

Fort Pelly: An Historical Sketch

The following article is based largely on available Fort Pelly Journals covering the periods 1832-36, 1843-44, 1857-58 and 1863-64. It is not presented as, nor is it intended to represent, a complete history of the fort. Such a history could only be written after detailed study of material in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives. The article, however, does gather together much new material on the history of this important fur trade post.

THE EDITOR

IN the reorganization following the union of the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821 a number of changes were introduced in the location of fur trading posts and in the organization of the fur trade districts. Many posts constructed by both companies were abandoned and some new ones were constructed. Among the latter was Fort Pelly which was constructed in 1824. The site chosen for Fort Pelly was the northeast corner of the elbow of the Assiniboine River, approximately eight miles southwest of the present village of Pelly. Its location at the end of the portage between the Swan River and the Assiniboine River¹ was ideal. By a short portage to the Swan River goods could be sent over the water route to York Factory. Or, alternatively, the Assiniboine River could be used to transport goods to or from Fort Garry. In other respects Fort Pelly was a good location. To the north there was an extensive bush region which was an excellent area for furs, particularly beaver. From the prairies to the southwest of the fort a good supply of pemmican could be obtained, at least while the buffalo were abundant.²

Fort Pelly was intended to be the center of the new Swan River District.³ The district included the Red Deer River, Swan River, Fort Dauphin, Brandon House and Qu'Appelle Fort. The Swan River District was thus bounded by Lakes Winnipegosis and Manitoba, the Red Deer River, the Quill Lakes and Touchwood Hills and the Qu'Appelle Valley. Actually the area controlled from Fort Pelly eventually extended beyond these boundaries. As a result of competition from American and native-born fur traders, the company was forced to build outposts to extend and protect the trade in the district. Manitoba House, Fort Ellice, Fort Qu'Appelle and the Touchwood Hills Post became the best known of Fort Pelly's outposts, although there were many others, including Swan River House, New Fort Swan Lake, Duck Bay Post, Egg Lake Post, Shell River Post, Guard Post and Last Mountain Post.

Fort Pelly was probably named after Sir John Pelly, who became Governor of the company in 1822. Its first Chief Trader, Alan McDonell, was responsible for selecting the building site and constructing the first Fort Pelly buildings. He described the site he selected as:

... a small eminence for our house. The situation is in a fine valley, environed by rising grounds on the E. and W., on the N. thick woods, on the S. a continuation of the valley, through which winds the Red River, and on the N.E. a fine high plateau running towards the third crossing place of the Swan River.⁴

¹ A. S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71* (Toronto: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1939), p. 703.

² Archives of Saskatchewan (hereafter cited as AS), Morton Papers, "Historical Geography," Vol. V, p. 175.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁴ Fort Pelly Journal No. 717, 1824.

When completed the fort consisted of a dwelling house, an Indian house, several houses for the staff, a store and stables enclosed within a palisade forming a square of one hundred and twenty feet.⁵ The building site was close to the Hudson's Bay Company original Fort Hibernia site. Fort Hibernia had been abandoned by the company in 1807 and the fort moved to a new site fourteen miles up the river.⁶

The swollen waters of the Assiniboine and the fact that his guides were not familiar with the area prevented Governor Simpson from visiting the newly-established fort in the Spring of 1825. Returning from the Columbia district the Governor and his party struck out overland from Fort Carlton, crossing the Birch Hills and passing by the Quill Lakes. However, the party remained south of the Assiniboine River, missing Fort Pelly.⁷ Simpson did visit the fort four years later, in 1829, on his return trip from an extensive western tour. The party travelled overland by horse from Fort Carlton to Fort Pelly and then by canoe to the Red River. On this occasion he was accompanied by his piper and standard bearer and made a ceremonial approach to the various posts he visited.⁸

Competition from American traders was an important factor in the early history of Fort Pelly. Despite the fact that the American posts to the south were often attacked by the Assiniboines, the Americans were able to maintain posts within reach of Fort Pelly. The Hudson's Bay Company in response to the threat were forced to cut prices and maintain outposts.⁹ In 1831 Fort Ellice was established at Beaver Creek as a Fort Pelly outpost "in order to protect the trade of the Assiniboine and Crees of the Upper Red River from American opposition on the Missouri."¹⁰

The Fort Pelly Journals for the period 1832-36 made frequent reference to the American competition and the resultant decline in trade. In 1833 it was reported that another party of Americans had established themselves near Fort Union, an American Fur Company post at the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers.¹¹ The new group of traders caused "considerable commotion among the Plains tribes by giving three times the price that has hitherto been given for Robes."¹² Eventually trouble developed between the American companies and the Assiniboines, with the Hudson's Bay Company outposts profiting by increased trade.¹³ The Indians came to trade at the company's posts despite the fact that, as the Fort Pelly Journal reported, "the Americans have every

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ AS, Morton Papers, "Historical Geography," Vol. V, p. 174.

⁷ E. E. Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870* (London: The Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1959), Vol. II: 1763-1870, p. 450.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 461.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 525.

¹⁰ Minutes of a council held at York Factory, Northern Department of Ruperts Land, June 29, 1831. Resolution 43.

¹¹ Fort Pelly Journal, Outfit 1833-34, Nov. 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, Dec. 10.

¹³ For example see Fort Pelly Journal, Outfit 1834-35, entries for Apr. 24 and 29.

advantage as the great body of the Stone Indians can go to their fort in two or three days to come either to Beaver Creek [Fort Ellice] or this place will take them 14 or 15 days."¹⁴

The employees of the Hudson's Bay Company, during this period of intense rivalry with the American companies, were occasionally attacked by Indian raiding parties. Chief Trader William Todd (1832-42), then in charge of Fort Pelly, made the following report of an attack by Mandan Indians on an express which reached them from Fort Garry:

... yet when attacked under great disadvantage, they showed both courage and address defended themselves & Coy's property successfully, on our side no human lives lost two Horses killed & two wounded one of the latter fell into the hands of the enemy whose loss could not be correctly ascertained two supposed killed and several wounded one of the former has since been found where his friends had buried him.¹⁵

On another occasion two men arrived with an express from Carlton and reported that they had been met by "a band of Assiniboin Horse thieves the day they left Carlton and were obliged to return when Mr. Pruden sent some Crees with them the first days March as a protection."¹⁶ Such attacks, however, appear to have occurred rarely.

Shortage of food, particularly among the Indians, was a recurrent theme in the Fort Pelly Journals. Their dependence on the buffalo for survival is strikingly evident by an entry in the winter of 1844 which reported that "There is a large camp of them [Indians] here now, all suffering more or less from hunger. They cannot move to the plains, as there is no certain account of the Buffalo being within reach."¹⁷ Fortunately, shortly after this entry was made a report was received that buffalo had been located within forty miles of the fort¹⁸ and the Indians were able to secure a supply of food. Despite these recurring food shortages, large quantities of meat supplies were traded by the Indians at the fort in times of plenty. The journal for 1833, for example, reports that the "Crees finished their trade which amounted to 3160 lbs dried [meat] 1950 lbs grease 60 lbs Beat meat."¹⁹ Most of these supplies were apparently reserved for the use of the brigades on their long trips.

The garrison at the fort apparently depended to a great extent on hunting and fishing for their food supplies. Sometimes provisions ran low at the forts. The year 1858 was a particularly bad one. Early in February six men had to go to another fort because of a food shortage.²⁰ Returning from a tour of inspection of the Qu'Appelle and Touchwood Hills Posts, during which plans were made

¹⁴ Fort Pelly Journal, Outfit 1834-35, May 8, 1835.

¹⁵ Wm. Todd, Journal of Daily Occurrences, Outfit 1832-33.

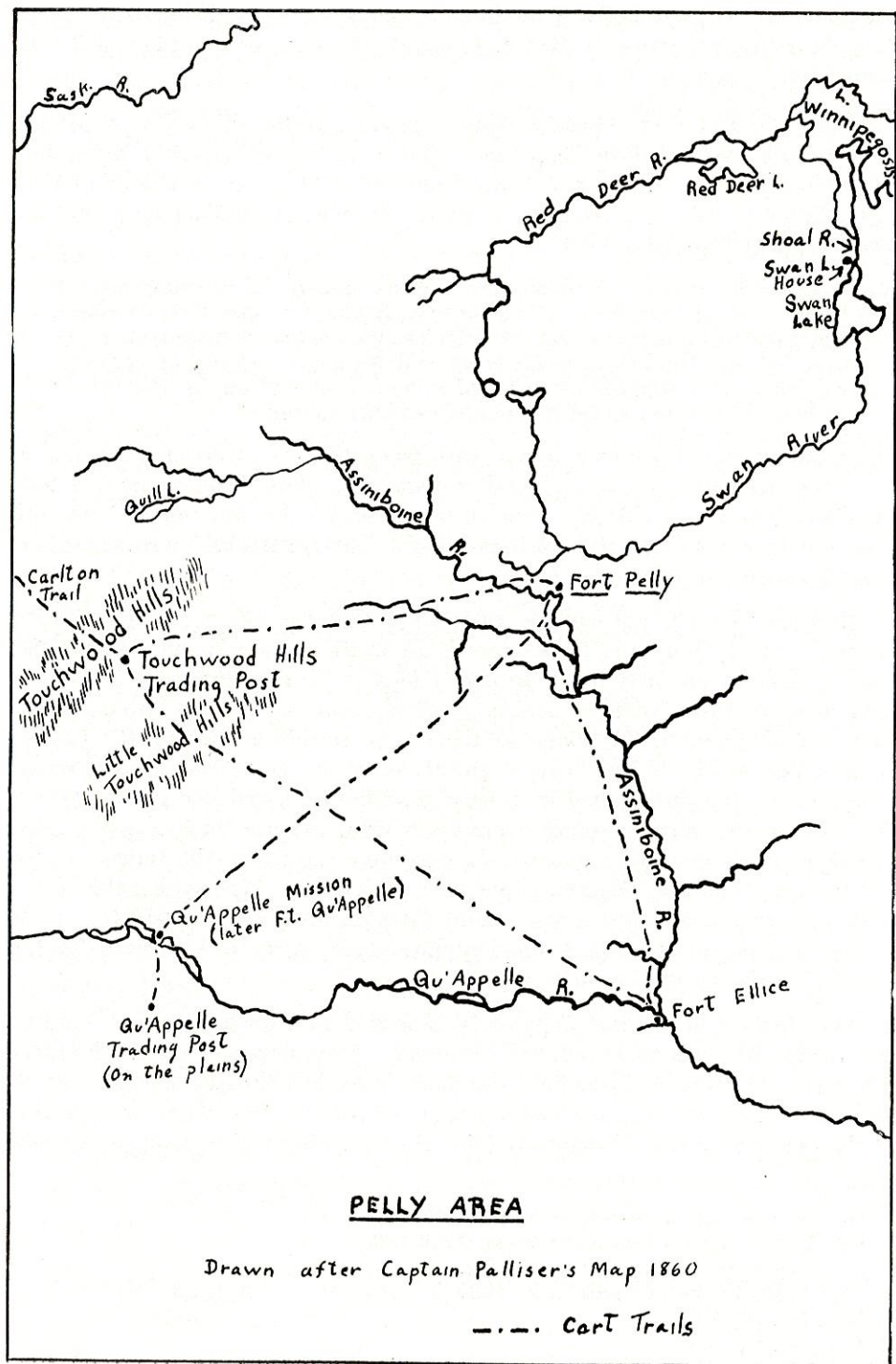
¹⁶ Fort Pelly Journal, Outfit 1834-35, Mar. 24.

¹⁷ Chief Trader Cuthbert Cumming, Fort Pelly Journal, Outfit 1843-44, Jan. 9, 1844.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Jan. 11, 1844.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Oct. 14, 1843.

²⁰ Fort Pelly Journal, Outfit 1857-58, Feb. 9, 1858.



for the following year, Chief Trader Christie (1852-58) made an entry regarding the general food shortage in the area:

The Trade in the plains this year will be a very poor one owing to the want of Buffalo, they have great difficulty in procuring enough of provisions to support the men & Families, their principal dependance at both Posts is Whitefish, which they get from the Q'Appelle Lakes & another Lake about 2 days journey from the T[ouchwood] Hills.²¹

They also fished at Swan Lake, Duck Bay and at a lake in the Porcupine Hills, probably Whitefish Lake. The fishery in the Porcupine Hills produced between two and three thousand fish in a ten day period in 1835.²² Part of the production of the fisheries had to go to feed the dogs required for winter transportation. The usual practice at the fort had been to give the dogs to the Indians to care for over the summer months, but too many dogs were lost this way. By 1858 they were forced to keep the dogs the year round which meant that the fisheries had to be maintained during the summer months to supply food for the dogs.²³

The forts were encouraged to grow as much food stuffs as possible. In 1833 Chief Trader William Todd noted that they had harvested ninety-six bushels of barley and four hundred bushels of potatoes.²⁴ As might be expected, the crops on occasions failed. The wheat crop in 1833 failed because of the "backwardness of the season."²⁵ In 1858 Hind reported that the "crops at Fort Pelly had been beautiful at the beginning of the season, but were all, excepting the potatoes completely devoured by grasshoppers."²⁶ Palliser, in 1857, noted that the fort had a "very fine breed of domestic horned cattle,"²⁷ most of which were sent to the Red River colony the following spring.²⁸ The fort also developed a reputation for its horses,²⁹ but even ranching was not without its risks. A journal entry in 1858 reported that "Mr. James McKay was sent to the Swan River to see what the Horse Keeper is doing and to ascertain if the wolves were killing any more of our Horses."³⁰ The journals also reported at various times that hogs and even hens were being kept at the fort, presumably to feed the garrison.

There was no lack of work for the garrison at Fort Pelly. Great amounts of firewood had to be cut and hauled in to keep the building warm during the winter months. Logs were converted to lumber by the use of pit saws. The lumber was used in the construction of boats for the transport of goods. Although consistently referred to as batteaux, they appeared to have built boats similar to the York

²¹ *Ibid.*, Jan. 13, 1858.

²² Fort Pelly Journal, Outfit 1835-36, Dec. 10, 1835.

²³ Fort Pelly Journal, Outfit 1857-58, Jan. 13, 1858.

²⁴ Fort Pelly Journal, Outfit 1833-34, Oct.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ H. Y. Hind, *Narrative* (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1860), Vol. I, p. 431.

²⁷ Capt. J. Palliser, *Journals, Detailed Reports and Observations Relative to the Explorations . . . 1857-60* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1863), p. 59.

²⁸ Fort Pelly Journal, Outfit 1857-58, Apr. 30, 1858.

²⁹ Morton, *op. cit.*, p. 703.

³⁰ Fort Pelly Journal, Outfit 1857-58, Jan. 6, 1858.

boats. Mention is made of laying a keel and in one case the size of the boat is given as seven and a half feet by thirty-one feet.³¹ Sometimes the term batteaux appears to have been used to denote a type of scow as in the following entry, "Five men [were] squaring wood for 2 batteaux for transport in spring down the Swan River. They got 20 logs which should be sufficient."³² Reference is also made to the construction of small boats which were used in local travel. Suitable wood was made into axles, wheels and frames for the carts needed to transport goods when river travel was impractical.

The regular work of the fort included the receiving and shipping of goods to the various points served by Fort Pelly. During the winter the furs and provisions that had been gathered at Fort Pelly and its outposts were transported by sled to the Shoal River Post on Swan Lake. With the arrival of spring the rush was on to haul the last of the returns by cart or boat to the Swan Lake Post to begin their journey to York Factory as soon as the waters were reasonably clear of ice.³³ Until the 1850's all goods and furs entered and left the Canadian West by York Factory. The brigades usually followed the network of lakes on streams along the Hayes River route.³⁴ However, the development of American railways and steamship lines enabled the Hudson's Bay Company to develop a new route via St. Paul to Fort Garry which created a considerable saving in time and money over the former York Factory brigades. By 1858 a growing share of the Red River trade was transported by way of St. Paul and in 1861 the Swan River District trade was added to this new route.

The 1864 journal confirms that trading goods were received from Red River, but also that the trade returns during that year left by way of York Factory. Even the Saskatchewan was supplied from Red River, still by way of Fort Pelly. The entry of January 30, 1864 states:

... preparing Horse Sleds for the transport of goods for the Saskatchewan to the Touchwood Hills. These goods, 50 pieces, were to leave the Red River in 10 Horse Sleds for Fort Ellice about the 18th., Mr. McKay would then forward them on here and we on to the Touchwood Hills, whence the Carlton people will get theirs in the course of the spring.³⁵

Due to shallow water in the Swan River carts had to be used again in the Spring of 1864 to forward the final returns of Fort Pelly and outposts to Swan Lake. On April 30 "Nine men with 27 carts were sent off to the shore today with 75 packs robes, 22 packs of furs, 5 packs of leather, 68 bags pemmican, 1 bag tongues."³⁶ On May 2 another party of 8 men started out on the same errand, to be followed by 20 carts containing the Fort Ellice returns in charge of

³¹ Chief Trader Cuthbert Cumming, Fort Pelly Journal, Outfit 1843-44, Apr. 29, 1844.

³² Fort Pelly Journal, Outfit 1833-34, Dec. 10, 1833.

³³ Cumming, *op. cit.*, Apr. 13, 1844.

³⁴ See Charles R. Tuttle, *Our North Land* (Toronto: C. B. Robinson, 1885), pp. 355-61, for a description of the route followed.

³⁵ Robert Campbell, Fort Pelly Journal, Outfit 1863-64, Jan. 30, 1864.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Apr. 30, 1864.

Francois Henderson. The cavalcade struggled on towards Swan Lake with considerable difficulties. An employee returning from there met:

... the first brigade of carts under Hammond at the Round Plain, the second under Bourassa near the Thunder Hill Creek, and the third under Henderson at the Plain beyond the Poplars. The first two brigades were getting on very well and would render their loads without any difficulty, but the oxen giving out (in the third brigade?), it is doubtful if all the pieces calculated to be rendered by this party to the store could be accomplished. The oxen are very lean from their long trip from Red River and it is no wonder the poor brutes are giving out.³⁷

Then on May 14 a report reached Fort Pelly that, due to the weakness of horses and oxen in the first brigade, 9 carts had to be left at the Round Plain, and that Henderson and his brigade were expected to reach the store the following day.

In the Winter of 1842-43 the buildings at Fort Pelly were destroyed by fire. They immediately began rebuilding under the direction of Chief Trader Cuthbert Cumming.³⁸

Trading with Indians was often an adventure. Every effort was made to try to reduce the quantity of liquor supplied to the Indians. However, in a district such as Swan River, where Indians could trade with the fur traders to the south, it was felt that it was necessary to meet their request for liquor. "The indulgence was allowed on two definite occasions, when they came in the autumn to be equipped and when they returned in the spring with their furs."³⁹ Chief Trader Cumming described one experience of trading with a large band of Crees. The Indians arrived on a Sunday in the spring of 1844. The trader did his best to:

... persuade them to abstain from drinking until Monday morning; no, not one of the whole band would agree to this proposition. In consequence the baneful grog was as usual distributed amongst them and they certainly did enjoy it all night, not, however, without some blue eyes and worse than bloody noses. Such is the pernicious effect of spirituous liquors.⁴⁰

Trade was carried on for two days and finally:

This day with great exertions the Crees were dismissed, apparently well pleased with our conduct and liberality toward them. The chief Kimicash with about 80 men left in the evening under a salute of musketry, it blew a hurricane which prevented us from hoisting the flag.⁴¹

It was probably with a sigh of relief that Cumming made this entry shortly after the departure of Chief Kimicash and his men "No Indians here but the home-guard, a perfect calm after a hurricane."⁴²

Chief Trader Cumming's journal entries express criticism of those in his command and of company policy. He complained of the reports he received from

³⁷ *Ibid.*, May 6, 1864.

³⁸ Cumming, *op. cit.*

³⁹ Morton, *op. cit.*, p. 640.

⁴⁰ Cumming, *op. cit.*, Apr. 28, 1844.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, May 1, 1844.

⁴² *Ibid.*, May 3, 1844.

McKay, the officer in charge of Fort Ellice, which he felt did not give the required information.⁴³ When McKay requested additional supplies of salt and rum he entered the following note:

Mr. Post Master McKay writes for a supply of salt and rum. I am surprised he should be in want of one or the other . . . He had two bush and of the latter 100 galls and there being no provisions traded, I cannot see what he has done with this large supply of Rum.⁴⁴

He expressed his conviction that it was unwise to maintain Fort Pelly as the centre of trade and stated that "the Red River . . . should be the route for exporting the prairie rations, and not the Swan River."⁴⁵ This may explain why he was suddenly recalled before he had a chance to wind up the affairs of the district.⁴⁶

Cumming was succeeded by Clerk Henry Fisher who managed the fort during the 1844 season. Chief Trader William Todd returned to the command of Pelly for the seasons 1845 to 1849. Subsequently, three one year terms were served by Nicol Finlayson, William Todd and Alexander Buchanan. Then William J. Christie took charge for the period 1852 to 1858.

During 1856-57 Fort Pelly was moved to a new site. The move was apparently necessary because of the occasional flooding of the Assiniboine, which, although it could not have flooded the buildings, probably caused some inconvenience.⁴⁷ The new site was about a quarter of a mile southeast of the first site. When Captain Palliser visited the area on October 19, 1857 he found the fort still in the process of construction and commented that it reminded him of a "commodious shooting lodge, similar to those at home in the highlands of Scotland."⁴⁸ He also noted that the old post was still in use.⁴⁹ Actually the old post continued to be used for some time. The journal for 1858 records the fact that one man was kept occupied cutting firewood to keep the fires burning in the old post.⁵⁰ The Earl of Southesk, when he visited Fort Pelly in 1859, commented that remains of the old fort were still being used partly as quarters for the men and partly as barns for the cattle and horses kept at the fort.⁵¹

One of the products manufactured in the Pelly area and supplied to the Red River and other areas was salt. Hind states that salt was being made at the Swan River for the Hudson's Bay Company by Monkman's sons,⁵² possibly in the same place mentioned in Harmon's Journal in October, 1800:

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Feb. 1, 1844.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Mar. 11, 1844.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Apr. 10, 1844.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, May 12, 1844.

⁴⁷ AS, Morton Papers, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

⁴⁸ Palliser, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Fort Pelly Journal, Outfit 1857-58, Apr. 16, 1858.

⁵¹ Earl of Southesk, *Saskatchewan and the Rocky Mountains* (Toronto: James Campbell and Son, 1875), Dec. 9, 1859, p. 322.

⁵² John Macoun, *Manitoba and the Great Northwest* (Guelph, Ont: The World Publishing Co., 1882), p. 401.

Mr. Perigné . . . is to go and build a fort about fifty miles up this river, [Swan River] where they will pass the winter. A few miles from this, there is a salt spring, by boiling down the water of which, tolerable salt is made.⁵³

Hind described the process of making salt as follows:

The brine from the wells is ladled into the kettles, and the salt scooped out as it forms, and allowed to remain for a short time to drain, before it is packed in birch bark roggins for transportation to Red River, where it commands twelve shillings sterling a bushel, or one hundred weight of flour, or a corresponding quantity of fish, pemican or buffalo meat, according to circumstances.⁵⁴

Free traders continued to affect the trade in the Swan River District. The number of outposts had been increased to deal with the situation. Besides the regular posts of Shoal River, Manitoba Post and Fort Ellice, the 1857-58 journal makes mention of the Touchwood Hills, Guard, Qu'Appelle, Egg Lake, Shell River, and Last Mountain Posts. One report indicated why it was sometimes necessary to abandon posts or change locations:

Freemen are as numerous in the Plains as usual and living amongst the Indians they in a measure cut off the Indians from our Posts, Not an Indian had come to the Touch[woo]d Hill since Winter set in, the Furs that had been traded were all secured by our Leaders out in the Camps. I think that it would be better another outfit to abandon the present T[ouchwood] Hills Post and Q'Appelle Post, and establish one Post with 20 men at the Last Mountains. There is plenty of wood there, the Fisheries would only be a short day from the Post and they would be close to the Indian Camps, and the Freemen could not go further out than that place owing to a want of firewood.⁵⁵

The plan for the Touchwood Hills Post was carried into effect with the trading season 1861-62, when the post was moved to the Little Touchwood Hills.⁵⁶

In spite of the competition by free traders the amounts and varieties of furs traded at Fort Pelly and outposts are quite remarkable. Muskrats, minks, martens, lynx, fishers, badgers, beavers, otters, wolverines, wolves, red, silver and cross foxes, brown, black and grizzly bears, moose skins, swan skins and skunks were traded in considerable quantities. After the closing of trade late in April or in early May the last of the returns were forwarded to Fort Pelly from the outposts; "the Q'Appelle Lake Carts arrived today and delivered their pieces . . . Peter Hourie arrived with the Touch[woo]d Hill Men & Carts with the Returns of the Post . . . the Fort Ellice Carts arrived to-day."⁵⁷ From here their loads were sent by boats and carts to join the bales already in store at Swan Lake to be loaded on York boats destined for York Factory.

Some time after the establishment of the first Touchwood Hills Post the route of the Northern Express changed from the direct Pelly-Quill Lake-Carlton line

⁵³ Daniel W. Harmon, *A Journal of Voyages and Travels in the Interior of North America* (New York: Allerton Book Co., 1922), p. 31.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Macoun, *op. cit.*, p. 402.

⁵⁵ Fort Pelly Journal, Outfit 1857-58, Jan. 13, 1858.

⁵⁶ AS, Morton Papers, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁵⁷ Fort Pelly Journal, Outfit 1857-58, May, 1858.

to run from Fort Pelly via Touchwood Hills Post and south of Quill Lake to Fort Carlton. On February 10, 1858 "The Northern Express arrived to-day from Carlton coming by Touch[woo]ld Hill Post."⁵⁸ When a packet arrived at Fort Pelly from Red River for the Mackenzie River on February 14, Mr. Christie hurried home "in order to dispatch it on to the Touch[woo]ld Hills."⁵⁹

The Fort Pelly-Fort Ellice Trail was usually followed to Red River, except in winter when the old fur trader's route by way of the Lake Posts was extensively used. When Palliser returned to Fort Carlton in the spring of 1858, he remarked:

When I arrived at Red River last November, I made arrangements for engaging men who were to proceed, in the beginning of March 1858, on foot to Carlton; and on my arrival at this place I learned that these men had arrived on the 7th of April, and were afterwards obliged to go out to the south of the Eagle Hills, where they supported themselves by hunting the buffalo, there being no provisions to spare at Carlton.⁶⁰

An entry in the Fort Pelly Journal of March 24, 1858 refers to this group of men and the route of their march:

A party of 16 men from Red River engaged for Capt'n Pallisers Expedition arrived to-day, they are on their way to Carlton. Paul Lascade accompanied them from Manitoba Post as Guide & Mr McBeath & an Indian joined the party on the Swan Lake & came up with them also.⁶¹

From Fort Pelly Francois Laroque was to guide them to Touchwood Hills.

About sixteen men seem to have been in steady employment at Fort Pelly in 1858, most of them busy at enlarging and finishing the post after its removal to the new site in 1856-57. Pits were dug for three saws requiring six men to convert logs into lumber for buildings and boats, two carpenters were at work roofing, flooring and getting stores, stables and dwellings ready for service. Many trade goods were now manufactured locally for the Fort Pelly District, as mentioned under February 3: "Blacksmith making Fish Spears for the Q'Appelle Lake & Mrs. Charles Pratt—and finished them. afterward at Rat Spears for Egg Lake."⁶² Other articles turned out by him are noted with some criticism, such as making Batteaux nails "very slow indeed," square-headed axes "a poor hand at axes." Then there are steel traps for Fort Ellice, horse harness pins, buckles for dog harness, bridle bits, hinges, powder horns, gun lock repairs and the hardware required for buildings. Boats, carts, sleds, horse and dog toboggans, called carioles, were also made here.

Occasional holidays were appreciated as a welcome relief from monotony and isolation. New Year's Day, in particular, a legacy of the French Canadian voyageurs, was still a cause of celebration in 1858:

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Feb. 10, 1858.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Feb. 14, 1858.

⁶⁰ Palliser, *op. cit.*, spring, 1858, p. 62.

⁶¹ Fort Pelly Journal, Outfit 1857-58, Mar. 24, 1858.

⁶² *Ibid.*, Feb. 3, 1858. Mrs. Pratt was the wife of the native Anglican catechist stationed at Qu'Appelle Lakes.

The men had a holiday to-day, and the same regale was given to them this day as on Christmas. Received the visits of the men after breakfast, gave them 2 Glasses of Rum each and some cakes. Rec[eive]d visits of Indians and Women, gave them the same. Gave 1 Gallon of Rum for a Dance.⁶³

Rum was also dispensed to Indian customers during their fall and spring visit to the fort, as on April 7:

The Chief Gabriel Coté arrived to-day on his usual Spring visit of ceremony, he was followed by only a few of the Indians. They received their usual gratuity of Rum which they got delivered to them at the Snake Creek.⁶⁴

Occasionally rum would be given out on compassionate grounds, as, for instance, on January 27:

Wm. Linklater . . . was sent off to Swan River with some Rum for the Indian whose child died last night, had the Rum been given to the Indian close to the Fort he would have drunk it & come back again to buy more, and moreover it would be breaking our Rules laid down with regards to Rum.⁶⁵

The Earl of Southesk visited Hudson's Bay Company's territories in 1859. On his way out in the spring his party followed the Carlton Trail to Fort Ellice. From Fort Ellice the party followed the Qu'Appelle Valley and eventually went as far west as the Bow River. On his return Southesk followed the Carlton Trail to the Touchwood Hills Post. He left there on November 30 on his way to Fort Pelly. Progress was slow and eventually, with his horses reaching the point of exhaustion, he was forced to send to Fort Pelly for assistance.

At the Mission House Mr. Murray's cariole was waiting my arrival. Glad to dismount, I placed myself in it, and the team of dogs took me over the remaining mile of the journey at a pace that seemed absolute flying after our last week's two-mile-and-a-half an hour crawl.⁶⁶

On December 9 he commented as follows on the appearance and accommodation offered at Fort Pelly:

Fort Pelly, pleasantly situated on rising ground, is a new, square, white-washed cottage with small dormer windows in the roof, and offers better accommodation than any house I have seen since leaving Red River. Various out-houses for stores, etc., surround it at the back and sides, but the Sauteaux Indians of the district are so peaceable that no stockade has been thought necessary⁶⁷

The graveyard near the fort interested the Earl, eliciting this comment:

There is a burying-ground near the Fort, used by Indians as well as the Company's people. Over one of the newest graves is fixed a pole, from which are suspended several buttons, a tobacco-bag of bark and beads, a piece of tobacco, and a human hand dried and stuffed.⁶⁸

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Jan. 1, 1858.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Apr. 7, 1858.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Jan. 27, 1858.

⁶⁶ Southesk, *op. cit.*, p. 321.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Dec. 9, p. 322.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Dec. 15, p. 328.

On December 27 the Earl of Southesk left Fort Pelly for Fort Garry, travelling the North Pelly Trail in a cariole pulled by dogs.⁶⁹

Free traders were still active in 1864, but the danger must have lessened as the company had now found it possible to prohibit the use of liquor here entirely, a rather drastic step not appreciated by their Indian customers. On October 22, "Gabriel Cote paid his visit of ceremony to the fort to-day, there was nothing very unusual in his speech, it tending as formerly to the hardship of want of rum."⁷⁰ Also on May 16:

Naerhoot, a Guard Post Indian, who arrived yesterday from the Egg Lake quarter, paid us a visit of ceremony, and with him the Fort Pelly Indians tenting at the fort. Saucy speeches were made by them, all tending to the re-introduction of rum.⁷¹

The new policy included the employees at the fort as well, although their thoughts or opinions are not recorded in the journal. On December 24: "Regales of tea and sugar and flour and the best provisions our Stores afford were served out to the people at the fort for Christmas."⁷² On New Year's Day, 1864:

The people enjoying the annual holiday at this season. A breakfast was prepared for all hands in the dining room to which all did justice. The men then had a game of football and the festivities of the day wound up with a ball in one of the men's houses at which everybody that could dance was present.⁷³

There was wide-spread missionary activity in the Fort Pelly District at the beginning of Robert Campbell's term in 1863. The Roman Catholic church had been in the field at a much earlier date, on May 3, 1844:

Monsieur Damarace, Catholic missionary, arrived this evening from Shoal River, intends staying with us a few days, meanwhile administering spiritual consolation and instruction to the few families at this place.⁷⁴

Charles Pratt, an Indian catechist of the Anglican church, resided at Fort Pelly from July 31, 1851 until his removal to the Qu'Appelle Lakes in October, 1854. Thereafter he visited Fort Pelly periodically, as did the Reverend James Settee, Anglican missionary at Shoal River, 1855-56, and Fairford, 1856-57. Mr. Settee was stationed at Fort Pelly from 1857 to 1862, although during 1858-59 he took charge of the Qu'Appelle Lakes mission when Charles Pratt was transferred to Touchwood Hills.⁷⁵ The Earl of Southesk mentions that in December, 1859:

There was morning service as usual at the old Fort, conducted by the Rev. Settee a gentleman of Cree origin, who had been appointed to the spiritual charge of this district by the Church Missionary Society.⁷⁶

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 337-338.

⁷⁰ Campbell, *op. cit.*, Oct. 22, 1863.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, May 16, 1864.

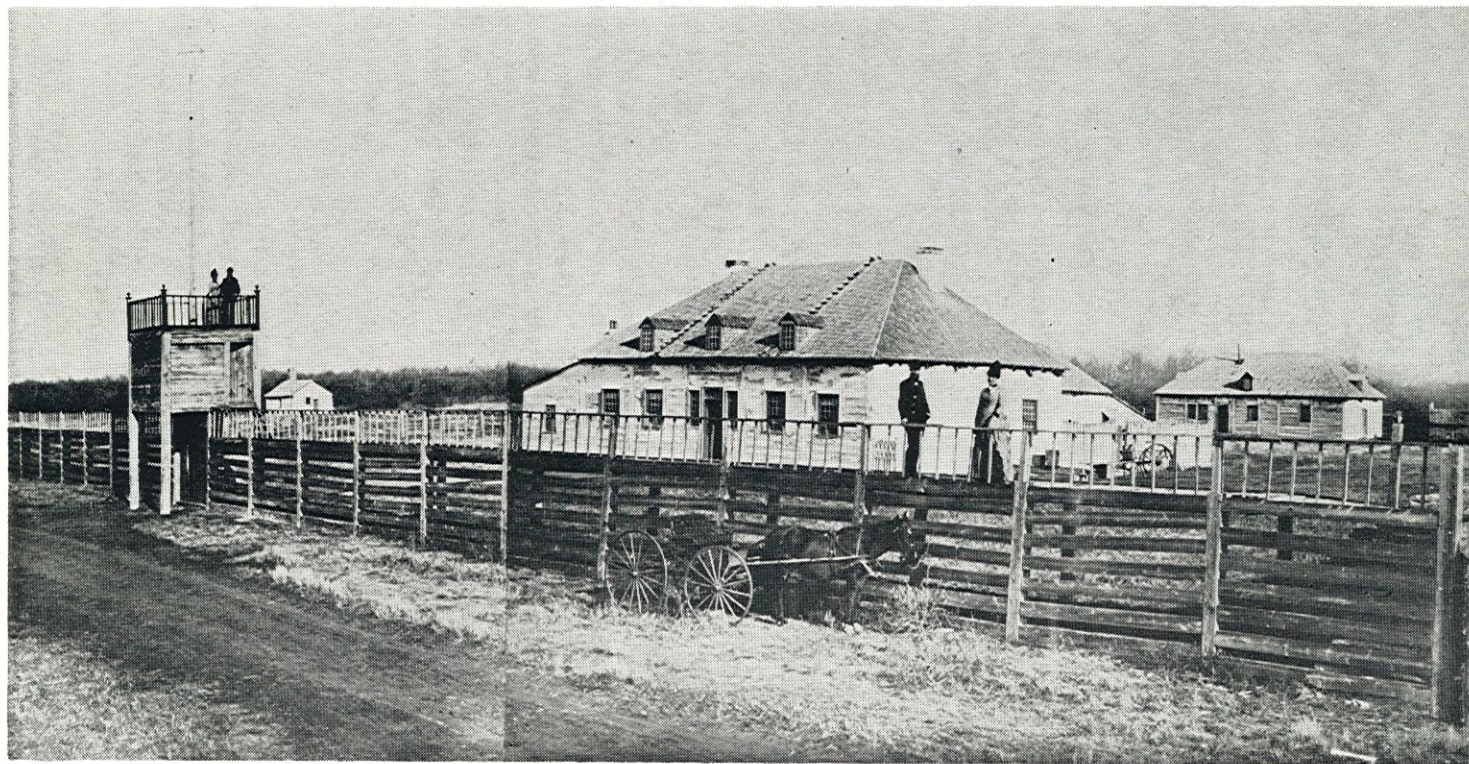
⁷² *Ibid.*, Dec. 24, 1863.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Jan. 1, 1864.

⁷⁴ Cumming, *op. cit.*, May 3, 1844.

⁷⁵ Public Archives of Canada, microfilm of Church Missionary Society Records, Series C 1/0: Journals of Pratt and Settee.

⁷⁶ Southesk, *op. cit.*, Dec. 11, 1859, p. 323.



Geological Survey Branch, Department of Mines and Technical Surveys.

Fort Pelly, 1887

This picture was taken by J. B. Tyrrel on a Geological Survey in 1887. It clearly indicates that the high palisade fence mentioned in Gore's report of 1872 had been replaced by a plank fence. For some time after the buildings had disappeared, the chimneys of the central building remained standing, marking the fort site. However, they have since crumbled and today there is little to mark the site of the buildings.

The Earl also attended Christmas service at Fort Pelly:

Communion service at the old Fort. Two Indians were present, and Mr. Settee addressed them in their own language when giving them the bread and wine.⁷⁷

The number of entries in the 1863-64 journals indicate an increase in the activity of missionaries in the Pelly area.

Company rule came to an end, effective July 15, 1870. The company surrendered its territories to Canada on terms which included the retention of its posts and a specified amount of land in their vicinity. The Fort Pelly Reserve was surveyed in 17 blocks of varying sizes east and south of the fort with the sites of both forts located in block 17. Deputy-Surveyor W. S. Gore arrived at Fort Pelly August 26, 1872 and described its appearance then as follows:

At this point, which is about 110 miles from Fort Ellice, the Company have very substantial buildings surrounded by high palisades of spruce pine, which would no doubt be of great assistance in case of an Indian attack. At this post the Company keep on an average 100 head Horses and 60 head of Cattle.⁷⁸

The new trend was reflected in the position of Fort Pelly. The last Chief Trader to command Swan River District from Fort Pelly was Archibald McDonald, who took over from Chief Trader William McKay in 1871. Shortly after, although the actual date is not clear, Fort Pelly was superseded as headquarters of a district by Fort Ellice. Fort Pelly became simply a post in charge of a clerk. Adam McBeath took over as clerk in charge in 1874. He was in charge during the historic period which saw in his area a survey for a proposed transcontinental railway, the completion of the Dominion Telegraph, the signing of Indian Treaty No. 4, the erection of the first headquarters of the newly established North West Mounted Police, the first royal mail in the North-West Territories and finally the first session of the new Government of the North-West Territories at Fort Livingstone, 10 miles north of Fort Pelly. However, any dreams of glory were destined to be almost unbelievably brief. The North West Mounted Police, compelled by Indian unrest south of the border, left their elaborate and extensive quarters on the Swan River within two years of occupancy to transfer command to Fort McLeod in southern Alberta, and Lieutenant-Governor David Laird was in residence at Fort Livingstone only from November 10, 1876 to August 11, 1877, holding the first legislative session March 8-22, 1877.

During this period of 1874 to 1877 the old Fort Garry-Fort Pelly-Fort Carlton Trail of the Hudson's Bay Company was again a much travelled road. The first steam sawmill to be used in Saskatchewan was transported over this trail in 1874 by the contractor undertaking the construction of the Swan River barracks.⁷⁹ Brigades of Red River carts brought building supplies, provisions and feed. The first royal mail in the North-West Territories was hauled by dogtrain to Fort

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

⁷⁸ W. S. Gore, *Deputy Surveyor Report to Minister of the Interior*, Nov. 25, 1873, pp. 10-12.

⁷⁹ Lewis H. Thomas, "The Saskatchewan Legislative Building and its Predecessors," *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada*, 1955, p. 248.

Livingstone along the old winter road by way of Fort Garry-Manitoba House-Fort Pelly in 1875, and extended the following year to Edmonton. The *Manitoba Free Press* reported May 12, 1876:

A record walk of six and a half days from Fort Pelly to Winnipeg was made by J. R. Matheson and J. H. Inkster of Kildonan . . . Mr. Matheson said that he had gone 5,000 miles of winter mail-carrying between Pelly, Carlton and Edmonton.⁸⁰

Lieutenant-Governor Morris described this trail in picturesque terms during his address to the Indians assembled for the negotiations leading to Treaty No. 6:

. . . standing here on this bright day with the sun above us, I cast my eyes to the East down to the great lakes and I see a broad road leading from there to the Red River, I see it stretching on to Ellice, I see it branching there, the one to Qu'Appelle and Cypress Hills, the other by Pelly to Carlton. It is a wide and plain trail. Anyone can see it, and on that road . . .⁸¹

This is a reference to the original Carlton Trail of the Hudson's Bay Company before the establishment of the Touchwood Hills Post in 1852. In 1849, for example, Fort Pelly was described by R. M. Martin as a "compact, well-ordered post on the route from Fort Garry, on the Red River, to Fort Carlton."⁸² From Fort Pelly west the route followed the Touchwood Hills Trail for some distance, then turned northwest past the north shore of the Quill Lakes to reach Carlton after crossing the South Saskatchewan in the Duck Lake region. From Quill Lakes to Carlton its course was roughly parallel to that of the more direct Carlton Trail⁸³ from Fort Garry to Fort Ellice and south of the Quill Lakes, which was used for the mail run after Livingstone ceased to be the seat of the territorial government in 1877.

Fort Pelly resumed its trading routine but the old ways of life were rapidly disappearing. The railway had reached Winnipeg in 1879 and began to traverse the west in the early 1880's. Ahead of it came the steamboats, carrying freight and passengers into the country. In 1879 the "Marquette" ascended the Assiniboine as far as Fort Ellice, and in 1881 managed to navigate as far as Fort Pelly, a hard-won victory over the obstacles presented by the innumerable loops and curves of this winding river.⁸⁴ In spite of all trouble, the river was pronounced navigable for a boat 100 feet long, although Captain Webber's private view was said to have been that the upper Assiniboine was more suitable for a stoneboat. However, a report by the Department of Agriculture of Manitoba stated in 1882 that:

Large quantities of freight and a considerable number of passengers were carried to points not served by the railway between Winnipeg and Brandon,

⁸⁰ Cited in Ruth Matheson Buck, "The Mathesons of Saskatchewan Diocese," *Saskatchewan History*, Vol. XIII, No. 2 (Spring, 1960), p. 55.

⁸¹ The Hon. Alexander Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with The Indians of Manitoba and The North-West Territories* (Toronto: Belfords, Clarke and Co., 1880), p. 231.

⁸² T. M. Martin, *Hudson's Bay Territory and Vancouver's Island* (London: T. and W. Boone, 1849), p. 17.

⁸³ R. C. Russell, *The Carlton Trail* (Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1955), p. 12.

⁸⁴ *Manitoba Free Press*, July 18, 1881.

and between Brandon and Fort Pelly. On this route the Northwest Navigation Company have two boats, the "Marquette" and the "Alpha", both flatbottomed sternwheelers drawing from 18 to 22 inches of water. The "Marquette" is 170 tons burden, has a crew of 15, with cabin accommodation for 50 passengers. Her trips from Winnipeg to Fort Ellice average a week, the round trip being made in 12 days. The upper part of the river is being navigated by the "Alpha", 80 tons burden with a crew of 9 and accommodation for 20 cabin passengers.⁸⁵

The "Alpha" was reportedly caught and destroyed in the ice above Brandon in the Fall of 1882, but stern-wheelers operated on the lower Assiniboine until 1885.

The Riel rebellion of 1885 created apprehension in most areas in the vicinity of old trading posts. There is no record of actual bloodshed at Fort Pelly, although nerves were on edge and an independent trader, E. A. W. R. McKenzie, had his store at Nut Lake burned during the disturbances. In 1887 McKenzie erected a new post in direct opposition with Fort Pelly and remained in business here to the end of the old fort.

Fort Pelly still preserved a neat appearance at this time, even though the formidable palisades of earlier years had given way to a less substantial fence. J. B. Tyrrell described it in 1887, on the occasion of his geological survey, as follows:

Fort Pelly is situated on rising ground on the east side of the river, and is a large, well-built fort protected by a high fence or wall of sawn planks. Over the heavy gate in front is a stout bastion, from the top of which a magnificent view can be had of the surrounding country.⁸⁶

Junior Chief Trader Cornwallis King had succeeded Adam McBeath, to be followed in 1890 by Clerk Angus McBeath, who conducted the trade during most of Fort Pelly's twilight period.

There was some ranching in the Pelly area before the turn of the century. Eric and Ashford Knight operated a ranch on a comparatively large scale south of Thunder Hill, but the venture was discontinued in the early 1890's. Edward Fields raised horses and cattle from 1888 to 1892 five miles south of Fort Pelly, and Seebach arrived about 1891 to ranch west of Moss Lake. Three French counts made a fleeting attempt in 1897 to operate a post in a manner reminiscent of Cannington Manor; otherwise the settlement was pretty much restricted to the Linklaters, Macdonalds, McDermotts and Fields, besides McKenzie, of course, whose store had now become a community centre. Others appearing on the scene before 1900 were Dick and "Admiral" Dundas, E. C. Clark, who ranched north of Fort Pelly near a lake bearing his name today, and Frank Maloneck, who was active in what is now known as Maloneck School District.

Settlers began taking up homesteads in the Fort Pelly District in the early 1900's, and within a few years there were more than a hundred families in the area. Fort Pelly served as the business and social centre of this growing com-

⁸⁵ Department of Agriculture of Manitoba, *Report of 1882*.

⁸⁶ J. B. Tyrrell, *Report of the Geological Survey*, Vol. V, 1890-1, Report E, p. 135.

munity. Clerk Angus McBeath and his two daughters, Nora and Lora, resided in the factor's house facing the gate and the prominent lookout tower. Behind it was a large warehouse of hewn logs fitted into the grooves of uprights spaced at intervals of about 8 feet—a type of construction characteristic of early Hudson's Bay Company buildings. The walls were plastered with clay, the roofs covered with homemade shingles. A flagpole still flew the Hudson's Bay ensign, displaying the letters HBC, but signs of decay were already evident as the fence surrounding the post was beginning to fall into disrepair.

Outside the fort, Andrew Stevenson had a shack, E. C. Clark operated a boarding house and the North-West Mounted Police had a barracks occupied by Constable Lee. J. B. MacLise taught school with about 8 pupils in attendance. E. A. W. R. McKenzie, often referred to as "alphabetical McKenzie" in view of his abundant initials, had become a prominent trader in opposition to the Hudson's Bay Company at a location approximately a quarter of a mile from the fort. J. B. Murray held the mail contract from the railway point of Yorkton to Fort Pelly, which included as points of call Crowstand, 3 miles east of present-day Kamsack, Muloch near Rhein and Wallace close to Yorkton. In 1903, when the railway reached Kamsack, the mail route was altered to run from Kamsack to Fort Pelly and on to Newin, where Murray had taken up a homestead on the "Murray Hills."

In 1909 the Canadian Northern Railway was built 6 miles north of Fort Pelly. In its wake new villages sprang up and trade at the old fort dwindled to a trickle. It was finally closed, or rather abandoned, in June, 1912, after 88 years of continuous service, or almost 120 years after the establishment of the first Hudson's Bay post at the Indian Elbow of the Assiniboine.⁸⁷ Fort Pelly was a vital link in the chain of Hudson's Bay forts stretching along the northern fringe of the Canadian prairies. As such it played an important role in promoting the company's policy of goodwill and fair dealing towards their Indian customers, which eventually enabled Canada to acquire this immense territory for settlement with a minimum of violence and friction, seldom equalled in the annals of history.

Today, little remains of Fort Pelly but the rubble of fireplaces and the rotting railings along long forgotten graves, but the sites have been preserved for the day when the past will come to life again. In 1923 the Hudson's Bay Company offered the sites and buildings, including 5 acres of land, as an historic site to the Historic Sites Board of the Dominion Government for the nominal amount of \$500.00, but no action was taken at that time. Lately, however, there has been mounting public and governmental interest in the old fort, which eventually may restore this venerable link with our past for future generations.

J. F. KLAUS

⁸⁷ Marlborough House, 1793.