THE PIONEER TELEGRAPH
IN WESTERN CANADA

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THE PIONEER TELEGRAPH IN WESTERN CANADA

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SYNOPSIS

In 1874 the government of Alexander Mackenzie let four contracts for a pioneer telegraph line to be built as part of the project for a Canadian Pacific Railway. The line was to extend from Thunder Bay on Lake Superior through Selkirk on the Red River to Cache Creek in B.C., where it would connect with that province's telegraph system. The contractors for the second section of the pioneer line built a short line from Selkirk to Winnipeg giving them connections with Ottawa and their suppliers in the East. Almost immediately after awarding the contracts, the Mackenzie government stopped work on the most westerly contract, leaving the pioneer line with a terminus at a point south of Edmonton, but not before the section from Cache Creek to Kamloops had been completed. This section of the pioneer line was eventually transferred to the Canadian Pacific Railway when its railway lines were built along that route, as was the section from Thunder Bay to Selkirk. A change of policy with regard to the route the railway would follow resulted in the abandonment of the inter-lake section and a portion of the prairie section. The remainder of the prairie line functioned as a sort of branch line of the newly-built Canadian Pacific telegraph line, giving service to Battleford and Edmonton by way of the "fertile belt". A part of it continued to operate until 1923, by which time it had outlived its usefulness.

This thesis examines the construction of the pioneer line and the extent to which the Mackenzie and Macdonald governments made use of it as part of national policy. Materials in the archives of the four western provinces and in the Public Archives of Canada, along with a body of material accumulated in the field, form the central core of the study.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One. First Attempts</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two. Letting The Contracts</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three. Winnipeg to Livingstone - The Sifton, Glass Contract</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four. Livingstone to Edmonton - The Fuller Contract</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five. Edmonton to Cache Creek - The Barnard Contract</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six. Selkirk to Thunder Bay - The Oliver, Davidson &amp; Co. Contract</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Seven. Abandonment of the Inter-Lake Route and the Construction of the Qu'Appelle-to-Humboldt Line</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Eight. Uses of the Telegraph</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Nine. The Last Years of the Pioneer Line</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Ten. Conclusion</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Eleanor - Map 1; Eleanor - Map 2</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Extension to Peace Hills</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustration</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map of Breckenridge, Minnesota-to-Fort Garry Telegraph Line</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwestern Telegraph Company Telegram</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map showing how the telegraph line crossed Dog Lake</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map of the Sifton, Glass Contract</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Colcleugh's sketch of stations and distances on his two subcontracts</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map of the Fuller Contract</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney Hall's sketch of Humboldt Telegraph Station, 1881</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map of the Barnard Contract</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map of the Oliver, Davidson Contract</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map Illustrating the Abandonment of the Humboldt-Selkirk Section</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Canadian Pacific Telegraph Line - Saskatchewan District-Telegram</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troops Moving Along Telegraph Line in 1885</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humboldt Telegraph Station, 1885</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map of Telegraph Lines in The North-West Territories in 1885</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlas map showing Eleanor</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map showing location of Eleanor</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map showing extension to Peace Hills</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PREFACE

The writer began the research for this thesis quite by accident eighteen years ago, while teaching at Irma, Alberta. A student handed in a scrapbook, containing a map torn out of an old atlas showing the North-West Territories as they were in the late 1880's. The map showed a telegraph line extending from Qu'Appelle, in the district of Assiniboia, to Edmonton, in the district of Alberta, and passing through the part of Alberta where I was living at the time. (See Eleanor - Map 1 in Appendix I). A station by the name of Eleanor had apparently been nearby. My curiosity stimulated, I began making the inquiries which finally led to this thesis. Nothing disappears more completely than a telegraph line which has been both built and abandoned before the period of settlement, and whose materials have been salvaged. I was occasionally told that no such line had existed, and that I should be directing my search north of the Saskatchewan River where, everyone knew, a telegraph line had existed until its abandonment in the early twenties. An article in a Viking, Alberta, publication Remember When? was encouraging at this time because it told of insulators which had been found in neighbouring districts, and I eventually learned that two of them had been preserved in the Viking school museum.

In time I came upon J. S. Macdonald's The Dominion Telegraph, published by the Canadian North-West Historical Society at Battleford, a society which had been one of the first casualties of the great depression of the 1930's. Here I must make a special acknowledgment of the work of this man and of the society which published it. The Dominion Telegraph
has been my constant companion ever since I was able to purchase a copy, and without it, research would have been much more difficult. Macdonald's work is basically about one section of the pioneer telegraph line built along the right-of-way of the projected Canadian Pacific Railway in the latter part of the 1870's, although the neighbouring section, crossing the inter-lake region of Manitoba, receives some attention in the first three or four pages. While Macdonald's work contains errors, some of them very serious, it gives a glimpse of the reasons for the construction of the line, and alludes to the existence of two other sections. In time, lines of research suggested by Macdonald's work led me to archives in Edmonton, Battleford, Regina, Winnipeg and Ottawa, as well as to the special collections at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. These studies showed that the pioneer telegraph line, along with the two lines which gave it connections, through the United States, to eastern Canada, is intimately associated with the history of Canada from the Lakehead west to the Pacific through a period beginning more than a decade before Confederation and reaching well into this century. Since it functioned in a dual role, primarily as a means of communication but also as a recorder of events, study given to it by historians is intrinsically worthwhile.
Chapter One
FIRST ATTEMPTS

In the 1840's and 1850's entrepreneurs were beginning to consider ways of shortening the trade routes of the world by constructing lines of transportation and communication across the North American continent. Major Robert Carmichael-Smith in 1848 advocated a railway from Halifax to the mouth of the Fraser. In 1851 Allan McDonell, of Toronto, sought a charter of incorporation for a Lake Superior and Pacific Railway Company, but had his application rejected on the grounds that the "claims of the Indian tribes had first to be adjusted". In 1852 Captain Millington H. Synge and Alexander Douell both proposed a transcontinental railway. They had two things in common: they ignored the chartered rights of the Hudson's Bay Company and they had little capital.

The Fraser River gold discoveries gave new impetus to such projects. Perry McDonough Collins' project for a transcontinental telegraph line to join at Bering Strait with another to be built through Siberia to Russia and on to western Europe received encouragement and support from Russian, British, American and Canadian governments. The construction of this line, which reached the Pacific at San Francisco and then swung north to pass through Oregon and Washington and British Columbia's Fraser Valley, was well advanced in 1866, when the laying of the Atlantic cable caused it to be discontinued.

The geographical obstacles in British North America were known to be formidable. There were, however, other obstacles to be considered. The chartered rights of the Hudson's Bay Company was one. The reluctance of the Canadian government to embark on any project which might raise taxes...
was another. Most difficult of all, perhaps, to capitalists in search of grants or loans or other financial aid, was the figure of W. E. Gladstone, chancellor of the exchequer in several succeeding British cabinets, and famous for his policies of economy and retrenchment. Only the Duke of Newcastle, the colonial secretary, gave encouragement to projects which might establish agricultural communities in areas presently occupied by Indians.\(^4\)

One entrepreneur whose efforts left tangible results was Sir Edward Watkin. The son of a wealthy Manchester cotton merchant, Watkin found in railway and telegraph expansion a natural outlet for his entrepreneurial zeal and managerial talents. He had been involved in British railway affairs since the mid-1840's, serving in various capacities the Trent Valley, the London and Northwestern and the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire railways. His railway career brought him into contact with such men influential in the political and financial worlds as the Duke of Newcastle and the Glyn family, well-known London bankers. He early developed an interest in North American affairs.\(^5\) A book written in 1852 recorded his observations after a summer tour of Canada and the United States.\(^6\)

Watkin's interest in the affairs of British North America had ideological as well as professional foundations. As he wrote in 1887,

Anyone who reads what follows will learn that I am an Imperialist - that I hate Little Englandism. That, so far as my puny forces would go, I struggled for the union of the Canadian Provinces, in order that they might be retained under the sway of the best form of government - a limited monarchy, and under the best of that form - the beneficent rule of our Queen Victoria.\(^7\)
But Watkin's imperialism was not based entirely on a conception of duty and patriotism. In Watkin's opinion Canada could in the future provide a secure route to the rich trade harvests of the Orient. British North America was something to be held for the material good of the Empire as well as a monarchical bulwark against a rising republican tide.

Watkin's distaste for republicanism did nothing to dampen his frank admiration for the accomplishments of American commerce and industry. His imperialism was combined with entrepreneurial supranationalism in matters of business and finance. The rapid expansion of the Republic's railroad and telegraph systems toward the western part of British North America caught his attention, and while fearing republican intrusions there, he readily adopted the management and promotion methods of the American railway builders to serve his own ends.

Watkin was sent to Canada in 1861 to attempt to reorganize the affairs of the Grand Trunk Railway, then in a state of chaos. He had been approached for a similar reason in 1854, but had refused, giving ill health and business preoccupation in England as his reasons. In 1861, however, he accepted with enthusiasm, probably because certain of his views had had time to mature. In an article in the *Illustrated London News* in February, 1861, he had strongly advocated the building of a Pacific railway to connect with the lines already operating in Canada. Such a railway, he argued, would provide an economical route to the Orient and would open up vast areas of the interior of British North America to colonization and commerce.

Watkin, as we have seen, was not the first to suggest a railway
linking the Atlantic with the Pacific. His advocacy of such a scheme shortly before accepting his post with the Grand Trunk, however, gave a clear indication of the steps he considered necessary if the Grand Trunk was to be a paying proposition. This commitment to the idea of a Pacific communications link was to lead him to propose a transcontinental telegraph line as a prelude to construction of a Pacific railway.

Before he left England, Watkin had an interview with the Duke of Newcastle, the colonial secretary. The two were in agreement as to the importance of a railway to the Pacific. Watkin later wrote "that from the 17th July, 1861, I regarded myself as the Duke's unofficial, unpaid, never-tiring agent in these great enterprises".10

Never-tiring Watkin would certainly have to be in the two years that followed. For, while the schemes and conceptions that he and Newcastle had talked of were far-reaching and grand, bringing them into reality involved making his way through a frightening maze of negotiations. Much of British North America was involved, including British Columbia, Vancouver Island, Rupert's Land, the provinces of Canada, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, the great and ancient Hudson's Bay Company, the Grand Trunk Railway and the Colonial Office itself. If this maze of interests and institutions defeated Watkin in the end, he at least had the satisfaction of knowing that the Hudson's Bay Company, then in its second century of trading activities in North America, would never be the same again.

Any project of transportation or communication in British North America involved lands of the Hudson's Bay Company if its aims were transcontinental in extent. The board of directors of the old company
could tell by the 1850's that the old regime was passing, and that the West could not always remain the preserve of the fur trader. Its legal position, however, was strong, and while it was not unprepared to sell some of its rights, it did not propose to give them away. In 1856 Edward Ellice, Sr., one of the members of the board, had even suggested a price.

The Hudson's Bay Company are quite willing to dispose of their territory and their establishments. It is a question of a million of money.11

Negotiations began in 1862, Watkin representing the Grand Trunk group and the Duke of Newcastle speaking for the Colonial Office, with the object of obtaining land for the proposed telegraph line and railway. The topic of the sale of the Company itself came up, and negotiations went forward simultaneously on the two possibilities.12 The negotiations culminated in the purchase of the Company by the newly-formed International Finance Society, a society in which Watkin's financial backers figured prominently and for which the trade in furs had not the importance given it by the old company.13 Watkin found himself in the not entirely comfortable position of being in fact an agent of the new Hudson's Bay Company, subject to the sanction of the Governor and board of directors, as well as president of the Grand Trunk and representative of the financial backers. He was close to the source of power but still did not have the last word.

The Duke of Newcastle, fully aware that the change of ownership of the company would involve a change in its policies on settlement and development, spoke optimistically in the House of Lords in July of 1863, announcing that the Pacific telegraph was about to become a reality and that credit for this was due to Watkin. While the project was still
dependent on the sanction of the Canadian government, the Duke was sure that this would be received in the coming session.14

Watkin, meanwhile, had held informal talks with Sir Edmund Head, the new governor of the company, and had then left for Canada to make further plans for the telegraph project. In Montreal he met Alexander Dallas, the Overseas Governor of the company, who had just come in from Red River, on his way back to London. That same day he received his official letter of instructions from Head, requesting him to go to Red River and report on the problems connected with telegraph construction across the West. It was at this point that he made what turned out to be a serious mistake. In his haste to set the project in motion he decided not to go to Red River at all, but to rely on Dallas for the needed information. He then proceeded to make definite plans for an immediate start on the line. He drew up an agreement with O. S. Wood, superintendent of the Montreal Telegraph Company, which would enable work to go ahead almost immediately. The agreement, which was conditional on the concurrence of both the Hudson's Bay Company board of directors and the board of the Montreal Telegraph Company, called for the latter to build a line from the eastern end of their Canadian lines to Halifax and from their western end to the Hudson's Bay Company post at Sault Ste. Marie. The Hudson's Bay Company was to build, by sub-contract to Wood, lines from Fort Garry to the Pacific, to the U.S. border at Pembina, and to the Canadian border at Fort William. They were also to make arrangements for a line from Fort William to Sault Ste. Marie. It was provided that the section from Fort Garry to Sault Ste. Marie was dependent upon arrangements with the Canadian government. Failing or pending those arrangements the route to
be adopted was to be by the way of Detroit, St. Paul and Pembina to Fort Garry. 15

Watkin thought that he had reason to feel encouraged about progress. A line avoiding the difficult terrain north of Lake Superior could be put into operation within a year. When the Canadian government agreed to a subsidy for the northern route, that portion could be built, making the line follow an all-British route. But Watkin's haste had hurt his project, as the official responses to his reports and agreements with Wood soon showed. Sir Edmund Head took an extremely serious view of the fact that Watkin had not obeyed his instructions and gone to Red River himself. "You will forgive me for saying that the conditional agreements for the telegraph are a little premature", Head wrote. He reminded Watkin that the final decision in such matters lay with the governor and board of directors. 16 Head told Watkin not to send Wood to Red River. Wood, however, was already under way, having ordered a limited supply of insulators and telegraph instruments in New York to enable an early start during the fall of 1863 or early in 1864. Watkin had no choice but to return to London and clarify his position with the governor and board of directors. In London it was clear that Head and the board were not prepared to act quickly. After private and probably stormy sessions with Head, Watkin submitted his resignation. 17

The Company, however, did not abandon the project, and in May of 1864, they set it in motion. They appointed Dr. John Rae, the noted Arctic explorer, to do the necessary survey for the route. Without waiting for his report, the board's agents ordered the wire and other supplies and arranged for their shipment to Victoria and to Red River. Watkin,
acting for the Grand Trunk, was free to offer free transportation over the railway company's lines. By April of 1865 the telegraph supplies were on the ground at Red River.\textsuperscript{18}

In choosing Dr. Rae the board had obtained the services of a man eminently qualified for the task. The noted Arctic explorer had crossed and recrossed northern North America a number of times. His expedition of 1853-54 had found evidence of the fate of the Franklin expedition. In 1869 he had undertaken the land part of the survey of a projected telegraph and cable system to link Europe with America by way of Scotland, the Faroe Islands, Iceland and Greenland.\textsuperscript{19}

Dr. Rae was on board the "Persia" when it sailed from Britain for Montreal in May, 1864.\textsuperscript{20} In Montreal he made St. Lawrence Hall his headquarters, conferring with O. S. Wood on matters of route, distance and supply of wood for poles.\textsuperscript{21} Notice was taken of the fact that Governor Dallas of the Hudson's Bay Company personally favoured the Thompson River route through the mountainous western end of the territory to be traversed by the telegraph line.\textsuperscript{22} The supply of timber for poles was seen as one of the chief problems, and throughout his journey west Rae made note of the kinds and extent of the stands of timber available. It was at all times assumed by Rae and the Hudson's Bay board that the telegraph line would be built through the Yellowhead Pass, since that pass was believed to give the lowest gradient through the mountains.

At St. Paul Dr. Rae hired a Mr. Schweiger to act as a foreman. In his final report Rae suggested that Schweiger would be willing and able to superintend construction of the line the next year.\textsuperscript{23}

The prairie was dry in the spring of 1864 and prairie fires had been
common. Pastures were poor as a result of drought, fires and grasshopper infestation. The drought, however, had made driving conditions better than usual all through Minnesota, and Rae noted with satisfaction that, while the average time for the trip from Crow Wing to Fort Garry was ten days, he had made it in seven. He arrived in Fort Garry on June 17, and immediately set about hiring six men, a number he considered sufficient for a basic crew to clear and cut brush where that should prove necessary. He purchased a spring wagon, three carts, fourteen horses and the necessary provisions and tools. His plan was to reach the Rockies by August 8, spend twelve to fifteen days exploring the area and send Schweiger and some of the men back, to arrive at Fort Garry on or before October 20. Rae and the rest of the men would go on to the coast.

Before he left Fort Garry Rae was met at the Court House by the Saulteaux chief, Panasay, "the Orator", and sixty of his tribesmen. News of the project had reached them, and they wanted an explanation of what was intended. Rae outlined the purpose of the telegraph line, assuring them that presents would be given to the Indians as long as the line remained undamaged. With the distribution of provisions, ammunition and tobacco, the Saulteaux went away happy.

Rae and his party left Fort Garry on June 26, and spent more than a month locating a suitable route for the line, arriving in Edmonton on July 28. Rae kept in mind the availability of suitable timber for poles, and the route he eventually recommended seldom strayed far from where trees were handy. Not surprisingly, the route recommended would have linked together a number of the famous old Hudson's Bay posts of the "fertile belt". From Fort Garry through Prairie Portage post and Fort
Ellice to Fort Pelly, timber was either readily available or not too far away. The most difficult part of the country to build through, Rae concluded, would be in the central region from Touchwood Hills to Fort Carlton. He decided to avoid that area by going north-west from Fort Pelly to cross the North Saskatchewan River at Fort à la Corne and then by keeping to the north bank of that river through Fort Carlton and Fort Pitt to Fort Edmonton. The line from Fort Carlton to Fort Pitt would also be difficult, Rae observed, but timber for poles could be brought to this section of the line by steamer. West of Fort Edmonton there was no problem, but a good trail would have to be cleared to facilitate hauling the supplies of wires, brackets and insulators. Rae was pleased to be able to report that in the country west of Fort Edmonton there were good stands of Norway pine or red pine which were suitable for telegraph poles. 28

The party did not reach Tête Jaune Cache until August 23, two weeks later than planned, because more clearing for the trail was necessary than Rae had anticipated. Rae changed his strategy. South of Big Lake he had hired an extra man to help with the clearing, making a total party of nine. He now decided to send out two parties, one to explore the Thompson River country, the other to go west to the Cariboo diggings. The rest, including Rae himself, would build a canoe to go down the Fraser River. 29

As a result of these explorations, Rae decided to recommend the Fraser River route. The Fraser was so crooked, he reported, that it would be advisable, in order to save wire, to cut a path along the outside limits of the loops, thus giving the shortest possible distance
along the river's direction of flow. Supplies of trees were available and would present no problem.

Appalled at the high cost of labour in the West, he recommended hiring eastern men, who would work for less. As for the line itself, twenty-four poles to the mile and number ten wire should make a satisfactory line. Since there were no particular obstacles to construction he looked forward to an early completion of the line, realizing, from long experience, the many advantages it could offer to the western traveller.

Rae reached Victoria, Vancouver Island, on September 29, 1864, and from there he made his way back to England, where he presented his report to the Hudson's Bay Company board.30

Construction could have begun on the Hudson's Bay telegraph project in 1865. The materials were on the ground and the route had been surveyed.31 Unfortunately, however, April of 1865 saw the completion of the line being built northward from San Francisco to British Columbia by Perry McDonough Collins, and the principal reason for the Hudson's Bay project had been removed.32 The telegraph materials in storage at Victoria were sold to the Collins project as the Siberia-bound line was being built through northern British Columbia.33 Telegraph service reached Victoria by way of this line in 1866,34 and it provided telegraph communication with the rest of Canada until the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company's line in 1885 gave more direct communication.35

There is irony in this story of Watkin and his negotiations with the Hudson's Bay Company. Had he made haste more slowly the outcome - and Canadian history - might have been much different. In 1863, when Watkin received the order to proceed to Red River, it was possible to make the
trip from Montreal to that place in a little more than a month. Lord Milton and Dr. Cheadle had done it the year before and managed some hunting on the side. Had Watkin followed orders and gone to Red River he could have obtained the information desired and been back in Montreal by late September. Armed with a favourable report he could either have written to Head or travelled himself to England in time for action to be taken by, say, mid-October. Supplies ordered in November and sent by steamer and American railways could have been on the ground at both Fort Garry and Victoria by late April of 1864. The line could have been constructed in the summer of that year. This would have given telegraphic communication between British Columbia, Rupert's Land and Canada regardless of whether the Canadian government decided to participate by authorizing the line north of Lake Superior. It is entirely possible that, faced with a positive Hudson's Bay Company decision in the fall and winter of 1863, the government of J. S. Macdonald would have decided to go ahead with its part of the project. Lacking this positive example, the Canadian government decided not to take part. As a result, Red River remained isolated from Canada until 1871, by which time the troubles of 1869-1870 and the Fenian raid of 1871 were history.

The telegraph materials which had been transported to Fort Garry in 1864 remained there, unused, until 1871. One of the first sights which greeted Adams George Archibald upon his arrival at Red River in 1870 was a massive pile of crates of telegraph insulators, brackets and coils of telegraph wire. Archibald, recently named Lieutenant-Governor of the newly-created province of Manitoba, faced a formidable task of conciliation,
Communication is essential to conciliation, and Archibald appears to have appreciated that fact.39 There is evidence to show that the unused telegraph materials were among the first items of unfinished business dealt with by the new Lieutenant-Governor, and that the telegraph line, whose construction he listed among his main achievements, had to have his attention on a number of occasions.40

The supplies at Red River were well-known in official circles, even if they had not been put to use. The list of articles drawn up in 1869 relative to the transfer of Rupert's Land from Hudson's Bay Company to Canadian jurisdiction had the following as clause 10:

Canada is to take over the materials of the Electric Telegraph at cost price, such price including transport, but not including interest for money, and subject to deduction for ascertained deterioration.41

A Privy Council minute, dated May 18, 1870, also had the telegraph material in mind. Mr. McDougall, the lieutenant-governor designate who had been prevented by the Metis from entering Rupert's Land in October, 1869, had made the suggestion that a telegraph line be built from Fort Garry to Pembina, on the international boundary. The minute directed that a study be made to find out the cost of building on Canadian soil first.42

The findings were not encouraging; a submarine cable linking Chantry Island with the head of Lake Superior would cost $467,000.00, while the estimated cost of a line from the head of the lake to Fort Garry would be $44,300.00, a total of more than half a million dollars. Those who made the study recommended, as a "temporary expedient", that an agreement be arrived at with the Northwestern Telegraph Company, whose lines then reached to Breckenridge, Minnesota, some three hundred miles south of
By August, 1870, the Northwestern Telegraph Company had made a proposal to the Canadian Public Works Department: a single-wire line was to be built before September 1, 1871, connecting Fort Garry with the Company's lines; the Company was to maintain the line for three years at its own expense; the Company was to transmit messages, offering a rebate of 25% on messages less than 100 words and of 75% on messages of more than 100 words; the Canadian government was to secure the right of property on the Pembina-to-Fort-Garry section of the line, and to give the right to do business free of taxation; the Canadian government was to furnish insulators and wire to build the 300-mile line, delivery to Fort Garry, Pembina and Georgetown. The government was to supply additional wire at cost price, receiving payment in telegraphy; the government was to pay duty on the supplies entering the United States; the wire was to revert to the Canadian government if the Company failed to maintain the line, and as much of the additional wire as remained unpaid for was to be returned or made good to the government.

An order-in-council dated August 17, 1870, implemented the agreement but revised clause 4, since that right - the right of property - was under the jurisdiction of the Manitoba government. The Company assented to the revision of the property clause on August 31. One of Archibald's first official duties was to meet with councillors Boyd and Girard to give the necessary provincial property privileges under clause 4. An act of the Manitoba legislature would be necessary to give this agreement the force of law, and Boyd and Girard recommended the appropriate steps.

The Hudson's Bay Company asked twelve thousand nine hundred
eighty-seven pounds fifteen shillings four pence for the telegraph supplies. After deductions for short quantity and for storage, which Canada was under no obligation to pay, the Company was paid eleven thousand seven hundred seventy-nine pounds one shilling and seven pence for them.47

Archibald and his councillors took a close look at the agreement which the Canadian government had arrived at with the Northwestern Telegraph Company, and thought that something should be done about clause six, having to do with the payment of duty. Duty had already been paid on the supplies once, when they were brought through the United States, and over two-thirds of the proposed line was actually in the United States, where it would be readily available for the use of American citizens. Archibald was directed to ask the United States consul in Red River, J. W. Taylor, if he could request the remission of duty on these particular supplies. J. F. Hartley, acting secretary of the U. S. Treasury Department, politely advised Taylor that there was "no provision of law" under which he could authorize the free entry of the materials.48

The materials were delivered to the specified delivery points and work went forward on the line. Archibald's work was far from done, however. When Robertson of Northwestern Telegraph Company wrote to the Manitoba government about the materials being assembled "in suitable places mentioned and left in safe hands",49 Archibald had to remind him that the Canadian government's obligation, as per clause 5, had to do with "delivery" only and not with appointing people to keep them safe.50

A memo of wire and insulators in store at Winnipeg, May 3, 1871, gives the amount of materials then in the pile at Fort Garry:
2078 coils electric wire weighing about 249,360 pounds. 
159 boxes insulators-220 each box or 34,980 in all. 
5280 feet, or one mile, length of wire weighs 252 pounds, or 21 feet to the pound. Jas. F. Graham. 51

Meanwhile the community at Red River was speculating about when the line would be finished. In January of 1871 the Weekly Manitoban hoped for telegraph connection by "the end of September next" and reminded its readers that there had once been hope of completion of the line "last fall". 52 In July the newspaper reported that work was continuing and the line was gradually being extended along the Red River Valley northward to Fort Garry. 53 But the Fenian scare of October, 1871 came and went and still there was not the convenience of telegraph service. Not until November 20 could a telegram be sent from Fort Garry. Archibald's message to Governor-General Lisgar spoke of "devout thankfulness to Almighty God for the close of our isolation from the rest of the world". "The voice of Manitoba", he went on, "uttered this morning on the banks of the Assiniboine, will be heard in a few hours on the banks of the Ottawa..." Lisgar replied congratulating the inhabitants of Manitoba on the event. 54

From then on most issues of the Manitoban contained news telegraphed from all parts of the world where telegraph service extended. If the month of February, 1872 is any indication, Archibald himself made considerable use of the line for government purposes, sending thirteen telegrams consisting of 1389 words, for a net cost after rebates of $152.06. 55 Maintaining telegraph service was to cause Archibald two more sets of problems with the telegraph line. A storm in April of 1872
Map of Breckenridge-to-Fort Garry Telegraph Line

(Information for this map was obtained from the Manitoba Daily Free Press, especially the long paragraph November 15, 1878.)
Northwestern Telegraph Company telegram. The message reads as follows:

"Fort Garry, July 25, 1872. To Lieut.-Governor, Fort Garry by telegraph from Ottawa, 25, 1872. Chief Justice leaves next week for Manitoba. On arrival can at once revise voters list for use at Elections it is advisable therefore that you should retain writs for the present as returns are not required till 12th Oct. Barnard"
wrecked portions of the line and it took a long time for service to be restored. In May the Manitoban commented editorially about the poor service given by the telegraph company, stating that even under the best of conditions, the company seemed to have "little time" for Red River messages. Then in September a sleet storm blew down poles and grounded the wire.

Archibald waited what he thought was a decent time and then made inquiries. When told that the man sent from St. Paul to repair the line had fallen sick and that there were no conveyances handy to take workmen out onto the line, Archibald replied that he would personally see to it that all the teams necessary were found. He went on to warn the company's representative that the government of Canada would hold the company responsible for any damages resulting from inability to use the line. Not content with this action, Archibald wrote to the president of the Northwestern Telegraph Company, notified the Secretary of State for the Provinces of his action, and urged him to write to the company too. Archibald was later informed by the telegraph company that the repair man had found over twenty miles of poles knocked down by the storm.

The telegraph line whose materials had been purchased by the Hudson's Bay Company, whose construction was arranged for by the Canadian government, and whose repair was so bluntly insisted upon by Archibald, was for twelve years the key section of telegraph line by which messages from first Manitoba and the North-West Territories and then from Western Ontario could be transmitted to the outside world.
Footnotes to Chapter One


4. Ibid., pp. 365-6.


13. Details of the negotiations can be found in Galbraith, op. cit., chapter 17.


17. Ibid., Watkin to Head, Aug. 26, 1863.

18. The Nor'Wester, May 13, 1865.


20. Rae's Report is in Public Archives of Canada, Hudson Bay Archives, E-15/12. (Cited hereafter as PAC and HBA respectively).

22. PAC, HBA, E-15/12, Rae's Report.

23. Schweiger seems to have been retained as engineer to the project for a time. He reported to The Nor'Wester on the transportation of the materials to Red River; see The Nor'Wester, Nov. 2, 1864.


25. Ibid.; The Nor'Wester, June 21, 1864.


27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. In 1864 Vancouver Island was a separate Crown Colony.

31. The correspondence about the telegraph materials is in PAC, HBA, A-7/4 and A-6/39.


34. McKay, op. cit., p. 200.


38. The Nor'Wester carried reports of the movements of the supplies between September 1, 1864 and May 13, 1865.

39. Archibald made frequent use of the available newspapers for the publication of proclamations and messages to the people, usually using English and French, and, in at least one case, Cree. See The Weekly Manitoban, Dec. 24, 1870.


42. Ibid. Privy Council Minute dated May 18, 1870.

43. Ibid. Privy Council Minute dated June 8, 1870.

44. Ibid. Proposal dated August 9, 1870.

45. Ibid. Order-in-council dated August 17, 1870.

46. Ibid. Minute of Manitoba executive council dated Sept. 30, 1870; Alfred Boyd was born in England. In the affair of 1869-1870 he was a delegate to the Convention of Forty. Archibald appointed him provincial secretary in his first council.

Marc Girard was born at Varennes, Lower Canada. Coming to Manitoba in 1870, he was appointed provincial treasurer in Archibald's first council. Appointed a Senator in 1871, he worked for the construction of a railway south of Lake Manitoba. He was later a premier of Manitoba.


49. Ibid. S. Robertson to Archibald, April 10, 1871.

50. Ibid. Archibald to Robertson, May 6, 1871.

51. Ibid. Memo dated May 3, 1871.

52. The Weekly Manitoban, January 28, 1871.

53. Ibid., July 22, 1871.

54. Ibid., December 9, 1871. See Map of Breckenridge-to-Fort-Garry Telegraph Line, p. 19.

55. The statement for the month of February is in the Archibald papers. A couple of other statements are to be found there, too, but it is not clear whether they are from Archibald's or from Morris's administration. Statement dated Feb. 29, 1872, Provincial Archives of Manitoba (cited hereafter as PAM), Archibald Papers, MG 12, A1, document 843. See sample telegram, p. 20.


58. Ibid.
Chapter Two

LETTING THE CONTRACTS

A prominent Canadian historian has written that Alexander Mackenzie's "railway policy, of going ahead slowly, and not attempting to finish within ten years, almost lost British Columbia to Canada". In the opinion of this writer, it is not at all certain that such a statement is justified, bearing in mind the decisions Mackenzie took with regard to the telegraph line. Rather it can be shown that Mackenzie's government received the criticism for Macdonald's neglect. It could, of course, be argued at the outset that the terms by which British Columbia entered Confederation were far more generous than was necessary, and that in wishing to renegotiate them, the Mackenzie government was only acting sensibly. But leaving that argument aside, there are facts which suggest that, far from acting slowly, he had acted with considerable dispatch, perhaps even ill-advised haste.

In July of 1873, an official complaint by the Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia, Mr. Trutch, was addressed to the Hon. Mr. Aikins, then Secretary of State for Canada, enclosing a minute of the executive council strongly protesting against the violation of the terms of Confederation. No notice was taken of the complaint, and it was, after a time, renewed. The government of John A. Macdonald appears to have been too preoccupied with other matters to deal with it. When a reply was made, it came from the Mackenzie government on December 23, 1873, not much more than a month after it had taken office. British Columbia had been in Confederation for two years and the plans of the Macdonald government had vanished with the "Pacific Scandal", leaving few traces of progress.
Surveyors had traversed the country a number of times in search of a suitable route for the Pacific Railway, and the Yellowhead had been confirmed as the best pass through the Rocky Mountains. Sandford Fleming had long advocated the construction of a telegraph line prior to the building of the railway, and, indeed, the agreement drawn up in February of 1873 between the government and the group headed by Sir Hugh Allan contained, in article 12 the following proviso:

That the Company may and shall construct, maintain and work a continuous telegraph line throughout and along the whole line of railway, such telegraph line being required for the proper working of the railway, and forming a necessary appendage thereto.

Macdonald's preoccupation with finding a group of capitalists able and willing to undertake the construction of the railway must have blinded him to the advisability of letting contracts for the construction of a telegraph line. Such a move would surely have been seen by Canadians in B.C. as an indication that the government meant to honour its commitment.

In February of 1874 Mackenzie sent an envoy, J. D. Edgar, a leading member of his party, to British Columbia to propose a revision of the terms of Confederation. In so doing Mackenzie may have been assuming that, since it was widely felt that the original terms had been overly generous, it would not be difficult to have them revised. Times were not good and residents of B.C. would be no more willing to accept the increased taxation that would be necessary, in order to build the railway, than citizens of other provinces. The government of B.C., however, now headed by George A. Walkem, refused to do business with Edgar. Walkem appealed to the Imperial government for redress of the breach of contract, eventually carrying the appeal personally to London. Lord Carnarvon, the
Colonial Secretary, announced, without consulting Canada, that he was willing to arbitrate between the two governments. Instead of maintaining, as he would have been justified in doing, that the matter was a purely domestic affair, Mackenzie at first declined the offer and then later agreed to submit the Canadian case to the Colonial Secretary.

The absurdity of a Canadian province appealing to the Colonial Office after having refused to deal with the Dominion government's envoy was recognized both in British Columbia and in the eastern provinces. A mass meeting at Yale, B.C., approved Mackenzie's railway policy and condemned the actions of the local government. The Toronto Globe commented favourably about the government's "proposal to utilize for a time the long stretches of lake and river communication". The government soon revealed how it intended to implement its policy. In June, just after the announcement by Lord Carnarvon, notices appeared in leading newspapers calling for tenders for the construction of a pioneer telegraph line from Lake Superior to the Pacific. The day after the notices appeared the Globe stated editorially,

We are glad to find that the government are prepared to adopt an energetic policy in these respects and thus not only develop the north-west region but also assist most materially the solution of the problem how the C.P.R. is finally to be constructed.

The notice outlined in clear terms that the government envisaged a "pioneer line... to assist in the building of the Railway". Shortly after the appearance of the notice the Governor-General, Lord Dufferin, sent to the Colonial Secretary, Lord Carnarvon, a little printed circular intended for distribution to prospective contractors and containing the same text.
While prospective contractors were studying the partial proposed telegraph line with a view to submitting tenders, the Assembly of British Columbia again petitioned the Queen, alleging that Canada had violated the terms of the Confederation agreement. The Mackenzie government then in power for less than a year was receiving the neglect of its predecessor in spite of the fact that it had been the government that first motioned arrangements for the construction of a pioneer telegraph line between the Pacific. A Canadian government, not for the last time since private capitalists could not be induced to come forward to complete a project, the government would have to undertake it. By November 1874, just a year after it had assumed office, and after the Mackenzie government had definitely located the route or obtained a complete knowledge of the nature of the country concerned, the Mackenzie government had contracted with a Canadian government covering 1369 miles of telegraph line from Selkirk, Manitoba, to the Pacific coast by way of the Yellowhead Pass. Contract No. 1, dated October 17, 1874, was made with Sifton and Glass for construction of a telegraph line between Selkirk and Livingstone. Under Contract No. 2, dated October 30, 1874, Richard Fuller was to build a line between Livingstone and Edmonton. Contract No. 3, dated November 20, 1874, for construction of a line between Edmonton and Cache Creek. On February 9, 1875, a fourth contract was awarded to Davidson & Co., for construction of a line from Fort William.

To avoid confusion the four telegraph contracts are designated by the order in which they were awarded.
Footnotes to Chapter Two


4. Appointed engineer-in-chief in 1871 by the Macdonald government, he was retained in that position by Mackenzie.


8. John S. Galbraith, "A Note on the Mackenzie Negotiations With The Hudson's Bay Co.", Canadian Historical Review, March, 1953, p. 44.

9. George A. Walkem succeeded De Cosmos as premier of B.C. in 1874. His first term was marked by a long battle with Mackenzie's federal government over the delay in the building of the C.P.R.


11. Toronto Globe, June 24, 1874.

12. Ibid., June 19, 1874.

13. Ibid., June 24, 1874.


15. CSP, 1878 (No. 52), memorandum dated June 18, 1874, p. 2.


17. CSP, 1876 (No. 41), p. 11, James Trimble, Speaker, to the Queen.

18. CSP, 1876 (No. 82), pp. 1-33, gives only such general descriptive words as "prairie" and "wooded". See also Manitoba Daily Free Press, August 3, 1875 and J. S. Macdonald, The Dominion Telegraph, p. 16.
Chapter Three
WINNIPEG TO LIVINGSTONE - THE SIFTON, GLASS CONTRACT

The route for the transcontinental railway was located through the inter-lake region of Manitoba. With the "fertile belt" and the Yellowhead Pass in mind, the engineer-in-chief had the options of locating the railway due west from Selkirk for 120 miles to angle north-west along the traditional route or of directing it due north-west from Selkirk, crossing Lake Manitoba at the Narrows. Fleming chose the latter option. On paper the route was a draughtsman's dream - a perfectly straight line from Selkirk to the Narrows, not deviating even for Dog Lake; another straight line from Ebb-and-Flow Lake to a point at the foot of Duck Mountain near present-day Swan River; then a short and nearly straight line to Livingstone on Snake Creek. On the ground, however, it was a telegraph contractor's nightmare, difficult to build and impossible to maintain except in winter. While Sir Sandford Fleming defended the choice of the route on a number of occasions, almost everyone who knew the West agreed that the choice was a mistake. The record is absolutely clear that the only time this section of the line was dependable was in winter, when that land of lakes, marshes and muskegs through which it passed was frozen solid and travel through it became easy for maintenance men. If the telegraph line was only a partial success during the pioneer period, it was because of the choice of the inter-lake route between Selkirk and Livingstone. The responsibility for the choice must be laid squarely on Fleming, since advice from almost all sources was against it. This is ironical, because Fleming was one of the first to suggest the construction of a transportation system across
western Canada, and the use of a telegraph line as an aid to railway construction is regarded by some as original with him.\(^5\)

Fleming was appointed engineer-in-chief in April, 1871, and surveyors were put to work almost immediately to locate the best route for a transcontinental railway. Fleming himself took part in a general reconnaissance in 1872.\(^6\) The route he followed then, described in Grant's *Ocean to Ocean*, was the traditional one by way of Fort Garry, Fort Ellice, the Little Touchwood Hills, the Touchwood Hills, Round Hill and Fort Carlton.\(^7\) In travelling along this route Fleming was simply following a trail which freighters had followed for years and were using increasingly. By July of the 1876 season, the *Manitoba Daily Free Press* informed its readers, 1500 carts had gone west on government business and 2000 more had done so for traders, telegraph contractors and the Hudson's Bay Company. And, the newspaper pointed out, three months of the freighting season remained.\(^8\) Fleming was, in fact, following the trail described in a memorial which he himself had taken to Ottawa in 1863 on behalf of certain citizens of the Red River settlement. The memorial made mention of "our intimate knowledge of the country lying between this place [Fort Garry] and the Rocky Mountains". "At all times during the summer season", the memorial continued,

loaded carts go from this place to Carlton, Fort Pitt and Edmonton...and last summer a party of Canadians...passed over the very same road...if, in its present unimproved state, the road is usable ...a comparatively small outlay will...make it all that could be desired...[the] surface of this vast region is...level...free from those heavy forests which, in Canada and elsewhere cause such delay, and expense in road making.\(^9\)
STINGUISHING CERTAIN LANDS DISPOSED
OR THE INFORMATION OF INTENDING SETTLERS, JANUARY 12th, 1882.

This Diagram is intended to illustrate the uniform disposal of Free Grant and Pre-emption Lands, also of Railway or Site Lands, as the case may be, in each Township in Manitoba and the North-West Territories.

The map, made in 1882, shows how the telegraph crossed Dog Lake in township 23, ranges 8 and 9, west of the principal meridian.
With the language of this memorial in mind, one can understand the uncomprehending disbelief with which the news of Fleming's choice of the inter-lake route was received by his former associates in the Red River settlement.

Why did Fleming choose the inter-lake route?

In 1872, during his "general reconnaissance" Fleming saw the deep coulees of the western rivers which his surveyors had reported. His report shows his concern with the "great cost" of bridging those rivers. He also seems to have been concerned about the slightly greater length of railway line made necessary by passing to the south of Lake Manitoba as all the old trails did. He calculated that the inter-lake route saved 30 miles. With his attention turned to a route by way of the Narrows he gave orders for a survey of that region.

Granville C. Cunningham, who made a survey of the region between Lake Winnipegosis and Livingstone, commented that though the worst of the swamps was

...impossible to cross with horses, and...offers difficulties even to a man on foot, it is not objectionable for the line of railway, as it is easily drained and possesses a good clay bottom.

Cunningham did not speculate on how difficult it would be to build a telegraph line through that country before the draining had been done for railway construction. He also did not explain how it was to be easily drained when it was impossible to cross with horses and offered difficulties to men on foot. Are we to believe that the work of draining these swamps would be less costly than building approaches to bridges over prairie rivers?
Fleming's surveyors themselves used the traditional trail to the West whenever possible. H. A. F. Macleod, sent to examine the country between Livingstone and Jasper Valley in the spring of 1875, went by way of Portage La Prairie and Fort Ellice. When he returned to Fort Garry by way of Livingstone and Mossy River - that is, by the inter-lake route - it was late December of 1875 and early January of 1876, when the swamps were frozen. He described the road along the surveyed line from Livingstone to Mossy River as "very rough". As soon as possible he got onto the winter trail "on the lakes".

When it came to making the location survey across the inter-lake region, the crews saw to it that it was done in winter. Here is how Fleming reported it:

The location surveys were carried on with so much determination and vigour that, notwithstanding the distance, fully 270 miles, and the inclemency of the weather, together with inadequacy of shelter, the survey of the whole section from Livingstone to Selkirk was completed before the arrival of spring.

He did not explain that the survey could not have been carried out in that amount of time if the weather had not been inclement, making travel over swamps easy.

In later years Fleming spoke of the "engineering features" and "commercial considerations" that had to be kept in mind when choosing a route and building a railway. Did he really believe that in choosing a route through the inter-lake region - a region throughout much of which extensive drainage works would have to be carried out - he was giving enough importance to "engineering features"? Did he believe that, in ignoring a country with a proven capacity to raise grain in favour of an
area whose only crop, even today, is hay, he was giving adequate weight to "commercial considerations"? The answer appears to be that he did, for he stuck with his decision in the face of almost universal disapproval.

The contract for the 295-mile section of the line from Selkirk to Livingstone was the first one awarded, the successful tender being that of J. W. Sifton and David Glass. One writer has suggested that there were irregularities in the granting of this contract - and there may have been - but the suggestion that Sifton and Glass were given the "easy part" of the line to build leaves the argument open to serious question. Construction was to start on October 17, 1874, and the time set for completion was October 13, 1875. The rate of payment was to be $189.00 per mile through prairie and $492.00 per mile through woods. The total cost was $146,020.00. Sifton and Glass were to operate and maintain the line for five years following its completion. Both men visited Winnipeg in November and set crews to work building the short spur line from Selkirk, where the proposed railway was to cross the Red River, to Winnipeg. This line was completed by November 25. In building it, Sifton and Glass were acknowledging the importance of a telegraph connection with Ottawa, something the government appears to have overlooked.

Although not part of their contract, the short line was necessary both in the construction of the telegraph lines to the West and to Thunder Bay and in the building of the railway lines upon which work, it was anticipated, would begin immediately.

The Manitoba Daily Free Press reported in late November of 1874 that the telegraph contractors had a number of men ready to go west whenever the weather permitted. Work probably began as soon as the muskegs
and swamps had frozen. One winter was not enough to complete the line, and in July of 1875 Sifton and Glass wanted men to "finish the line between Selkirk and Swan River". The next winter H. A. F. Macleod met the crews at work putting up the telegraph line between Livingstone and Mossy River in December and January of 1875 and 1876.

Very little is known about the actual construction of the line beyond what has been said about its being built in winter. J. S. Macdonald's The Dominion Telegraph contains a paragraph about a band of Indians who wished the telegraph construction party to give them supplies. A message was sent to Winnipeg - only forty miles away - and militia units were reportedly sent to disperse the Indians, who thought that they had been magically transported over the telegraph wire.

Very little is known either about the telegraph stations of the line built by Sifton and Glass. Like the other contractors, they were required to build and maintain stations every fifty miles along the line. A diagram in the Colcleugh papers suggests that there were three stations between Selkirk and Livingstone. In addition to this, the diary of an unidentified telegrapher, found in the same papers, hints at the existence of repairmen's "shanties" at Shoal Lake and Swan Creek in the section of the line between Selkirk and the Narrows of Lake Manitoba. Only one of these stations ever received mention in the columns of the Manitoba Daily Free Press, and this reference, while not naming the stations, leaves no doubt that there was a station at the Narrows.

The Selkirk to Livingstone line was in operation in July of 1876. As late as July 3 of that year news items from Swan River were being published in Winnipeg papers with a dateline that showed that they had
Facsimile of James Colcleugh's sketch of stations and distances on his two sub-contracts.
been mailed twelve days earlier. However, an item telegraphed from Livingstone on July 17 expressed satisfaction at the "resumption of telegraph service to Winnipeg", so the line must have been working before that date, if only for a short time. And it is certain that on at least one day in August of 1876, the entire line was working satisfactorily, for H. A. F. Macleod was able to send a message from a point near Fort Edmonton to his office in Ottawa. But the state of affairs which was to become familiar in the months and years to come soon became obvious. The line could not be counted on to function in the period between spring break-up and the onset of winter. Hardly was the line finished when portions of it fell down, and the general public had to rely on mail service to send communications to western points. On many occasions telegrams sent from Battleford were received in Livingstone and forwarded from there to Winnipeg by mail. When winter came service was restored, and news from the West was published in Winnipeg papers the same day that it was sent or the day after. For example, when Lieutenant-Governor Laird was sworn in on the 27th of November, 1876, the Free Press published the news the same day. A January fire in the Lieutenant-Governor's residence at Swan River was reported to the Free Press on the same day - the 12th. In March the summary of the achievements of the first territorial council meeting held at Swan River was published the day after the session ended. But in the summer of 1877 when Alexander Mackenzie wrote to Laird asking about the telegraph line Laird had to answer as follows:
...Well, I am sorry to say that it is a very uncertain institution. All the communication we have had with Winnipeg for the past two months has been some three or four days. It has now been out of order completely since the 23rd of June...I understand it crosses one or two small lakes. It appears to me that it would be economy to alter the line, and run it around these bad places. A few miles more posts and wire would be nothing to secure almost constant communication.38

The line worked spasmodically between then and the winter, when regular service was resumed. A pattern had been established which was to continue as long as the inter-lake line was used.39

There is evidence which suggests that administrative defects were responsible for at least a small part of the unsatisfactory functioning of the line. James Colcleugh, of Selkirk, Manitoba, operated the line by sub-contract for Sifton and Glass. It appears that he experienced considerable difficulty obtaining qualified help for the "forty or fifty" dollars per month that he was prepared to pay young men who would learn on the job.40 An incident which formed the subject matter of a letter of complaint published in the Manitoba Daily Free Press illustrates the point.

Angus McLean had difficulty getting service at the Narrows station. McLean had gone to the telegraph station on March 25, 1878, to send a message to Winnipeg. The regular operator had left some days before to make repairs on the line. McLean eventually found an employee who could send the message for him. This employee was then sent out to make repairs on the line. McLean waited five hours for the reply to his message, and when it came the person then in charge of the office was unable to receive it, although it was repeated to him many times. McLean's complaint
was to the point:

Now, I am a working man and on that answer depended all my summer's work, as by not getting it the party I was going out for the summer with may leave without me. I understand the contractor, Mr. J. W. Sifton, gets a large sum per annum to keep the line in running order, and is obliged, by his contract, to have stations and operators every fifty miles... I think it a public duty to request you to insert this in your paper and to give the public an opportunity of judging whether contractors or sub-contractors are to be allowed to draw their money for doing work or neglecting it. 41

The point which emerges most clearly from this letter is that operators were repeatedly sent out on the line to make repairs, leaving the station in charge of inexperienced employees. Apparently this happened fairly often, for on August 30, 1878, the unidentified telegrapher at Selkirk made this comment in his diary:

Can't get NS [Narrows] from here. Cannot account for it unless he is not in when we call him. So he is out most all day. Some days. 42

The same telegrapher shed light on another reason for difficulty contacting an operator. In September of 1878 a number of entries told of inability to make contact with an operator named Conners. 43 Days went by and Conners couldn't be reached. On the 17th of September J. W. Sifton gave a line repairer, Linday, orders to either go out himself or to send a man out to find Conners. Linday sent a man out, and Conners was discovered at Dog Lake "cutting hay". 44

Sifton was often out repairing the line himself. In April, 1878, the telegrapher at Selkirk entered in his diary that Sifton had reported by telegraph that the line was all down at Dog Lake. Moving ice kept knocking the line down and prevented Sifton from crossing to make the
necessary repairs. In view of the fact that Sifton had railway crews at work at a number of points east of Selkirk, it is hard to understand how he could afford to be making telegraph repairs himself at Dog Lake.

Maintenance difficulties plagued contractors and sub-contractors alike throughout the period of operation of the inter-lake telegraph line. In August of 1881, not long before the termination of the Sifton, Glass contract, the Saskatchewan Herald commented in an editorial that

At one point on the eastern section the line is completely destroyed for ten miles, and at another for three, and although Mr. Sifton has had a gang of men on all season, he has not been able to get his line all up at one time.

When the government took over the operation of the line after the termination of the Sifton, Glass contract, the government crews had no greater success. In November of 1881 the Herald published the old familiar refrain, "line down east of Pelly". It was not until the end of November that communication with the east opened again. Winter was the best maintenance man on the Sifton, Glass contract.
Footnotes to Chapter Three

1. See map on page 33, reproduced from W.B. MacDougall, Manitoba and the North-West, Winnipeg, 1882, opposite the title page.

2. See map in Fleming, Report-1877, opposite page 1. A portion of it, entitled "The Sifton, Glass Contract", is reproduced on page 34.

   Here the reader is warned that the Livingstone telegraph station is known in literature dealing with the Canadian West by no fewer than four other names: "Snake Creek" or "Snake River" after Snake Creek beside which the station was located, "Swan River" after the nearby North-West Mounted Police barracks, "Pelly" after the Hudson's Bay Company fort located some miles to the south. In this thesis the writer uses the name Livingstone except in cases where he is using a quotation.

3. The best source on this point is the Saskatchewan Herald, which chronicled with almost monotonous regularity, the annual spring and summer failure of this portion of the telegraph line from 1878 to 1882. The Saskatchewan Herald was published in Battleford.

4. See, for example, Manitoba Daily Free Press, August 12, 1874.

5. L. J. Burpee, Sandford Fleming-Empire-Builder, p. 68.


10. Fleming, op. cit., p. 36.


13. Ibid., p. 198.


16. Born in London, Upper Canada, J. W. Sifton had been a private banker and operator in the Petrolia oil fields. He built the C.P.R. from East Selkirk to Kenora and the telegraph line from Winnipeg to Livingstone. He was the father of Arthur and Clifford Sifton. The partner of J. W. Sifton, David Glass, managed the Ottawa end of the firm's affairs.
17. Pierre Berton, *The Great Railway Illustrated*, McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 1972, p. 89. Sifton and Glass's tender was not the lowest, but the fourth lowest, of fifteen tenders, CSP, 1876 (No. 82), p. 13. This report deals with the tenders but does not give the reasons why the contracts were awarded.

18. CSP, 1883 (No. 10A), p. 758.


20. Ibid., Nov. 25, 1874.

21. See map on page 34.


23. Ibid., June 7, 1875. See note 2.


26. At this writing it has not been possible to verify this use of the militia.

27. PAM, Colcleugh Papers, MG 14, B57, 3/7, letter dated April 17, 1877. See sketch on page 39.

28. PAM, Colcleugh Papers, MG 14, B57, 1/7, diary of telegraph clerk at Selkirk, Manitoba, 1878.


30. CSP, 1883 (No. 10A), gives August 1, p. 758.


32. Ibid., July 17, 1876; see also ibid., August 5, 1876.


34. The complaint expressed in *Manitoba Daily Free Press*, August 5, 1876, was the first of many published about the line.


36. Ibid., Jan. 12, 1877.

37. Ibid., March 23, 1877.

38. Saskatchewan Archives (cited hereafter as SA), Laird Papers, Laird to Mackenzie, July 10, 1877.
39. See footnote 3. No Winnipeg newspaper seems to have considered the Sifton and Glass telegraph contract very newsworthy, except when making complaints about non-performance of the line. The Selkirk Interocean did not begin publication until September of 1878. A very incomplete file of this newspaper is in the PAM, but the copies preserved there do not report events on the Selkirk-Livingstone line in the way that the Saskatchewan Herald - and, later, the Bulletin, published in Edmonton - did for the Fuller contract.

40. PAM, Colcleugh Papers, MG 14, B57, 6/7, undated letter written in 1879 by James Colcleugh to "Willie".

41. Manitoba Daily Free Press, April 6, 1878.

42. PAM, Colcleugh Papers, MG 14, B57, 1/7, diary of telegraph clerk at Selkirk, Manitoba, 1878.

43. Ibid., Sept. 6, 1878.

44. Ibid., Sept. 19, 1878.

45. Ibid., April 15, 1878.

46. Saskatchewan Herald, August 15, 1881.

47. Ibid., November 12, 1881.

48. Ibid., November 29, 1881.
Chapter Four
LIVINGSTONE TO EDMONTON - THE FULLER CONTRACT

The location of the Livingstone-to-Edmonton line was basically determined by the decision to use the inter-lake route from Selkirk to Livingstone and, farther west, to use the Yellowhead Pass through the Rocky Mountains. A straight line drawn from Livingstone west to the elbow of the North Saskatchewan River pretty well located the eastern end of the line. Fleming wished to avoid crossing the North Saskatchewan three times, as the Canadian Northern Railway later did, so he chose a route south of that river and along the edge of the Eagle Hills. Had the railway actually been built along that route many small bridges over creeks running out of the Eagle Hills into the North Saskatchewan River would have been required. The Battle River was to be crossed at Battleford. The decision to follow a line surveyed south of the Four Blackfoot Hills would have made necessary the crossing of four deep coulees, each of which would have required a long section of trestle or, alternatively, long deviations leading to bridges. From the Four Blackfoot Hills the line extended almost due west to a point about eighteen miles south of Fort Edmonton. It should be noticed here that such old settlements as Fort Pelly, Fort Carlton, Fort Pitt and Fort Edmonton were by-passed by the surveyed right-of-way and by the telegraph line which followed it. This appears to have been done as a deliberate policy, the purpose being to make it possible for the railway company to "select the very best positions for the Railway Stations" without having to consider the landed interests of either the Hudson's Bay Company or of private citizens.
Richard Fuller, of Hamilton, Ontario, was awarded the contract on October 30, 1874. The length of the line involved was 517 miles; the rate of payment $213.18 per mile; the date for completion of work was July 1, 1876. Fuller was to operate and maintain the line for a period of five years following its completion. 

In April of 1875, while making his preparations for work on the contract, Fuller foresaw the possibility of trouble with the Indians. The experience of Robert Bell, of the Geological Survey, in being stopped in 1873 south-west of the elbow of the South Saskatchewan River, was common knowledge at Fort Garry and served as a warning to him. He wrote letters to Sandford Fleming, engineer-in-chief of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and to Hon. David Laird, then Minister of the Interior, outlining his plans and mentioning the foreseen difficulty. Between the 5th and the 15th of May, he wrote, work parties would leave for the West to begin work on the contract. One would leave Winnipeg for Fort Pelly to work westward on the part of the line where a supply of poles was no problem, a second would head for the South Saskatchewan River to lay out supplies from there to the end of the contract, and the third would be sent to the South Saskatchewan to cut poles for the western part where trees were scarce. He respectfully called it to the attention of the honourable gentlemen that much of the territory that the line ran through was unsurrendered. The Indians could cause trouble and prevent the construction of the line. While not specifying how he would do it, he suggested that if the government was agreeable he would undertake to deal with the Indians himself.

A few days later, Sandford Fleming replied to the effect that steps
had already been taken to satisfy the Indians along the route of the railway and telegraph line. The government, however, would not be responsible for any imprudence on the part of Fuller's men. Fleming did not enlarge upon the nature of these "steps".

With these assurances Fuller set his plans in motion and the crews began to work. C. A. Belch wrote to the Manitoba Daily Free Press from Livingstone reporting that the first pole was put in on June 30 and the first wire strung on July 3. The builders found more timber west of Livingstone than they had bargained for, but then they found open prairie again where less clearing was needed. In early July Fuller had every reason to believe that he would finish his entire contract in 1875, well ahead of the deadline, but he soon found that, if Fleming's "steps" had indeed been taken, they were singularly ineffective in satisfying the Indians.

It is not possible to establish a precise date for the first stoppage of work on the Fuller contract. On the 20th of July Mr. Ellis of the Geological Survey arrived at Fort Carlton with his heavy drilling equipment, reporting that the Cree chief Mis-ta-wa-sis had met him at the elbow of the North Saskatchewan and told him not to do any drilling until a treaty had been made. He said then that the telegraph construction party had already been stopped.

Fuller's supply train was met at Fort Carlton by Mis-ta-wa-sis and Ah-tuk-u-koop, who came into the camp and requested a chance to speak. They said the government had promised them a treaty. They had, they said, received a letter from Lieutenant-Governor Archibald making all sorts of promises, none of which had been kept. Now the government was sending
the telegraph through their country without asking their permission. They wanted their rights. The government had made a treaty with the Indians as far as the south branch of the Saskatchewan, and if Sinclair wanted to cut hay or poles he might cut them to the east of that river. But the construction party would have to stop at the south branch. Sinclair was well known to the Crees, and they realized that stopping all work was going to create a hardship for him. After a short discussion, and possibly as a result of representations made by Sinclair himself, the chiefs changed their minds and said that he might go ahead and lay out the supplies but that he must cut nothing.

Uncertain what to do, George Wright, the foreman, went to confer with Mr. Clarke, the Hudson's Bay Company officer at Fort Carlton. Clarke assured him that Mis-ta-wa-sis and Ah-tuk-u-koop were perfectly within their rights; the government had promised them a treaty but had not made one with them. He said that Wright's party might continue laying out supplies, but that it would be unwise to cut any poles or hay. Accordingly Wright gave orders for Sinclair to leave his rake and mower at Carlton and proceed west laying out the supplies.13

Mis-ta-wa-sis and Ah-tuk-u-koop must not have realized that Wright's men had enough insulators and wire to reach the end of the contract south of Fort Edmonton. When the carts did not return soon, Mis-ta-wa-sis sent a message to the Crees south of Fort Pitt to stop the supply train. Three of them rode south and intercepted the train just west of the Four Blackfoot Hills. Their spokesman said that the Indians had been expecting a commissioner, but none had come. He warned that if Wright insisted on going farther west they would soon bring enough Indians to stop him.
Wright had in his pocket a letter from Fuller advising him to act civilly toward the Indians in case of any encounter with them, and to avoid any kind of disturbance. There was no alternative but to put all the wire, insulators and brackets into a pile, dig a fireguard around them and head back to Battleford.

On the eastern end of the contract the newly-built miles of line were being used to report similar events to headquarters at Livingstone, on the banks of Snake Creek. Fuller had arranged that the construction party would be equipped with batteries and instruments so that as the work progressed they could establish temporary stations and communicate by telegraph with headquarters. Early in August the operator at the recently-established Poplar Plains station, A. T. Westfall, telegraphed that twenty-five lodges of Indians were camped nearby, demanding payment for land and poles. The chief argued that since he had not been present at the signing of the treaty the previous year he was not bound by its terms. He demanded fifty cents a pole in payment, and said that the Indians would cut the line as fast as it was built if the amount was not paid. Presents were distributed. The Indians were informed that a letter from Lieutenant-Governor Morris was waiting for them at Fort Pelly, and that Rev. George McDougall had been sent out on a mission to tell the Indians that a treaty would be made with them next year.

Mr. Fuller's hopes for completion of the line in 1875 had disappeared by the latter part of July and the early part of August. Since he had not been allowed to cut hay, his oxen would all have to be taken back to Winnipeg, where they could be fed through the winter. He could not telegraph instructions, but must rely on the mail service, the telegraph
line from Livingstone to Selkirk not being finished. The result was the loss of nearly a year. Fuller applied to the government for compensation for the extra expenses caused by the need to winter his oxen and hire men for another season.

The efforts of Rev. George McDougall calmed the fears of the Indians and some crews were able to resume work, reaching a point seventy miles west of Battleford by the end of the construction season in 1875. Work on the Fuller contract was completed in July of 1876, at approximately the same time that a treaty was made with the Indians at Fort Carlton. This was two weeks later than the date stipulated by the contract, but caused no particular concern, because at that time the Sifton and Glass contract was not officially completed.

Fuller called his telegraph operation the "Saskatchewan District" of the "Canadian Pacific Telegraph Line", and - unlike Sifton and Glass - assumed the operation of the line himself. His superintendent, John Little, used Battleford as headquarters, that place being fairly near the mid-point of the line.

The four stations of the east end of the Fuller contract were all in existence by February, 1876. In that month the Manitoba Daily Free Press published a news item stating that there were three offices between Telegraph Flat (Battleford) and Fort Pelly (Livingstone), "one at the South Branch, one in the Rainy Hills, and one between that and Pelly". The "one at the South Branch" refers to Clarke's Crossing, the "one in the Rainy Hills" must refer to the one later known as Humboldt, and "the one between that and Pelly" to Poplar Plains.

Fuller did not erect telegraph stations at 50-mile intervals as
Humboldt Telegraph Station as sketched by Sydney P. Hall in 1881
(The Graphic (London) January 4, 1882)
stipulated by the contract, but was content (and apparently the government acquiesced) with placing them at points considered strategic for one reason or another, sometimes as much as 75 miles apart. Water was a consideration at Poplar Plains, where it was readily available in a nearby coulee. Clark's Crossing and Battleford were at points where the railway right-of-way crossed a river. The station later known as Humboldt was located where the surveyed line crossed a trail which was already well defined when John Palliser travelled it in 1857 and was one of the West's main trails by the 1870's. When H. A. F. Macleod was returning from a survey of the country as far as Yellowhead Pass in November of 1876, he followed portions of this trail as well as portions of the new telegraph line trail. In so doing he passed the "telegraph station at Big Stone Lake" on November 18. A close study of his itinerary added to the fact that Humboldt Lake was formerly known as Big Stone or Stony Lake makes it certain that the telegraph station he passed was the one later known as Humboldt.

The station known as Grizzly Bear appears to have been in existence as early as July, 1876, for in that month H. A. F. Macleod, then in Winnipeg,
gave a requisition to Mr. Nixon to send one month's supplies for each party, to the telegraph station about 100 miles west of Battleford.

Hay Lakes, the other station on the western part of the Fuller contract, was also in existence that summer. When Macleod arrived "at the telegraph station on the Hay Lake trail to Edmonton on the 24th August" he was "enabled to communicate by telegraph with the office in Ottawa."
It seems likely that all of these stations were not intended to be full-fledged telegraph stations, but were rather buildings which housed the batteries necessary to maintain current on the line, and served as shelter for the maintenance men who travelled back and forth along the line making needed repairs. Fuller's employees, however, were for the most part qualified telegraphers, able to send messages from their stations or, on occasion, to cut in on the line and send a message.28

The special case of Livingstone must be mentioned here. Fuller shared with Sifton and Glass the cost of maintenance of the Livingstone station.29 No doubt Fuller assumed that the same would be the case with the station on the extreme western end of his contract - a station shown as "Edmonton" on Fleming's map - once construction on the Barnard contract had been completed.30 As it turned out the Barnard contract was cancelled, and Fuller chose the location of the Hay Lakes station because of the proximity of the North-West Mounted Police barracks at Fort Saskatchewan.31 No station was built at the western terminus of the line during the period of its operation by Fuller.

Maintenance problems varied with the season of the year and with the climatic conditions. In spring and in autumn, when the grass was dry, prairie fires were the chief problem. This was particularly true of the western end of the line. On the eastern section, where the line ran through leafy groves, wet weather would cause a loss of current as wet branches were blown against the wire. Buffalo sometimes used the telegraph poles for scratching posts, and the poles, being for the most part poplar, would break and fall, allowing the wire to touch the ground. Winter usually saw more or less uninterrupted telegraph service, except
when sleet froze on the wires and the weight of the ice broke them.\textsuperscript{32} By and large, the line worked well, and the proof of this can be found in the files of the \textit{Saskatchewan Herald} and, later, the \textit{Bulletin}, whose editors reported its condition almost every week.

The line was operated by Mr. Fuller under contract until July 15, 1881. In late May of that year Mr. Little, the superintendent, made a hasty inspection tour preparatory to handing it over to the government. Nothing was heard from the government, however - probably the line to Selkirk was down east of the Narrows - and by the time Mr. LaTouche Tupper arrived in Battleford to take over the line on behalf of the government and keep it in working order Mr. Fuller had paid off his staff and broken up his establishment. Tupper, therefore, had to start from scratch, renting the old office, hiring the former employees and setting the line from Edmonton to Livingstone working again.\textsuperscript{33} There was a period of about three weeks when there was no telegraph service at all, and the editor of the \textit{Bulletin} paid the telegraph company and its employees a belated compliment when it commented editorially,

\begin{quote}
We feel very much isolated since the abandonment of the telegraph line and have to depend on the mail for our news.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

In August of 1881 it was common knowledge that the pioneer line would never serve its original purpose - that of facilitating the construction of a railway - but pioneers in the West had already learned to value it for the many ways that it ended their isolation.
Footnotes to Chapter Four

1. See map in Sandford Fleming, Report-1877, opposite page 1. A portion of it is reproduced on page 48 of this thesis.

2. See Fleming, op. cit., Appendix Y by H.A.F. Macleod, for a description of special surveys conducted in that area.

3. Fleming, op. cit., p. 95.

4. CSP, 1883 (No. 10A), p. 758; Fuller's tender was the lowest submitted, CSP, 1876 (No. 82), pp. 10, 11, 13.


6. CSP, 1877 (No. 57), pp. 17-8.

7. At this writing the writer has not been able to find any reference to these "steps". Laurence Clarke, Hudson's Bay Company factor at Fort Carlton, wrote to Lieutenant-Governor Morris in July of 1875: "I consider that it was rash in the extreme to have dispatched any such expeditions before first having treated with the Indians for the right of way through the country over which those expeditions have to travel". PAM, Morris Papers, LG 1039, letter dated July 10, 1875.


9. CSP, 1877 (No. 57), p. 25.

10. Mis-ta-wa-sis, or Big Child, was a head chief of the Creeks living in the vicinity of Fort Carlton. Butler met him at Battle River in November of 1870 (W. F. Butler, The Great Lone Land, p. 237); see also Buck (ed.), Voices of the Plains Cree, which contains a number of references to him.


12. Ah-tuk-u-koop, or Star Blanket, was also a head chief of the Creeks living near Fort Carlton. Milton and Cheadle met him in the winter of 1862-3 (Dr. Cheadle, Journal, p. 71). See also Buck (ed.), Voices of the Plains Cree.

13. CSP, 1877 (No. 57), p. 23.


15. Ibid., pp. 24-5.

16. A few miles from present-day Kelvington, Saskatchewan.
17. CSP, 1877 (No. 57), pp. 21, 22, 25.

18. Ibid., pp. 22, 25; see also Report of the Minister of the Interior in CSP, 1877 (No. 11); see also H.A.F. Macleod in Appendix M of Fleming, Report-1877, p. 197. Macleod met McDougall at Fort Edmonton in October of 1875; see also John McDougall, Opening The Great West, Glenbow-Alberta Institute, Calgary, 1970, pp. 20-1; After his mission was complete Rev. George McDougall wrote to Lieutenant-Governor Morris, "...my opinion is that an old traveller would have regarded the whole affair as too trivial to be noticed. I have not met a chief who would bear the responsibility of the act" (PAM, Morris Papers, LG 1039, McDougall to Morris, October 23, 1875).

19. CSP, 1877 (No. 57), pp. 16-26.

20. CSP, 1883 (No. 10A), p. 758.


22. Irene M. Spry, The Palliser Papers, Champlain Society, Toronto, 1968, pp. 162-3; in 1854 a member of the Sinclair party described the trail as "good" (John V. Campbell, "The Sinclair Party", Washington Historical Quarterly, July, 1916, p. 188.)


25. Robert W. Grant, The Humboldt Story, Humboldt Board of Trade, 1953, p. 35. See sketch on page 54 of this thesis.


27. Ibid., p. 339.

28. For example, a telegraphed report, sent from Buffalo Coulee and published in the Saskatchewan Herald, tells of the breaking of the line by buffalo. See issue of Sept. 9, 1878.


30. See chapter entitled "Edmonton to Cache Creek - The Barnard Contract.

31. CSP, 1877 (No. 57), p. 17.

32. J. S. Macdonald, The Dominion Telegraph, pp. 24-5; The Saskatchewan Herald published dozens of reports of the problems which faced maintenance men.

33. Saskatchewan Herald, August 15, 1881.

34. The Bulletin, August 8, 1881.
Chapter Five
EDMONTON TO CACHE CREEK - THE BARNARD CONTRACT

When the government called for tenders in June, 1874, the western end of the telegraph line envisaged would have connected the British Columbia telegraph system, at Cache Creek, with the prairie section by way of the Kamloops Valley, the North Thompson River valley, the Yellowhead Pass through the Rockies, and a rather direct route through the foothills and wooded country of what is now western Alberta to a point eighteen miles south of Fort Edmonton. There was nothing unusual about the route which the government had in mind at the time. Governor Dallas, of the Hudson's Bay Company, had recommended it more than ten years earlier. Both the Canadian Northern and the Grand Trunk Pacific railways later made use of it, and the Yellowhead Highway follows it today. But at the time the tenders were called for the government had crews at work in a number of parts of British Columbia, and while the route mentioned had been chosen in a general way, the line itself had not been located. Nevertheless the government decided to call for tenders.

Tenders were submitted by fifteen contractors, the lowest of whom, William R. Macdonald, of Yale, estimated that he could complete the work in nine months. Of this tender, which was not accepted, Fleming wrote as follows:

The lowest tender is that of William R. Macdonald, of Yale; the price that he asks for the work is, in my opinion, so low, and the time within which he would undertake to complete it so short, that I have grave doubts as to the tender being bona fide.

As for the next tender, Fleming went on, it was inadvisable to award the
The Barnard Contract Section completed Section remaining when cessation of work was ordered.
contract to Waddle and Smith of Kingston since there was a chance that they would be awarded a contract farther east, and he deemed it inadvisable to award them two contracts so far apart.³

Fleming finally came to the one whose acceptance he recommended:

The next lowest is that of F. J. Barnard, of Victoria; this gentleman is well and favorably known in British Columbia, and is believed to possess sufficient energy and resources to carry out anything he undertakes.⁴

One wonders as he reads these remarks how much Fleming really knew about conditions governing telegraph construction in interior British Columbia. In 1865 the Overland Telegraph was built from New Westminster to Quesnel - a distance of 435 miles - between May 31 and September 14.⁵ Is it not entirely possible that Macdonald, who had submitted the lowest tender, could have finished the work in the nine months he estimated he would require? It is open to question whether Fleming was in a position to depart from established practice and trust to his own judgment.

Barnard was awarded the contract on November 9, 1874. He proposed to build the 557-mile section for $495.00 per mile and to maintain it for $46.50 per mile. A sum of $413,217.00 was given as the probable amount of money involved.⁶

Francis J. Barnard had worked with such men as De Cosmos to bring British Columbia into Confederation. He was well known in the transportation business, having introduced six-horse stage coaches to replace his pony express on the road from Yale to Soda Creek.⁷ He set about completing the work on his contract with his customary energy. Purchasing a part ownership in the steamboat "Martin", he began to convey supplies up the North Thompson river. With his eye on the part of the contract
where a steamboat could not go, he made arrangements for the transfer of telegraph supplies through the Yellowhead Pass by pack train onto the eastern end of his contract. Beginning at Cache Creek, construction crews worked at full speed towards Kamloops, 48 miles away. About 30 miles of line had been laid out along the North Thompson river valley past Kamloops when, without any warning, Barnard received the order to cease work on the contract.

The order left Barnard in a very difficult position. He had undertaken obligations all the way from Victoria to the Yellowhead Pass area on the strength of the payments which would be forthcoming the moment he could report a certain mileage of telegraph line ready for operation. Now he had to send messengers into the interior to inform the various crews that work must stop. He began a long correspondence with departmental officials in an attempt to receive compensation enabling him to pay off what he owed, submitting a detailed claim sheet showing the prices charged for many kinds of goods and services. Very little more work was done, although the poles from Cache Creek to Kamloops must have been erected and the wire attached. When he was instructed to proceed with work in April of 1876 it appears that activities were restricted to laying out materials along the projected route. By 1880 the contract was described as "cancelled", and Barnard's health was broken from frustration and anxiety. The account was still not settled in 1890.

There are a number of difficult questions involved in a study of the Barnard contract. Why was the contract awarded before the line was definitely located? Once Barnard had been permitted to put his workers in the field why was the order to cease work given? The answer seems to
be that even at this very early date what has been called the battle of the routes had already begun. In April of 1875 Barnard stated that he had learned the reasons for the order to stop work. He had heard about the "political position of the case" and realized that that, "coupled with the report of a favorable route to the north" was responsible for the order. Barnard inquired whether it would be advisable to use the steamboat and animals to forward materials to Tete Jaune Cache and Yellowhead Pass, "should it have been determined that the Pass would be a common point to either route". The Yellowhead Pass was in fact a common point in six of the seven routes that were being given serious consideration. The only route it was not a part of was the most northerly one of all, which involved either the Peace Pass or the Pine Pass. Barnard must not have known that Marcus Smith, at that time engineer in charge of all surveys in British Columbia, personally favoured the route via the Pine Pass, Fort George and Bute Inlet, and was using his influence in its favour.

The government must have made a decision against the choice of the Pine Pass, because in June of 1875 Barnard was authorized to deliver supplies to the Yellowhead Pass area, and supplies were delivered there either that same year or later. But the stoppage of work had been expensive for Barnard and, although Fleming gave him a verbal assurance that he would receive "advances" on the necessary supplies and materials, the Department of Public Works refused to either pay him in full for work done or advance him anything so that he could continue the work which had been interrupted. Barnard appears to have been unwilling to risk assuming the obligations involved. This must be the explanation for
statements made by Fleming in reports concerning work on the contract. In his Report for 1877 he stated, concerning the work on the Barnard contract, that

Materials and supplies have been provided but no great progress in construction has been made.\textsuperscript{22}

In the Report for 1880 Fleming wrote as follows:

With the exception of the contract for the section between Edmonton and Cache Creek in B.C., which has been cancelled owing to the unsatisfactory progress made by the contractor...\textsuperscript{23}

One thing is certain. Only the Cache Creek to Kamloops section of the Barnard contract was completed, and the telegraph line was left with its terminus at a point eighteen miles south of Fort Edmonton. Strategically the order to cease work had created a disaster, and Fleming was aware of the fact. In his Report for 1880 he wrote:

Non-completion of the telegraph in Canadian territory will, therefore, cause inconvenience and serious expense. All telegrams will have to be sent by California. Foreign companies will reap benefit of the traffic, while the portion of our own line in operation to Edmonton will remain for the most part unemployed and unremunerative, as the merely local traffic is limited and insufficient to meet the expenses of operating and maintenance. There are, therefore, strong reasons for the connection of the telegraph at Edmonton with the system in operation in B.C. In its present incomplete condition, the capital so far expended in its construction remains unproductive, and brings no proportionate benefits.\textsuperscript{24}

One can only regret the decision of the Mackenzie government to stop work on the Barnard contract. Fuel was added to the fire of the ongoing dispute between the Walkem government in B.C. and the federal government. Any credibility that Mackenzie gained in 1874 by letting the
contracts he lost in 1875 by stopping work on the Barnard contract. And in addition to the reasons mentioned by Fleming for going ahead with the work was the fact that the long stretch of country between Fort Edmonton and Kamloops was left without telegraph service at a time when surveyors were combing it in search of a satisfactory route for the railway. B.C. was left dependent upon American lines of communication until the completion of those built by the new C.P.R. syndicate.25

The cancellation of the Barnard contract may have been common knowledge in British Columbia but in the North-West Territories it was, and remained, just part of the general mystery relating to government policy concerning the Pacific railway. Writing in 1913, the Saskatchewan historian N. F. Black made the following statement:

A telegraph line was established through the West, but it was continually breaking down, and its management by the Dominion authorities presents some riddles to the student. For example, after being carried seven hundred miles out of Winnipeg, the line ended for a long time nowhere in particular, eighteen miles from Edmonton. The nearest telegraph office, moreover, was not at this point, but seventeen miles further back...26

The Barnard contract, its place in a national scheme of things and its cancellation are the missing clues in the student's riddle. Curiously enough, Macdonald's booklet, The Dominion Telegraph, the only published work dealing with aspects of the pioneer telegraph line, makes no mention of the Barnard contract, and makes only one allusion to the existence of such a contract:

...contracts were entered into to build various sections of a line from the Great Lakes to connect with the Telegraph system of British Columbia.27
There is no record of Barnard's having operated the Cache Creek-Kamloops line at all, although the annual report for 1879 described it as "completed ready for operating from Cache Creek eastward". It is possible, however, that Barnard did operate the line for a time. Barnard's contract, unlike the others, called for stations every 30 miles. While the short distance of forty-eight miles from Cache Creek to Kamloops might have permitted its operation with a station at each end only, a station was, in fact, built at Savona's Ferry, midway between the two points. The fact that the contract wasn't described as "cancelled" until 1880 lends weight to the supposition that Barnard may have operated the line. On the other hand, the presence of a ferry may have made the telegraph station necessary in any event. One is probably safe in assuming that the government took responsibility for the line at the time the contract was cancelled.

The government operated the line under the Department of Railways and Canals until July 1, 1882, transferring it at that time to the Department of Public Works as part of the Government Telegraph and Signal Service. Major repairs were made to the line in 1884.

Since the route adopted by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company led along the valley from Cache Creek to Kamloops, the company made use of the line in railway construction, and the government contemplated turning it over to the C.P.R. as early as 1885, but the actual transfer did not take place until 1887.

The Cache Creek to Kamloops line was the only line built as part of the original contracts west of Selkirk to actually be along the right-of-way of the completed Canadian Pacific Railway.
Footnotes to Chapter Five

1. Fleming, Report-1877, pp. 8-9. A portion of it is reproduced on page 61 of this thesis. See CSP, 1883 (No. 10A), p. 757; but see also CSP, 1876 (No. 82), p. 29.

2. CSP, 1876 (No. 82), p. 22.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.


8. CSP, 1876 (No. 82), pp. 31-2.


10. Ibid., p. 16.

11. In April of 1875 Barnard described the section from Cache Creek to Kamloops as "completed with the exception of erecting the poles and attaching the wire", CSP, 1876 (No. 82), p. 32.

12. CSP, 1877 (No. 57), p. 3; CSP, 1878 (No. 20), p. 27.

13. CSP, 1880 (No. 6), p. 106.


15. CSP, 1876 (No. 82), Barnard to Mackenzie, April 26, 1875, pp. 29-30.


17. Ibid., p. 62.

18. CSP, 1876 (No. 82), Braun to Barnard, June 1, 1875, p. 32.

19. CSP, 1878 (No. 7), p. 189.
20. CSP, 1877 (No. 57), letter from Barnard to Braun dated April 20, 1876, p. 4; Ibid., letter from Barnard to Braun, Dec. 29, 1876, p. 13; Ibid., letter from Barnard to Braun, November 16, 1876, p. 10.

21. By December 29, 1876, Barnard wrote to Braun stating that he had parted with a 2/3 interest in the steamer, CSP, 1877 (No. 57), p. 13.


25. Sandford Fleming, Report-1877, Appendix Y by H.A.F. Macleod, p. 338. In July of 1876 Macleod telegraphed from Winnipeg via the American lines to a Mr. Robson in British Columbia concerning the forwarding of supplies from Kamloops to the area east of Yellowhead Pass.


28. CSP, 1879 (No. 8), p. 156.


30. CSP, 1882 (No. 7), p. 102.

31. CSP, 1883 (No. 10A), p. 759.

32. CSP, 1885 (No. 10), p. 203.

33. CSP, 1886 (No. 10), p. cxxiii.

34. CSP, 1888 (No. 7), p. cxxvi.
Chapter Six
SELKIRK TO THUNDER BAY - THE OLIVER, DAVIDSON CONTRACT

Surveys were begun in 1871 which continued during the succeeding years to find a satisfactory route from Selkirk to Thunder Bay. Some of the world's most difficult terrain is to be found in this area, and surveyors did not have at their disposal the experience gained by generations of western travellers, fur traders and missionaries, as was the case in the areas further west. The Indians knew the country, especially where the water routes through it were concerned, but they were not of much help when it was a question of seeking for a suitable line along which to build a railway. Only one thing was certain; if the government authorities were determined to build a railway on Canadian soil it had to pass through the area somewhere. Since Thunder Bay was the head of navigation on the great lakes that seemed to be the logical eastern terminus for the railway which the Mackenzie government had in mind.¹ The route located never strays very far from a straight line drawn from Selkirk to Thunder Bay. Sandford Fleming described the located line as "extremely favourable".² That is probably a gross misrepresentation; no route through that area could be described in such terms. But by 1874 the government felt that it could safely call for tenders for the construction of a telegraph line. A telegraph line was considered to be of "paramount importance", facilitating the construction of a railway in a way that no other agency could.

Some months passed between the date of opening of tenders and the awarding of contracts. Readers of the Manitoba Daily Free Press were given to understand that the government was having difficulty persuading
The Oliver, Davidson Contract
anybody to tender for the work, but one writer has stated, and there appears to be evidence to support his view, that the intervening months were taken up with what is called "wheeling and dealing". At any rate, the contract was awarded on February 9, 1875, to Oliver, Davidson and Co. The 410-mile line was to be constructed at the rate of $590.00 per mile where the line ran through woods, and for $435.00 per mile where there was prairie. The time for completion was to be December 31, 1876, and the contractors were to operate the line for a five-year period following the date of completion.

The construction crews soon found that the "prairie" section of the contract - the first few miles to the east of Selkirk - was quickly left behind, and then the hard work began. The work went on from both ends of the line, and the farther the crews went the harder the work became. The problems of construction were quite different from those of any other contract. There were no natural transportation routes like those on the Barnard contract. Cart trails, like those near much of the Fuller contract, did not exist. However, the presence of numerous rocky ridges made it possible for a line to be built using pole tripods which, once set in place, did not fall down.

It was soon obvious that the contractors could not meet the construction deadline. The first section to be complete - that between Fort William and Port Arthur, a distance of only two miles - was not completed until June 22, 1876, just six months from the date specified for completion of the line. The end of the year saw the telegraph line in operation to a point 69 miles inland from Thunder Bay and 45 miles along the grade past the end of the track. The *Manitoba Daily Free Press*
occasionally recorded events in the process of construction, one of its first reports having to do with the completion, in January of 1877, of the telegraph line from Selkirk to Cross Lake, a distance of 77 miles. On the same date, the Free Press reported, the poles were up from Cross Lake to Keewatin, another 36 1/2 miles farther east. In May the Free Press stated that a party of 45 men had gone east to work on the line from Rat Portage east. In August George Taylor, one of the sub-contractors, told of clearing for the line extending 100 miles east of Rat Portage. Early September saw a shipment of thirty-five tons of telegraph wire leave Winnipeg for that section of the line.

The year 1877 saw the telegraph line in operation from Selkirk to Keewatin on the western end, and from Fort William to English River on the eastern end. Considerable clearing had been done along the intervening distance, and a certain amount of line was erected.

In June of 1878 Adam Oliver informed the Free Press that 55 miles of line remained to be built. Work must have gone ahead fairly briskly because on August 28 telegrams of congratulations were exchanged by J. W. Sifton, whose men were at work building one of the sections of railway east of Selkirk, and Thomas Marks, reeve of Shuniah municipality at Prince Arthur's Landing. The line was finished, twenty months after the date specified in the contract.

The line from Selkirk to the north end of Lake of the Woods was operated by Sifton and Glass under sub-contract from Oliver, Davidson and Co.. Sifton and Glass in turn sublet the day-to-day operation and
maintenance of the line to James Colcleugh, of Selkirk. At this writing the writer has not been able to ascertain what arrangement was made about the operation of the remainder of the line. Oliver, Davidson and Co. may have operated it themselves, or they may have had a firm in Thunder Bay operate it by sub-contract. The contract for maintenance and operation should have terminated on August 28, 1883, five years from the date of the completion of the line, but the contract was cancelled on June 30, 1882, and the government assumed control of the line, operating it as part of the Government Telegraph and Signal Service under the Department of Public Works.

Two diaries in the Colcleugh papers mention telegraph stations between Selkirk and Thunder Bay. References to a Cross Lake may mean the station also known as Telford, and the station referred to as Darlington most likely means the station on Lake of the Woods, also known as Keewatin or Rat Portage. It is known that a station existed for a time at Ostersund and also at Rideout's camp, but these were likely temporary stations established at a camp near the end of the completed track.

If we can judge by the entries in the diary of the unidentified telegrapher in the Colcleugh papers, the line from Selkirk to Lake of the Woods worked tolerably well; certainly it worked better than the Selkirk to Livingstone line. The diary also refers a number of times to successful contact with Thunder Bay. Colcleugh was under pressure from Sifton to maintain the line successfully, since Sifton had railway construction crews at work, and had good reason to wish for efficient telegraph service. In addition there were a number of other contractors with crews along the line; there would be every reason for maintaining the best
possible service.\textsuperscript{18}

There is evidence which suggests that by 1880 part of the line was made up of two wires, an indication that a certain state of efficiency demanded by the movement of trains had been reached. A picture taken in Rat Portage in 1880 shows that that portion of the line was of two wires.\textsuperscript{19} In 1882 the Canadian Pacific Railway Company had 181 miles of telegraph of one wire and 714 1/2 miles of two-wire line. With the Thunder Bay to Selkirk section running trains it is almost certain that 410 miles of the 2-wire were on that section.\textsuperscript{20}
Footnotes to Chapter Six


2. Ibid. See map opposite page 1. See also the portion of that map reproduced on page 71 of this thesis.


4. CSP, 1883 (No. 10A), p. 758. Adam Oliver was a prominent Liberal and member of the Ontario legislature. Joseph Davidson had been a partner of Oliver in a lumber mill business in the Fort William area where they had extensive timber rights.

5. Fleming, op. cit., p. 58.

6. PAC, M.G. 29 D-10, McIntyre Papers, telegrams dated June 22, 1876; CSP, 1877 (No. 6), p. 188, states that one-fifth of the work was completed in 1876.


9. Ibid., May 9, 1877.

10. Ibid., August 25, 1877.

11. Ibid., September 6, 1877.

12. CSP, 1878 (No. 7), p. 189.


14. Ibid., August 30, 1878.

15. CSP, 1883 (No. 10A), p. 758; PAM, Colcleugh Papers, MG 14, B 57, 6/7, letter no. 36, James Colcleugh to his brother Malcolm, April 17, 1877. See sketch on page 39 of this thesis.


17. PAM, Colcleugh Papers, MG 14, B 57, 1/7, diary of James Colcleugh and diary of unidentified telegraph clerk at Selkirk; Manitoba Daily Free Press, April 8, 1879, reported the closing of the telegraph station at Rideout's camp; Fleming, Report-1877, p. 96.


Chapter Seven

THE ABANDONMENT OF THE INTER-LAKE ROUTE
AND THE BUILDING OF THE QU'APPELLE-TO-HUMBOLDT LINE

Public opinion in Manitoba was against the choice of the inter-lake route for the railway and telegraph from the moment it was announced, and the ensuing criticism followed two general themes. On the one hand there were complaints about the unsatisfactory functioning of the line, and on the other about the obvious fact that settlers moving into the fertile lands along the Assiniboine river west of Winnipeg were without telegraph service and would be without railway transportation unless a branch line was built. From the moment the government's railway policy was announced the Manitoba Daily Free Press had reservations about the wisdom of the choice of the inter-lake route for the railway and telegraph.\(^1\) In September of 1874 it published Rev. McDougall's statement that the "Bow River country must be tapped through Canadian territory".\(^2\) In saying this McDougall was one of the first to advocate a railway through the southern prairies. In the face of government unwillingness to change its policy the Free Press took the stand that while the inter-lake route had been chosen for what must be "Dominion" reasons, a branch railway should be built into western Manitoba.\(^3\) Others in Manitoba were more critical and more determined to have changes made. On the initiative of Senator Girard of Manitoba a parliamentary committee was set up in March of 1877 to study the "Narrows" route, and the reasons for Fleming's adoption of it.\(^4\) The "Pacific Railway" debate was constantly reported in the pages of the country's newspapers during the spring and summer of
1877. In June reports of the committee's hearings began to appear.

Sandford Fleming told the committee that he had chosen the Selkirk crossing of the Red River because Selkirk had never been flooded, whereas Winnipeg had been flooded in 1852 and 1861. He stated that he considered the timber of the inter-lakes region important. He had to admit that the telegraph poles of the inter-lake route had been set up in winter and that they had fallen when the snow melted. He was forced to admit, too, that the area was too swampy for effective telegraph line maintenance in the summer, but assured the committee that this would not be true after the area was drained.5

About two weeks later a group of prominent Manitoba citizens made representations concerning a route through western Manitoba. It was agreed that engineers would look at the recommended route.6 A report on the findings of the engineers was made public in late February of 1878, and the matter was debated in the House of Commons.7 Opposition critics flayed the government unmercifully concerning the choice of the inter-lake route. The member for Frontenac, Mr. Kirkpatrick, quoted the testimony of witness after witness to the effect that the country south of Lake Manitoba was superior to the inter-lake region in every way, and that efforts to build a railway through the inter-lake swamps and marshes would meet with nothing but difficulties. His speech filled five pages in the Debates, and when he sat down he was supported by other critics of government policy.8

After these blistering attacks Prime Minister Mackenzie rose to defend Fleming's choice of route in particular and the government's railway policies in general. As both Minister of Public Works and Prime
Minister he had been doubly under attack and welcomed the opportunity to answer. He laid emphasis upon the information and advice which Sandford Fleming and others had given. All the government could do was ask for advice from those best qualified to give it and then follow that advice. If the advisers were right - and he had every reason to think they were - his government's policies were right. It was the duty of his government not to allow itself to stray from the path of its duty because of the representations of any special interest group. Then he dealt what he probably considered his most telling blow in the debate when he said that

the bursting granaries of Marquette...are not sufficient...to induce the government to deviate from a line of railway which is believed otherwise to be in the general interests of the country.9

Fleming clearly had the confidence of the Prime Minister, so it is not to be wondered at that the Manitoba Daily Free Press appeared to give up hope of ever having the route altered to go south of Lake Manitoba and turned its attention to other issues.10

The Mackenzie government, however, went down to defeat in the elections of September, 1878. In the session of 1879 the Macdonald government decided "to locate a portion of the Canadian Pacific Railway from the Red River westerly, running to the south of Lake Manitoba, with a branch to Winnipeg..."11 With this decision to build the railway south of Lake Winnipeg the chief reason for the existence of the Selkirk-Livingstone section of the pioneer telegraph line had disappeared. Since it was still government policy to build the railway through the Yellowhead Pass a decision had to be made as to where to connect the old
pioneer line with the new line which, it was assumed, would parallel the railway. But the Macdonald government, preoccupied with finding a group of capitalists to construct the railway as a private enterprise, gave little priority to telegraph matters. The government did not, as might have been expected, call for tenders to finish the Cache Creek to Edmonton portion of the pioneer line, and it did not act with anything like decisiveness in either abandoning the inter-lake route or in building a new line south of Lake Manitoba. This may have been because the area in question was now served by other telegraph lines - a private line to Portage La Prairie was built in 1879 and opened for business in February of 1880 - or it may have been because Sir Charles Tupper, the Minister of Public Works, did not consider it important enough.

The first report that the government intended to change the route of the eastern end of the pioneer telegraph line came in September of 1879, and the reopening of the Poplar Plains telegraph station in November must have made it appear that the government was listening to reason concerning an alternative route. A line built northwest from the junction of Birdtail Creek and the Qu'Appelle River, not far from present-day Virden, Manitoba, to the Poplar Plains station would have avoided the difficulties presented by the low-lying country east of Riding Mountain, and the Herald recommended such a route. But it was the fall of 1880 before Fuller, the contractor, and F. N. Gisborne, the general superintendent of government telegraphs, came west to inspect the Fuller line. Whether Gisborne then made an inspection tour of the Sifton-Glass line was not reported, but it needed inspection, being out of order
continuously from September 9 to November 20.17

In December of 1880 the news came that the Pacific Railway was to be built along a route that would touch Portage La Prairie, and it was publicly announced that a railway syndicate was being discussed as an alternative method of financing it.18

The government appeared to be in no hurry to do anything about the telegraph line. Fuller's contract was to expire on the 15th of July, 1881, so in late May Mr. Little, the superintendent, made a final inspection tour of the line, preparatory to handing it over to the government. Nothing was heard from the government as to its intentions, and by the time Mr. LaTouche Tupper arrived in Battleford on August 6 to take over the line, Mr. Fuller had paid off his staff and broken up his establishment. Mr. Tupper had to rent the old office, hire the former employees and set the line working again.19 While in Battleford Mr. Tupper told the Herald that the government had still not decided what to do about the inter-lake telegraph line. The Herald trusted that Mr. Tupper would "do what the country requires".20 But clear decisions were still not forthcoming. In September of 1881, two years after the initial report, the announcement came that the government proposed to abandon the eastern end of the old pioneer line and build a new one from Qu'Appelle on the C.P.R. northwestward to Humboldt.21 This was followed by a report in late October that the government intended to operate the eastern end of the line after all.22 This proved to be true. Tupper put a staff of repairers to work, but had no better success than Sifton and Glass had had. In November the Herald once again published the old familiar story, "line down east of Pelly".23
Map illustrating the Abandonment of the Humboldt-Selkirk section

1. Humboldt-Selkirk line abandoned in 1882.
2. New line built from Qu'Appelle to Humboldt.
3. Line from Poplar Plains suggested by the Saskatchewan Herald but never built.
4. The "gap" - 1883.
5. C.P.R. telegraph line.
In August of 1881 the new Canadian Pacific Railway Company requested permission to change the route of the railway across the prairies. The government immediately asked, "How do you propose to reach the Yellowhead Pass?" The response was that there might be a better pass giving a "much more direct" route to Kamloops. In April of 1882 a bill was introduced in the House of Commons authorizing the construction of the C.P.R. "through some Pass other than the Yellow Head pass". The fact that it was presented by the Hon. Charles Tupper, Minister of Public Works, indicates that the change was now government policy, and by early May it was law. This decision to change the route of the C.P.R. signalled the end of the government's "pioneer telegraph line" policy. With the Canadian Pacific Railway Company building its own telegraph line along its own right-of-way - using its own flat-cars to haul the telegraph poles to where they were needed - the "pioneer" telegraph line passed into discard as an aid to railway construction. As for the existing line, it was now clear that money spent on it would have nothing to do with railway construction but would be an index of how much importance the government placed on maintaining an end to isolation in the communities through which or near which it passed.

Tupper's crews worked with might and main to maintain service on the old inter-lake line, but in spite of all their efforts it went out of order in April and again in May of 1882. In July the Herald was regularly publishing news which came by mail from Qu'Appelle - on the C.P.R. - to Humboldt and then by telegraph again to Battleford. Not until October did progress reports on the new telegraph line begin to appear. On the 14th of that month the Herald confidently announced that
the line would soon be finished. As for the old inter-lake line, all the wire that it would pay to save would be salvaged. Line superintendent Hartley Gisborne made his headquarters in Battleford, but connection between Qu'Appelle and Humboldt was not, in fact, made soon.

Winter passed and messages from the East began to come to the new telegraph station at Touchwood Hills to be carried by courier across the "gap" between there and Humboldt. This institution of the "gap" was commemorated by Lindeburgh, the operator at Touchwood Hills, who named the new station "Kutawa", using the Cree word for "gap". In April the Herald, always optimistic about this new line, still expected it to be finished daily. Summer passed and the "gap" was not closed. In August the wire was strung but there was no communication, and not until September of 1883 could the Herald report that the line was working.

It is difficult to say what prevented more prompt action in completing this line. Probably the best answer is that after April of 1882 no one was under any illusions about its strategic importance. Begun as a pioneer line for a Canadian Pacific Railway, it was now simply a branch line from the newly-built telegraph lines of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, but operated as part of the Government Telegraph Service.
Footnotes to Chapter Seven


2. Ibid., Sept. 10, 1874.


8. Ibid., pp. 570-5.

9. Ibid., p. 589. Marquette was a federal constituency west of Winnipeg.


12. The Yellowhead Pass was part of government policy until 1882. See CSP, 1882 (No. 48), pp. 67ff.


14. Saskatchewan Herald, September 6, 1879; Saskatchewan Herald, Nov. 3, 1879. The reader should note that the Herald makes a slip and calls it Poplar Point. J. S. Macdonald makes the same mistake on his map in The Dominion Telegraph.

15. Saskatchewan Herald, March 29, 1880. See map on page 83 of this thesis.

16. Saskatchewan Herald, Sept. 13, 1880; F. N. Gisborne had already had a distinguished career in telegraphy before becoming superintendent of the Dominion Government Telegraph Service in 1879. He was responsible for connecting Nova Scotia and Newfoundland by cable. He then had the idea of doing the same between Newfoundland and Ireland. He took the idea to Cyrus Field and Mr. Brett. These men had the necessary capital to complete the project. Gisborne was an original
member of the Royal Society of Canada (Sir James Grant, "F. N. Gisborne-In Memoriam", Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, 1893, Section 2, p. 67.)

17. Saskatchewan Herald, Nov. 29, 1880.
20. Ibid.
21. Saskatchewan Herald, Sept. 4, 1881. See map on page 83 of this thesis
23. The reader is reminded that Pelly refers to the Livingstone telegraph station.
27. Saskatchewan Herald, May 27, 1882.
30. Hartley Gisborne served as superintendent of the line, using Battleford as headquarters. He was the son of F. N. Gisborne.
32. Saskatchewan Herald, April 28, 1883.
33. Saskatchewan Herald, Sept. 15, 1883. The account mentions "Troy". This was the name for the railway station at Qu'Appelle; J. S. MacDonald, The Dominion Telegraph, pp. 29, 61.
Chapter Eight
USES OF THE TELEGRAPH

The pioneer telegraph was planned and constructed as an adjunct of the projected Canadian Pacific Railway. Its first impact upon the areas through which it passed, however, involved more than railways. Its presence in an area ended the isolation of that area, allowing people to communicate with each other quickly and relatively cheaply. This was the function of the telegraph to which Lieutenant-Governor Archibald was alluding in 1872 when he wrote:

...if we are to know how to deal effectively with events in the remote West we must have some way of obtaining information: Helena [Montana] has telegraphic communication...

Archibald well knew what he was writing about, having had experience in attempting to communicate with the West. In 1870 he had sent Sir W. F. Butler as a special envoy to all the old forts of the western prairies. He was to observe conditions and make recommendations concerning the administration of the area. Butler had found that when he could travel more than forty miles per day by horseback he was doing very well. When he tried to travel farther than that he was risking the life of his horse. To state it briefly, in 1870 the speed of travel and communications across the West was limited to the distance a horse could travel in one day and still be able to travel the next.

The telegraph changed all that. It could be described as a unique kind of tiny nerve extending out into the wilderness and enabling people to talk with their relatives, friends, employers and employees with the speed of electricity. But, unlike the nerves leading from the brain to
the limbs of a living being, the telegraph had the valuable feature that any place where a key could be "cut in" and grounded could become for a time the brain. Hay Lakes could communicate with Ottawa or with Grizzly Bear. Poplar Plains could telegraph to Humboldt or Livingstone as well as to Battleford. And when the message arrived it was written down. The addressee went away from the telegraph office with a piece of paper in his hand. Some of these pieces of paper were crumpled up and thrown away, but others were kept and are to be found in public and private archives today.

In 1874, when the telegraph contracts were let, Fort Edmonton was approximately twenty days travel from Winnipeg, the nearest telegraph office. In August of 1876 H. A. F. Macleod, a surveyor working under Sandford Fleming's direction, "arrived at the telegraph station on the Hay Lakes trail to Edmonton". There he "was enabled to communicate by telegraph with the office in Ottawa". For communication purposes eight hundred miles had disappeared. Butler's title for his book, The Great Lone Land, was no longer so appropriate as it had been. Fuller reported to the Department of Public Works that for the portion of the year 1876 in which the telegraph line built by his contract was functioning, "the number of messages transmitted between Battleford and Pelly...was 517. Between Battleford and Hay Lakes - 80. Between Pelly and Hay Lakes - 53". While we cannot know the actual source or destination of the telegrams which came and went through "Pelly" (Livingstone), the station operated jointly by Fuller and Colcleugh, even the convenience represented by the eighty telegrams sent between Battleford and Hay Lakes is impressive.
For the overwhelming majority of telegrams transmitted there is no knowing either the sender or the receiver of the telegram, not to mention the subject dealt with. A few were published in government reports. Others are to be found in the files of government departments. No doubt many are to be found in the files of private companies doing business in the West in the 1870's. A surprising number were reported immediately to such newspapers as the Manitoba Daily Free Press and Saskatchewan Herald, indicating how happy people were with the wonderful new means of communication and how willing they were to share their news with the editor of the local newspaper. The historian who is interested in the history of the Edmonton area in the 1870's, for example, - a period when Edmonton had no newspaper - is well advised to study the Saskatchewan Herald for the period from 1878 to 1880, and the Manitoba Daily Free Press for the period before that. He will find that telegraphed material makes up a significant part of the material gleaned. He will find that he must discard far more than he can use, for the information published covered the whole range of human activities over an area in excess of eight hundred miles in length. And he will find in this published potpourri the occasional item which warned of trouble to come.

Metis requests were outlined in a story from Battleford in February of 1877. They asked for the election of a councillor, for advances of farm implements to assist them in farming, and for the appointment of a trilingual Metis stipendiary magistrate. When the Territorial Council met in March one of the measures considered had to do with protecting
the buffalo from extermination. News of the Swan River meeting was published the same day in Winnipeg. In October the Free Press gave a description of a meteorological service, whereby reports telegraphed from Battleford were compared with observations taken in Winnipeg and published in tabular form. In November a man by the name of Flint blew off a finger while shooting in the area near Battleford. No doubt this was one occasion when the medical book kept in the telegraph office at Battleford was put to good use. In December of 1877 checker players at Livingstone competed with players at Battleford, the moves being transmitted by telegraph. Livingstone won.

In January of 1878 someone sent a telegram from Winnipeg to Edmonton and the Free Press rejoiced; "This is one of the longest, if not the longest, circuit without a repeater on this continent". A court case in Battleford must have been embarrassing to the Mounted Police. The policemen who had taken part in a gambling game were "handed over to their inspector". A message from the Cree chief Big Bear was telegraphed in March of 1878 to the effect that it would be useless for the Territorial government to try to govern the Indians as long as they put them in jail for killing buffalo. Big Bear was heard from again two days later. The Indians wanted to handle their own affairs, he insisted.

In May the Free Press announced P. G. Laurie's departure from Winnipeg with the plant for the Saskatchewan Herald. A "private" telegram told of his arrival in Battleford at the end of July. By the end of August the Herald had begun publication of news at Battleford. While Laurie was on his way west a land surveyor, William Ogilvie, then at Battleford,
received a telegram from the Surveyor-General instructing him to assume the direction of any survey parties that were then at Battleford.  

The feeling of isolation and the desire to be part of a larger community were expressed by the Weldons in a Christmas telegram to the Herald:

The citizens of Humboldt, one and all, from the postmaster down to the train dogs, feel glad, and in their gladness extend a hearty greeting to the Herald, to Battleford, and its people. The plum pudding is gurgling in the pot, the beef is fizzling (sic) in the oven, and the pemmican is - well, it's raw. These things make us unspeakably happy, and feeling that everything is well, we say, Merry Christmas to all.

Snow two feet deep.  

In February of 1879 Battleford was in direct telegraphic communication with Thunder Bay. The Thunder Bay operator couldn't believe it. Isolation had ended for his area too.

An indication of the costs of running the territorial government was given in a telegram to Lieutenant-Governor Laird from J. S. Dennis, in Ottawa:

Five thousand placed to your credit in Merchants' Bank Winnipeg for North-West Govt expenses. J. S. Dennis.

In October of 1879 a man by the name of Langdon was missing for eight days in the area between Battleford and Sounding Lake, an area almost devoid of wood for either shelter or fuel. He sent a telegram from Hay Lakes stating that he was safe, and the Herald published the story.

The telegraph and the newspapers were interdependent in a number of ways, some not immediately obvious. Letters to the editor published in
Canadian Pacific Telegraph Line - Saskatchewan District

Telegram

Canadian Pacific Telegraph Line - Saskatchewan District

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the Herald in the summer of 1879 had unexpected effects. One was that Superintendent Little published a statement as to what telegraph rates then were: one dollar for ten words, seven cents for each additional word.25 Another was that Richard Fuller repeated an offer to the citizens of Edmonton; he would extend the line to their town if the townspeople would erect the poles and haul the wire along the eighteen miles from the end of the line.26 The offer was accepted, and the line completed in late December.27 Extension of the telegraph line to Edmonton did not mean the immediate establishment of a newspaper there, however, and for the year 1880 it is still necessary to read the Herald or the Free Press to find information concerning Edmonton. In March the Herald reported that "Mr. Frank Lamoreux and others have telegraphed to Haslam and Wilson for a 10-horse thresher and two self-rake reapers, mowers and sulky rakes".28

With the establishment of the Bulletin in December of 1880 each of the three telegraph contracts between the Rockies and Thunder Bay could both communicate with each other and have telegraphed news recorded by newspaper for its own citizens' interest and for that of posterity.29

Few localities in the West were more isolated than Grizzly Bear telegraph station. Half way between Battleford and Edmonton, its isolation was more complete than a glance at the map would reveal. Freighters avoided the telegraph, or "empty" trail, which crossed the deep Blackfoot, Grizzly Bear and Buffalo coulees, in favour of a more northerly trail which offered fewer problems. Only freighters forced to travel "empty" and telegraph repairmen used that part of the trail. Accordingly
Grizzly Bear operators welcomed the occasional visit by travelling Indians like the one telegraphed to the Bulletin in January of 1881:

> A large band of Indians arrived here today and say they have had no hard times this winter. They have killed forty moose. Amongst the number was one white one which they claim was the first white moose ever killed in the North-West. 

Even when communication with the East was interrupted, as during the period when the new line from Qu'Appelle was being built, freighters and others used the line locally to notify their friends and business acquaintances of their movements. For example, in November of 1882 the Herald published the following notice received by telegraph from Edmonton:

> Jack Norris, Joe McDonald and D. Kiplin arrived Monday for assistance. Their freight is still at Grizzly Bear.

The telegraph made it possible for the people of the North-West to use standard time, a proposal made by Sandford Fleming and adopted earlier in 1883 by North American railways. The Herald announced the change of time in December of that year:

> The new standard of time has been adopted at the telegraph office here. This is one hour slower than the present Winnipeg time, and about thirteen minutes faster than true solar time by which we were formerly governed. The new standard time has been generally adopted here.

In June of 1884 when the trouble occurred at the Indian reserve west of Battleford settlers at Saskatoon telegraphed an offer of fifty armed men to help defend Battleford, indicating that settlers were alert to the possibilities offered by the telegraph line in a time of emergency.
Evidence was soon forthcoming that showed the Indians were also well-informed about the telegraph and how to make it cease working. On Thursday, June 19, while the Mounted Police were at the reserve coping with the problem there, an attempt was made to establish telegraphic communication with the reserve. A party made up of Hugh Richardson, telegraph operator at Battleford, Wm. Smart and Wm. Laurie, drove out to Thirty-Mile Lake, where the trail from Bresaylor to Poundmaker's reserve crossed the telegraph line, a point about five miles from the reserve. Here the line was cut and an instrument connected, but it was not possible to contact Battleford. The line was examined, and the wire was found tied down with willow withes in a slough not far from the temporary station.

Only nine years after it had been built the pioneer telegraph line had significantly altered life in the Canadian North-West, removing the isolation of former times and giving a hint of the wonders of communication yet to come.

East of Selkirk, in eastern Manitoba and western Ontario, the country served by the Oliver, Davidson telegraph contract, the impact of the telegraph line was somewhat different. Railway contractors were at first almost the only customers of the telegraph company. No territorial government was established at a point along the line, as had been the case with the line in the North-West Territories. With the exception of Rat Portage there was no settlement between Selkirk and Thunder Bay whose citizens could use the line for purposes which might eventually
result in a published account in a newspaper. Only of the telegrams sent along the line the overwhelming majority must have been about railway construction business, and are not readily available for study. Only when something unusual or of the nature of an emergency arose did the telegraph serve in such a way as to leave a published record of some kind. Just such an emergency occurred at Cross Lake in May of 1879. The telegraph played a key role which was to leave traces in the newspapers and in government reports.

The emergency was the "strike on contract 15", and Winnipeg newspapers referred to it in that way. Contract 15 had made news from the beginning, and Winnipeg readers needed no explanation about it. The contract involved grading and bridging from Cross Lake, near the Manitoba-Ontario border, to Keewatin, a distance of 36 1/2 miles, as well as track-laying and ballasting from Selkirk to Keewatin, a distance of 112 miles. In November of 1876 there had been trouble about the signing of the contract; the government would not accept the security offered. When the contract was finally let to Joseph Whitehead, the man who had fired the first railway locomotive on the Stockton-Darlington railway in Yorkshire, England, Winnipeggers shone in the reflected glory of the event. The first locomotive to arrive in Manitoba, the "Countess of Dufferin", brought in by the steamer "Selkirk", was intended for use on contract 15. A second arrived on the steamer "Cheyenne" in June of 1878 destined for work on the same contract. Deaths caused by blasting and drowning during the work on the contract were numerous, and the accounts were telegraphed to Winnipeg and published in the newspapers.
In early May of 1879 it was decided to lower the wages paid on contract 15 from $2.00 per day to $1.75. This decision, coupled with other complaints that the men had about working conditions, caused them to go on strike. Whitehead, in Ottawa at the time, got news of the strike by telegraph. He instantly made the request that Col. Osborne-Smith and troops be ordered out to suppress the disorder. Men were said to have seized works and stores and to have contemplated the "destruction of immense quantities of plant". It is possible that stores had been seized, because under the arrangements then in effect employed men ate at company kitchens and lived in company bunk-houses. When they quit work they were paid by cheque and, since non-employees had to pay cash at company stores, would have to go hungry until they could present the cheque where there was a bank. In this case many of the men had not been paid in any way. It would have been most unusual if men had not broken into stores. The Winnipeg Times thought it saw a Communist threat in the strike, and reported that when a body of men marched to a company office at Cross Lake they carried a Union Jack and a red flag.

On May 7 Ottawa telegraphed a warning to the three Winnipeg corps of militia to hold themselves in readiness. A special force of seventy men was assembled on May 8, and each man was issued with a short rifle and bayonet, suited, as the Free Press reported it, for the "business upon which they were sent". The men were given rations for four days and 100 rounds of ball cartridges. Colonel Osborne-Smith was in charge of the men, while Colonel Kennedy remained in Winnipeg in
command of a reserve force. On the way out to Cross Lake a halt was made at Monmouth where an operator cut into the line but was not able to establish a circuit. At Rennie, a few miles farther east, another stop was made, and this time it was possible to communicate with Cross Lake. Charles Whitehead, the son of the contractor and superintendent at Cross Lake, met the volunteers and put the facilities of the company at their disposal. Blankets were issued and the men were given the boarding house to occupy. Immediately upon the arrival of the militia at Cross Lake five ringleaders were arrested. These men made no resistance but held up their hands to be handcuffed, remarking, "Now we are in the hands of the law we will have justice".

Early next morning a long line of men was seen coming around a curve in the tracks, some distance from the railway station. Colonel Osborne-Smith immediately ordered the troops to fall in. A large number of flat cars extended down the track a considerable distance in the direction of the strikers, compelling them to string out in a long narrow line. Colonel Osborne-Smith, taking a detachment of troops, advanced to meet them. A car's length away he ordered the strikers to halt. One of the strikers asked by what authority he ordered them to halt, and made a few insolent remarks. While Osborne-Smith was talking to the strikers the rest of the troops came up, stationing themselves beside the other troops and on top of the flat cars. Some stationed themselves a short distance along the tracks to guard against any attack from the rear. When the strikers, some of whom were armed with sticks, showed a disposition to advance, the troops were ordered to load their
rifles, and Captain Brereton, stipendiary magistrate, was summoned and the Riot Act was read. The men said that all they wanted was their pay. Whitehead assured them that they would be paid up to the time they had ceased work. The men wanted to know if they would be charged for the food they had consumed during the strike and were told that they would. The men then retired and entered several boarding houses for their breakfast before returning to get their pay.

A later story, telegraphed to the Free Press, reported that all the men had ever asked for was their pay, which had been promised to them from day to day but not paid. Most had received no money since February, and when those who were paid received their cheques they had to go to Cross Lake to cash them or spend time and money going to Winnipeg.

The five ringleaders were tried by Captain Brereton, the stipendiary magistrate. He warned the five that if they did not plead guilty to a charge of common assault the more serious charge of rioting would be laid. When the men pleaded guilty they were asked how much money was coming to them. Justice was then administered to each on a sliding scale from five to ten dollars, depending on the amount to his credit in the books. The Manitoba Daily Free Press commented, "British justice, heavens! What a burlesque on the time-honored name." For over a week the strike on contract fifteen occupied columns on the front pages with news telegraphed in from Cross Lake. It would have been a simple thing for the strikers to break the line, disrupting communications with Winnipeg, but they must have known that they were as dependent upon the line as the contractor was, and there is no record
that the telegraph line was ever touched by them.

In July of 1879 another incident on the railway saw the telegraph line in use as the news was sent to the newspapers. Lieutenant-Governor Macdonald of Ontario visited Winnipeg, travelling by way of the Great Lakes and the Dawson Route, and completing the trip on the section of the C.P.R. east of Selkirk. A collision of trains occurred and the Lieutenant-Governor narrowly missed being injured. The final portion of the trip was accomplished by hand-car, and the Lieutenant-Governor was forced to jump when the hand-car on which he was riding collided with another hand-car.60

In 1880 another strike took place at Cross Lake and the telegraph was used by Whitehead, the contractor, the men's delegates at Spruce Lake and a correspondent of the Free Press reporting the affair.61

In the official reports dealing with the later stages of railway construction between Selkirk and Thunder Bay it is possible to catch a glimpse of the functioning of the telegraph and of the importance of its role.

Construction went on from both ends of the railway line, crews working eastward from Selkirk and westward from Thunder Bay. At all stages transportation of materials was the chief problem. Theoretically, the nature of the country being more or less the same throughout, construction should have proceeded from both ends at about the same pace. No doubt the planners expected that this would be the case. But it did not turn out that way. Surveyors and engineers had not counted on the nearly insurmountable obstacle presented by Cross Lake. There the
construction of railway line came to a stop while over 200,000 yards of gravel were poured into an embankment. The surveyors had evidently been hasty in probing for the depth of the lake, and thought they had found bottom when they had really only found a false blanket of silt. Joseph Whitehead, the contractor, began work on the embankment in 1879 and was still pouring gravel into it when the government relieved him of his contract in March of 1880.62 While this was going on track-laying was at a standstill, and the contractors on the next section east, contract 42, were only able to do the work of clearing, cutting, blasting and filling on their section of the projected railway. Supplies for this contract were brought to the end of the track by railway train and then unloaded, to be transported to points beyond by wagon in summer or by sleigh in winter.63 The rolling stock of two contracts was moving back and forth along a single railway track. Obviously trains would have to be driven onto sidings while other trains went past. Without a telegraph to expedite the orders, every train would have had to have a man running ahead of it with a red flag. Indeed, on occasions when the telegraph line failed this still had to be done.

At the Thunder Bay end construction went forward more successfully, and by August 25, 1881, the 232 1/2 mile-section from Prince Arthur's Landing to Eagle River was "in safe condition for the passing of trains". Train-loads of rails for the uncompleted section from Eagle River to Keewatin began to move from Fort William over the two completed sections to the end of the track at the same time as train-loads of gravel were being hauled along the line to complete the work of ballasting.
where it was needed. Trains were constantly having to be switched onto sidings while other trains passed by. With a functioning telegraph line available it was a simple matter to convey the message to an engineer to pull his train onto a certain siding while another train passed by, perhaps with a load of empty cars to be returned to Fort William.

While this type of work was being done other contractors were using the railway track to deliver their materials where needed. For example, W. Gooderham had the contract to install the Haggas system of water service along the first 140 miles of track west from Fort William. During this construction period, as well as later during the time when regular passenger and freight trains were running, an efficient telegraph service was almost indispensable.

Concerning the operation of the line in the last year it was managed by Oliver, Davidson and Co., the official record has this to say:

> Considering the difficulties of maintenance in a country where rock blasting is in progress, communication may be considered to have been fairly kept up during the year.

In 1882 the contract with Oliver, Davidson and Co. was cancelled, and the government operated the line. The next year the government turned it over to the Canadian Pacific Railway Company who incorporated it into their system.

The line from Selkirk to Thunder Bay was the only one which developed according to the government's plan of 1874. Built before the
railway along the route which the railway eventually followed, it served the railway builders and operators in the way the government intended.

The North-West Rebellion of 1885 has been dealt with in two excellent studies. In what is perhaps the best analysis of the military aspects of the suppression of the rebellion, C. P. Stacey concluded that "administration dominated the campaign". If this is true - and Stacey has made a good case - then the role played by the telegraph was crucial, although Stacey managed somehow to avoid saying so in his study.

Before proceeding to show how the telegraph was of service at all stages of the rebellion it is necessary to emphasize the fact that after 1883 Canadians were no longer dependent upon American telegraph systems. The new C.P.R. syndicate had constructed a telegraph line along the new railway line east of Thunder Bay. From Thunder Bay to Winnipeg the original pioneer line had been taken over and improved by the C.P.R. and was operated as part of their system. West of Winnipeg a line had been built parallel with the railway. A line operated by the Government Telegraph Service stretched north from Qu'Appelle to Humboldt, the old station on the pioneer line. The government was considering repairing the pioneer line west to Battleford, and plans were under way to abandon the old line from Battleford to Edmonton, replacing it with a new line north of the North Saskatchewan river. Short lines gave connections with Prince Albert via Clarke's Crossing.

The unrest in the North-West came as no surprise to either the
Canadian government or to citizens interested enough to read their newspapers. News telegraphed by government departments and by the Mounted Police gave ample warning that there was discontent, and newspapers had published warnings for their readers. The situation had become serious enough by late March of 1885 that the General Officer Commanding Canadian Militia, Major-General Frederick Middleton, had been sent to the North-West before there was any actual bloodshed. When he arrived in Winnipeg on the 27th he learned about the fight at Duck Lake, and on that same day Prime Minister Macdonald informed the House of Commons of the event. Both Middleton and Militia Minister Adolph Caron had a lively appreciation of the importance of the telegraph. Middleton sent telegrams to Caron almost every day he was in the North-West, and saw to it that military units were detailed to protect all telegraph lines. As for Caron, he arranged for the construction of a telegraph line to the Parliament Buildings and set up a telegraph office right next to his own. In this way he maintained constant contact with government officials in the North-West, with militia units as far away as Halifax, with contractors serving or wishing to serve the government, and, of course, with Middleton himself. He took his duties very seriously. Caron's telegraph office either sent or received telegrams on all of the fourteen Sundays between the battle of Duck Lake on March 26 and Big Bear's surrender on July 2, following a pattern set early in the campaign, and on thirteen of those Sundays Caron himself prepared telegrams for transmission by his telegrapher.

The telegraph was used to order troops to set out for the North-west,
and it was used to record their progress over the "gaps" in the country north of Lake Superior. One volunteer was even reached en route by a telegram asking him for the combination of the safe at the place where he worked. When news reports were published to the effect that volunteers making their way along the shore of Lake Superior had used the hull of a schooner for shelter, the owner telegraphed to Caron warning him that the volunteers should be careful with their campfires, since the vessel was not covered by insurance. Caron dutifully telegraphed the warning to the officers concerned.

Middleton chose to march north from Qu'Appelle along the telegraph line, and in the weeks that followed he was constantly able to be in touch with Caron by telegraph. Indeed, he was occasionally in touch with commanders elsewhere in the field. He was at a camp at Touchwood Hills, for example, when he wired to Major-General T. B. Strange to assume command of the Alberta Field Force. Again, he was in camp on the Salt Plain north of Touchwood Hills at the time he telegraphed to Colonel W. D. Otter to leave for Battleford. The procedure necessary was simple; a telegrapher accompanied Middleton and his staff, and when a message had to be sent he would "cut in" on the line and establish a temporary telegraph station.

Middleton and Caron were not alone in recognizing the utility of the telegraph. At an early stage of operations both Strange and Colonel Osborne-Smith recommended construction of a line linking Calgary and Edmonton. On his march north Strange gave orders for the construction of the line to be begun, and part of it was actually completed. A line
North-West Rebellion, 1885. Photo taken in coulee near Fort Cal'Appelle, 22d and 35th Regiments and Winnipeg Cavalry, York and Simcoe Batteries, en route to Humboldt. Lt.-Col. Wm. E. O'Brien on white horse commanding the York and Simcoe Battalions. Note telegraph poles and wire, which crosses the road at this point. (Photo by courtesy of the Public Archives of Canada.)
linking Saskatchewan Landing on the South Branch with the C.P.R. at Rush Lake was built early in the campaign to facilitate the movement of supplies intended for the Otter and Middleton columns. Probably motivated by fear of a general Indian uprising involving the Blackfoot confederacy, the government built telegraph lines connecting with the recently-built C.P.R. lines. It is possible that the government also saw these lines assisting in economic development after the rebellion. One established telegraphic communication between Wood Mountain and the C.P.R. line at Moose Jaw. The other connected Fort Macleod with Dunmore Junction, near Medicine Hat, by way of Lethbridge, along a route later useful to the Northwest Coal and Navigation Company.

When Middleton's force was north of Humboldt that place was sometimes for practical purposes the terminus of the line, and a courier service was instituted to take telegrams to Humboldt and to return with telegrams received at Humboldt. The one photograph in existence which shows the old Humboldt telegraph station also shows a mounted courier in conversation with Lieutenant-Colonel G. T. Denison, officer commanding the Governor-General's Bodyguard, one of a number of units detailed to guard lines of communication. The entire regiment of 9th Voltigeurs of Quebec was used to guard other such centres on lines of communication as Fort Macleod, Calgary, Langdon, Gleichen, and Crowfoot. Detachments of other regiments were posted at Qu'Appelle, Swift Current, Touchwood Hills, and Clarke's Crossing. A detachment of the Montreal regiment then known as the 65th Mount Royal Rifles built the telegraph line which Strange ordered built to Peace Hills from the old
North-West Rebellion-1885. Photo taken at Humboldt telegraph station. The men are, left to right, an unidentified courier, Lt.-Col. G. T. Denison, officer commanding the Governor-General's Bodyguard, unidentified telegrapher (in doorway), Mr. Wm. Scott, unidentified man holding loaves of bread. (Photo by courtesy of the Public Archives of Canada).
terminus of the pioneer line south of Fort Edmonton. At a late stage in the rebellion a detachment of the 7th Fusiliers were at the temporary telegraph station at Telegraph Coulee, just west of the Elbow of the North Saskatchewan River and not far from the present village of Borden, Saskatchewan.

An interesting situation developed when Middleton reached Fish Creek. Part of his force was on the east side of the South Branch and part was on the west, moving north along the branch telegraph line to Prince Albert. Communication between the two parts of the force was a problem, and various methods were tried, including bugle calls. Gunner Wood, telegrapher with Middleton's column, solved the problem by running a field line of insulated wire across the South Branch, giving Middleton instant communication via the Prince Albert branch line and Clarke's Crossing. This must certainly be the first example of the field use of temporarily-laid telegraph field lines by Canadian forces.

The Metis seem to have made little or no attempt to disrupt telegraphic communications. Only on a couple of occasions was it suggested that a break in the line had been caused by enemy action. Middleton marvelled at this, and stated in his report that Riel must have been seeing to it that the line was not damaged so that when he had defeated Middleton he could use it to negotiate terms with Ottawa. Middleton's report contains a copy of a map made by the Metis of telegraph and other installations at Clarke's Crossing. The map was captured by Middleton's forces when they took Batoche. One must marvel
with Middleton at this tactical oversight - if oversight it was - on the part of the Metis. A few men detailed to make systematic breaks in the telegraph line at a point in the Touchwood Hills where there was plenty of protective cover available would certainly have caused Middleton serious embarrassment. As it was Middleton was free to direct the campaign as he chose, and he chose to direct it by telegraph.

Otter's attack on the Cree camp at Cut Knife Hill was made without consultation with Middleton, but Otter had telegraphed to Lieutenant-Governor Dewdney for permission, and Dewdney, in replying by telegraph and giving his permission, did not remind Otter that he should have consulted Middleton.

With victory in hand after the battle of Batoche, Middleton sent a report to Caron by telegraph and received telegrams of congratulation from Governor-General Lansdowne in Ottawa and from Lord Wolseley, then in Egypt. Middleton's force marched to Battleford and made a junction with Otter's. The united force then moved up the North Saskatchewan River to assist Strange and the Alberta Field Force in the pursuit of Big Bear. This part of the expedition saw Middleton at his greatest distance from the telegraph line. The solution adopted was simple and effective. A telegrapher was given an escort and ordered to establish a temporary telegraph station by "cutting in" on the pioneer line at a point due south of Fort Pitt. Mounted couriers rode back and forth bearing telegrams throughout the entire search for Big Bear. The last telegrams concerning the movements of troops in the field in search of an enemy passed through this temporary station, and the name
Straubenzie became familiar to readers of newspapers. Later telegrams, like those sent from Telegraph Coulee, had to do with collecting supplies left at strategic points and with the preparations for transporting the troops to their homes. Some of the units were rewarded by being taken on a tour of the C.P.R. into British Columbia as far as the Columbia River, and these arrangements were made by means of telegrams passing between Caron, Middleton and the officers in Calgary. But most troops were sent home as directly as possible, some proceeding to Winnipeg by C.P.R., others being transported to that city by river steamer down the North Saskatchewan River and by lake steamer on Lake Winnipeg. Certain units were taken east over the recently-completed C.P.R., while others made part of the journey by Great Lakes steamer, completing it from Owen Sound, Ontario, by rail.

On one occasion after the end of the rebellion there was public acknowledgment of the role played by the telegraph service. This was expressed on November 28 by the Winnipeg Daily Free Press after the executions of the Indians at Battleford. The Saskatchewan Herald republished the words of praise:

Great credit is due the Government and C.P.R. operators for the excellent service rendered yesterday in the transmission of the report of the Battleford execution. The report, as published this morning, comprises two thousand words, which were put on the wires at 9 o'clock mountain time, and received at Winnipeg at 10:55 central time. When the difficulty of operating a line of such length as the Government wire is considered, together with the time necessarily consumed in transferring a despatch of such length to the C.P.R. wires at Qu'Appelle, it will be seen that the operators must have acted with the utmost promptness in order to
The Governor was very sensi-
tive by the Major Lord a later became September, with rough Canada most inaccessible till the world fell on 26 Oc-
make the time above recorded. It is but fair to say that the telegraph service of the North-West is unexcelled by any on the continent.120

The telegraph operators and maintenance men had to be satisfied with this verbal tribute to their efforts at the time of the rebellion. When the War Claims Commission met, F. N. Gisborne made a small claim for each of the telegraphers who had made possible the functioning of the line during the rebellion:

the above [names] listed performed under the most hazardous circumstances, the different stations being in the heart of the rebel stronghold. All admit the efficiency of the service, which was ... performed under very trying circumstances.

Gisborne's application was rejected.121

The telegraph and its telegraphers have not fared any better at the hands of historians. Stanley, in *The Birth of Western Canada*, accepted as the standard work on the rebellion, both cites and quotes telegrams but nowhere makes a statement concerning the system that existed.122 One map gives no hint of the existence of the line, and the other contains errors. The military historian, C. P. Stacey, in his short study intended for the use of soldiers, states that "communications with the East were still imperfect" and then goes on to use the words "telegraphed" or "telegrams" on almost every page. His map, like Stanley's, shows no trace of a telegraph system.123 The best map so far is that illustrating Goodspeed's short account, which, while incomplete, at least shows that Middleton's line of march was along the telegraph line north of Qu'Appelle.124 A well-illustrated and otherwise well-researched article by Pierre Berton manages to allude to the presence
of a telegraph line without ever stating whether it extended into the North-West. And the most recent work, that of Morton and Roy, a mine of information on the telegrams of the campaign, nowhere gives a description of the lines then existing. The maps, likewise, ignore the line completely.

In an age which lays stress on the importance of communications these would seem to be strange oversights.
Footnotes to Chapter Eight

1. PAM, Archibald Papers, Dispatch No. 97, dated Sept. 20, 1872.


3. Ibid., p. 209.

4. These stations have been discussed in Chapter Four.


6. CSP, 1877 (No. 57), p. 16. Please note that while Fuller gives the year 1875 he must mean 1876, because the line to Hay Lakes was not finished in 1875 and was only in operation during a part of 1876.

7. CSP, 1885 (No. 116) contains a number. For an illustration of an earlier one see note 23.

8. One issue of the handwritten Swan River Daily Police News, that of April 27, 1876, is in the Saskatchewan Archives. It contains a few items of news telegraphed from Battleford as well as some about the Swan River North-West Mounted Police Barracks.


10. Ibid., March 8, 1877.

11. Ibid., October 6, 1877.

12. Ibid., Nov. 24, 1877.


15. Ibid., Jan. 24, 1878.

16. Ibid., Feb. 5, 1878.

17. Ibid., March 20, 1878.

18. Ibid., March 22, 1878.

19. Ibid., Aug. 1, 1878.

21. Saskatchewan Herald, December 30, 1878. Mrs. Weldon was the operator at Humboldt; her husband the lineman.

22. Ibid., Feb. 24, 1879.

23. PAC, No. 2 Treasury Department, 1879; Public Accounts, North-West Territories, 1879-1880, Dennis to Laird, Aug. 13, 1879, see illustration on page 93.


25. Ibid., June 30, 1879.

26. Ibid.

27. Saskatchewan Herald, Jan. 26, 1880.


29. The Thunder Bay Sentinel had been published since 1875; Elizabeth Arthur (ed), The Thunder Bay District, The Champlain Society, Toronto, 1873, p. xc1.


32. Ibid., Dec. 7, 1883.

33. Ibid., June 28, 1884.


35. There are a number of such references in the Manitoba Daily Free Press. The writer was not able to study the files of the Thunder Bay Sentinel.

36. The writer has learned of the existence of material on the government's role in the construction of the telegraph line in the records of the Department of Public Works and in the correspondence of the Chief Engineer in the records of the Department of Railways and Canals after 1879. These materials were not consulted in this study.

39. Ibid., Oct. 8, 1877.
40. Ibid., Oct. 9, 1877.
41. Ibid., June 8, 1878.
42. Ibid., Jan. 30 and 31, 1878, A man was killed both days.
43. Ibid., May 7, 1879.
44. CSP, 1880 (No. 8), p. 85.
45. Ibid.
47. Winnipeg Times, May 6, 1879.
49. Ibid., May 8, 1879.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid., May 9, 1879.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., May 10, 1879.
59. Winnipeg Times and Manitoba Daily Free Press for week of May 6 to May 14, 1879.
60. Manitoba Daily Free Press, August 5, 1879.
61. Ibid.

64. CSP, 1882 (No. 8), p. 10.

65. CSP, 1881 (No. 5), p. 10.


67. CSP, 1882 (No. 8), p. x; CSP, 1883 (No. 10), p. 158; CSP, 1885 (No. 10), p. cxiii.


69. Stacey, op. cit., pp. 84-5.

70. Letter from Dave Jones, C.P.R. Corporate Archives, Montreal, dated June 17, 1975.

71. CSP, 1885 (No. 10), p. cxiii.


73. Saskatchewan Herald, Sept. 15, 1883; CSP, 1883 (No. 10), p. 759.

74. CSP, 1884 (No. 9), p. 227.

75. Saskatchewan Herald, Dec. 26, 1884.

76. CSP, 1884 (No. 9), p. xxxiii; Saskatchewan Herald, Jan. 9, 1885.

77. The Toronto Globe, Aug. 19, 1884 and Sept. 4, 1884; CSP, 1885 (No. 116).


79. Desmond Morton and Reginald H. Roy, Telegrams of the North-West Campaign, The Champlain Society, Toronto, 1972, (cited hereafter as TNWC), gives the text of these telegrams. Middleton stated that without the telegraph wire he "could have hardly carried out the campaign". Major-General Sir Frederick Middleton, Report Upon The Suppression of the Rebellion in the North-West Territories and Matters in Connection Therewith, in 1885, Department of Militia and Defence, Ottawa, 1886, p. 14.
80. Ibid., p. ix.
81. Ibid., p. 97, J. MacTaggart to Caron, April 4.
82. Ibid., See, for example, p. 14, Caron to Van Horne, March 27.
83. Ibid., See, for example, p. 41, Abbott to Caron, March 30.
84. C. P. Mulvaney, The History of the North-West Rebellion of 1885, A. H. Hovey, Toronto, 1885, p. 73.
85. TNWC, p. 133, Thompson to Caron, April 7.
86. TNWC, p. 135, Caron to Abbott, April 7.
87. See PAC photo c1876, p. 107.
88. TNWC, p. 160, Middleton to Caron, April 10.
89. TNWC, p. 163, Middleton to Caron, April 11.
91. TNWC, p. 209, Osborne-Smith to Caron, April 26; p. 290, Strange to Caron, May 16.
92. See Appendix 2, The Extension to Peace Hills, p. 129.
93. TNWC, p. 146, Galt to Caron, April 9; CSP, 1887 (No. 9), p. 5.
94. CSP, 1886 (No. 12), p. cxxiii.
95. CSP, 1887 (No. 11), p. cxix.
97. Ibid., p. 282; see photo on page 109, PAC c753.


102. Ibid., p. 220.

103. Ibid., pp. 246, 252.

104. Ibid., pp. 191-2; It must be remembered, however, that the line between Battleford and Edmonton was broken some time early in the Rebellion, *Saskatchewan Herald*, June 1, 1885; In July telegraph repairers found that the telegraph station at Eleanor (see Appendix 1) had been broken into and the instruments scattered about, *Saskatchewan Herald*, July 13, 1885.


111. Stacey, op. cit., p. 83.

112. J. S. Macdonald, *The Dominion Telegraph*, pp. 40-3; See map on page 113 of this chapter.

113. TNWC, p. 376, Middleton to Caron, July 7.


115. TNWC, p. 373, Middleton to Caron, July 4; p. 373, Caron to Middleton, July 4.


120. Saskatchewan Herald, Dec. 14, 1885.

121. CSP, 1887 (No. 9b), continuation of Appendix No. 4, War Claims Commission, Claim No. 81.

122. Stanley, op. cit. See chapters XV and XVI of Book Two, and maps on pages 243 and 355.

123. Stacey, op. cit. Map is on page 80.


Chapter Nine

THE LAST YEARS OF THE PIONEER LINE

Immediately after the close of the north-west rebellion the government gave its attention to the rerouting of the line from Battleford to Edmonton, a project which had been temporarily postponed because of the hostilities in 1885. A new departure featured construction of the section from Battleford to Fort Pitt on which fire-proof tubular iron telegraph poles were used.\(^1\) Contracts were let, construction went forward and the line was ready for use in 1887. At this time the old line, via the Four Blackfoot Hills and the old terminus of the Fuller contract south of Edmonton, was abandoned. The only section of the pioneer line still in use by 1887, then, was the section from Humboldt to Battleford. Much of this section would remain in use until the line's abandonment in 1923.

Superintendent Gisborne, always willing to try out new ideas, had installed telephones on the Wood Mountain-Moose Jaw line in 1885. Used at first on an experimental basis, they operated very successfully, and immediately afterward telephones were installed on the line connecting Clarke's Crossing with Saskatoon and on that connecting Edmonton with St. Albert.\(^2\) These are believed to be the first uses of the telephone in the North-West Territories.\(^3\)

The period after 1885 saw an increase in the number of settlers coming to the West, and the extension of railway lines went on rapidly. Here and there telegraph lines or portions of lines were abandoned as telegraphic services were provided by these railways. With the building
of the Regina to Prince Albert railway, for example, the government telegraph line linking Saskatoon with Prince Albert via Clarke's Crossing was abandoned.4

Gisborne died in 1892 and was succeeded by D. H. Keeley, but no change in policy resulted; telegraphic services were to continue to be provided in areas where none would otherwise be available.5 As homesteads were taken up in areas served by the telegraph line it was often found necessary to reroute portions of the line to make it follow road allowances where it was out of the way of the cultivation of fields.6 Crews were kept busy at this in several parts of the West. In addition, every effort was made to keep telegraph services abreast of, or in advance of, settlement. When the Barr colonists made their long trek from Saskatoon to Lloydminster in 1903, a spur line was quickly built to Lloydminster from a point just east of Onion Lake and an office opened.7 An extension was made from Edmonton to Athabaska Landing in 1905,8 an extension which was eventually to reach Hudson Hope in British Columbia.9

The year 1905 could easily have seen the abandonment of the Humboldt to Edmonton section of the government lines. The construction of a Canadian Northern Railway line through Warman and North Battleford to Edmonton saw the duplication of telegraphic services in an area which the government line had served since 1875. The government line was not abandoned, however, because of its connections with the area north of the North Saskatchewan River in Alberta, an area not served by a railway until some years later.
The telegraph line never made money, and a good case could have been made for abandoning it. The increase in population did not mean a rapid increase in net revenue. For example, in 1883-4, the revenues were $2,725.00, while expenses were $18,000.00. Nearly thirty years later, in 1921, expenses were over $195,000.00, while revenues had increased to $49,000.00. The reasons are not hard to find. Settlers who came to the West by railway tended to use the telegraphic services offered by that railway. On the other hand, the government lines, constantly being extended into areas of sparse population, were in the position of providing a basic minimum of service over a maximum of distance.

Questions asked in the House of Commons in February of 1923 brought the answer that 5,762 messages had been transmitted in the preceding year over the Qu'Appelle-Battleford line. At that time all places on the line but Baljennie in Saskatchewan and some settlements farther west in Alberta were served by either C.P.R. or C.N.R. telegraph lines.

On April 1, 1923, the 423 miles of the Qu'Appelle-to-Onion Lake section, including the only remaining section of the pioneer line, was abandoned. Ten offices were closed and eleven employees were laid off at a saving of $16,500.00.

The pioneer telegraph line, begun as an aid in the construction of a Canadian Pacific Railway, kept in existence as a means of ending the isolation of a frontier region, finished by serving as a valuable convenience to immigrants in the period of massive immigration which settled the agricultural West.
Footnotes to Chapter Nine

1. CSP, 1887 (No. 11), Appendix No. 19, p. 165.
2. CSP, 1886 (No. 12).
3. J. S. Macdonald, The Dominion Telegraph, p. 44.
4. CSP, 1891 (No. 9), Appendix 12, p. 189.
5. CSP, 1893 (No. 8), Appendix 10, p. 165.
6. CSP, 1904 (No. 19), Part V.
7. CSP, 1905 (No. 19), Part V.
8. Ibid.
10. CSP, 1885 (No. 10).
11. CSP, 1922 (No. 19).
Chapter Ten

CONCLUSION

It would be pleasant to be able to conclude that the pioneer telegraph line had in some way played a key role in the development of western Canada. Unfortunately that is only partly true. Few Canadian leaders appear to have had a clear idea of the role that the telegraph could play. One wonders if the political paralysis of the period prior to Confederation had left these men unprepared to assume the quasi-imperial responsibilities of the late 1860's and 1870's.

Leaders of the provinces of Canada drew back from cooperating in a scheme that would have given British North America a coast-to-coast telegraph system in 1865. When it became his lot to use the materials left at hand by that abortive effort Lieutenant-Governor Archibald of Manitoba acted with dispatch and persistence in bringing telegraph services to Manitoba, and one wishes that there had been more Archibalds in cabinet positions elsewhere. The government of John A. Macdonald seemed completely unable to follow Archibald's advice about the importance of concluding treaties with the western Indians. Valuable time was lost and the western Indians were still not included in any treaty when Fuller's crews began work in the 1875 construction season. As a result the telegraph line across the prairies, which could easily have been finished in 1875 was not ready until 1876. One can understand Mackenzie's wish to show British Columbia that progress was being made on the Canadian Pacific Railway, but the decision to start work without having concluded treaties with the Indians was foolhardy to say the
least.

The choice of the inter-lake route is completely inexplicable, all things considered. The Macdonald government had appointed Sandford Fleming engineer-in-chief of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and the Mackenzie government retained him in that position. Fleming had a double portfolio, being in charge of the Intercolonial Railway as well. Whether Fleming's choice of the inter-lake route was influenced by the deepening economic depression of the 1870's is debatable, but there is no doubt that it retarded the development of the Canadian West. Not only was it impossible to make the telegraph line across the inter-lake region work well, but areas being opened up for settlement west of Winnipeg were left without telegraph service.

Alexander Mackenzie also held a double portfolio, acting as prime minister at the same time as minister of public works. All available evidence suggests that he should have relinquished one or the other. With a half-time minister of public works and a half-time engineer-in-chief it was inevitable that mistakes like the decision on the Barnard contract would be made. It is clear that there were good strategic and local reasons for completing the Edmonton-to-Cache Creek contract in 1875 or 1876 as originally planned, reasons having to do with binding B.C. more firmly into Confederation as well as with the development of interior B.C. and the area between Yellowhead Pass and Edmonton.

In all fairness it must be stated that the Macdonald government, when it came to power, did not seem to place any greater priority on completing the pioneer line. There were three years between Macdonald's
assumption of power in 1878 and the request made by the C.P.R. to abandon the Yellowhead route for the railway. There was plenty of time to finish the telegraph line if the government had considered it important.

The Macdonald government's record was no better where maintaining an existing service was concerned. Four years elapsed between the decision to build the railway south of Lake Manitoba and the actual completion of the line replacing the inter-lake line.

In the case of the Selkirk-to-Thunder Bay line the Mackenzie government was fortunate in not having to make any decisions beyond the initial decision to set crews at work. Any route from Selkirk to Thunder Bay was going to be fraught with difficulties, and the government is to be commended for persisting in its efforts even if it should become clear that there was corruption involved in the letting of the contracts. The construction of the telegraph line and the completion of most of the railway track from Selkirk to Thunder Bay is one of the Mackenzie government's major achievements. It is a story that at this writing is for the most part left untold.

A valuable concomitant of the construction of the pioneer telegraph line is its contribution to western Canadian history. The extent to which this is true is only partly revealed by a study of pioneer newspapers. One has only to consider the contents of the recently-published *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign*, and the contribution it has made to an understanding of the events of 1885. Telegrams in collections now held in the Public Archives of Canada may some day shed light on the difficulties faced by those who built the railway from Selkirk to
Thunder Bay.

In conclusion the writer would estimate that government policy as it concerned the four contracts of the pioneer telegraph line in western Canada was about fifty per cent effective. It is not fair to blame the contractors or the maintenance men for this. Nor is it fair to blame one government. Delays, neglect, poor decision and lack of decision on the part of three governments prevented the policy from being a success.
Note concerning Appendix 1. In the preface to this thesis the writer made reference to a map which stimulated his curiosity and led him to make researches concerning the pioneer telegraph. The portion of the map which shows Eleanor telegraph station is reproduced in Appendix 1. This map, known as Eleanor - Map 1, is followed by another labelled Eleanor Map - 2, which incorporates the writer's findings as to Eleanor's location. The writer has made other studies - some successful, some unsuccessful at this writing - concerning other telegraph stations and structures on the Sifton, Glass contract and on the Fuller contract. These studies have been deposited in the Saskatchewan Archives in Saskatoon, the Provincial Archives of Alberta, in Edmonton, Alberta, and in the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Note concerning Appendix 2. The writer's researches concerning the telegraph line to Peace Hills are included here because while the construction of the telegraph line is part of the historical event known as the North-West Rebellion of 1885 no reference to it is to be found in Middleton's Report, in Strange's Gunner Jingo's Jubilee or in the Sessional Papers dealing with aspects of the rebellion.
The Extension To Peace Hills

The need for a telegraph line along the western Alberta frontier was already evident in 1883, when F. N. Gisborne, general superintendent of the Government Telegraph Service, travelled along that frontier in 1883 as part of an inspection tour. He noted the existence of a string of small settlements along the Calgary-Edmonton trail and recommended the construction of a telegraph line linking Edmonton with Calgary and giving service to the settlements between them. No action was taken on his recommendation, however, and when the North-West Rebellion broke out in the spring of 1885 this 185-mile frontier was still without telegraph service. In a telegram to Hon. A. P. Caron in Ottawa, Lt.-Col. W. Osborne-Smith, then officer commanding the Alberta Field Forces, pointed out that the cost of couriers between Gen. Strange's column, then marching to Edmonton, and Calgary, where telegraphic service to Ottawa was available, was very great. The same was true of courier service between Macleod and Calgary. He recommended the construction of a telegraph line connecting these three points, and estimated that the time required for construction would be "inside twenty days".

The same idea was expressed by Strange himself in a telegram sixteen days later. Then at Fort Edmonton, Strange was about to leave with his Alberta Field Force for the Fort Pitt area, where he hoped to engage the Cree force under Big Bear. He was worried about the lines of communication which would grow longer as he marched east. The Indians had looted the store at Battle River, and while they were now
quiet they might attack supply trains if there was no show of force like that presented by the detachments at Red Deer crossing, Battle River and Peace Hills.

There is abundant evidence that Strange gave orders for the construction of a telegraph line reaching from the old "terminus", near the present-day town of Leduc, to the government farm at Peace Hills where the 65th Mount Royal Rifles constructed a blockhouse and fortified the farmyard, although no record of this order can be found in Gunner Jingo's Jubilee or in the Report. Strange alluded to it, however, in a letter published in the Calgary Tribune and republished in the Saskatchewan Herald for October 15, 1887. Evidently General Middleton suppressed certain portions of Strange's report. When Strange called this to his attention Middleton at first denied it and then said that the omitted portions were not important anyway. One of the omitted paragraphs supplied to the Tribune by Strange was as follows:

> The cattle districts in the heart of the Indian reserves were secured, the frontier patrolled, and Indian and Fenian incursions prevented, and telegraph communication established.

A French-Canadian soldier, recalling the activities of his detachment at Peace Hills, has given us this account of the completion of the line:

> A few days later, the telegraph line from Edmonton was finished. The construction of this line had been ordered by Major-General Strange before his departure from Edmonton. The work was carried forward with despatch. The man in charge was a Mr. Parker ... The soldiers helped in the construction of the line. On the 23rd of May all was finished and the line was functioning ... Mr. Parker made his headquarters in the interpreter's house, and stayed there until the 23rd of June.
Map showing extension of telegraph line to Peace Hills - 1885.
The Edmonton Bulletin announced the line's completion too, adding the detail that the wire had been fastened to every second pole for the time being, and that a construction party would attach the remaining ones as required. 10

There was an impression abroad that the line would soon be extended to Calgary. Leonidas Rousseau, a soldier of No. 5 company, 9th Voltigeurs of Quebec, accompanied a supply column from Calgary to Edmonton in May and June of 1885. He noted that while the telegraph line ended at Peace Hills,

This line will go before long as far as Calgary, connecting all the forts scattered throughout an immense area of the north-west. 11

It was probably good for the morale of the Peace Hills detachment of the 65th to be thus set to work building a telegraph line. By the time the men of the 65th had reached Peace Hills they had begun to wonder what was going to become of their battalion if Strange continued to leave detachments along his lines of communication. 12 It was a practical move too. Strange remarked that most country-born Canadians could "build a house or make a toothpick" with an axe. 13 A telegrapher was handy in the person of Julius Foster Dyke-Parker, who had come in from Eleanor in the early part of April. 14 Strange had noted that the country contained plenty of timber for poles. 15 It must have seemed sound for a number of reasons to order the line's construction.

Probably the telegraph line would have been extended farther south toward Calgary if the rebellion had lasted much longer. But by the latter part of May the battle of Batoche had been won, and it was just
a matter of time until Big Bear would have to surrender. The officers at Peace Hills most likely didn't think it was worthwhile to set to work on the second section which would have connected Fort Ethier at Peace Hills with Fort Ostell at Battle River. No more work was done on the line.

At this writing it has not been possible to ascertain how much use was made of the line. We have noted that Parker remained at Peace Hills until June 23. In later years Parker told of being a "telegrapher with General Strange's column" and sending out what he assumed were "important military messages" because they were "in cipher".16

In October of 1885 the citizens of Edmonton petitioned for the construction of a telegraph line direct to Calgary, making use of the existing line to Peace Hills.17 No action was taken on the request, however, although the Peace Hills line remained in position until late in 1887.18 In October of that year W. McKay had orders to take down the Peace Hills line, "erected by Gen. Strange", and store the wire in Edmonton.19 Edmonton citizens would have to wait several years for direct telegraphic communication with Calgary. It was provided by the Canadian Pacific Railway when that company's line was built from Calgary to Edmonton.20

Osborne-Smith's recommendation of a line giving communications with Macleod was acted on, but not in the way he suggested. A telegraph line was built between Dunmore Junction on the C.P.R. and Macleod by way of Lethbridge, probably because of fears of a general uprising of Indians involving the great Blackfoot Confederacy.21 After the rebellion this
line was leased to the Northwest Coal and Navigation Company, who paid an annual rent of 5% of the government's investment in the line. In 1896 the Dunmore Junction to Lethbridge section of this line was sold to the Company, and the Macleod to Lethbridge section was turned over to the North-West Mounted Police.
Footnotes to Appendix 2

1. CSP, 1884 (No. 9), Appendix 21, pp. 251-8. The entire report has been reproduced in J. S. Macdonald's The Dominion Telegraph, pp. 47-59.

2. One individual received $100 per day for providing the service. CSP, 1886 (No. 6), p. 158.

3. Morton and Roy, Telegrams of the North-West Campaign; Osborne-Smith to Caron, p. 209.

4. Morton and Roy, Telegrams of the North-West Campaign; Strange to Caron, p. 290.


8. Maj.-Gen. Sir Frederick Middleton, Report Upon The Suppression of the Rebellion in the North-West Territories...


16. Regina Leader-Post, October 3, 1942. J. F. D. Parker was later a prominent Anglican clergyman, serving in several Saskatchewan parishes.

17. Calgary Tribune, November 18, 1885, quoting from The Bulletin for October 31, 1885.

18. An 1886 map shows a "proposed telegraph line" to Calgary, as well as the Peace Hills line. See map entitled Description of the North-West Territories West of the Fourth and Fifth Initial Meridian. Ottawa. Department of the Interior, 1886.
22. CSP, 1887 (No. 11), p. cxix.
23. CSP, 1897 (No. 9), Appendix No. 12.
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Maps


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Photographs


The statement in the first three lines of page 43 suggests a point of difficulty.
Since I prepared the thesis a book has been published which clears up this difficulty.
J. W. Sifton had the telegraph construction contract with Glass (see thesis, page 37), a telegraph line operation sub-contract from Oliver, Davidson and Co. (see thesis, page 73), and a railway construction contract somewhere east of Selkirk (see thesis, page 73).

His cousin, William B. Sifton, evidently was hired to arrange for the actual construction of the telegraph line from Selkirk to Livingstone. He made his home on the west side of the Narrows of Lake Manitoba, and seems to have had some responsibility constructing the line even while it was being operated by Colclough.

Notes
2. See page 292 of Taming A Wilderness. References to the Sifton family will also be found on pages 267, 275, 276, 277, 280, 283, 288, 289, 290, 292, 293.

Allen Ronaghan
Pioneer Telegraph Line built between 1875 and 1878

Humboldt - Qu'Appelle line completed in 1883

Traditional cart trail from Fort Garry to the West

Telegraph lines giving Manitoba and British Columbia connections with eastern Canada by way of U. S. lines

Stations established between 1875 and 1878 (in purple)

1. Cache Creek
2. Kamloops
3. Hay Lakes
4. Grizzly Bear
5. Telegraph Flat (Battleford)
6. Clarke's Crossing
7. Humboldt
8. Poplar Plains
9. Livingstone
10. The Narrows
11. Selkirk
12. Darlington (Rail Portage) (Keewatin)
13. Eagle River
14. English River
15. Fort William

Stations established in later years (in green)

16. Savona's Ferry
17. Leduc
18. Edmonton
19. Strang
20. Eleanor
21. Straubenzie, Howe
22. Telegraph Coulee, Henrietta
23. Kutawa (Touchwood Hills)
24. Fort Qu'Appelle

Canadian Pacific Railway completed in 1885