ottawa where he was arrested for attempting to extort

⁸⁷ “Clarence Augustus Fisher”, Regimental Number 1242, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040

⁸⁸ “William Hart”, Regimental Number 914, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10039

prominent politicians⁸⁹ It is obvious from a close reading of the members' files that the image of the stoic Mountie bearing his lot with dignity found little echo in the actual activities of those enlisted at this time.

Alfred Brunson Hayes, a twenty-three year old telegraph operator from Ontario, had served less than one year when he attempted to desert from the NWMP He was eventually caught and arrested, but he escaped from prison and was not found again⁹⁰ Desertion also proved too tempting to John Cotter, a twenty-six year old printer from Quebec Constable Cotter had approximately two years of service when he deserted and was imprisoned After his prison term, he was returned to the Writing-On-Stone detachment in Alberta, where he once again deserted Cotter did not resurface following his last desertion attempt⁹¹ Echoing Cotter's actions, Emile Dubois deserted after about two years of service The then twenty-four year old labourer was born in Quebec, but had been residing in the United States Interestingly enough, Dubois was not the first nor last of the members who had dual Canadian and American residency, which is reflected in the previously discussed statistics He deserted from the force while on leave, and was found two weeks later Dubois was sentenced to a year of prison with hard labour and a ball and chain, but he still managed to escape from prison for a short while He was returned to jail with an additional two months of time and one week of only bread and water After his release from prison, Dubois was back on detachment duty where he deserted one final time⁹² Interestingly enough, Dubois's case received wide media attention, and was used as an example of Commissioner Herchmer's "tyrannical and

⁸⁹ "John Albert", Regimental Number 1023, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040

⁹⁰ "Alfred Brunson Hayes", Regimental Number 1042, LAC, RG 18 Volume 10040

⁹¹ "John Cotter", Regimental Number 1345 LAC, RG 18, Volume 10041

⁹² "Emile Dubois", Regimental Number 1538, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10041

unlawful conduct.”⁹³ Then again, these allegations had been made by the member of parliament for Assiniboia West, Nicholas Flood Davin, who had a personal feud with the Herchmer family. Commissioner Herchmer’s brother, Superintendent William Herchmer, had arrested Davin for public intoxication. Several years later, Davin began an inquiry into Commissioner Herchmer, who was eventually exonerated of all allegations.

There were some members who sought to leave through legitimate reasons. The best way to do so was by purchasing the remaining service contract. While Herchmer had initiated some measures to make purchasing the service term more accessible, only three men, in order of seniority, were permitted to do so on a monthly basis. Only 179 of the men were allowed to purchase the end of their contract, for a total of 15 percent of men engaged during the time period. Yet, not all purchases were straightforward. Alfred Harvey Delschlager was allowed to purchase his discharge after three years of service, as he had originally lied about his age on his application. The then seventeen year old had been underage, and had claimed a previous occupation of “machinist”.⁹⁴ Delschlager was allowed to leave the force before the expiration of his service term with relatively easy terms, due largely to the fact that he had deceived the organization upon his engagement.

Commissioner Herchmer also used the purchase option when he was displeased with certain enlisted men. Sergeant Warren Kerr had over thirteen years of service when Herchmer claimed he “had no control over his men”. The Commissioner referred to Kerr as “useless”, and demoted him to the rank of Constable. The Irishman had joined the

⁹³ Horrall and Beahen, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 237.

⁹⁴ “Alfred Harvey Delschlager”, Regimental Number 929, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040.

force at the age of twenty-three. After his demotion, Kerr applied for and was granted a purchase.⁹⁵ Staff Sergeant Walter Simpson was a forty-year-old Master Gunner in the Royal Navy when he joined the NWMP. Simpson had served only two years when Commissioner Herchmer decided to transfer him to Calgary in the spring of 1886. Herchmer had “lost confidence” in Simpson and it was alleged in his file summary that the Commissioner had purposefully sent him far away from his wife and six children, who were residing in Regina. Simpson therefore elected to purchase his discharge.⁹⁶ The use of political connections and acquaintances in government positions was an expected element for staffing all military and paramilitary organizations, and it was used to both join the NWMP and also to leave the force before the expiration of one’s service term.⁹⁷ William Stuart Townshend was a nineteen year-old medical student from Nova Scotia who used political pressure to leave the force. The NWMP had deemed Townshend an alcoholic, and he was allowed to purchase his discharge after only a year of service.⁹⁸

Significantly, about 10 percent of enlisted men during the period were invalided, or 115 of all cases. The force was careful to require all enlisted men to undergo medical examinations before their engagement. However, not all mistakes surfaced. Hedley Vicasis Pinsent was a twenty-year old clerk when he joined the NWMP in 1883. Three years later, he was invalided due to tuberculosis. In a report after the invalidation, the medical examiner, Dr. Alfred Codd, made the recommendation that the force include medical information during the examination for all recruits, as the previous questionnaire had not had any sections or questions dealing with a member’s family and

⁹⁵ “Warren Kerr”, Regimental Number 887, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10039

⁹⁶ “Walter Simpson”, Regimental Number 1028, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040

⁹⁷ Stephen J Harris, *Canadian Brass The Making of a Professional Army. 1860-1939* (Toronto University of Toronto Press, 1988), 23.

⁹⁸ “William Stuart Townshend”, Regimental Number 1205, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040

medical history⁹⁹ Richard Patrick O'Donoghue was a twenty-two year old saddler from Quebec when he joined the NWMP. Only twelve days into his service, O'Donoghue was invalided as his chest measurement was below the accepted size¹⁰⁰. Another member, William Baldwin Macleod, was initially rejected at his medical examination. However, NWMP Comptroller Fred White intervened and allowed the engagement of the twenty-year-old Ontario farmer. Macleod would go on to serve over twenty-three years, before being committed to the Brandon Hospital for the Insane. Macleod was pensioned one year after his stay at Brandon¹⁰¹. Mental health also played a role in the early invalidation for twenty-six year old Frank Lawton. The British sailor joined the NWMP in August 1885. Less than three weeks after his engagement, Lawton was invalided from the NWMP suffering from hallucinations and was "certified insane". After his discharge, he was transferred to an asylum in Manitoba for further treatment.

Other members invalided included those who were hurt in the performance of their duties. As Bill Beahen and Stan Horrall noted, the "most common cause of disablement were accidents involving horses or injuries caused by firearms"¹⁰². Joseph St Jacques was a twenty-three year old commercial agent from Quebec who served for approximately one year before being invalided. St Jacques had lost his right thumb, and was no longer able to fire a weapon, an important duty required of a mounted policeman¹⁰³. Another member, Seymour Jacob Huff, suffered a similar mishap. While conducting a patrol on a particularly cold day, Huff's finger froze, requiring amputation. The twenty-one year old from Ontario chose to remain in the NWMP, and served his full

⁹⁹ "Hedley Vicasis Pmsent", Regimental Number 875, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10039

¹⁰⁰ "Richard Patrick O'Donoghue", Regimental Number 2001, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10042

¹⁰¹ "William Baldwin Macleod", Regimental Number 1985, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10042

¹⁰² Beahen and Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 186

¹⁰³ "Joseph St Jacques", Regimental Number 2002, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10042

term. The NWMP did learn a valuable lesson in this case, as force-issued mittens and gloves were improved to prevent similar occurrences in the future.¹⁰⁴ This case was the exception rather than the rule, as most injuries led to invalidation. On the one hand, the force did not wish to keep men that would be unable to complete their work, and on the other, many men looked for the opportunity to leave the force prior to the expiration of their service term.

Throughout the five-year period studied, there were in excess of seventy dismissals. These dismissals were due to a variety of factors, which Commissioner Herchmer often traced to the mass influx of recruits in 1885. Prior to 1885, the NWMP had approximately 300 members. Due to rapidly increasing population and the pressing requirements of police work in the west, in 1885 the government authorized the force to increase in size to 500, and by the end of 1887, there were over 1000 members in the NWMP. In rapidly engaging five hundred men, the NWMP had seen its share of bad apples join the organization. Letters of reference were often taken for applicants, but it was difficult to verify the information provided by candidates upon enlistment. John Henry Beggs is a prime example of a less-than-desirable character joining the organization during the rapid engagement of 1885. Beggs had a few months of service when he was imprisoned for his participation in a mutiny in Edmonton. This mutiny was put down quickly, and all participants and conspirators were imprisoned for periods ranging from six months to a year. Beggs, a Canadian farmer born in the United States, was noted for being an extremely difficult prisoner, and at one point was wearing a ball and chain twenty-four hours a day. His initial twelve-month prison sentence eventually grew to sixteen months, as extra time was added for various offences, including stealing

¹⁰⁴ "Seymour Jacob Huff", Regimental Number 1511, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10041.

a pipe from the canteen, using threatening language, and lastly, for biting a provost guard.¹⁰⁵ The twenty-four year old was eventually dismissed from the NWMP after his imprisonment came to an end.¹⁰⁶ Beahen and Horrall point to Beggs's case as a particular example of Commissioner Herchmer's strict discipline. While the young constable proved problematic while under arrest, he had no option to counsel, and the Commissioner had ignored a letter from Beggs stating that he would behave if his prison sentence was shortened. Prisoners were expected to behave, and Herchmer ignored this blackmail attempt.¹⁰⁷ Beahen and Horrall also concluded that Herchmer's approach to discipline and administrative problems in the organization had been successful, and had paved the way for a more permanent and stable workforce.

Camille Leclair, from Quebec, was a student at the Royal Military College who came highly recommended from his local member of parliament. Throughout his near five-year term with the force, he was imprisoned three times. Once was for theft, another for desertion, and the last for disciplinary violations. He had not been dismissed for the theft, as the Deputy Minister responsible for the NWMP, Comptroller Fred White, had thought others would follow a similar course of action to leave the organization.¹⁰⁸ Criminal offences such as theft were handled internally with the NWMP Rules and Regulations serving as a disciplinary guide. While the Royal Irish Constabulary, the model for the NWMP, used civil courts for such matters, Commissioner Herchmer and

¹⁰⁵ John Peter Turner, *The North-West Mounted Police, 1873-1893*, Volume II (Ottawa: The King's Printer, 1950), 273

¹⁰⁶ "John Henry Beggs", Regimental Number 1139, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040

¹⁰⁷ Beahen and Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 253.

¹⁰⁸ "Camille Leclair", Regimental Number 873, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10039

Comptroller White preferred to address these issues internally and quietly.¹⁰⁹ Despite the risk of stiff penalties, theft still played an important role in at least two dismissals.

The first, William Pepo, was a twenty-six year old baker from Germany. Serving less than eight months, Pepo was dismissed after stealing cigars from a saloon and having overall “bad conduct”. A few years after leaving the NWMP, Pepo was tried for murder in Montana.¹¹⁰ Similarly, Ernest James Lilly was imprisoned for fifteen months and dismissed after stealing a watch. Lilly had been a twenty-nine year old British soldier prior to joining the force, and served less than two years in the Northwest.¹¹¹ James Frederick Smith had over nine years of service when he was similarly dismissed for theft. Originally a farmer from Ontario, Smith had married and was having a hard time providing for his family on a daily wage of fifty to seventy-five cents.¹¹² Interestingly enough, most enlisted members were prohibited from marrying during their service. The force had believed that men earning a constable’s wage would have a very hard time providing for themselves, let alone a wife and children.

With such marriage restrictions, some members sought comfort in other ways. Thomas Patrick Cairney was a twenty-three year old blacksmith from Ontario when he joined the mounted police. Less than three years into his term of service, Cairney was imprisoned for one year and dismissed for several disciplinary breaches. While travelling from Fort Saskatchewan to Fort Calgary, he had stopped at Edmonton where he became drunk. He then headed to a “house of ill repute operated by a prostitute named Nell Webb”. Cairney was refused entry, and responded by breaking into the

¹⁰⁹ Beahen and Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 253.

¹¹⁰ “William Pepo”, Regimental Number 1917, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10042.

¹¹¹ “Ernest James Lilly”, Regimental Number 1039, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040.

¹¹² “James Frederick Smith”, Regimental Number 1596, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10041.

house Webb shot through the door and wounded Cairney, landing him in the hospital and later in jail ¹¹³ While several members of the force were known to frequent prostitutes, it was the more public cases such as Cairney's that drew the ire of Herchmer As the Minister responsible for the NWMP, Prime Minister John A Macdonald routinely answered to two public concerns the first about inappropriate relations between the men of the mounted and women of doubtful virtue, and the second related to drunkenness

Herchmer took it upon himself to rid the NWMP of the scourge caused by alcoholism Alfred Webb, a twenty-two year old lumberman from Ontario, was dismissed due to what was deemed to be a significant "drinking problem" ¹¹⁴ Edward Thomas Bull, a twenty-year old confectioner from Great Britain, served as a cook while a member of the NWMP He was imprisoned for six months and later dismissed for being "an incorrigible drunkard" ¹¹⁵ Prohibition existed in the Northwest Territories until 1892, and until then, the NWMP had the unpopular task of enforcing this legislation While members of the force could drink, civilians could not, creating an uneasy tension in the region ¹¹⁶ Upon becoming commissioner, Herchmer felt he had no choice but to ensure that members refrained from drinking by creating a significant deterrence through punishment As with the issue of desertion, a detailed examination of the men's personnel files offers sufficient evidence to significantly nuance our views of the Mounties as uniformly upstanding law-enforcement officers Problems abounded, obviously

¹¹³ "Thomas Patrick Cairney", Regimental Number 1189, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040

¹¹⁴ Alfred Webb", Regimental Number 1921, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10042

¹¹⁵ 'Edward Bull", Regimental Number 1622, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10041

¹¹⁶ Macleod, *The NWMP and Law Enforcement*, 135

The force's regulations inherited a distinctly military character, with some portions written in vague, overarching language so that any perceived disciplinary slight could be addressed ¹¹⁷ John Twomey was a twenty-four year old cigar maker born in the United States but settled in Ontario. He joined the NWMP in 1883, and was dismissed after less than three years of service for having an all around "bad character".¹¹⁸ A similar treatment befell John Golden, a twenty-nine year old American blacksmith. Golden served all of a year and some months before he was imprisoned and later dismissed for having a "bad character"¹¹⁹ This latter determination was also used to describe British labourer John Daley. Daley had several fines and reprimands during his seven years of service before he was fined two months of pay, imprisoned for two months, and dismissed after "using obscene language to a mess sergeant"¹²⁰ These vague charges were likely used by Commissioner Herchmer and other officers to rid the force of men they deemed undesirable. The rapid influx of men from 1885, the difficulties encountered in verifying recruitment information, and the importance of positive public perception combine to help explain why members did not stay long in the force, sometimes whether they liked it or not, and why there were so many disciplinary problems.

The force also used another term, "discharge", for men who were let out of their service contract for a variety of reasons. Two particular instances illuminate how difficult it was to verify information provided by members seeking to join the North-West Mounted Police. Albert David was a twenty-one year old tailor from Ontario who

¹¹⁷ Beahen and Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 247

¹¹⁸ 'John Twomey', Regimental Number 1580, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10041

¹¹⁹ 'John Golden', Regimental Number 1165, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040

¹²⁰ 'John Daley', Regimental Number 1507, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10041

had nearly five years of service. However, he was recognized as a former convict and later admitted to having served two years in Kingston Penitentiary for larceny. David was allowed to discharge from the force before the end of his service.¹²¹ John George Newman, a twenty-eight year old American soldier, only had twenty days in the force before he was discharged. Newman had claimed to be a member of the British Army; in actuality, it came to the attention of the NWMP that their new recruit was a deserter from the American artillery.¹²²

Members also died while in service with the mounted police. A total of 35 deaths were reported, including three suicides. One of the most heartbreaking cases of suicide during the time period was that of Ernest Edward Harris. Harris joined the NWMP as a twenty-three year old, after his arrival from Britain where he had worked as a pipe fitter. While posted to Medicine Hat, he accidentally shot and wounded Constable Sydney Burgoyne, leading to a three-month prison sentence. Two years after serving his sentence, Harris was found in the Bow River near Calgary, dead from a gunshot wound to the head.¹²³ Suicides were not very common, and the leading causes of death for members were natural causes or sickness. During the time period, several members were stricken by typhoid, especially during breakouts in Battleford in 1886 and in Fort Steele in 1887.¹²⁴ Also factored into this statistic are the four who died during the 1885 Northwest Campaign. William Hay Talbot Lowry, Thomas James Gibson, and George Pearce Arnold all died at Cut Knife Hill in May 1885, along with several others who

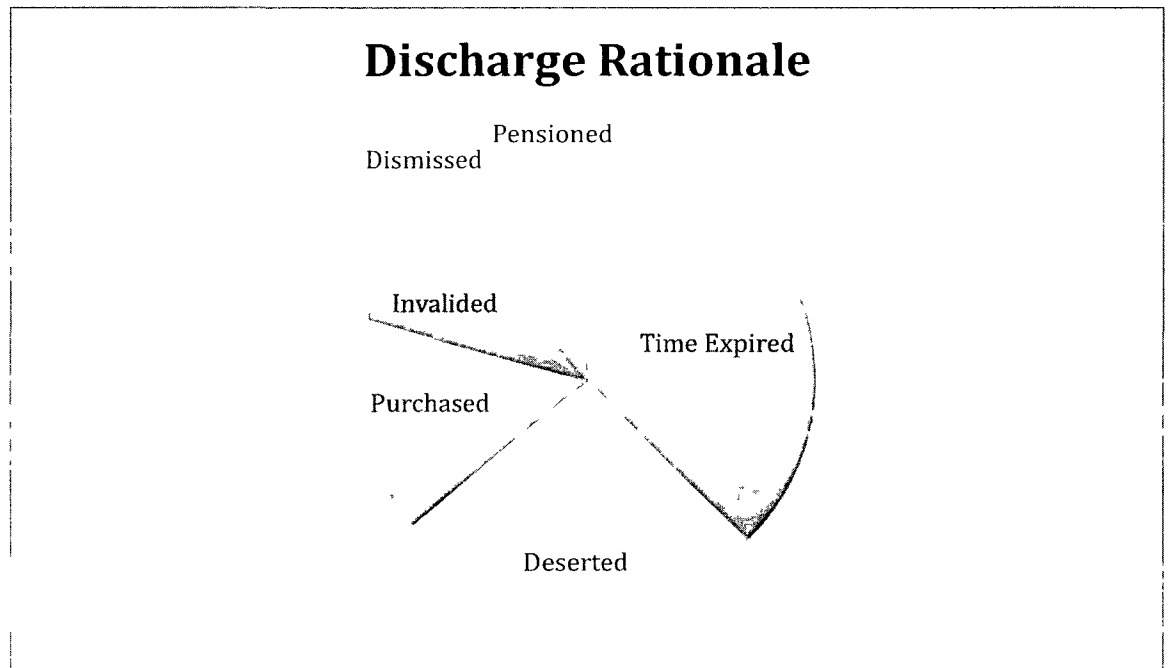
¹²¹ "Albert David", Regimental Number 1867, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10042.

¹²² "John George Newman", Regimental Number 1893, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10042.

¹²³ "Ernest Edward Harris", Regimental Number 1710, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10041.

¹²⁴ Beahen and Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 192.

joined the mounted police prior to 1883.¹²⁵ In addition, Frank Orlando Elliott died at Battleford while on scout patrol a few days after the battle at Cut Knife Hill.¹²⁶



As already noted, the mounted police faced several challenges during the time period, including rapid turnover and low morale and it was only in 1885 that the force was allowed to recruit two hundred members to adequately police the region.

Recruitment continued up until 1887, when there were approximately one thousand men in the NWMP. Another view of the force's difficulties can be seen through an exploration of the default records, or penalties and reprimands handed to members.

Thirty files indicated that the individual had been demoted from corporal, sergeant, or staff sergeant back to the rank of constable. While this number appears to be low, those already at the lowest class of constable could not be further demoted. These demotions were due to various reasons, including alcoholism, insubordination, and causing

¹²⁵ "William Hay Talbot Lowry", Regimental Number 907, LAC, RG 18. Volume 10039, "Thomas James Gibson", Regimental Number 1003 and "George Pearce Arnold", Regimental Number 1065, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040

¹²⁶ "Frank Orlando Elliott", Regimental Number 973, LAC, RG 18. Volume 10040.

disturbances One interesting case was that of Samuel William Waller Waller was a thirty-five year old druggist from Quebec when he joined the mounted police After about nine years of service, he was demoted from the rank of staff sergeant to constable, a fall of three grades, due to drug use, or as it was referred to in the file, “undue use of medical comfort” Regrettably, the drug in question was not identified on file ¹²⁷ Demotion was also used to reprimand Percival Walwin The twenty-four year old bookkeeper, who served for six years, was demoted and imprisoned for disgraceful conduct when he obtained \$40 “under false pretenses ”¹²⁸ Similar to Walwin’s experience, Oswald Cheke was a twenty-year-old British farmer when he joined the mounted police During his time in service, he was demoted and imprisoned for a year due to mutinous behavior At the end of his prison term, he was allowed to finish the remainder of his service with the force ¹²⁹ Even more problematic were those who flaunted the regulations of the force while having men under their command William Donald Bruce, a staff sergeant, was reprimanded and demoted after he was found to be intoxicated while commanding a search party “for horse thieves near Wood Mountain” Bruce had also been found intoxicated at a territorial fair Losing three ranks to constable, he eventually served the remainder of his second service contract and left the North-West Mounted Police ¹³⁰

Members who were demoted or imprisoned were routinely returned to the ranks to finish their service time Of the files surveyed, there were an additional thirty-six arrests and terms of imprisonment noted, for a variety of reasons John Thompson was a

¹²⁷ “Samuel William Waller”, Regimental Number 1093, LAC, RG 18 Volume 10040

¹²⁸ “Percival Walwin”, Regimental Number 915, LAC RG 18 Volume 10039

¹²⁹ “Oswald Cheke”, Regimental Number 1096, LAC, RG 18 Volume 10040

¹³⁰ William Donald Bruce”, Regimental Number 1202, LAC RG 18 Volume 10040

twenty-four year old British merchant when he joined the NWMP. He was imprisoned for one year for being absent from his post, including absenting himself from various duties and parades. After his prison term, he returned to the ranks and discharged, time expired.¹³¹ George Gordon, a twenty-year old farmer from the Northwest Territories, was imprisoned six months after his failed desertion attempt. After his sentence, he served the completion of his five-year term, and a few years later, engaged for another service term.¹³² Albert Alexander Strachan, a British dry goods clerk with military experience, deserted from the NWMP but eventually returned and submitted to a six-month prison term. The thirty-two year old purchased his discharge, but eventually re-engaged as a special constable.¹³³ Special constables were engaged for specific service terms with the NWMP, and required specialized knowledge. For example, special constables were routinely engaged to act as guides and interpreters.

As indicated, alcoholism and intoxication were at the root of the majority of demotions, dismissals, and prison terms. However, punishment was not always evenly applied to the men of the mounted. There were eleven cases of men who were scolded for their drinking, without formal reprimand. For example, Dominique Lapointe served twenty-two years and was pensioned, even though his file indicated that he was once hospitalized for severe intoxication. Lapointe was held back from any promotional opportunities due to his drinking problem, but he was allowed to stay in the force until his retirement.¹³⁴ Inconsistencies abounded. One can compare the treatment afforded to Lapointe to that given to Sergeant Major Samuel Hetherington. A Briton who joined at

¹³¹ "John Thompson", Regimental Number 1056, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040.

¹³² "George Gordon", Regimental Number 2003, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10042

¹³³ "Albert Alexander Strachan", Regimental Number 1632, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10041

¹³⁴ "Dominique Lapointe", Regimental Number 926, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040.

the age of twenty-three, Hetherington had over eighteen years of service when he was imprisoned and dismissed for drunkenness at the age of forty-one¹³⁵ The different approaches could have resulted from differences in the men's overall demeanor and service history, but the fact remains that discipline could be arbitrarily applied across the rank and file While the commanding officers passed judgment, Commissioner Herchmer had reserved, and used extensively, the right to review and modify all punishment Still, Herchmer could not have reviewed all files, and the various punishments could be attributed to the different men granting these penalties

There were several files that recorded some disciplinary issues without any punishment decreed Patrick Joseph Curran had served in the NWMP from 1873 to 1879 and re-engaged five years later While his service file noted that he had "very good conduct", he was also admonished in 1886 The thirty-two year old constable had been found guilty of "neglect of duty in not reporting that he was not issued a comb and brush during his service " Curran eventually purchased his discharge, and his file noted that he had likely returned to his work as a farrier in the Northwest Territories¹³⁶ It is very likely that Curran was admonished, rather than punished, as a result of his good conduct throughout his service This explanation may also serve to understand the case of Edward John Keays Joining the NWMP as a twenty-three year old farmer from Manitoba, Keays made a career out of the force, and was pensioned after twenty-four years with a "good" service record However, it was also noted on Keays's file that he was fined \$10 and confined to barracks for drunkenness He was also fined \$15 and confined to barracks for over a month for "disgraceful conduct in breaking open the door

¹³⁵ "Samuel Hetherington", Regimental Number 894, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10039

¹³⁶ "Patrick Joseph Curran", Regimental Number 1040, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10038

of the house of Camille Bonned a prostitute in Klondike City” and “frequenting a house of ill fame”.¹³⁷

Members who were found to have “bad characters”, an overarching, vague term used by the force to identify those who misbehaved or questioned authority, were not necessarily dismissed or imprisoned. Instead, two specific cases exist of members denied a further service term. Robert Grining was a thirty-five year-old British groom when he attempted to re-engage at the expiration of his service term in 1890. Grining went through all of the steps for re-engagement, and his medical examiner recommended him for another service term. Upon receipt of these documents, the commissioner instructed that he be denied re-engagement due to his “bad character”.¹³⁸ The commissioner was also directly involved in the file of Thomas Edward McKewan. Joining the NWMP as a twenty-year old farmer from England, McKewan served a total of thirteen years in the force before a further re-engagement was refused. McKewan had been found to have several disciplinary issues, including “abuse of alcohol, neglect of duty and absences.” In response, McKewan lobbied “his local member of Parliament for the removal of the Commissioner”. However, the member of Parliament found that after “a full investigation, [McKewan’s] resolution was [to be] withdrawn with an apology”.¹³⁹ Commissioner Herchmer maintained control over all matters of discipline, and often questioned and amended previous sentences and fines that had been handed down by the Assistant Commissioner or Commanding Officers. While the organization was only a thousand members strong, Herchmer provided individual attention to ensure that the few who sullied the reputation of the force or hindered its operations would either leave or

¹³⁷ “Edward John Keays”, Regimental Number 2044, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10042

¹³⁸ “Robert Grinning”, Regimental Number 1244, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040

¹³⁹ “Thomas Edward McKewan”, Regimental Number 1060, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040

face harsh penalties. To counter the overbearing power of Commissioner Herchmer, many members turned to political connections and influence to overturn decisions. Interestingly enough, the discipline cases were usually the ones that Herchmer refused to entertain.¹⁴⁰

The commissioner understood that political patronage was endemic during the time period, and some was allowed in the recruitment and promotion process. The nephew of John A. Macdonald, Alexander Nicholson Hutchinson, joined the mounted police, and served one term of service.¹⁴¹ The fact that the application made explicit mention of his familial ties speaks to the power of political patronage in this era and within the force. There were other files that made note of the fact that the members had been recommended by Parliamentarians. Malcolm Blomefield was a twenty-five year old British farmer when he joined. He rose to the rank of sergeant, and the Governor General, Lord Lansdowne, specially recommended him for a commission to the officer ranks. Interestingly enough, Blomefield was not commissioned, and instead chose to purchase his discharge after six years of service.¹⁴² Similarly, Robert Clarkson, a twenty-four year old farmer, attempted to secure several promotions through political connections. After failing to rise in the ranks, Clarkson decided to purchase his discharge and start again in another country. Less than three years later, Clarkson re-joined the NWMP, but purchased his discharge after less than one year.¹⁴³

The file of Richard Julian Bidwell showcases the political pressures that were applied both during his time within the NWMP, and after his term of service. The

¹⁴⁰ Beahen and Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 236.

¹⁴¹ "Alexander Nicholson Hutchinson", Regimental Number 1432, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10041,

¹⁴² "Malcolm Blomefield", Regimental Number 1010, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040

¹⁴³ "Robert Clarkson", Regimental Number 960, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040.

nineteen-year-old student arrived from Great Britain and joined the NWMP. Throughout his term of service, he was promoted twice due to pressure from the Honourable Mr Meade, Undersecretary at the Colonial Office, and the Governor General. However, Bidwell was described by his superiors as being “never zealous, utterly without interest in police work and considered careless and a disrupting influence.” Eventually, Bidwell was demoted, and he finished his five-year service term. Upon returning to England, Bidwell applied pressure to have his discharge certificate changed, since it noted his “bad conduct” and his demotion. Eventually, the discharge certificate was changed, but without explanation in his service file.¹⁴⁴ Political connections were also used to the advantage of Arthur Huot, a Quebec farmer who joined at the age of twenty-three. Huot twice applied for an invalidation to end his service term, but both requests were denied. Eventually, he turned to more powerful friends who exercised their influence. In the end, Huot served only nineteen months, spending the rest of his five-year service term on leave.¹⁴⁵

The NWMP’s relations with Aboriginal and Métis groups were a source of ongoing concern and friction. Prior to the 1885 Northwest Campaign, ‘mistrust’ might best characterize these relations. One NWMP recruit listed “Canadian Métis” on the form where he was supposed to enter his birthplace. Constable John Ballending was a twenty-five year old farmer when he re-joined the NWMP in 1884, after having served an initial term of service from 1875 to 1878. His Métis culture was not forgotten by supervisors, who had him transferred to Calgary during the 1885 Campaign, fearing that he would sympathize with the cause of Louis Riel. Ballending chose to leave the NWMP.

¹⁴⁴ “Richard Julian Bidwell”, Regimental Number 1531, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10041

¹⁴⁵ “Arthur Huot”, Regimental Number 1503, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10041

at the end of his service term, and he settled in Battleford.¹⁴⁶ George Taylor, a twenty-six year old labourer from England, had learned the Cree language. Rather than seeing the positive aspects of knowing an Aboriginal language, his file noted that he was known for “associating with Half Breeds”, which “brought displeasure from his superiors”.¹⁴⁷ The NWMP’s leaders were hardly the sympathetic government agents so often portrayed in popular culture. During the Northwest Campaign, the NWMP specially hired Louis Napoleon Blanche, a twenty-two year old clerk from Quebec, to serve as an interpreter for Louis Riel. Blanche purchased his discharge after approximately one year of service in the NWMP.¹⁴⁸ Perhaps indicative of its suspicious institutional nature, the force had sought an individual from Quebec to translate, rather than rely on a French speaker, Métis or otherwise, that existed out west.

Also worrisome to the force’s leaders were members who fraternized or married Aboriginal or Métis women. Public perception again played a key role, and Prime Minister Macdonald, as the minister responsible for the NWMP, often answered questions related to this topic in Question Period.¹⁴⁹ Henry William Spurway, a member with a little less than six years of service, was approximately twenty-eight when he married a Métis woman. Shortly thereafter, he deserted, most likely back to the United States where he had worked as a rancher.¹⁵⁰ Spurway deserted prior to receiving his punishment, which was probably wise given Herchmer’s approach to discipline. Spurway had not only married without permission, but had done so with a Métis woman.

¹⁴⁶ “John Ballending”, Regimental Number 1088, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040

¹⁴⁷ “George Taylor”, Regimental Number 1540, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10041.

¹⁴⁸ “Louis Napoleon Blanche”, Regimental Number 1210, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040

¹⁴⁹ Beahen and Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 243

¹⁵⁰ “Henry William Spurway”, Regimental Number 1877, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10042.

If caught, he would have faced upwards of one year in prison in addition to his desertion attempt.

In essence, the information mined from the files of enlisted men in the NWMP show that their time in the force was harsh, temporary, and transient. Discipline was not always evenly applied, and when it was, the methods and rationales ranged from fines to imprisonment with ball and chain. Attention was always paid to transgressions that stirred the Canadian public: desertion, alcoholism, and relationships with women. After all, it was during this time period that the romantic image of the NWMP took hold, gaining rapid popularity in American and Canadian popular culture. Even with its underlying problems, the force wished to portray a very positive public image. Upon taking command of the NWMP in 1885, Commissioner Herchmer wished to instill strict discipline to weed out members who were engaged without benefit of proper screening, and to install a pension system and other comforts to retain the best mounted policemen. Still, few were pensioned. The majority served only one five-year contract, or left before the expiration of their term by desertion, dismissal, or invalidation. Clearly, all was not well in the NWMP. The next chapter will offer further analysis of the men's demographic information, with special attention to the various methods and means utilized to leave the force. This data will then help us understand the life of a mounted policeman in the 1880s.

Chapter 2: Social Demographics and their Impact on the Mounted Police

An initial review of the men of the mounted police provides an image of the common applicant: a Canadian-born, Ontario-raised farmer in his early twenties who had some experience in the militia. He would serve about one five-year term. Yet, beneath such a broad characterization lie other findings. By isolating individual variables in the statistical study of the men of the mounted, one can better understand why a career in the NWMP might have been so transitory. The quantitative data was analyzed and separated according to the discharge rationale of the men, so that trends could be further detected in addition to the overall statistics provided in the previous chapter. Only 4 percent of all members studied for the period 1883 to 1887 were pensioned. In comparison, about 36 percent discharged at the end of their service term, and 25 percent deserted. Essentially, this chapter seeks to explain these findings by closely examining the men's discharge rationale, place of birth, and previous occupation through a quantitative analysis. Why did some men stay and so many others leave? What incentives, based on their backgrounds, induced them to one decision or the other? What does an in-depth demographic profile reveal about the men's likelihood of remaining in the force?

Without a doubt, the NWMP was experiencing a significant change between 1883 and 1887. In the 1884 Annual Report, Commissioner Irvine noted that he had "sufficiently shown the need for an increase to the number of non commissioned officers and men in the force to enable us to comply with the daily increasing requirements of

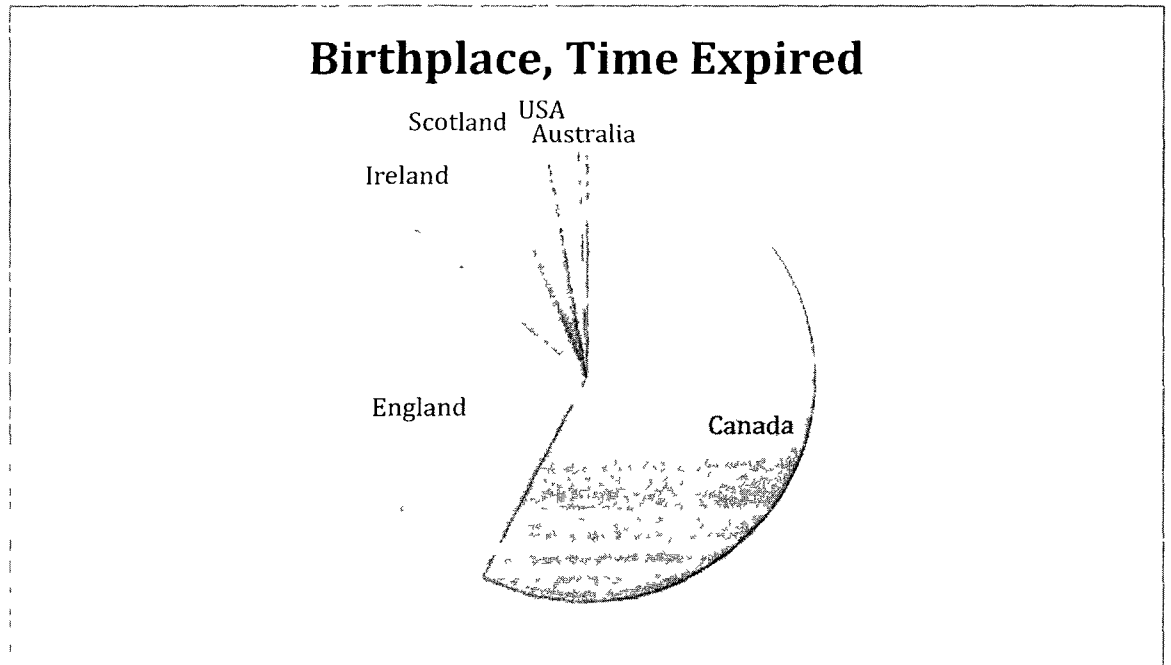
advancing settlement and civilization”¹⁵¹ It would only be over a year later that the federal government allowed for additional recruiting, leading to the rapid engagement of a diverse lot of men. At the end of 1885, there were 608 new recruits, which was more than the overall membership in 1883.¹⁵² These recruits were not necessarily the solution to the problems already experienced by the NWMP. Rather, because the majority left prior to the expiration of their service term, any benefits the increased manpower may have had on the NWMP was mitigated.

Discharge by Expiration of Service Term

First to be examined are the members who stayed within the mounted police until the expiration of their service term. A review of the birthplaces for those 379 men who served until time expired finds that 217, or 57 percent, were born in Canada. Another 109 were born in England, for 29 percent, and twenty-eight were born in Ireland and thirteen in Scotland. There were also eight Americans, two Australians, and two born in France. While more Canadian than British-born men completed their service term overall, in fact, near-equal percentages of Canadian and British-born men served time expired. Of the 594 Canadian-born men who joined the NWMP during the time period, 217 lasted their term of service, for approximately 36 percent. Of the 391 British-born men, 150 served for a complete service term, for approximately 38 percent. Attrition and retention within the force, then, could not simply be attributed to the nationality of members.

¹⁵¹ *North-West Mounted Police Annual Report 1884* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1885), 21.

¹⁵² *North-West Mounted Police Annual Report 1885* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1886), 13.



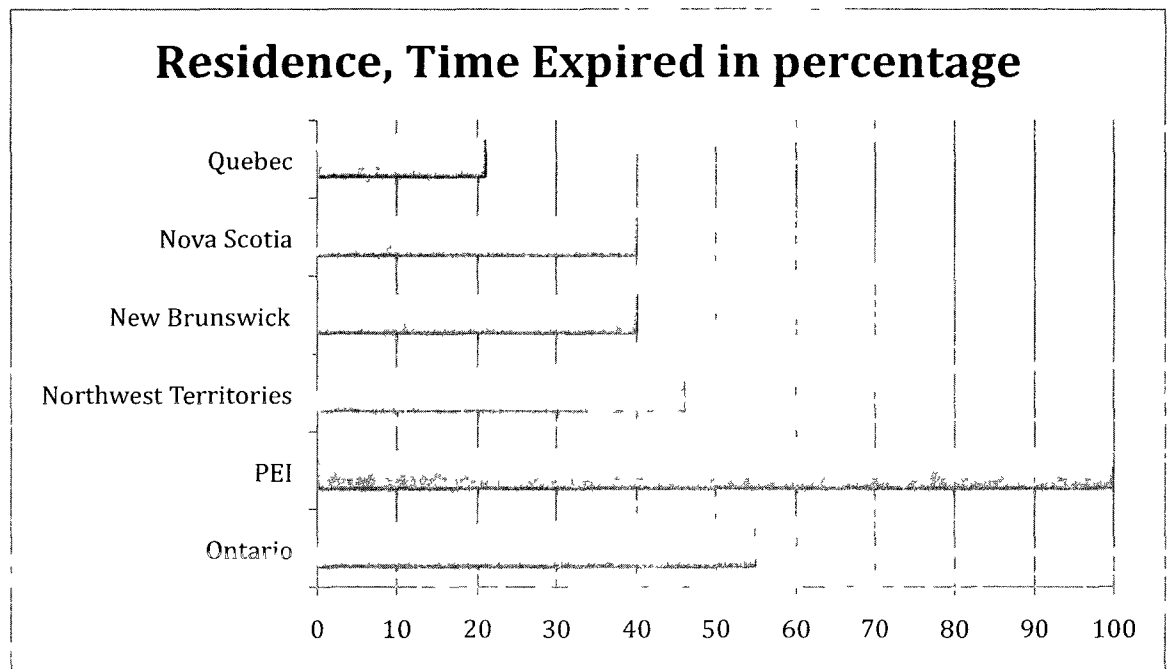
However, a further look at the provincial provenance of those Canadian members who served to expiration highlights interesting trends. Out of the 297 men who served time expired and who had provided a province of residence, 165 were from Ontario. While at first glance this would appear to be a significant number, it is also true that only 34 percent of all members from Ontario served time expired. Recruitment efforts targeted farmers' sons from Ontario, and it would appear that these men had a rate of attrition that was much less than those seen in other provinces. The highest retention rate was from Prince Edward Island, as its two members who joined between 1883 and 1887 discharged at the expiration of their service term. This number is rather inconsequential within the larger scope of the study, but it does serve to further explain the rarity of a member serving until the end of term. The second highest retention rate was from the Northwest Territories, at fifteen men, or 46 percent. Men who joined the mounted police from the territories were making a much more informed decision on life in the force than those joining from the other provinces. In his memoirs, Superintendent Richard Burton

Deane noted that members who were from the west were “hardy men with experience”, who tended to stay in the organization longer than those recruited out east ¹⁵³ These men were better acclimated to the trappings of life in the still-young territories, as compared to those joining from Eastern Canada and the British Isles Both Nova Scotia and New Brunswick saw 40 percent of all of their members serve time expired, or twenty-eight and nineteen men, respectively This was a greater retention ration than those from Ontario Only 21 percent of all members from Quebec served time expired, which translated to forty-eight men The great majority of members joining from *la belle province* did not finish their service term, instead leaving by desertion, invalidation, or purchase While allegations existed that Commissioner Herchmer was biased against French-Canadian members, the great majority of those joining from Quebec were, in fact, English speakers ¹⁵⁴ A career in the NWMP for Quebec-born members and other easterners was not as enticing as it was for others, perhaps in some measure due to what former member John Donkin described as life on “a hard land where existence is a struggle” ¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Deane, Richard Burton, *Mounted Police Life in Canada A Record of Thirty-one Years Service* (Toronto Cassell 1916), 15

¹⁵⁴ R C Macleod, *The North-West Mounted Police and Law Enforcement 1873-1905* (Toronto University of Toronto Press, 1976), 54

¹⁵⁵ John C Donkin, *Trooper and Redskin in the Far North West Recollections of Life in the North West Mounted Police Canada 1884-1888* (London Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1889), 253



The occupations of those who served the duration of their contract term tended to be workers who were not seasonal nor transient. Forty-seven percent of all clerks joining the NWMP during the time period, or thirty-four men, fulfilled their contracted time, and more than 50 percent of white-collar workers similarly stayed within the organization. Over 40 percent of all farmers, or ninety-three men, served time expired. Commissioner Herchmer was correct in seeking out farmers to join the mounted police, as number-wise, this was greater than any other occupation of men joining the organization. What was surprising was that only 22 percent of all professional soldiers completed their service term. These soldiers, who would have much more experience and knowledge when joining a para-military organization, were instead overwhelmingly leaving the organization before the fulfillment of their mandated time. The low retention rate for soldiers is surprising, since life in the militia during the time period was also

very difficult, with no pension and much lower pay than that which could be found in the NWMP.¹⁵⁶

As previously discussed, the NWMP attracted relatively young men, due mainly to the recruitment drives' emphasis on youth and non-married status. Of those men who completed their service terms with the mounted police, the most frequent to do so were those under the age of twenty, and those above the age of thirty. These two age groups worked well together, as Commissioner Herchmer noted that it was not "possible to expect very young men to enforce these laws unless they had" older men to set an example.¹⁵⁷ Those between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine, the ages when one is likely most mobile in looking for a career, were the lowest. Thirty-four percent of all men between the ages of twenty and twenty-four served out a service term. Most disconcerting were the mere 26 percent of men between the ages of twenty-five and twenty-nine lasting it out. In essence, almost three quarters of those over twenty-five and under thirty upon engagement chose to leave before the expiration of their service term. This further demonstrates the immediate retention problem of the NWMP between 1883 and 1887. Older men probably had less flexibility in searching out new careers, thus explaining their higher retention period. Moreover, the younger men joining had time to benefit from the pension system and social accommodations, including messes and recreational sports, created in the Herchmer reforms of the 1880s and 1890s.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Stephen J Harris, *Canadian Brass The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939* (Toronto University of Toronto Press, 1988), 26

¹⁵⁷ *North-West Mounted Police Annual Report, 1886* (Ottawa Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1887), 11

¹⁵⁸ William Beahen and Stanley Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies The North-West Mounted Police, 1886-1900* (Regina Centax Books, 1998), 241

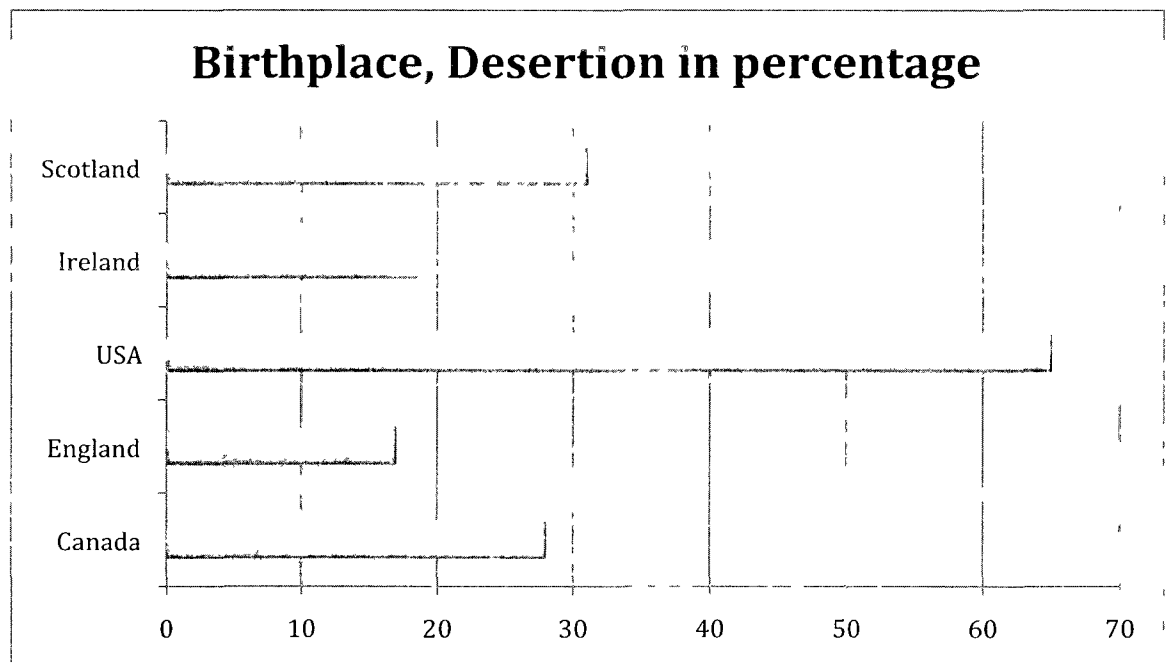
Discharge by Desertion

Still, life in the mounted police proved much too difficult for many. A former member described the envy he felt as a corporal left the organization after the expiration of a five-year service term, while the constable himself still had over four years of time left in the organization. This member, Constable John Donkin, described the Northwest as a hard land to live on, noting simply that “existence was a struggle”.¹⁵⁹ The harsh nature of the prairie frontier, as well as the work required of members, help explain why desertions were the second most frequent means of leaving the NWMP. The most common deserter was a Canadian-born Ontario resident, between the ages of twenty and twenty-five, who identified himself as a member of the Church of England. However, this finding is skewed by the very fact that the most common applicant during the time period was a young farmer from Ontario. When analyzing the birthplace of those who chose to desert, a different pattern emerges.

While the overall majority of deserters were Canadian-born, once calculated against all Canadians joining during the time period, only 28 percent chose to desert. This was roughly on par with the 31 percent of all Scottish men who deserted. These numbers were the median with respect to country of origin. On the higher end of the scale were the two German nationals, who both deserted, and two of the three Dutchmen who also deserted. More interesting to note are the thirty men from the United States who deserted, which represented more than 65 percent of all Americans enlisted in the NWMP. It may very well be possible that the proximity of the American border was too tempting to Americans joining the force. The majority of desertions during the time period happened in locations close to the US border, such as in Regina, Maple Creek,

¹⁵⁹ Donkin, *Trooper and Redskin*, 253.

Lethbridge, and Fort Macleod.¹⁶⁰ The arm of the law could not reach deserters in the United States, and Americans may very well have found desertion an easier option than purchasing their discharge. The lowest numbers belonged to English and Irish members, as only 17 and 19 percent, respectively, broke their service term. Joining the NWMP was seen as an honourable career for all classes of men in England, which may explain why so few chose to desert.¹⁶¹ Moreover, the majority of English and Irish immigrants were poor with no other prospects, leading them to accept some of the difficulties of life in the mounted police in return for the average wages and housing provided by the organization.

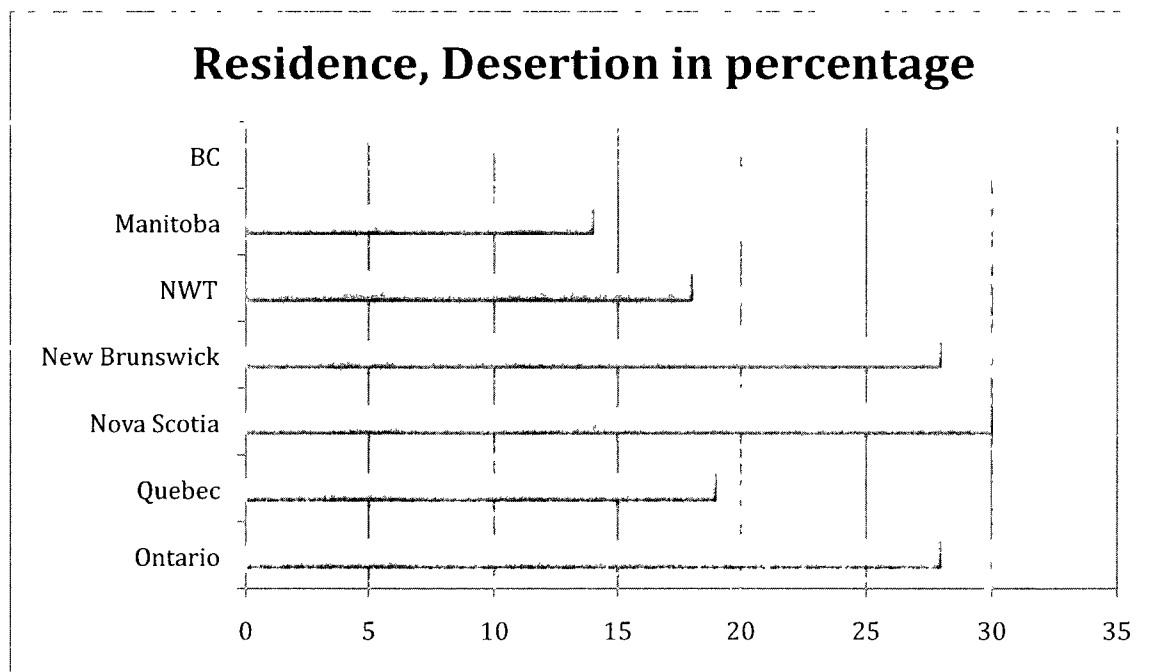


Of those born in Canada, the majority of deserters originated from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, at 30 and 28 percent each. Almost a third of men joining from the Maritime provinces chose desertion, more so than any other region. On the other hand, only 18 percent of men from the Northwest Territories and 14 percent from Manitoba

¹⁶⁰ Beahen and Horall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 233

¹⁶¹ Macleod, *The NWMP and Law Enforcement*, 82

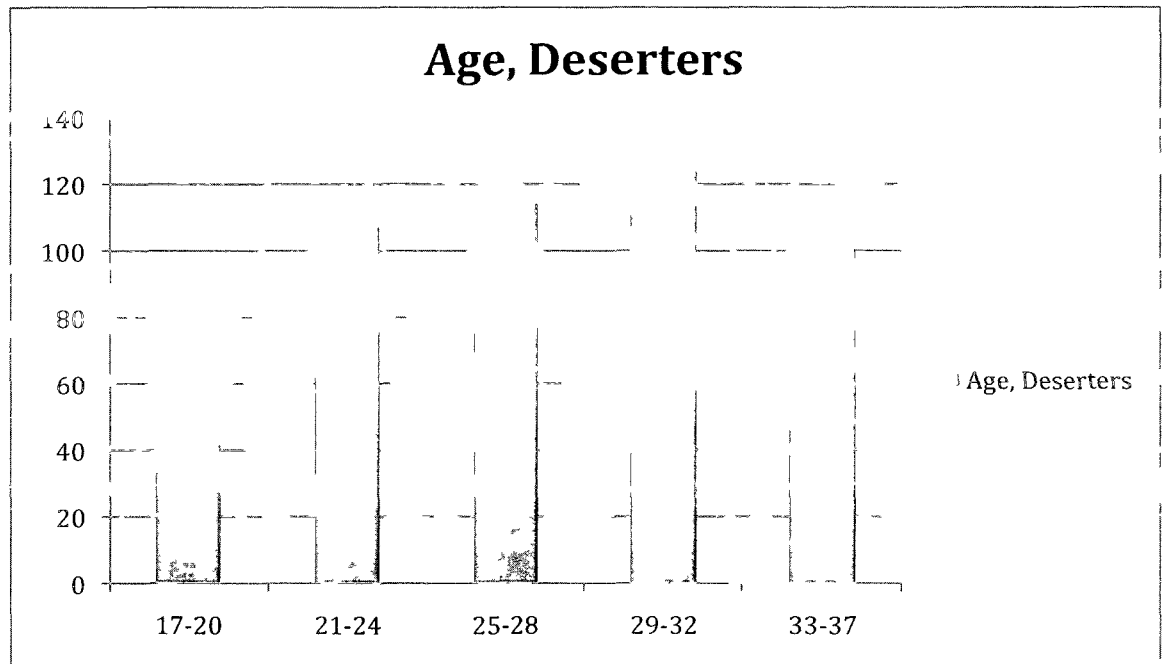
deserted from the mounted police. There were also no desertions among men joining from British Columbia. Two further surprises were found in the provincial analysis. Firstly, only 19 percent of men joining from Quebec chose to desert, which was on par with those from the Northwest Territories. This may be an indication that the majority joining from Quebec were English-speaking, given the likelihood that French speakers would have felt a greater degree of alienation and perhaps have been inclined to leave the force. Secondly, 28 percent of men from Ontario deserted, which was at the higher end of the scale. The rapid engagement drives in small Ontario towns adversely affected the mounted police, as by the force’s own admission, the men taken on between 1885 and 1886 “were neither suited by character nor ability to perform the actions and responsible duties of their new positions.”¹⁶²



There were no major discernible trends when the religions of deserters were analyzed. However, the largest number belonged to the Baptist faith, as 36 percent

¹⁶² *NWMP Annual Report 1886*, 10

deserted. When combined with the 31 percent of Episcopalians, or essentially American Anglicans, who deserted, these last two numbers help further portray the common desertion of Americans since both the Baptist and Episcopalian faiths were far more concentrated in the United States. Comparatively, the 1881 census identified only 7 percent of Canadians who were Baptists and less than one hundredth of a percent who were Episcopalians.¹⁶³



While patterns of occurrence were evident in the birthplace, residence, and religions of deserters, age was a less clearly defined characteristic. As demonstrated in the chart above, the age of those who chose to desert did not follow a set pattern. Numbers generally ranged between 13 percent of all nineteen year olds, to the 46 percent of all twenty-nine year olds. This chart also helps explain the previous assertions made of men in their twenties. The numbers of deserters rose progressively through the

¹⁶³ Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *General Report of the Census of Canada 1880-81*, Volume IV (Ottawa, 1884), 6

twenties, perhaps because these more mobile men were still looking for a permanent career.

The occupations of deserters were more frequently those of blue-collar, transient workers, further substantiating the patterns emerging from the ages of these members. On the one hand, the lowest occurrence belonged to farmers and students, at 16 percent each, and clerks, at 18 percent. The majority of professions fell in the range of 30 to 40 percent, and featured mostly blue-collar workers. While some were few in number, their ratios were important. The highest numbers belonged to barbers at 67 percent, printers at 57, boilermakers at 50, labourers at 45, and painters at 41 percent. The two shanty men and two stonemasons all deserted as well. Surprisingly, given the opportunity to indulge their profession, those who had worked with horses, such as drivers, horse trainers, and horse keepers all had a high number of desertions, ranging from 40 to 60 percent. Soldiers had a desertion rate of 22 percent, which was exactly equal to those soldiers who left at the expiration of their service term. White-collar workers were much less represented among those who deserted. On the one hand, this could be seen as an indication of the education and upbringing that men with white-collar employments might have brought with them when joining the NWMP. These men would also have had a more difficult time finding employment in their original fields in the Northwest Territories or the American west, making deserting locally an unattractive option. On the other hand, blue-collar workers could have more readily found lucrative employment in their fields out west, especially during periods of seasonal employment.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ *NWMP Annual Report 1886*, 16.

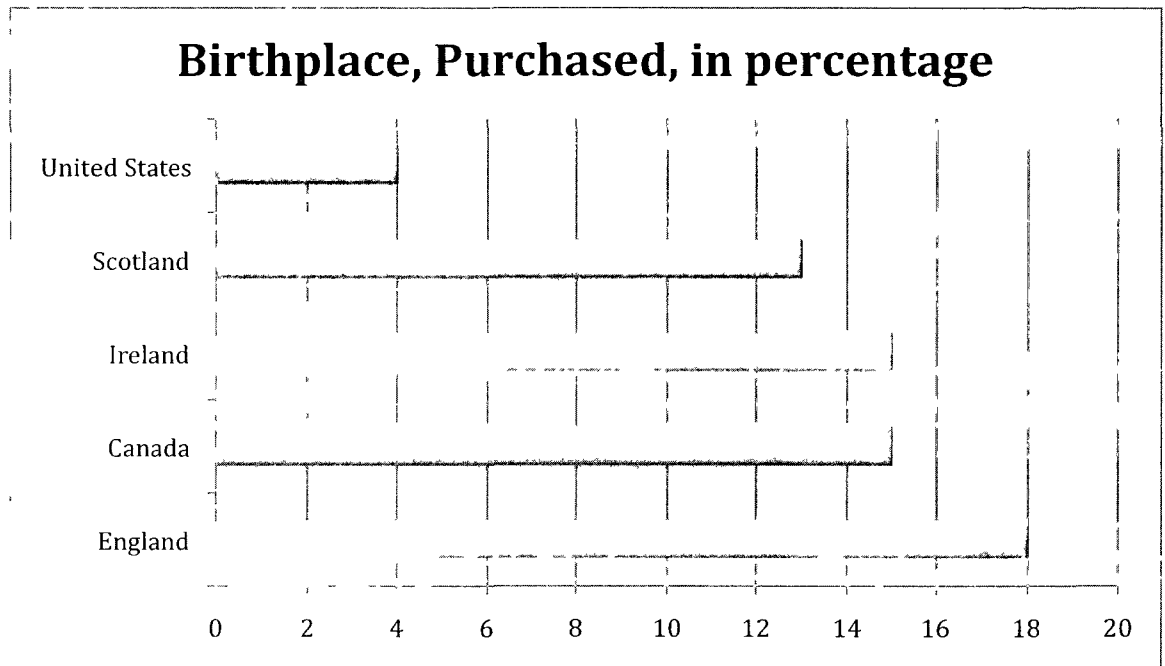
Discharge by Purchase

The high number of desertions within the ranks of the mounted police remained an endemic problem for the organization. The permanent need for policing was being undertaken by temporary workers who, for the majority, left before the end of their five-year term of service. To help address the problem of desertion, Commissioner Herchmer allowed for more men to purchase their discharge.¹⁶⁵ However, Superintendent Richard Burton Deane found that the money paid back did not make up for the expense of bringing men out west, training them, and then having to start again with a new crop of men. As Deane noted, the “public suffered from the purchase and quick turn-around” generated by the men leaving the organization.¹⁶⁶ While purchases still remained less frequent than desertions, a discharge by purchase was the third most common form of leaving the force’s ranks.

Eighteen percent of Englishmen purchased their discharge, the greatest ratio of any nationality. These men were followed closely by those born in Canada and Ireland, as 15 percent of each nationality elected to terminate their service term before its expiration. Scotsmen followed thereafter at 13 percent. The lowest amount belonged to the Americans, as only 4 percent elected to purchase. This low ratio is understandable when one recalls that over 65 percent of Americans deserted. The option to purchase the remainder of a service term must have appeared less appealing to men who were less than a day away from the American border.

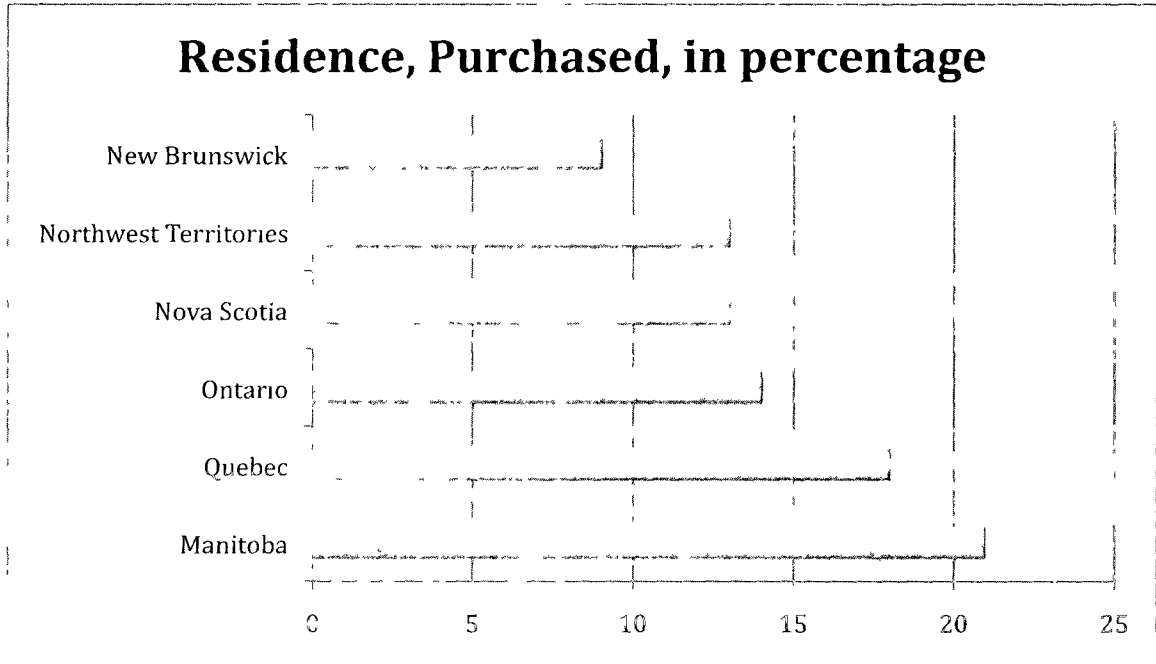
¹⁶⁵ William and Nora Kelly, *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police A Century of History* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1973), 87

¹⁶⁶ Deane, *Mounted Police Life in Canada*, 9



A provincial breakdown of those who purchased their service contract finds a majority from Manitoba, at 21 percent of all those enlisting from the province. Manitoba had low numbers of deserters, which may be attributed to the fact that the mounted police actively sought deserters who were in Manitoba and the territories. Therefore, many more chose to legally end their service, allowing them to return to their homes before the expiration of their engagement term. Quebec was second overall, with 18 percent of those from the province choosing to purchase their discharge. As a significant sum of money was required to purchase a service term, at approximately three dollars per month left in the service term, this indicates again that members from Quebec were more likely urban English-speaking men, rather than agricultural French-speaking *Québécois*. Ontario, Nova Scotia, and the Northwest Territories averaged between 13

and 14 percent, while New Brunswick had the least, at 9 percent.



In order to purchase a discharge, one would have required enough money and the approval from the Commissioner of the NWMP. The most common occupations of men who obtained a purchase were those who had no previous occupation, insurance agents, stable hands and civil servants. All four categories had an occurrence rate of 100 percent. These were followed by 58 percent of medical students, 50 percent of saddlers, and 40 percent of plumbers. Those who had no occupation were often referred to as “gentlemen”, and combined with the civil servants, insurance agents, and medical students, were white-collar workers who likely could earn more income than what was offered in the NWMP. At first glance, the oddity belonged to the stable hands, saddlers, and plumbers. While unskilled labourers tended to only find seasonal work, they could still make upwards of \$1 or \$1.50 per day, as compared to the fifty to seventy-five cents earned in the NWMP.¹⁶⁷ These men may very well have had the opportunity to find

¹⁶⁷ Beahen and Hoirall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 182.

other employment in the United States or the Northwest Territories that was more lucrative.

Still, the typical member purchasing his discharge required enough money to offset the costs of the service term, and more often than not, connections and friends to help push their file forward to receive their discharge. John Donkin had applied for a purchase, but he had few political connections to help expedite his file. As such, he had to wait on a list until he was part of the three men who were allowed to purchase each month.¹⁶⁸ The most common sort of member leaving the force in this manner was either above the age of thirty-three, or those much younger, under twenty years of age. Over 60 percent of those aged forty and 50 percent of those aged thirty-nine purchased their discharge. Those that were between their early twenties and early thirties were least likely to purchase their discharge, with only 6 percent of those twenty-six and 8 percent of those aged twenty-three applying for a purchased discharge. Rather, these younger men were much more likely to leave by desertion. Younger men had less money available for a purchase, and they could also more easily face the consequences of a possible jail sentence than those who were older with families and perhaps other careers waiting for them.

Discharge by Invalidation

Older men were also most likely to leave the NWMP by medical invalidation. These medical discharges were the fourth most common rationale for leaving the force prior to the expiration of a service term. For the most part, medical discharges were due

¹⁶⁸ Donkin, *Trooper and Redskin*, 279.

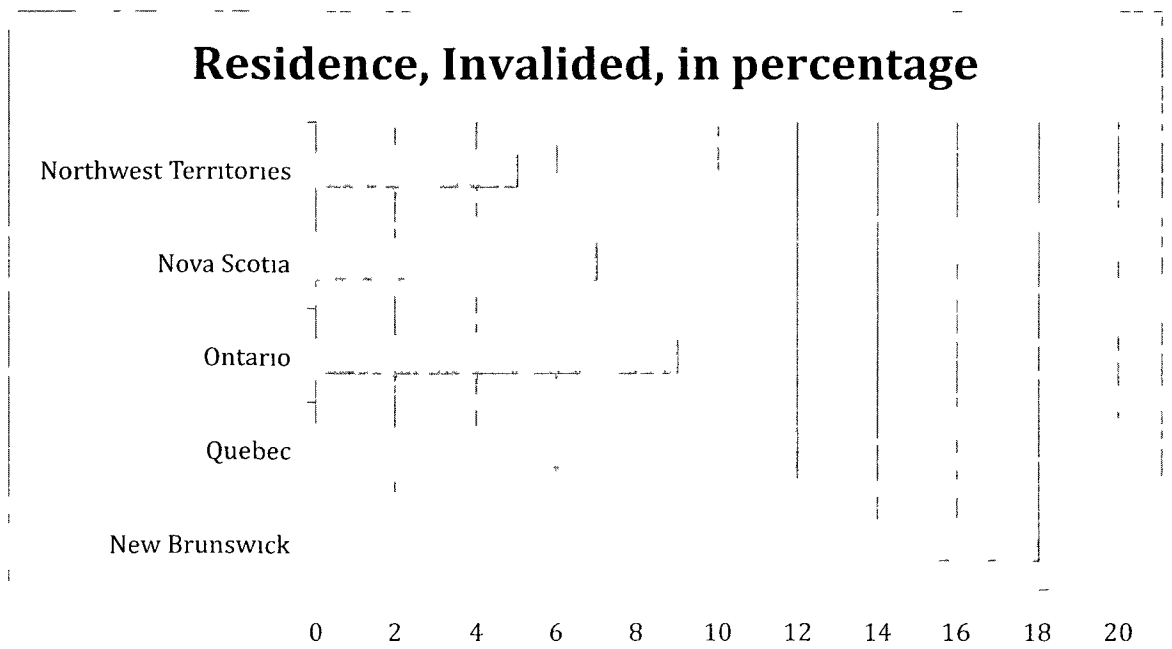
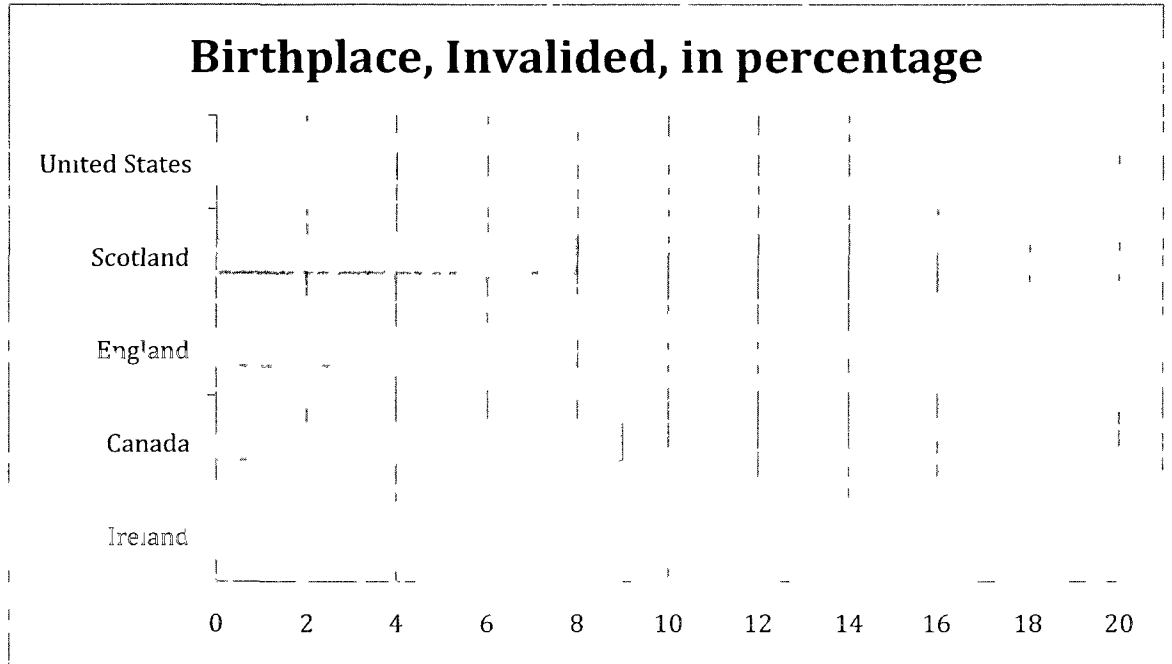
to injuries sustained in incidents involving either horses or firearms ¹⁶⁹ Still, the men who were invalided were few Two of the six men who had joined at the age of seventeen were invalided, most likely due to the fact that they were younger than the minimum age of enlistment The numbers fluctuated between 7 and 17 percent for those between the ages of eighteen and thirty The highest ratios belonged to members among the ages of thirty-two and thirty-nine, as between 27 to 40 percent were invalided Police work of the NWMP was without a doubt arduous, which was only compounded by the difficult surroundings of the prairie frontier ¹⁷⁰ Exhaustion and the pressures of policing may very well have led the older members to incur accidents and leave the force before the expiration of their service term

The harshness of police life also helps understand the birthplace of those who were invalided At the top of the spectrum were the 11 percent of Irishmen who were invalided, with England and Scotland each at 8 percent On the opposite end of the spectrum were the two Americans out of forty-six who enlisted While there were also 9 percent of all Canadians who were invalided, the majority again came from the eastern provinces, with New Brunswick at ten cases, or 18 percent of those from the province, and Quebec, at sixteen cases or 12 percent Ontario followed in third place, with 9 percent, followed by Nova Scotia at 7 percent Members from the Northwest Territories only had 5 percent of its members invalided, and none were invalided from either Manitoba or British Columbia In the 1887 Annual Report, Senior NWMP Surgeon Augustus Jukes noted that recruits who were new to the territories and the demands of the mounted police had the most difficult time, often appearing several times on sick

¹⁶⁹ *NWMP Annual Report 1886*, 89

¹⁷⁰ Nora and William Kelly, *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police* 88

parade. On the other hand, the “healthiest, soundest, most vigorous and efficient men” were more often than not “restored and returned to duty”¹⁷¹



¹⁷¹ *North-West Mounted Police Annual Report 1887* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1888), 99

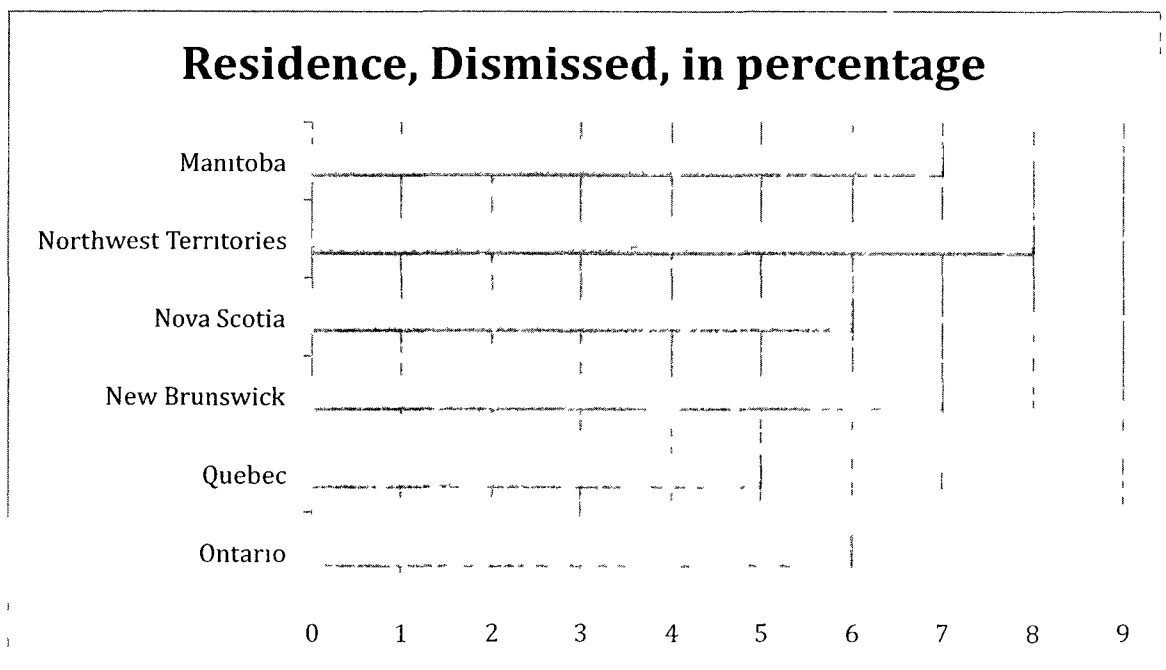
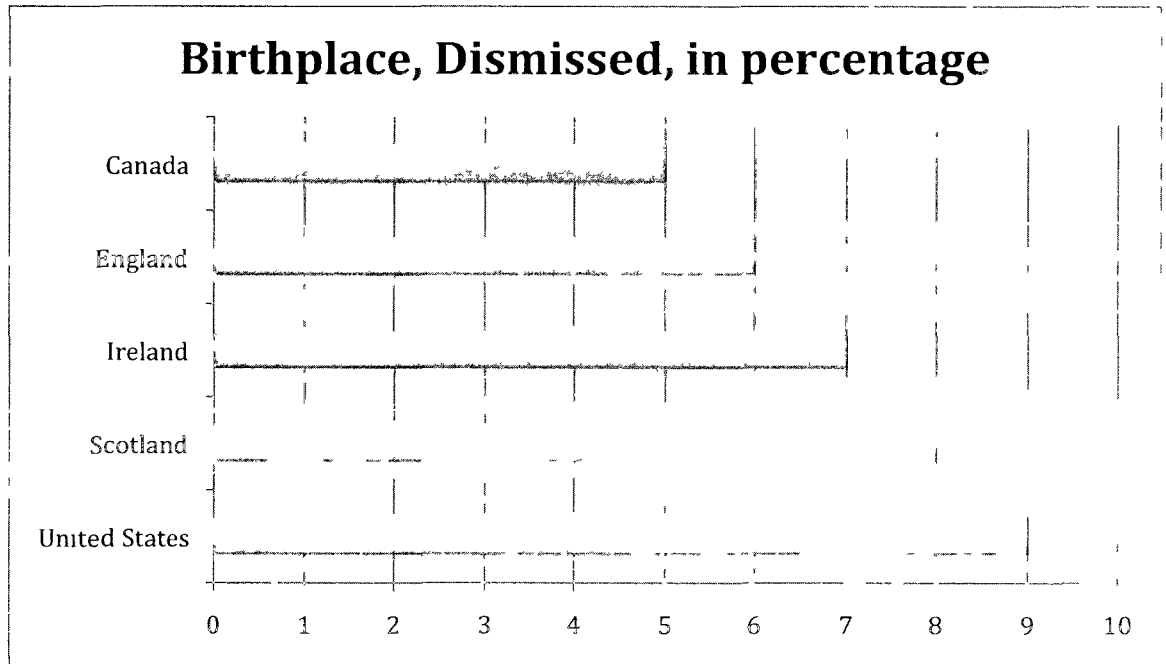
A review of the occupations of those invalided show a majority held blue-collar work. The highest percentage belonged to coachman, at 40 percent. A distant second were soldiers, but the fact that 19 percent of all soldiers were invalided is surprising when compared to the fact that 22 percent of soldiers deserted and another 22 percent served the duration of their service term. Farmers had the lowest rate of invalidation, at 7 percent. The urban working class or poor, who worked in blue-collar work, were more likely to be hurt in the fulfillment of their duties with the force. These uneducated men would not have held any administrative or clerical postings within the NWMP, making them more liable to be hurt in the fulfillment of their duties.

Other Reasons

Mounted police discipline and obedience began to be more thoroughly enforced in the mid 1880s. Superintendent Deane wrote in 1883 he had “been warned in Ottawa that I should find the Mounted Police an ‘armed mob’ and I certainly discovered them to be so.”¹⁷² Two years later, Deane had helped write the rules and regulations that would be strictly enforced by Commissioner Herchmer. Members were routinely dismissed from the ranks for various disciplinary incidents, including theft, insubordination, and after periods of imprisonment for desertion. Noteworthy here is the fact that there were more members dismissed than were pensioned at the end of their service. Over 9 percent of all Americans who joined the NWMP were dismissed. Eight percent of Scots, 7 percent of Irishmen, 6 percent of Englishmen, and 5 percent of Canadians were dismissed. Of those Canadians, the highest concentration was from the Northwest Territories, as 8 percent were dismissed. Interestingly enough, Quebec had the least

¹⁷² Deane, *Mounted Police Life in Canada*, 3

incidence of dismissals, at only 5 percent, while Ontario, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Manitoba all averaged between 6 and 7 percent of all cases. Dismissals were the one unifying discharge rationale, as the numbers were very similar when reviewing the birthplace and residence of these men.



The least likely to be dismissed were those who had been farmers and blacksmiths prior to joining the NWMP. The dismissal of men from the force is one means of understanding disciplinary issues in the mounted police. By using this measure, Commissioner Herchmer again was proven correct to actively engage farmers and the sons of farmers, as only 3 percent, or six men in total, were dismissed. Conversely, 22 percent of miners and 12 percent of bakers were removed from the NWMP. Surprisingly, there were still 9 percent of all former military men who were dismissed. As with any military instruction, obedience and discipline were core operating principles in the NWMP. The teaching of drill, in fact, was done in both the mounted police and the military to instill submission and respect.¹⁷³ However, it would appear that those joining the mounted police from various military bodies were having difficulty adapting, thereby leaving the organization through various methods before the expiration of their service term.

While youthful folly may be blamed for some dismissals, the lowest number belonged to those between the age of twenty and twenty-four. In fact, the highest concentration of dismissals belonged to those who were thirty-three when they joined the NWMP, as 17 percent were dismissed. The numbers gradually rose between the age of twenty-six and thirty-three, and there were no dismissals for members under the age of twenty, the two twenty-year olds who were dismissed being an insignificant number.

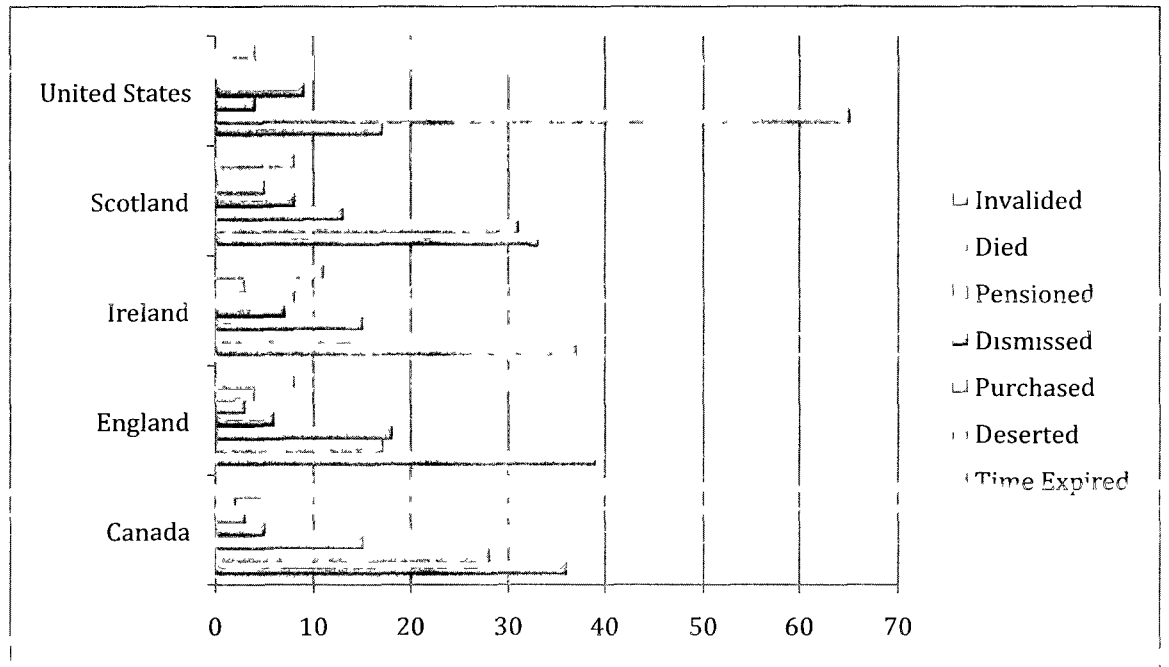
It may very well be that the younger members who joined during the time period were already preparing for more career advancement and permanency, rather than those who were older upon engagement. Commissioner Herchmer introduced pensions for

¹⁷³ Beahen and Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 249.

constables and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) in 1889.¹⁷⁴ Those who began serving in 1883 would have been eligible for pension had they served a minimum of fifteen to twenty years with acceptable conduct. Still, the amount of members pensioned was very low, at only 4 percent of all enlisted men studied between 1883 and 1887. There were 17 percent of enlisted men born in Canada pensioned, followed by England at 7, Ireland at 6, and Scotland at 2 percent. There were no Americans pensioned during the time period studied. When these low numbers are taken within the context of all those who enlisted, one finds that only 3 percent of those born in Canada and England were pensioned. Conversely, 8 percent of Irishmen and 5 percent of Scots were offered a government pension. A provincial breakdown of the pensioned members finds that the majority came from Ontario, and even then, only 4 percent of Ontarians were pensioned, compared to 3 percent of those originating from Nova Scotia and 2 percent from Quebec.

¹⁷⁴ Horrall, *The Pictorial History of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police*, 98.

Discharge Rationale by Birthplace, in percentage

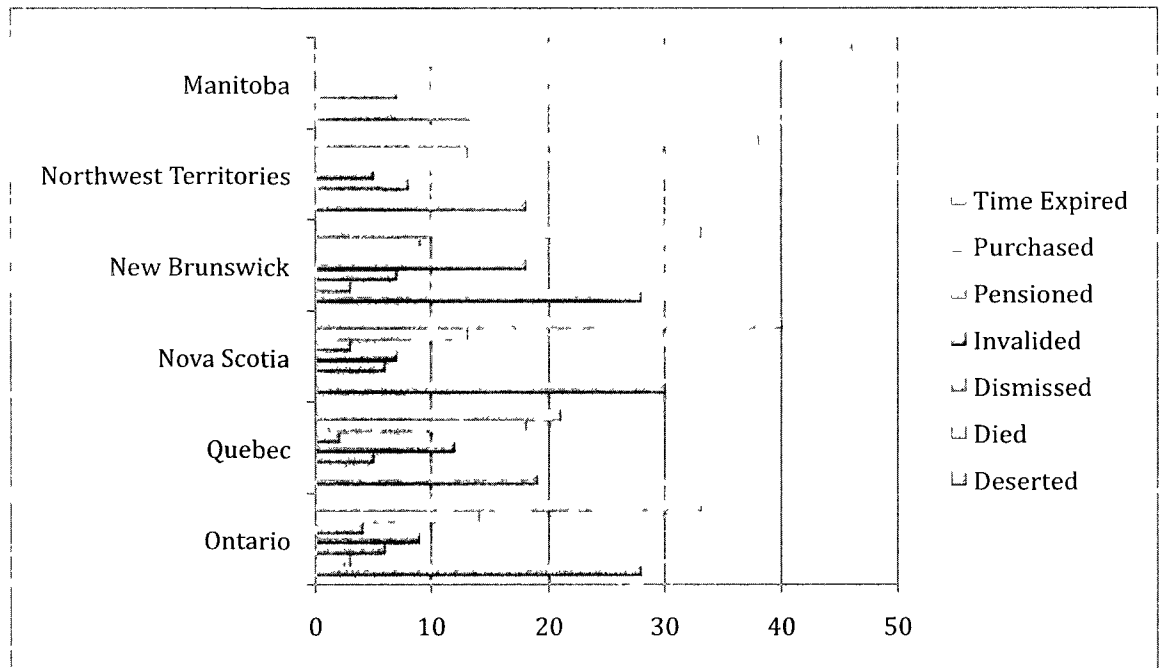


The ages of those pensioned reinforces the idea that the younger one joined the mounted police, the higher the chances of working enough years to earn a pension. All of those pensioned fell between the ages of nineteen and twenty-eight, even though some in their early thirties may have worked a minimum of years to earn a government pension. Of interest in reviewing the occupations of the pensioned is the fact that there were no white-collar workers pensioned – no students, clerks, or other skilled profession. The pensioned occupations, in order of frequency, were farmers, blacksmiths, sailors, soldiers, carpenters, labourers, and teamsters, and even then, those numbers were very low, ranging from five to two for each. In this instance again, Commissioner Herchmer's search for young sons of farmers from Ontario was redeemed in this statistical review.

Nevertheless, the occurrence of those pensioned was only slightly greater than those who passed away while in service. As previously mentioned, those who died in the

ranks were casualties incurred in the exercise of their duties, illness, or natural causes. Four percent of those born in the United States and England passed away, while only 3 percent of Irish and 2 percent of Canadians died in the ranks. Of the Canadians who died, fourteen were from Ontario, and two were from New Brunswick. When those numbers are reviewed against the overall numbers who engaged from their respective provinces, both represent only 3 percent of those who originated from Ontario and New Brunswick.

Discharge Rationale by Residence, in percentage



The majority of occupations for those who died in service reflected more blue-collar work. Farmers, soldiers, blacksmith, carpenters, and teamsters were equally represented. Only two clerks passed away, and no other white-collar occupation was represented. While members received medical care once they had joined the mounted police, those who had come from urban or agricultural working-class backgrounds had

less access to medical care prior to joining than those of likely more affluent, white-collar backgrounds ¹⁷⁵ The social division between these members might explain the higher occurrence of death, as illness easily proved to be the greatest cause of death during the time period Also worthy of note was the relatively young age of those who joined the NWMP and later died in service, some of which passed away after 1887 Nineteen of the twenty-two members dying for whom information was available had joined between the ages of twenty and twenty-three, while the other three were aged thirty-one upon engagement

These calculations help provide a new dimension to why men might have chosen to remain in the NWMP, or to leave before the end of their service term The birthplace, residence, occupation, and religious beliefs of these men, once further analyzed against the overall statistics of the time period, help explain and understand patterns of behavior Shifting from a focus on discharge rationale to those who joined from various geographical locations also helps highlight the dominant occupations and age of the men who were attracted to join the mounted police In essence, this geographical breakdown further displays patterns of Canadian industrial development and the marked differences between eastern and western men

For example, only ten men joined the NWMP from British Columbia between 1883 and 1887 Of those ten men, six were born in England, thus making the Church of England the dominant religion from the province Also of note is the fact that only two occupations and ages were recorded, and both were aged twenty-two and working as ranchers when they joined the NWMP While the size of the survey is small, these

¹⁷⁵ Beahen and Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 181

numbers still provide a glimpse of the men who joined from the province, and who chose to serve the duration of their service term.

A similar trend was apparent among those joining from the Northwest Territories. There were a total of thirteen farmers, five ranchers, and two carpenters joining the force, and no white-collar workers, as such professions there were few. The members all joined between the ages of eighteen and thirty, which mirrored the larger trends and recruitment drives for younger candidates. England once again dominated as the birthplace for those joining from the Northwest Territories, as thirteen were British born, while eleven were born in Canada. With the western economy slowing after 1883, it is very possible that these men then decided to join the mounted police.¹⁷⁶

Similarly, the men choosing to enlist from Manitoba were young, the youngest being eighteen, and the oldest at twenty-six years of age. Their professions were typically western, as there were ten farmers, two carpenters, and only two skilled tradesmen who were surveyors. While the majority of members from British Columbia and the Northwest Territories were foreign-born, Manitoba provided fifteen born in Canada, and ten born in England.

Moving in an eastward direction, members were more likely to have been born in Canada, and have worked in white-collar or skilled trades. Forty-six percent of all farmers joining the mounted police were from Ontario, which helps illustrate how well recruiters had followed Commissioner Herchmer's request.¹⁷⁷ The province also featured a wide array of professions, with a greater concentration of white-collar workers. There were eighteen clerks, seven druggists, six bookkeepers, four students,

¹⁷⁶ Doug Owsram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 172.

¹⁷⁷ Beahen and Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 172.

three engineers, two bankers, two men in commerce, and two insurance agents. There was also a high concentration of blue-collar workers, especially in skilled trades, as 68 percent of all blacksmiths joined from Ontario. As could be expected with the occupational trends, Ontario also had a much higher concentration of older applicants than was seen in British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, and Manitoba.

The vast majority of those residing in Ontario before their work in the NWMP were born in Canada. Seventy-one percent of men joining from the province were Canadian born, and of these, 58 percent were from Ontario. Only 26 percent of those joining from Ontario were from England, Ireland, or Scotland. The decreasing number of British men joining from eastern provinces may have been due to the fact that these migrants could find other work than those who were in British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, or Manitoba. Nevertheless, falling back on a career in the mounted police was still deemed respectable for British men, which is a comment on how quickly and pervasive the “Mountie myth” had already spread by the mid 1880s.¹⁷⁸

The majority of Catholics joining during the time period were Irish Catholics joining from Ontario. On the other hand, Quebec had a high concentration of Episcopalians and Lutherans as 38 and 29 percent, respectively, resided in *la belle province*. Once again, this statistic helps substantiate the idea that men joining from Quebec were not French Canadians, and the high number of Episcopalians points to an important concentration of immigrants from the United States. This is further demonstrated in the occupation of the men from the province, as there were only fifteen farmers and fifteen clerks from the province. Other occupations were mostly related to blue-collar trades, but an important 30 percent were white collar, including bankers,

¹⁷⁸ John Peter Turner, *The North-West Mounted Police, Volume II* (Ottawa: The King's Printer, 1950), 268.

agents, students and commercial tradesman. These white-collar workers were the English-speaking and urban individuals who largely represented Quebec in the mounted police. There were also only two soldiers, which was only slightly less than other provinces. Rather, the majority of soldiers originated from England, Ireland, and Scotland rather than from Canada.

Quebec also had a significantly older population joining the NWMP, as approximately one third of applicants from the province were over the age of thirty. Included in this statistic were two thirty-seven-year-olds and three forty-year-olds, a relatively late age to commence a five-year service term. This again represented the urban industrial worker who typically joined from the Maritimes and Quebec, as compared to the younger, agricultural man joining from the western provinces or territories. New Brunswick had no applicants over the age of thirty, the majority joining in their late twenties. What this province did have in common with Quebec was the 30 percent of members who were white-collar workers. Nevertheless, the most common professions from New Brunswick were labourers, farmers, carpenters, and fishermen. These men were, for the most part, born in Canada, as only two members joining from the province were born in England.

Nova Scotia had similar statistics to New Brunswick, albeit with a handful more men born in England and Scotland. Its residents joining the mounted police were all under the age of thirty-one, and their religious beliefs were equally divided among Roman Catholics, who were the most numerous, followed by Presbyterians and the Church of England. These numbers were still relatively low compared to other provinces as only 8 percent of all those studied had resided in Nova Scotia prior to becoming mounted policemen. Men from Nova Scotia were more likely to work in various trades,

including clerks, miners, soldiers, sailors, and firemen, with some engineers and blacksmiths. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick had younger, blue-collar workers or skilled tradesmen joining the NWMP, as compared to the more white-collared, older population emanating from Quebec.

The occupation of the men joining the force remains a very interesting aspect of this study. Less than a third of enlisted men had previous military experience, and only 7 percent of these men had been professional soldiers. Men from all walks of life chose to become scarlet-clad Mounties. A review of these occupations highlights the high numbers of older, white-collar, educated men joining as enlisted men from England, serving alongside transient or blue-collar workers from Canada.

Farmers, the most numerous occupation, joined at all ages, and were represented by men as young as eighteen and as old as thirty-eight. Over 61 percent of all farmers were born in Canada, and 25 percent were born in England. Nine percent were from Ireland, and less than 3 percent were born in either the United States or Scotland.

Second to farmers were the professional soldiers joining the ranks of the NWMP. There were three times more soldiers born in England than in Canada, and following Canada in short succession were Ireland, the United States, and Scotland. These men represented various age groups, again ranging from twenty years of age up to thirty-nine. Labourers, as the third most common occupation, were represented by men as young as twenty and as old as thirty-six. Interesting to note here is the fact that these general labourers were twice as likely to have been born in Canada than in England. This reaffirms the idea that the typical Canadian enlistee was more likely to be rural and

agricultural, which is representative of the Canadian population during the time period, 46 percent being engaged in farming or other agricultural fields.¹⁷⁹

There were also many Canadians who joined the NWMP from more formal and educational backgrounds. Over 60 percent of clerks were Canadian born, as were a majority of druggists, engineers, law students, bookkeepers, medical students, agents, and men of commerce. However, these numbers were far outweighed by the farmers, labourers, carpenters, lumberpersons, and blacksmiths, among others, who were born in Canada.

All the preceding statistics are for enlisted men in the NWMP. As will be shown in the next chapter, commissioned officers of the force had different backgrounds, nationalities, and ages when they joined the mounted police. While only forty-two officers were commissioned between 1883 and 1887, these men help provide a counterbalance to the constables and non-commissioned officers taken on strength during the same time period.

¹⁷⁹ Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *General Report of the Census of Canada, 1880-1881*, 72.

Chapter 3: A Different Lot of Men

Commissioned officers of the North-West Mounted Police stood apart from the enlisted men. Commissions were almost always tied to political patronage, and the majority of officers joined the NWMP upon their commission, with no previous experience in the ranks of the organization. The rank structure of the officer class was established by the Act of Parliament that created the NWMP in 1873. Provision was made for a commissioner, along with superintendents, a paymaster, a quartermaster, a surgeon, and a veterinary surgeon. By 1883, the rank of assistant commissioner was created, which reported to the commissioner, as was the rank of inspector, which was below the rank of superintendent.¹⁸⁰ Once commissioned, officers travelled west to take up their duties which ranged from military planning, conducting drills, and organizing training, making former military men in demand for these commissions. Officers were also required to have a sound educational background, as they carried out administrative skills ranging from correspondence to in-depth reports provided to the Comptroller and Parliament.

Life in the mounted police, however, was not necessarily more lucrative for the officers. While inspectors made approximately \$1,000.00 a year, they had to pay out of pocket for their uniforms and the costs of maintaining a social profile required of the governing classes.¹⁸¹ This salary also had to support their families, as the majority of commissioned officers were married. Some brought their families west with them, while

¹⁸⁰ James J. Boulton, *Uniforms of the Canadian Mounted Police* (North Battleford: Turner-Warwick Publications Inc., 1990), 6

¹⁸¹ William Beahen and Stanley Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies The North-West Mounted Police, 1886-1900* (Regina: Centax Books, 1998), 156.

others' loved ones remained in eastern Canada. Leaving a family behind in Ottawa could also be advantageous to officers who sought to lobby for promotions and special duties.¹⁸² Life as an officer also came with superior privileges to those afforded to the enlisted men. In his memoir, Superintendent Richard Burton Deane had found himself "supremely fortunate" with what was provided by the government out west, including housing, fuel, light, food, and medical care.¹⁸³ On the other hand, enlisted men often lived in barracks or tents with no beds.

Officers were also far less numerous than enlisted men. Between 1883 and 1887, there were almost twelve hundred men who joined as constables. Conversely, there were only forty-two men who were commissioned either out of the ranks or from outside the organization. The social and moral division linking rank with class was further evident in a comparative review of these men. The majority of officers were Canadian born, half from Ontario and Quebec. Some had previous service as non-commissioned officers (NCOs) in the force, and on average were only slightly older than enlisted men. The most important difference between the enlisted men and the commissioned officers rested in their time spent in the organization. Commissioned officers were most likely to make a career in the NWMP, rather than the temporary work that was seen in the case of enlisted men. As William Beahen and Stan Horrall noted, 1885 proved to be a year when not only the ranks of the NWMP doubled, but so did the officer cadre, leading to a ratio of one officer to twenty enlisted men.¹⁸⁴ Thus, the time period 1883 to the end of 1887

¹⁸² Richard Burton Deane, *Mounted Police Life in Canada A Record of Thirty-one Years Service* (Toronto: Cassell, 1916), 57

¹⁸³ Deane, *Mounted Police Life in Canada*, 3

¹⁸⁴ Beahen and Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 154

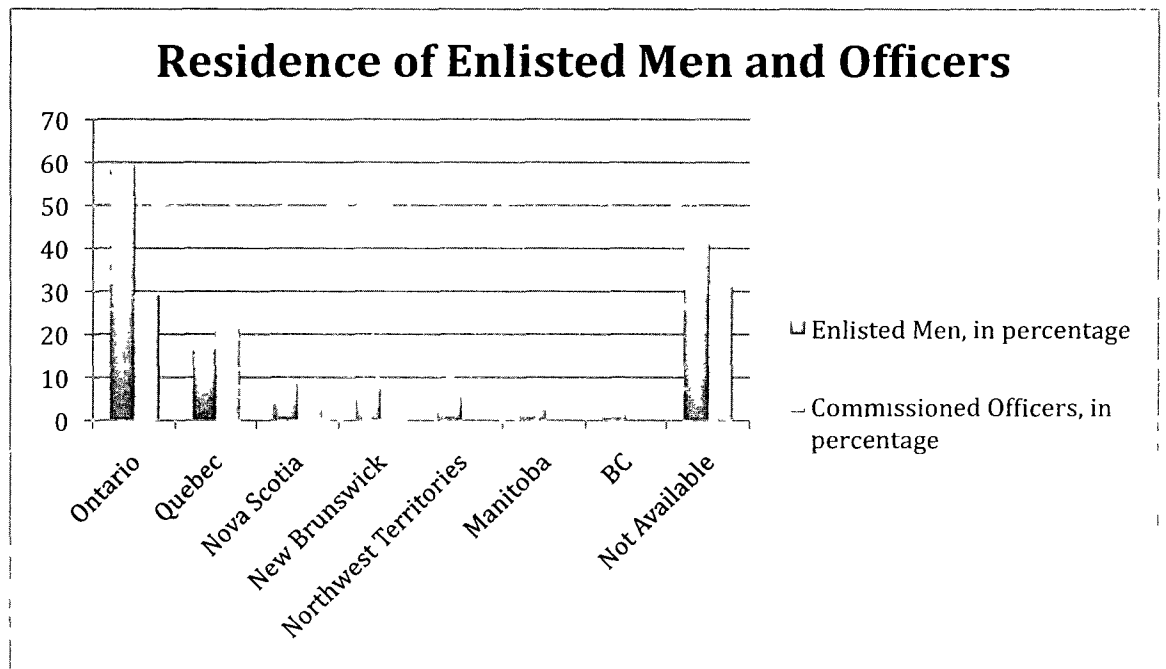
helps to provide a glimpse of the men that would join the NWMP as it grew from a temporary to a permanent fixture in the Canadian west.

The NWMP strove to commission more Canadian-born men than those born outside of the country. In fact, 61 percent of the officers were born in Canada, as compared to only 17 percent who were born in England. One officer was also born in Scotland, and another in Ireland. If these two were added to the English total, it would still amount to only nine officers from the United Kingdom. There were an additional seven officers who had no information in their files, but those who did help provide a different perspective of these higher-ranking members. In contrast, 56 percent of enlisted men were Canadian, while 37 percent were from England, Ireland, or Scotland. As compared to the enlisted men of the mounted, there was a concerted effort to favour and commission Canadian-born over foreign-born men.¹⁸⁵



¹⁸⁵ R C Macleod, *The North-West Mounted Police and Law Enforcement, 1873-1905* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 74

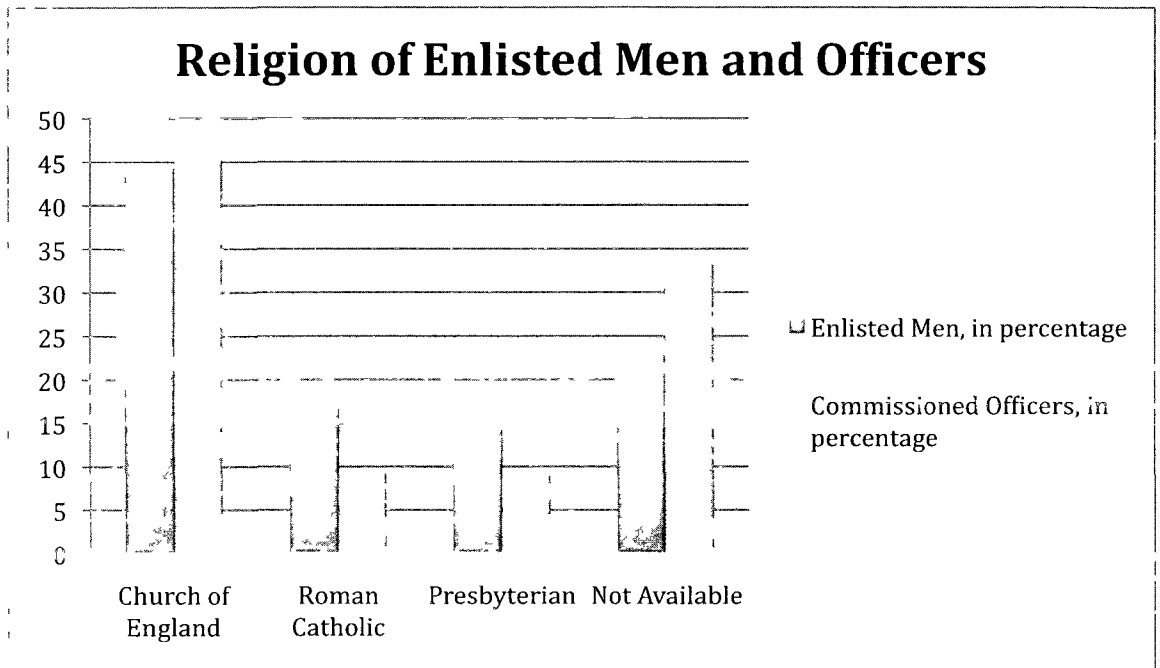
From a provincial perspective, the single greatest source of officers was Ontario, at twelve men, or 29 percent. Quebec followed, with nine men, or 21 percent of all officers. Another 7 percent of officers originated from New Brunswick (three men), 5 percent from Nova Scotia (two men), and one each from British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, and Prince Edward Island. Thirteen officers, or 31 percent, did not list a previous residence, which most likely included the nine officers who joined from England, Ireland, and Scotland. In essence, these statistics help further the findings made by R.C. Macleod that the cadre of officers was drawn to represent the regional enclaves of Canadian society.¹⁸⁶ These findings also highlight the importance of political patronage in securing a commission. Those residing in central Canada may have had more political connections than those residing further away from Ottawa, thereby explaining the greater concentration of officers from Ontario and Quebec.



¹⁸⁶ Macleod, *The North-West Mounted Police and Law Enforcement*, 78

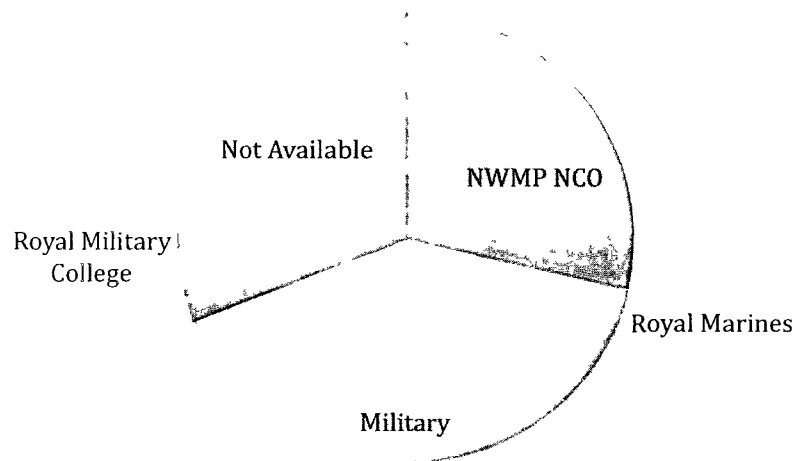
Following these national and regional trends, almost half of commissioned officers were followers of the Church of England. At over 45 percent, these congregants far outweighed the 9 percent of Presbyterians. There were also 9 percent of Roman Catholics. The low number of Roman Catholics within the officer rank, as compared to the relatively high number from Quebec, may be a further indication that these men were Anglo Protestants, and not French Canadian. The only other religious affiliation listed within the forty-two files was the one follower of the Seventhist Church from Ontario.¹⁸⁷ There were fourteen officers who did not disclose their religious affiliation, or 33 percent of all files. In essence, there were fewer French Canadian and Irish as officers. Even the Canadian-born officers were of British (and probably English) ethnic origin as demonstrated by these ratios of religious denomination. There was more information on the religious affiliations of the enlisted men, as only 23 percent of those files did not disclose a religious affiliation. This variance in available information might very well explain the absence of certain faith groups, such as the Methodist faith. There was also slightly more Roman Catholics, at 18 percent, and Presbyterians, at 14 percent, among the enlisted men, showing a bit more variety than what was seen in the files of commissioned officers.

¹⁸⁷ "Victor Arthur Seymour Williams", Regimental Number O.82, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10037



Another deviation from what was seen in the enlisted ranks was the previous military and NWMP service of commissioned officers. There were 38 percent who had previous military service, as compared to 44 percent of enlisted men. These ratios were similar, but the difference is that in the case of commissioned officers twelve out of forty-two were promoted from their work as non-commissioned officers in the mounted police, for 29 percent. In addition, there were four officers who joined after studying at the Royal Military College in Kingston, Ontario, and one former member of the Royal Marines. Combined with the members who had noted previous military service, this amounted to 79 percent who had received policing or military instruction prior to their commission. There were nine files that had no information on previous service, or 21 percent of those studied during the time period. In essence, 100 percent of officers studied had seen military or NWMP service.

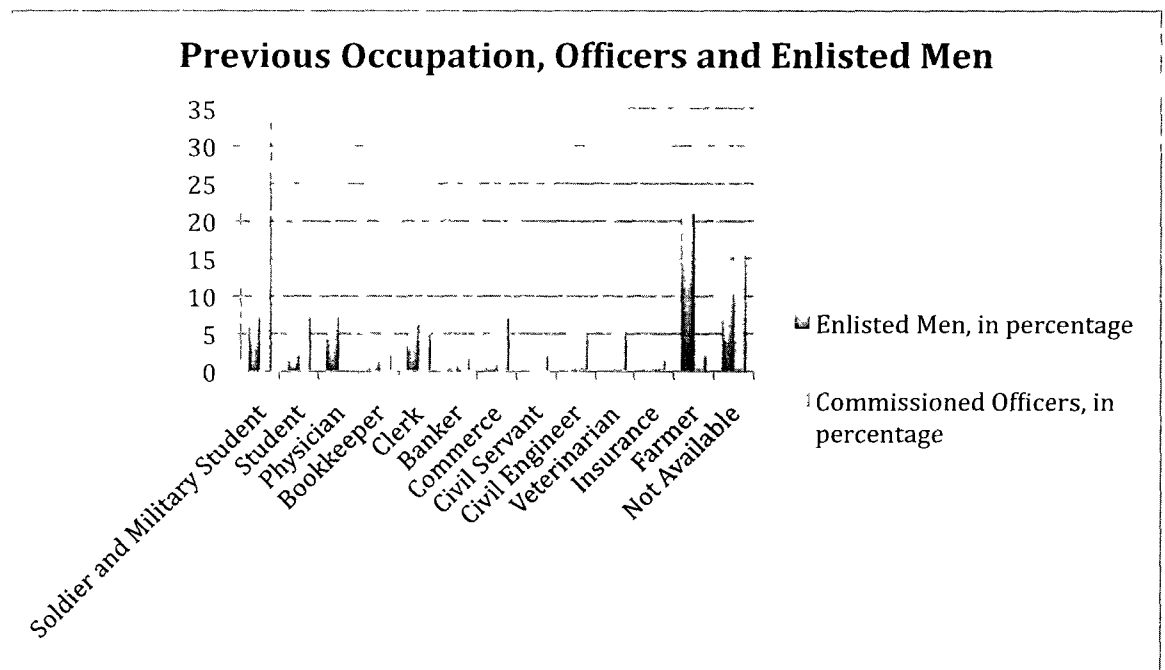
Previous Service, Officers



As could be expected of the commissioned ranks, 26 percent worked in fields that could be described as white-collar. These included one bookkeeper, two clerks, one banker, three men of commerce, one civil servant, two civil engineers, and one insurance salesman. An additional 17 percent were students, with four specializing in military studies, two medical students, and one exploring general studies. The commissioned members were often selected on a basis of class and social leadership. Some form of political patronage was needed to obtain a commission and to move up from the non-commissioned ranks. The NWMP, in essence, was very much an institution influenced by Victorian ideas of social hierarchy, which is reflected in its selection of men to fill the commissioned ranks.¹⁸⁸ There were also 17 percent from medical fields, including the previously mentioned medical students, the three physicians, and two veterinarians. This last statistic requires further explanation. Within the commissioned ranks were those

¹⁸⁸ Macleod, *The North-West Mounted Police and Law Enforcement*, 79.

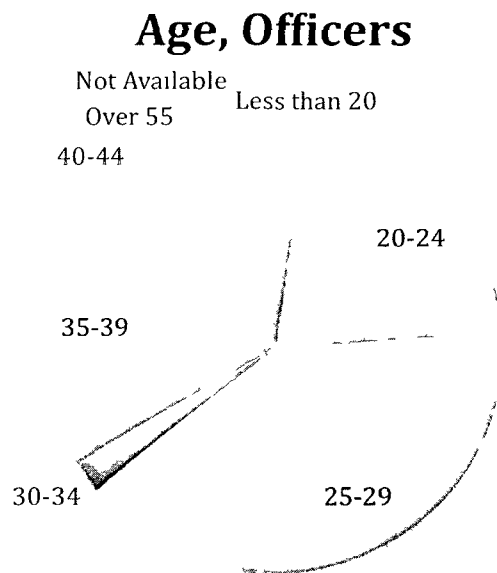
men engaged to serve as medical officers and veterinarians. These practitioners were treated as commissioned officers, and earned upwards of \$1,400 per year.¹⁸⁹ From more blue-collar trades were the one miller and one farmer who joined as commissioned officers. This, of course, contrasts starkly with the backgrounds of enlisted men. Only 5 percent of officers were blue collar, a great difference with what was seen in the ranks. The following table makes a comparison of the trades among the commissioned officers and enlisted ranks. Combined with previous military and policing experience, the officer cadre was mostly composed of men with education that ranged from high school to university, who were skilled, white-collar workers.



Members of the commissioned ranks were slightly older than those in the enlisted ranks. As previously noted, twelve of the forty-two officers had previous service within the ranks of the NWMP. Moreover, the professions of those joining required more extensive education. The most common officers' age group was between twenty-

¹⁸⁹ "Louis Alphonse Paic", Regimental Number O 86. LAC, RG 18, Volume 10037

five and twenty-nine years of age, which was exactly five years older than the majority of those joining in the enlisted ranks. There were still about 21 percent who joined between the ages of twenty and twenty-four, and one officer, Victor Arthur Seymour Matthews, was commissioned at the age of 19. Perhaps not surprisingly, Matthews, a student at the Royal Military College, had been recommended by the Minister of Militia and Defence, Adolphe-Philippe Caron.¹⁹⁰ Slightly older were the ten members who joined between the ages of thirty and thirty-nine, for 23 percent of all officers. There were also two physicians who were engaged at older ages, John Widmer Rolph at the age of forty, and Henry Dodd at the age of fifty-seven. Rolph only ended up serving two years, and Dodd died still in the service of the NWMP after six years.¹⁹¹



The relatively young age of officer candidates helps further the argument that commissions were given to men who were expected to make a career in the mounted

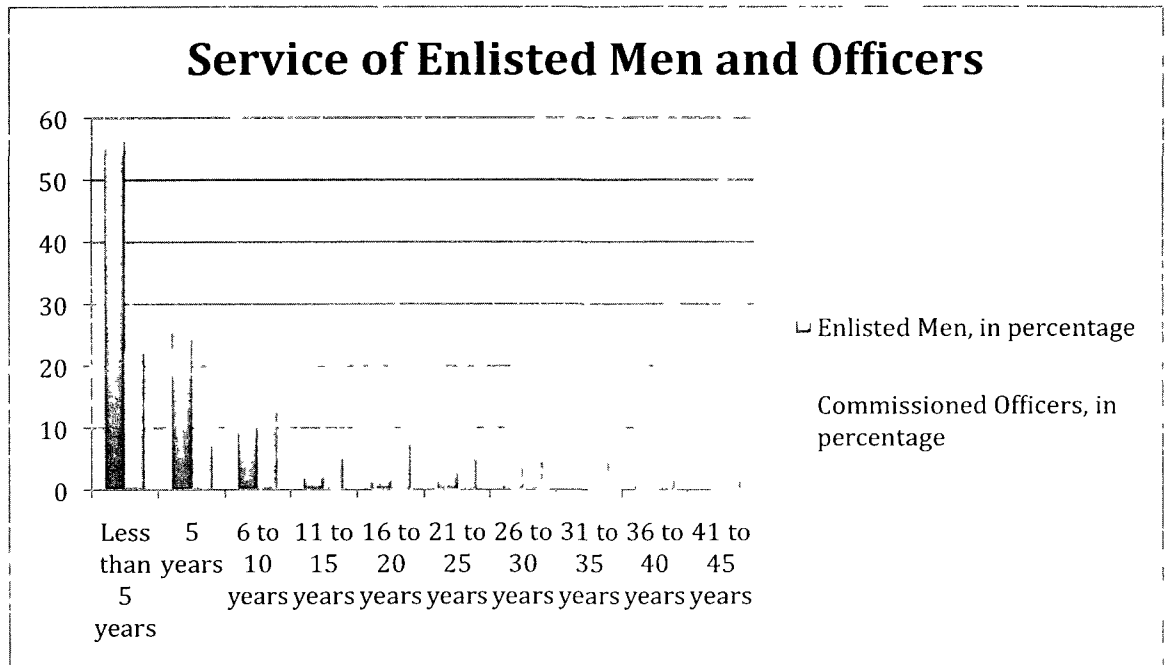
¹⁹⁰ "Victor Arthur Seymour Williams" Regimental Number O 82, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10037

¹⁹¹ "John Widmer Rolph" Regimental Number O 59, and "Henry Dodd", Regimental Number O 88, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10037

police, which was not the prevailing notion for the enlisted ranks. Over 50 percent of commissioned officers joining the NWMP between 1883 and 1887 served between fifteen and forty-five years, earning a pension. Significant is that another half did not serve long enough to secure a pension. In fact, there were over 22 percent of officers who served between six months and less than five years. Just like enlisted men, officers could find more lucrative employment elsewhere, or leave after receiving family legacies. Others sought a commission through political patronage, but soon found life in the Northwest more difficult than they had imagined.¹⁹² In addition, the officers were at the mercy of higher-ranking men. Superintendent Deane recalled that “life was none too pleasant” working with Commissioner Herchmer, and Deane was eventually sent on a recruitment drive out east to create distance between the two men.¹⁹³ Only 7 percent served a full five-year term, and 21 percent served between seven and nine years. Still, commissioned officers had a much higher average of service time compared to enlisted men, where the majority was less than five years of service.

¹⁹² *North-West Mounted Police Annual Report, 1887* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1888), 16.

¹⁹³ Deane, *Mounted Police Life in Canada*, 35 and 37



The emphasis on a career with the mounted police could also be demonstrated in the way in which members left the organization. Forty percent of all officers were pensioned, and another 31 percent died while still in service. Most deaths were due to natural causes. However, there was one case of suicide. William Springfield Piercy was twenty-seven when he was commissioned from the ranks of the NWMP. While posted in Edmonton, Piercy killed himself, “with no reason being established.” He was only thirty-three upon his death, and had served for approximately fourteen years in the organization.¹⁹⁴

About 21 percent of officers resigned, or nine of the forty-two officers. This was not an option available to enlisted men, who had to look to other means, both legal and illegal, to leave the force before the expiration of their service term. Within the commissioned ranks, one member was invalided, one was dismissed, and one deserted. The term desertion was not used on official documents relating to officers, as it was

¹⁹⁴ “William Piercy”, Regimental Number O 61, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10037.

termed “service dispensed – absent without leave” The lone dismissal belonged to Surgeon John Widmer Rolph, who was let go after two years of service Rolph had secured a commission while working as a physician in the Northwest Territories Regretfully, the file did not have further information as to why the forty-two year old surgeon had been dismissed ¹⁹⁵ The discharge was granted to Francis John Harper, an Englishman who had first joined the NWMP in 1880 as a constable Rising through the ranks rather quickly, he was commissioned as an inspector in 1887 On 1 March 1900 Harper transferred to Lord Strathcona’s Horse, a mounted regiment funded by Lord Strathcona, Canada’s High Commissioner in London, to fight in South Africa Shortly after arriving in South Africa, “he was charged with misconduct”, but the “court martial was dropped when he agreed to resign” Harper returned to England, and was considered to be “absent without leave” from the force He was discharged, and only contacted the mounted police in 1908 when he was residing in Seattle, Washington ¹⁹⁶

The men who chose to leave had various experiences within the NWMP There were three officers who resigned after less than seven years, and these were made up of a banker, an engineer, and a clerk There were also two military students who chose to leave, and two surgeons after only eighteen months of service The reasons for leaving were not always related to treatment within the mounted police Rather, there were some who wished to undertake different professions Montague Baker, who had in excess of fifteen years of service as an officer, and six years as an NCO in the NWMP, chose to resign and return to England in order to “enter a business with his brother” ¹⁹⁷ Thomas Wellington Chalmers, after seven years of service in the mounted police, left in order to

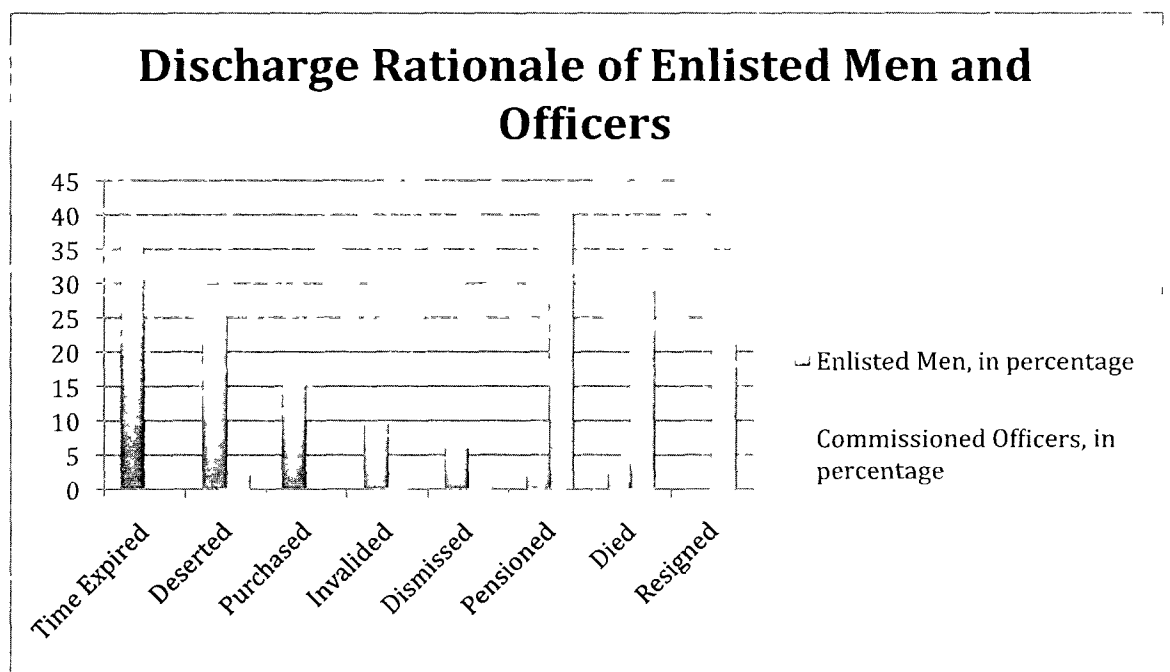
¹⁹⁵ “John Widmer Rolph”, Regimental Number O 59, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10037

¹⁹⁶ “Francis John Harper”, Regimental Number O 83, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10037

¹⁹⁷ “Montague Baker”, Regimental Number O 84, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10037

“seek employment as a civil engineer with [the] Dominion Survey department”. He later went on to serve with the 2nd Canadian Mounted Rifles in the South African War, and was “killed in action at Belfast, South Africa.”¹⁹⁸

In light of these statistics, it could be said that about two-thirds of officers either made a career in the force, or died while still in service. The majority of enlisted men either left at the expiration of their service term, deserted, purchased out, or were eventually invalided. On the other hand, less than 5 percent were either pensioned or died in service. This is at the heart of the difference between the experiences of enlisted men and commissioned officers within the North-West Mounted Police.



The NWMP’s promotion system bears explaining. As demonstrated, there were NCOs who eventually were promoted to the commissioned ranks. However, the majority of enlisted men remained at the rank of constable, and there were still many who, once promoted to NCO, were demoted for disciplinary issues. The promotion process for

¹⁹⁸ “Thomas Wellington Chalmers”, Regimental Number O 74, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10037.

commissioned officers was often slow and tied to political connections. There was still some relative mobility within the ranks. Of the forty-two officers commissioned during the period of study, sixteen remained at the lowest rank of inspector. Another eleven were promoted to the rank of superintendent, and another five were made assistant commissioners. Of those who had previous service as NCOs in the NWMP, eight of the twelve remained at the rank of inspector, while two were promoted to superintendent, and another two to the rank of assistant commissioner. The time period also saw the engagement of two eventual commissioners. Cortland Starnes joined as a twenty-two year old businessman from Quebec about one month prior to Lawrence William Herchmer, who joined the North-West Mounted Police as Commissioner after the organization had been severely criticized both during and after the Northwest Campaign of 1885.¹⁹⁹ Starnes was commissioner from 1923 to 1931.

While there were not too many disciplinary cases within the commissioned ranks, it is still important to review these to balance those found in the files of enlisted men. Beahen and Horrall found some 25 percent of officers “were heavy drinkers.”²⁰⁰ This was a source of tension not only between the enlisted men and the officers, but also with the general population of the Northwest Territories during the period of prohibition. Philip Carteret Hill Primrose was commissioned in the NWMP on 1 August 1885. A twenty-year old student from Nova Scotia when he joined the organization, Primrose would eventually go on to serve thirty years before he was pensioned. However, Primrose was also imprisoned and fined for drunkenness when he was in the Skagway. He was never promoted above the rank of superintendent, but was eventually

¹⁹⁹ “Cortland Starnes”, Regimental Number O.71, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10037 and Macleod, *The North-West Mounted Police*, 38.

²⁰⁰ Beahen and Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 163.

pensioned.²⁰¹ This is in direct contrast to what was seen in the files of the numerous enlisted men who were dismissed after completing their punishment when found drunk. This is a further indication of the double standard that existed between the commissioned and enlisted men. The social distinction that was made in the force allowed officers to leave the organization at any point in time, enjoying benefits to entice them to make a career, while expecting little likelihood of reprimand. Even the one who deserted was never reprimanded

Still, there were some minor similarities between the commissioned and enlisted men. Political influence, which would have been more predominant in the officer ranks, was often seen among those seeking to join the NWMP. After all, there was a waiting list in 1885 for constables in the organization.²⁰² Both officers and enlisted men used political connections to join the mounted police, and men in both categories also used connections to be promoted. John Alexander McGibbon, from Quebec, joined the NWMP in 1880 and secured a promotion to the rank of sergeant before discharging. Just a few months later, he used “the aid of influential political friends” to garner a commission, and through his next thirty-four years of service, used these same friends to secure further promotions to the ranks of superintendent and assistant commissioner. McGibbon’s son, Douglas Lorne McGibbon, and grandson, Douglas William McGibbon, all served in the organization, and all eventually reached the rank of assistant commissioner.²⁰³ Echoing a similar career trajectory, James Osgoode Wilson joined the NWMP as a constable in 1879. He discharged, time expired, in 1884, returning to the organization after obtaining a commission through the use of political influence. The

²⁰¹ “Philip Carteret Hill Pimiose”, Regimental Number O 56, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10037

²⁰² Macleod, *The North-West Mounted Police*, 44

²⁰³ “John Alexander McGibbon” Regimental Number O 62, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10037

twenty-seven year old had worked as a miller between his two service terms with the NWMP. As an officer, he served over thirty-eight years, and again resorted to the use of political pressure to gain promotions to superintendent and assistant commissioner.²⁰⁴ The fact that they each served in excess of thirty-four and thirty-eight years, respectively, must also lead to the conclusion that they were competent in effecting the tasks required of them.

Commissioner Aylesworth Bowen Perry, in charge of the organization from 1900 to 1923, and the Comptroller of the NWMP, Fred White, discussed their concerns about some enlisted men and officers. One officer in particular, George Buchanan Moffatt, worried the NWMP's administration. Moffatt was forced to take his pension in 1903, as his health was a major concern. This was the first time an officer was forced into a pension, and correspondence indicates they eventually settled on a sum of \$800 a year, based on his annual salary of \$2,600 as a superintendent. While an \$800 annual pension could be considered reasonable for the time period, Moffatt found this sum too small, and wrote to the NWMP that this created financial problems for his family. Ironically, Moffatt died in 1950 at the age of ninety-five, one of the oldest living members of the NWMP at that time. Before his death, Moffatt had been asked how he had been able to reach such an old age, answering that it had been "just misfortune".²⁰⁵ Approximately ten years after Moffatt was forced to pension, Joseph Victor Bégin, a rare francophone, was also given a compulsory pension after twenty-eight years of service,. Bégin had been a businessman in Quebec when he had secured a commission in the NWMP. While he was given no choice in his retirement, he remained close to the

²⁰⁴ "James Osgoode Wilson", Regimental Number O.64, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10037.

²⁰⁵ "George Buchanan Moffatt", Regimental Number O.50, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10037.

organization and often wrote to Commissioner James Howden MacBrien, who was in charge of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police between 1931 and 1938.²⁰⁶

Bégin's experience further entrenches the idea that a commission in the NWMP was a career and a lifetime membership. Many officers, upon retirement, remained in contact with the organization. These men received a rather small pension, but this was still an improvement on what was offered to the rank and file who joined the organization between 1883 and 1887. There appeared to be a balance between the men in both ranks, as the ratios of birthplace, regional provenance, and religious beliefs of the two groups were similar. However, the experience of commissioned men once they had entered the organization, and the emphasis on a permanent career, is what colours the difference between these two groups. The over eleven hundred enlisted men who had a brief and temporary time in the NWMP remained the standard for the time period.

²⁰⁶ "Joseph Victor Bégin", Regimental Number O 68, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10037

Conclusion: The Men of the Myth

The romantic myth that enveloped the North-West Mounted Police and its membership was already entrenched well into the 1880s, even after only ten years of being a fixture in the Canadian west. Historians have already concluded that the mounted police was able to control crime and uphold relative peace during this time period.²⁰⁷ However, until this thesis, no study had existed on the men who had made up the membership of the organization. Who were these men? Were they the stuff of legend? Not exactly. The majority of the enlisted men were Canadian-born, but of British Isles ancestry, who had worked as farmers or unskilled labourers often in Ontario. The commissioned officers were also Canadian born, but from skilled, educated backgrounds with a majority bringing with them some form of military instruction.

In his memoirs, John Donkin remarked that he lived a “weird life of exile where there is no scroll of honour... all is done as a simple duty... to wear a scarlet coat here is not to flaunt it before the wonderly [*sic*] grace of a lovely woman”.²⁰⁸ In one sentence, Donkin describes the reality, rather than the myth, of the NWMP. It is after a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the member files that the conclusion can be made that the majority saw their time in the force as transitory. Life in the mounted police was harsh and temporary, with many members biding their time until they could leave the organization. It is remarkable that the organization was able to successfully enforce the

²⁰⁷ John P. Turner, *The North-West Mounted Police, 1873-1893*, Volume II (Ottawa: The King's Printer, 1950), 282 and R.C. Macleod, *The North-West Mounted Police and Law Enforcement, 1873-1905* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 5.

²⁰⁸ John C. Donkin, *Trooper and Redskin in the Far North West: Recollections of Life in the North-West Mounted Police, Canada, 1884-1888* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1889), 236.

law while over half of its members were leaving before the expiration of their service terms, either by desertion, purchase, or invalidation.²⁰⁹

Once the members left the mounted police, post-service information was sometimes included in their files. Some had unfortunate occurrences after their service. Robert Walter Jamieson, a thirty-six year old Scottish soldier, left the mounted police at the expiration of his five-year service term. He re-joined for a year as a special constable at Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. Approximately one year after the end of his service with the NWMP, he committed suicide.²¹⁰ Augustus Graves, a twenty-eight year old farmer from England, served in the NWMP for one five-year service term. Approximately four years after his discharge from the force, newspapers reported that he had been murdered in Brandon, Manitoba.²¹¹ Of course, the men themselves caused some of their own misfortunes. Robert Maxwell was a twenty-three year old from Ontario when he deserted from the mounted police after one year of service. The self-described shanty man “fell in bad company”, and was convicted of murder and sentenced to be hanged in November 1886, only five months after his desertion. His sentence was eventually commuted to life imprisonment.²¹² And as previously mentioned, William Pepo, who had been dismissed less than a year into his service term, was tried for murder in Montana in 1899. Documents on this murder trial had been kept on file, as the mounted police had been asked to identify his belongings during the trial.²¹³

²⁰⁹ Edwin Charles Morgan, “The North-West Mounted Police, 1873-1883”, (University of Saskatchewan, Regina, 1970), 187 In his unpublished memoir, Morgan concludes that the force experienced no great problems with “efficiency”, but even with constant turnover and bureaucratic problems, the force was still successful in the enforcement of law and order

²¹⁰ “Robert Walter Jamieson”, Regimental Number 1015, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040

²¹¹ “Augustus E Graves”, Regimental Number 1031, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040

²¹² “Robert Maxwell”, Regimental Number 1633, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10041

²¹³ “William Pepo”, Regimental Number 1917, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10042

Some of the many men enlisted between 1883 and 1887 and who rejected the NWMP as a career had some noteworthy post-discharge experiences. Frank Perry was a twenty-one year old farmer from England when he joined the force. Perry was granted leave to attend the Ontario Veterinary College, and he worked for a brief time as a Veterinary Surgeon in the NWMP and later as a Veterinary Inspector at Wood Mountain for the Canadian Department of Agriculture²¹⁴ Samuel James Farrell was afflicted by rheumatism, and after successful treatment, he purchased his discharge to attend medical school. The then twenty-five year old from Quebec became a doctor, and later served during the South African War as a medical officer.²¹⁵ Perhaps realizing that the life of a mounted policeman was not suited for him, Thomas William Harris chose to purchase his discharge after less than five years of service. The twenty-four year old student from Nova Scotia had decided to become a teacher in Battleford, a profession that was most likely more suited to his previous educational work prior to joining the mounted police.²¹⁶ Frank Spicer was a sergeant major with over nineteen years of service when he was pensioned, receiving ninety cents a day until his death. After his pension from the force, he became a Protestant minister in Illinois where he died at a very late age.²¹⁷

Spicer was but one of several members who decided to leave Canada after their service term. Henry Spencer was a British cavalry officer who had joined the mounted police at the age of twenty-two. After less than three years of service, Spencer chose to purchase his service contract to return to England.²¹⁸ Sergeant Albert Watson had over seventeen years of service when he was pensioned. Watson, who had been a twenty-two

²¹⁴ "Frank Perry", Regimental Number 1125, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040

²¹⁵ "Samuel James Farrell", Regimental Number 1662, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10041

²¹⁶ "Thomas William Harris", Regimental Number 1850, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10042

²¹⁷ "Frank Spicer", Regimental Number 21, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10038

²¹⁸ "Henry Spencer", Regimental Number 964, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040

year old farmer from Ontario when he joined, chose to leave Canada and move to New Zealand. The lure of the United States also proved powerful, as discussed earlier in relation to deserters. Harry King Sargent served a five-year service term, and did not re-engage. Rather, he went to law school in Oregon and in 1912 was practicing as a lawyer in Los Angeles.²¹⁹ Abraham Edward Head was a twenty-year old farmer from England upon commencement of his service term with the mounted police. Head purchased his discharge after only three years, and settled in California.²²⁰

One wonders to what extent their time served as Mounties influenced their later career choices and assisted them to succeed in life. Whatever the case, they carried their experience gained in Canada's rugged Northwest with them forever. In order to understand the police, one has to start with the policeman. The historiography of the mounted police traced its exploits in enforcing law and order on a harsh prairie frontier, with most of the focus laid on the larger-than-life characters such as Superintendent Sam Steele or Commissioner Lawrence Herchmer. However, little had been documented or written about the constables who enforced the laws, patrolled the territories, and interacted with the growing population. It is hoped that this has helped unmask them. While successful in policing over 200,000 square miles of territory, the organization was less successful in attracting and retaining able-bodied men in the 1880s.

While the men of the mounted were revered the world over, the member enlisting between 1883 and 1887 faced a different reality filled with difficult work made even harder by the constant change-over that occurred in the ranks due to desertions and purchases. It is no wonder that a member remarked after a few difficult tasks that it was

²¹⁹ "Harry King Sargent", Regimental Number 1066, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040.

²²⁰ "Abraham Edward Head", Regimental Number 1091, LAC, RG 18, Volume 10040.

“the whole duty of a man in the ranks to not simply ‘slap your thigh with your cane and wink at the girls’... nowhere is the guilt so ruthlessly stripped off the gingerbread as in the North-West.”²²¹

²²¹ Donkin, *Trooper and Redskin*, 194

Appendix 1

Age – Enlisted Men

Age	Number of files
17	5
18	25
19	38
20	79
21	145
22	277
23	143
24	76
25	65
26	62
27	35
28	36
29	26
30	31
31	25
32	15
33	18
34	7
35	16
36	10
37	7
38	7
39	6
40	5

41	0
42	2
52	1

Appendix II

Birthplace – Enlisted Men

Birthplace	Number of Files
Canada	594
England	277
Ireland	75
Scotland	39
United States	46
Germany	7
France	4
Denmark	2
Holland	3
Belgium	1
Newfoundland	1
Norway	1
South Africa	1
Spain	1

Appendix III

Residence – Enlisted Men

Residence	Number of Files
Ontario	491
Quebec	130
Nova Scotia	69
New Brunswick	57
Northwest Territories	39
Manitoba	28
British Columbia	10
Prince Edward Island	2

Appendix IV

Religion – Enlisted Men

Religion	Number of Files
Church of England	440
Roman Catholic	179
Presbyterian	139
Protestant	107
Methodist	91
Baptist	25
Episcopalian	16
Lutheran	7
Wesleyan	4
Quaker	1
Unitarian	1

Appendix V

Previous Service – Enlisted Men

Previous Service	Number of Files
Military	420
US Military	6
French Military	2
British Army	1
Dutch Military	1
South African Military	1
Royal Navy	1
Russian Military	1

Appendix VI

Discharge Rationale – Enlisted Men

Discharge Rationale	Number of Files
Time Expired	434
Deserted	304
Purchased	179
Invalided	115
Dismissed	70
Pensioned	54
Died	32
Suicide	3
Engagement Cancelled	1
Temporary Term of Service	1

Appendix VII

Occupation – Enlisted Men

Occupation	Number of Files
Farmer	235
Soldier	81
Labourer	76
Clerk	73
Blacksmith	38
Carpenter	35
Teamster	34
Groom	32
Railroader	30
Lumberperson	33
Sailor	25
Student	30
Painter	17
Baker	17
Butcher	15
Machinist	11
Medical Student	12
Rancher	11
Miner	9
Printer	7
Civil Engineer	7
Bookkeeper	12
Druggist	11
Miller	6

Tailor	7
Boilermaker	6
Engineer	6
Banker	6
Driver	5
Driver	5
Herder	5
Plumber	5
Shoemaker	5
Surveyor	5
Bricklayer	4
Cabinet Maker	4
Coachman	5
Cook	5
Fireman	4
Police	4
Agent	3
Barber	3
Civil Servant	2
Fisherman	3
Harness Maker	4
Horse Driver	3
Horse Keeper	5
Law Student	3
Moulder	3
NWMP	3
Plasterer	3

Salesman	6
Telegraph Operator	3
Armourer	2
Cheesemaker	2
Chemist	2
Dyer	2
Fitter	2
Grocer	2
Grocery Clerk	2
Insurance Agent	2
Insurance Agent	2
No Profession	4
Porter	2
Shanty man	2
Steamfitter	2
Stone cutter	2
Stone mason	2
Watchmaker	2
Accountant	1
Agriculture Instructor	1
Architect	1
Baggageman	1
Barrister	1
Billiard maker	1
Book binder	1
Brass Moulder	1
Brick and Pipe Maker	1

Brickmaker	1
Broker	1
Bugler	1
Business Student	1
Hunter	1
Carpetweaver	1
Freightman	1
Carter	1
Checker	1
Cigar maker	1
Circus	1
Coffee planter	1
Collector	1
Confectioner	2
Courter	1
Engine Driver	1
Florist	1
Foundryman	1
Gardener	1
Graveler	1
Gunsmith	1
Hardware	2
Hay Trader	1
Chairman	1
Hostler	2
Hotel Porter	1
Indian Department	1

Iron Moulder	1
Ironplate Worker	1
Ironworks	1
Lathing	1
Lawyer	1
Locksmith	1
Machine fitter	1
Mail courier	1
Merchant	2
Newspaper Reporter	1
Organist	1
Livery Stable	1
Packer	1
Piano maker	1
Pipe maker	1
Rock foreman	1
Scholar	1
Scout	1
Servant	1
Shoemaker	3
Soapmaker	1
Steamboat Fireman	1
Steamroom	1
Stockman	1
Store Clerk	1
Sugar Refiner	1
Teacher	1

Time keeper	1
Tin smith	1
Tradesmith	1
Trumpeter	1
Upholsterer	1
Voyageur	1
Waiter	1
Warehouseman	1
Watchman	1

Appendix VIII

Birthplace – Officers

Birthplace	Number of Files
Canada	25
England	7
Scotland	1
Ireland	1

Appendix IX

Residence – Officers

Residence	Number of Files
New Brunswick	3
Ontario	12
British Columbia	1
Nova Scotia	2
Quebec	9
Northwest Territories	1
Prince Edward Island	1

Appendix X

Previous Service – Officers

Previous Service	Number of Files
NWMP NCO	12
Royal Marines	1
Military	16
Royal Military College	4

Appendix XI

Religion – Officers

Religion	Number of Files
Church of England	19
Roman Catholic	4
Presbyterian	4
Seventhist	1

Appendix XII

Occupation – Officers

Occupation	Number of Files
Soldier	10
Military Student	4
Student	1
Physician	3
Bookkeeper	1
Clerk	2
Banker	1
Miller	1
Medical Student	2
Commerce	3
Civil Servant	1
Civil Engineer	2
Veterinarian	2
Insurance Agent	1
Farmer	1

Appendix XIII

Age – Officers

Age	Number of Files
Less than 20	1
Between 20 and 24	9
Between 25 and 29	17
Between 30 and 34	1
Between 35 and 39	9
Between 40 and 44	1
57	1

Appendix XIV

Highest Rank – Officers

Highest Rank	Number of Files
Inspector	16
Superintendent	11
Assistant Commissioner	5
Surgeon	8
Commissioner	2

Appendix XV

Discharge Rationale – Officers

Discharge Rationale	Number of Files
Pensioned	17
Died	13
Resigned	9
Invalided	1
Dismissed	1
Discharge – Absent without leave	1

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