

Conditions Attendant on the Opening-Up of Western Canada.—The new territory was a vast Indian hunting and battle ground—a gigantic buffalo pasture. The Indians of the farther plains had never permitted permanent trading posts to be established there, though they had not refused to accept trading visitors from the Saskatchewan and Missouri Valleys. But this did not satisfy the white man. Wagon trains from the Missouri River Valley and free traders with their carts from the Red River Settlement began to carry 'fire-water' to the Indians. Though many Hudson's Bay Company officers and missionaries made frequent and vigorous complaints, these had little effect and a veritable plague of illicit traffickers swarmed across the Border to the utter demoralization of Indians and white men alike. Especially troublesome were the members of the ferocious Black-foot Nation—the Blackfeet proper, the Bloods and Piegans, all speaking the same language, and the Sarcees, a small adopted tribe. Settlers on their way north from the United States were commonly waylaid by debauched Indians and completely wiped out.

In 1873 a small party of freebooters from beyond the Boundary fell upon a camp of Assiniboines in the Cypress Hills, on the Canadian side, in retaliation, it was said, for wrongs inflicted by Indians from the north. With repeating rifles they cut down the defenceless red men indiscriminately. For no apparent reason, a camp of Piegans was butchered mercilessly to the number of 170 men, women and children by armed white men. Smallpox also appeared and was reducing the Indians of the plains to a sorry plight. These conditions were not conducive to orderly settlement. About this time, too, the demarcation of the western half of the International Boundary was being carried forward under an International Boundary Commission.

Altogether it was a strenuous period for the young Dominion—the Fenian raids had drawn heavily upon the Treasury, the future of the railway planned to span the continent at tremendous expense was obscure, the new Provinces of Manitoba and British Columbia were being organized, a severe trade depression prevailed and revenues were limited.

The Dominion Government, disturbed by the constant reports of lawlessness and disorder, assigned an officer to examine conditions. He reported that the entire Northwest was "without law, order or security for life or property" and recommended: (a) the appointment of a Civil Magistrate or Commissioner, after the models existing in Ireland and India; (b) the organization of a well-equipped force of from 100 to 150 men, one-third to be mounted; (c) the establishment of several government posts; and (d) the extinguishment by treaty of Indian titles to the land, and other essentials.

The commanding officer of the Canadian Militia was also despatched upon a western reconnaissance. He in turn reported that "a large military force was not required, but that the presence of a certain force would be found to be indispensable for the security of the country, to prevent bloodshed and preserve order"

The Establishment of the North West Mounted Police.—On May 23, 1873, six years after Confederation, the Dominion Parliament authorized the establishment of the North West Mounted Police. It had been the intention to call the Force "Mounted Rifles" but, in deference to suggestions reaching him, the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Sir John A. Macdonald, drew his pen through the words and substituted "Mounted Police". The plan called for the enlistment of men between the ages of 18 and 40, of sound constitution, able to ride, active, able-bodied