

**Rocky Mountain House  
National Historic Site and Park History  
1875 - 1980  
by David A.A. Finch  
1990**

Rocky Mountain House  
National Historic Site and Park History  
1875-1980  
by David A.A. Finch

3	Abstract
4	Précis
6	Acknowledgements
7	Rocky Mountain House Chronology
10	Rocky Mountain House - 1875 to 1980
16	Map 1 - Rocky Mountain House National Historic Park
21	Map 2 - Brierley Farmyard Details
52	Conclusions
55	Bibliography
57	Appendix A Correspondence Regarding the Historic Site
67	Appendix B Correspondence Related to Erosion Problems
72	Appendix C The Brierley Family History and Farming Operations
78	Appendix D Machinery used at the Brierley Farm
79	Appendix E Brierley Family Photographs



Abstract

This history of the site of the Rocky Mountain House National Historic Park begins where the history of the fur trade activity in the area ends in 1875 and concludes with the formation of the park in 1979. It reviews the major factors which contributed to the extent of human activity on the site and explains the levels of disturbance by these activities. It also suggests areas for further research and includes a review of the previous historical and archaeological work at the site.

## Précis

After the last Hudson's Bay Company fur trade post at Rocky Mountain House closed in 1875, the land lay unused until well into the twentieth century. In the early 1900s, settlers poured into the area, populating the arable lands and working on local railway construction crews and in logging camps and lumber mills to augment their income. By 1910, when the first railway arrived at the Rocky Mountain House community, most of the best land was gone. In 1911, the Hudson's Bay Company purchased the land upon which the fur trade posts ruins sat from the province and a sawmill began cutting wood a few years later.

The Brierley family arrived on the site in 1922 from southern Alberta and rented the land until 1928 when it purchased the land from the HBC. In 1926, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board designated the fur trade posts ruins a site with national significance and in 1931 the Canadian Parks Service built a cairn to commemorate the fur trade and David Thompson. Most of the remaining history of the site revolves around the agricultural activities of the Brierley farm. While the river constantly eroded away the ruins of the last fort, Mrs. Brierley as well as local and regional politicians lobbied various governments to save the site from the river and develop a park to interpret the history of the area. The Brierley farming operations disturbed the extant ruins only slightly and probably protected them from further vandalism and souvenir hunting.

Archaeological investigation into the forts began in the 1950s and continued throughout the next twenty years. Finally, in 1970, the Crown purchased the Brierley farm, leveled the buildings, bermed the riverbank to protect the sites from further erosion and began developing the park which officially opened in 1979. During this decade, historical

research into the various fur trade posts also helped the park planners and interpreters develop the interpretive themes and messages for the park.

During the century between the cessation of fur trade activity at the Rocky Mountain House posts and the creation of the National Historic Park the land remained largely undisturbed. As a result, future interpretation of the history of the fur trade, the explorations of David Thompson, as well as the life of the native people's in this area is possible on a site very similar to the one the fur traders visited two centuries ago.

### Acknowledgements

Various people contributed to the creation of this report. At the Glenbow Alberta Institute, Douglas Cass of the Archives gave valuable direction in the pursuit of unpublished materials and Hugh Dempsey provided personal insight into the early excavations at the site and the relationship between the site and the native population in the century after the last post closed.

At the National Archives, archivist Candace Loewen combed her finding aids in order to make my research as direct and relevant as possible.

Finally, the Brierley family, especially Mabel and Chester's youngest daughter, Dawn Philips, filled in many of the details about the history of the site in the twentieth century and expended great amounts of energy to track down information which otherwise would not appear in this report.

Rocky Mountain House Chronology

- 1799 - First fur trade post opened at Rocky Mountain House
- 1875 - Last fur trade post closed
- 1891 - CPR built its line from Calgary to Strathcona(Edmonton)
- 1906 - Rocky Mountain House area was surveyed
  - First settlers arrived in the area
- 1907 - First post office opened and other businesses followed
- 1911 - HBC received title to the land now in the park
- 1912 - Competing railways built track through Rocky Mountain House to coal fields 100 kilometres west at Nordegg
  - Railway building activity provided seasonal work for many early settlers including Chester Brierley
- 1916 - Joseph Burr Tyrell, while editing David Thompson's journals, tried to piece together the succession of forts at the site
- 1920s - Erosion of river into site 1R first brought to the attention of government officials
- 1922 - Brierley family arrived at Rocky Mountain House and wintered in a cabin at the sawmill near site 16R
- 1923 - Brierleys built and moved into the farmhouse
- 1925 - Sawmill on the farm property ceased operations
- 1926 - The Historic Sites and Monuments Board recognized the fur trade posts at Rocky Mountain House "as a site of national importance"
- 1928 - Brierleys bought the land from the HBC after renting it for 6 years from the HBC
- 1930s - County road built through the farm
  - Locals began lobbying for recognition of the fur trade posts with a park
- 1930 - Large barn constructed at the farm
  - Brierleys donated land to the HSMB for the cairn
- 1931 - Cairn built near the chimneys of the last fort
  - Locals unveiled the cairn without HSMB approval

- 1932 - HSMB hired Mabel Brierley as caretaker for the cairn
- 1938 - Chimneys at 1R repointed
- 1939 - HSMB accepted additional land from Brierleys and enlarged the site to include the chimneys
- 1947 - The province built an automobile bridge across the North Saskatchewan River just west of the town
- 1950 - Mabel Brierley moved into Rocky Mountain House town
- 1955 - Mabel Brierley gave up the caretakers duties
- 1956 - HSMB hired Mabel's daughter-in-law, Jean, as caretaker for the historic site
- 1958 - Glenbow Foundation team surveyed the site of the posts
- 1962 - 1963 - Archaeologists completely excavated site 13R
- 1967 - HSMB approved a new plaque for the site
  - Provincial and federal officials met to discuss options for development of the site of the posts
- 1969 - HSMB recommended that the site become a national historic park
- 1969 - William Brierley sold land to the gas plant
  - Seafort Oil Company construction of a gas plant revealed native burial site at the northeast end of the park
- 1970 - Crown purchased the farm to make a park
- 1972 - Land extraneous to the needs of the interpretation of the park's themes was leased to local farmers for hay
- 1973 - 1R site protected from river erosion with a berm
- 1974 - Ottawa assigned an archaeologist and an historian to research the fur trade posts
- 1975 - Archaeological survey of the park revealed two more posts, 15R and 16R
  - Interpretive Trailer opened at the site
  - Rocky Mountain House Project Development Team established
- 1976 - Parking lot removed from the site 1R and the road

past the cairn was closed

1978 - Park purchased Acton House/Rocky Mountain House(13R)  
site from province

1979 - Remains from site 17R, a burials site, removed and  
relocated northeast of the Visitor Reception Centre

## **Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site and Park History 1875 to 1980**

The National Historic Park at Rocky Mountain House seems isolated from the busy community life around its borders. The windblown land around the ruins of the fur trade posts looks untouched by the settlement activity which changed the surrounding landscape beginning just after the turn of the century. But the remote feeling of the site, especially on a cold wintery day when the snow blows parallel to the ground, indicates little of the activity since the last fur trade post closed in 1875.

The century between the closing of the last fort and the inauguration of the national historic park was a busy time in this area, creating many potential threats to the historic sites. As detailed below, had events gone otherwise the old fort sites could now be underwater or perhaps washed downstream. The town of Rocky Mountain House could be on top of these sites, adjacent the railway tracks instead of east, below the confluence of the North Saskatchewan and the Clearwater Rivers. The park property could belch fire from a gas processing plant, boast a large farm or have all its historic and archaeologically significant sites buried, destroyed or looted by landscapers, treasure hunters or thieves. Instead, trails, interpreters, displays, audiovisual presentations and publications help visitors experience life at the most southwesterly fur trade post in the Canadian plains.

The history of white habitation at Rocky Mountain House dates to 1799 when competing fur trade companies, the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company, built the first trading posts and forts on property contained within the national historic park. Attempts to attract trade from native

peoples to the south and west met mixed results until finally, in 1875, the last post closed its doors. In the interim, at least five posts operated at Rocky Mountain House, four of which were clearly identified by archaeological investigations in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>1</sup>

This report, however, focuses on the activities of the historic era for the first three quarters of the twentieth century. No records exist to describe the events at the site from 1875 until the early 1900s. Native people undoubtedly passed through the area and perhaps even camped at the site but other than a dozen graves, no other evidence of their passing remains. Situated on a windswept point overlooking the confluence of the rivers, it was probably not a preferred site for native peoples after the last fur trade posts closed.

Until settlers hacked their way through the inhospitable brush and prodded their horses and oxen to pull their belongings, loaded high on wagons, over the bumpy trails and through the bogs, creeks and rivers, few Europeans had reason to pass through the Rocky Mountain House area. The transcontinental railway chose a series of mountain passes further south and west in order to cut through the mountains and the main rail link north from the Canadian Pacific Railway station at Calgary carried commerce and settlers 100 kilometres to the east.

The Rocky Mountain House area was hard to reach before the first railway arrived. In 1891, the CPR built its line from Calgary north to the community of Strathcona.<sup>2</sup> Workers began making railway grades for two competing railway

---

<sup>1</sup>David E. Smyth interprets this era in his report, "The Fur Trade Posts at Rocky Mountain House." Manuscript Report Series 197, National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Parks Canada, Ottawa, 1976.

<sup>2</sup>E.S. Gish, "A Study of the History of Rocky Mountain House," unpublished manuscript, 1952, p. 88.

companies headed west from the Red Deer station on this line a few years later in order to exploit the rich coal seams discovered 100 kilometres west of the Rocky Mountain House community. While crews laid track along the railbed and began building the bridge across the North Saskatchewan River for the Alberta Central Railway in 1910,<sup>3</sup> the Canadian Northern Railway workers also ran track towards the rich coalfields. The boom associated with the construction of the railways gave the Rocky Mountain House area a feeling of excitement and the residents expectantly awaited a prosperous future. Timber also abounded in the watersheds of the Clearwater and the North Saskatchewan Rivers upstream from the townsite.<sup>4</sup> Rail finally arrived at Rocky Mountain House in 1912 and the competing railways agreed to use just one bridge and set of tracks west of the river. Two years later, the Canadian Pacific Railway bought the Alberta Central Railway.<sup>5</sup> The single track from the bridge over the North Saskatchewan river ran just northwest of the fort sites and the current national historic park. Although a siding northwest of the forts had the potential to develop into another community, the only buildings ever constructed there were related to railway maintenance operations.

Before the railway afforded easy access to the area, diligent settlers registered their claims on free land at the nearest land titles office in Red Deer and headed west to make a living.<sup>6</sup> The first settlers had the pick of the land, but none chose the exposed site of the old fur trade posts.

---

<sup>3</sup>Charles Winfield Matheson, "A History of Rocky Mountain House," unpublished thesis, University of Alberta, Calgary, 1959, p. 101.

<sup>4</sup>Gish, p. 105.

<sup>5</sup>Matheson, p. 102.

<sup>6</sup>Gish, p. 94.

George Fletcher squatted on land near the Clearwater River in the Rocky Mountain House area and was probably the first settler in the region.<sup>7</sup>

The year 1906 marked the beginning of settlement in the area when Thomas Daniel Green, a full-blooded Indian from the Six-Nation Reserve at Brantford, Ontario, surveyed the townships in the Rocky Mountain House area.<sup>8</sup> Frank Halstead made the first homestead claim in the area after he arrived from Minnesota on December 19, 1906.<sup>9</sup> Others followed and chose land to their liking, but the site of the old fur trade posts sat uninhabited for more than another decade.

In 1907, Henry Bertrand homesteaded land at the present townsite and the first post office opened in the area at Prairie Grange, 3.2 kilometres (two miles) south of the current townsite. Scott MacKenzie was the first postmaster.<sup>10</sup> Thomas Gray opened the first store in the area in December, 1909, 3.2 kilometres (two miles) west of the chimneys.<sup>11</sup> On February 4, 1910, the first local newspaper, The Echo, began publishing the news of the growing community.<sup>12</sup>

Railway construction crews added to the activity at the new settlement. The Alberta Central Railway began building

---

<sup>7</sup>Matheson, p. 100.

<sup>8</sup>A graduate of McGill University and a certified Alberta Land Surveyor, Green later surveyed the Rocky Mountain House townsite, homesteaded in the area, moved into town and was active in the community until his death in 1935. Gish, p. 104.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Gish, p. 92.

<sup>12</sup> Other newspapers followed including the Prairie Echo, edited by George T. Thomson, who then sold to Lacombe Globe owner James D. Skinner who changed the name to The Guide. The paper later became The Mountaineer. Ibid., p. 100.

the bridge across the North Saskatchewan River in 1910.<sup>13</sup> The Canadian Northern Railway also laid track to Rocky Mountain House before WWI. Both railways sought access to the rich coal fields west of Rocky Mountain House near Nordegg and their operations provided seasonal work for many settlers needing cash to pay their bills and keep their land.<sup>14</sup>

As demand for services grew, more businesses sprang up at the Rocky Mountain House townsite. In 1911 a hotel, restaurant, barber shop, general store and a drugstore opened. The first Dominion Land Agent, Mr. L.G. Taylor, also arrived in 1911.<sup>15</sup> In August, 1912, the first Rocky Mountain House post office opened. The first school also opened in 1912 with Mrs. Nordstrom as its teacher.<sup>16</sup>

When the community on the east bank of the North Saskatchewan River blossomed in the early part of the century, it named itself after the Rocky Mountain House fur trade posts. Throughout the early years of the century, the chimneys at the site of the last fort reminded the community of its link to the past.

The Brierley's choice of the site of the Rocky Mountain House fur trade posts as their new home seems quite accidental. Although the chimneys stood as evidence to one post, the family lived on the farm for half a century with little knowledge of the other posts. Chester Brierley probably chose the land because it was available and allowed him to continue his winter work in the timber trade.

When the Brierley's arrived in the Rocky Mountain House area in 1922, settlement was well underway. The land upon which they settled was owned by the Hudson's Bay Company and

---

<sup>13</sup>Gish, p. 100.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>15</sup>Gish, pp. 100-2.

<sup>16</sup>Matheson, p. 102.

although they bought it from the company in 1928, they were probably not the first white people to live on the property.

At the east end of the property, someone built a structure in the riverbank. It sat south from the McKay place and still remained until after the Brierleys arrived in 1922. The older brothers remembered it but did not know its function or who owned it. Upon returning in recent years to find the remains, they discovered that river erosion had washed it all away. (Appendix B - Correspondence Related to Erosion Problems, contains a detail review of the riverbank erosion problem and various attempts to rectify the problem) For some years poles stuck out of the bank at the site.<sup>17</sup> (See Map 1 for details of the site)

A few small shacks sat at a gravel pit west of the modern road into the park near the railway tracks for many years and they probably housed railway employees. Where the gas plant now sits, there was a two storey house, called the McKay house. After they moved onto the property, Chet moved it to the Sand Hills north and west of the tracks.<sup>18</sup> The brothers also remembered a log shack, near the railway and the present road, south of the railway. Although it was there when the Brierleys arrived in 1922, no one in the family recalls anything about its function.<sup>19</sup>

The most imposing structure on the property was the lumber mill, owned and operated by a man named McKechnie.<sup>20</sup> He probably leased the land from the HBC. In operation when the family arrived in late 1922, the mill occupied the middle bench of land, below the eventual location of the house.

---

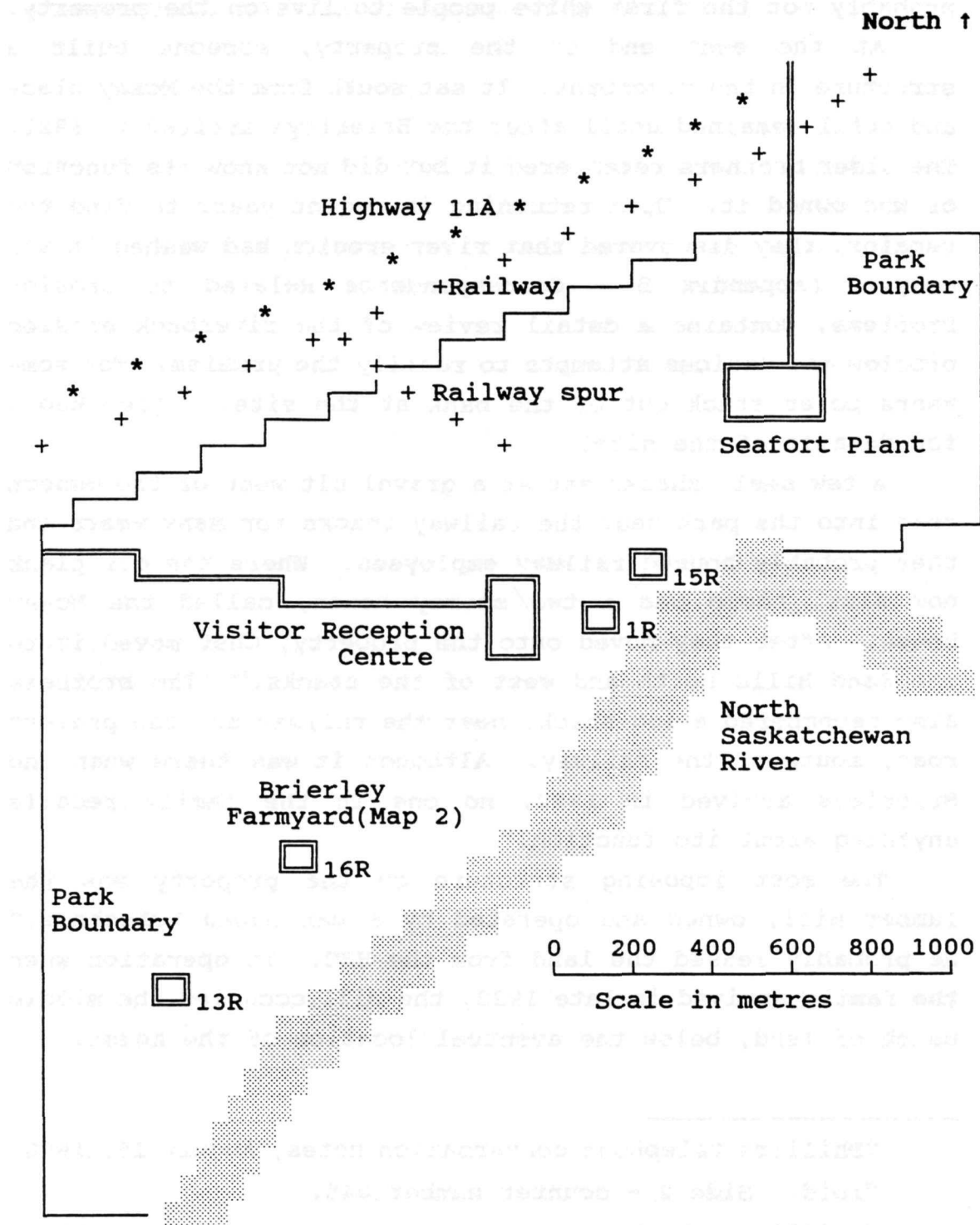
<sup>17</sup>Phillips telephone conversation notes, August 15, 1990.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., Side 2 - counter number 045.

<sup>19</sup>Phillips telephone conversation notes, August 15, 1990.

<sup>20</sup>Personal communication from Dawn Phillips, September 19, 1990.

Map 1 - Rocky Mountain House National Historic Park



The family lived with the workers in the log buildings at the lumber mill from November, 1922 until they moved into their new house in the summer of 1923. The mill only operated until 1924 or 1925.<sup>21</sup> Mabel cooked for the sawmill staff during the first winter. Dawn remembers playing in the rusting boilers as a child and that her father used the steel wheels to make flower beds. The remaining metal was sold during the war as scrap.<sup>22</sup>

Although the area was heavily timbered at the turn of the century, by the time the family arrived, much of the forest was gone. A spur line came off the main railway track and ran a short distance southeast into the north field. In the winter, timber came from across the river on sleighs to the spur.<sup>23</sup>

Although it owned the property in the 1800s, the Hudson's Bay Company again received title for the land upon which the park now sits from the Crown in 1911 and sold it to the Brierleys in 1928. The youngest daughter, Dawn, remembers seeing documents that indicate the family rented land from the HBC for the first few years.<sup>24</sup>

On August 13, 1928, Mabel Annie Brierley signed an agreement to purchase the property from the Hudson's Bay Company. The large document shows that the family agreed to purchase 90.25 hectares (222.83 acres) minus road allowances for a total of 84.3 hectares (208.19 acres) more or less. The purchase price was \$3122.85. Terms included \$392.00 first year and 390.00 thereafter on the principal, plus interest each year. Typed in the border of the document the HBC land agent added:

---

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 077.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., Side 2 - counter number 090.

<sup>24</sup>Phillips telephone conversation notes, August 15, 1990.

The purchaser further covenants and agrees that during the season of 1928 he will erect in a good and workmanlike manner a substantial fence around the within described land and he further covenants that during the season of 1929 he will break in a good and husband like manner not less than forty acres [16.2 hectares] of the uncultivated arable area of the said land.

Correspondence with the HBC shows that the family could not always find the money to pay the instalments. Some years they sent grain to a seed company and the proceeds went to pay the mortgage on the land. For example, on March 11, 1932, the manager of the Land Department, HBC, Winnipeg, wrote Mabel regarding land described as M24803, Part of 17 and 20, 39-7 W5. "Enclosed is our receipt for \$378.68 sent into this office by the A.E. McKenzie Ltd., being the proceeds of Timothy seed sold by you to them." The family nearly lost the farm and the strain was hard for Mabel. Dawn remembers the final payment as a happy occasion for the family.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to the farming operations described in more detail below, Chet also went into the guide and outfitting business with Clarence Sands. Although he did not have much time to spend on the operation of the business, he bought a ranch northwest of the farm 51.2 kilometres (32 miles) and used it as pasture for the horses and cows in the summer.<sup>26</sup> Dawn drove horses for farming operations and cooked at the ranch while her mother stayed home to take care of the farm.<sup>27</sup>

Chet was also a land agent for the HBC until his death. Although Dawn does not remember when he became an agent, she remembers a metal sign on the garage that identified him as

---

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., Side 2 - counter number 160-250.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 065.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 200.

an HBC land agent. She also remembers Ted Atkins, of Red Deer, who worked as a supervisor for the HBC and often visited the Brierley farm. In 1943, Chet received a special HBC blanket for his exceptional work as a land agent.<sup>28</sup>

Chet also continued in the lumber business. In the 1930s he landed a railway tie contract with the Atlas Lumber Company.<sup>29</sup> He also ran a lumber camp near Crimson Lake. He called it the Diamond Lumber camp and it operated seven or eight years.<sup>30</sup>

The business at the park site was a mixed farm. Chet used most of the property for crops or pasture, including the flood plain by the river upon which he planted grain. Livestock included sheep, cattle and horses. Most years Chet had a shepherd to look after the 300 head of sheep which resided on land the family owned on the north side of the tracks. The shepherd lived in a house in the Sand Hills north of the farm. About 100 head of cattle stayed at the farm in the winter and ranged at the ranch each summer. Dawn once herded 80 head by herself, 51.2 kilometres (32 miles) from the ranch to the farm, at her father's insistence, when she was 12 or 13 years old. They also kept about 30 or 40 head of horses. Chet bought some wild horses from the Indians at Nordegg and broke them for the guide and outfitting business. The women or the hired men milked five or six cows and the farm also had chickens and, in earlier years, turkeys and geese. A quota of about 20 pigs also usually inhabited the farm.<sup>31</sup> The family brand was the x0, an x and an upside down u. After brother William bought the farm, he put a bar over

---

<sup>28</sup>Phillips telephone conversation notes, August 15, 1990.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., Side 2 - counter number 555.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 180.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 093-130.

the brand, probably at his wife Jean's suggestion."

The farm also grew crops for feed and for sale to cover the mortgage. Chet sold some hay to the Atlas Lumber camp for its animals. Grain crops included mostly oats and wheat, but he also planted a few crops of rye for sheep pasture on the flood plain below the house where Acton House/Rocky Mountain House was later discovered. Dawn thinks the climate has changed since the 1930s because the area is no longer considered appropriate for wheat. She also remembers her father regularly worked in the field on April 24, his birthday, a date much earlier than is possible in the Rocky Mountain House area in the latter years of the century." The family also grew a huge garden with corn, pumpkin and vegetable marrow and stored produce for the winter."

Various buildings supported the farming operations. They sat immediately north and west of the North West Company post, 1799-1821. A square 9.15 by 9.15 metre (30 foot by 30 foot) house, with five bedrooms, housed the family. A small barn sheltered the animals at first but in 1930 or 1931 a second, much larger and "beautifully built" barn replaced the first one.<sup>35</sup> A wooden picket fence surrounded the house. Other structures included a woodshed, an outhouse, a machine shed and shop, a blacksmith shop, a chicken house, a garage, a bunkhouse, a shed each for pigs, sheep and cattle as well as numerous granaries.<sup>36</sup> When the sewage system was installed in the 1940s, it ran south from the house but somehow managed to avoid the fort.<sup>37</sup> (See Map 2 for details of the farm layout)

---

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 190.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 152.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 175.

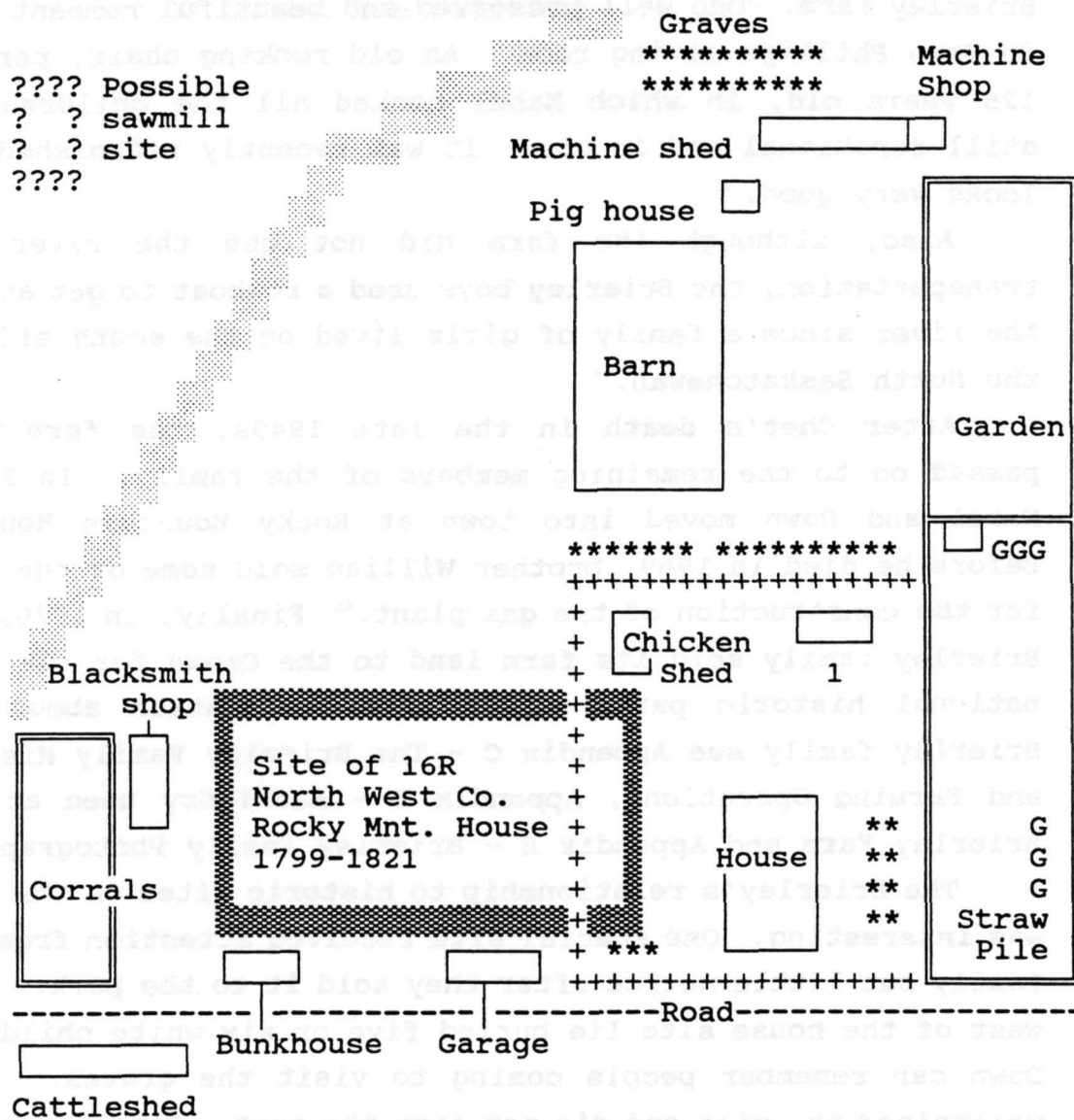
<sup>35</sup>Ibid., Side 2 - counter number 130.

<sup>36</sup>Phillips notes, August 14, 1990.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

Map 2 - Brierley Farmyard Details

North →

**Key**

- G = graineries
- 1 = woodshed, outhouse and windcharger
- + = picket fence
- \* = trees
- = wooden rail fence

50ft  
Scale |  
10m

NOTE: The information in this map is based on a hand drawn map provided by Dawn Philips and although the approximate locations are correct, the distances are estimates.

Other than a few photographs, little remains of the Brierley farm. One well preserved and beautiful remnant sits in Dawn Phillips living room. An old rocking chair, perhaps 125 years old, in which Mabel rocked all the children, is still functional and in use. It was recently refinished and looks very good.<sup>38</sup>

Also, although the farm did not use the river for transportation, the Brierley boys used a rowboat to get across the river since a family of girls lived on the south side of the North Saskatchewan.<sup>39</sup>

After Chet's death in the late 1940s, the farm work passed on to the remaining members of the family. In 1950, Mabel and Dawn moved into town at Rocky Mountain House.<sup>40</sup> Before he died in 1969, brother William sold some of the land for the construction of the gas plant.<sup>41</sup> Finally, in 1970, the Brierley family sold its farm land to the Crown for use as a national historic park. (For more information about the Brierley family see Appendix C - The Brierley Family History and Farming Operations, Appendix D - Machinery used at the Brierley Farm and Appendix E - Brierley Family Photographs.)

The Brierley's relationship to historic sites on the farm was interesting. One special site received attention from the family but little notice after they sold it to the park. Just west of the house site lie buried five or six white children. Dawn can remember people coming to visit the graves. Chet maintained the site and did not farm the spot. Family members cannot provide additional information about the graves.<sup>42</sup>

The other historic sites on the farm received

---

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., Side 2 - counter number 415.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., Side 2 - counter number 065.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., Side 2 - counter number 065.

<sup>42</sup>Phillips notes, August 14, 1990.

considerable attention. For many decades the only road in the area ran immediately beside the chimneys and therefore attracted the attention of all travellers. The residents of Rocky Mountain House were well aware of the existence of the forts and, as documented elsewhere in this report, lobbied for the recognition of the posts as important historic sites. Action to preserve, protect and commemorate the posts began about the time the family moved onto the land.

The Brierleys watched as the North Saskatchewan River eroded the river bank and washed away part of the last fort ruins. According to Dawn, Mabel often said "I really would have liked to be an archaeologist." She cared for the site and took care of it on contract with the Historic Sites and Monuments Board.<sup>43</sup> Her children also helped at the site. Dawn remembers working on groundskeeping. She weeded, painted the fence and removed lipstick graffiti with coal oil.<sup>44</sup>

Some of the evidence seems to indicate that Chet did not like living on land that attracted attention as an historic site. Further analysis reveals a more complex reality. He bought the land in order to make a living. According to Dawn, "He was very much a man's man." He had already lost one farm in his lifetime and he was determined to make this one a success.<sup>45</sup> Although he was not involved in preserving, protecting or commemorating the forts, Mabel obviously convinced him of the importance of the sites. According to Dawn, "Had mother not have had enough influence, I . . . [doubt they would have] preserved what they did. I am not sure that he would have been that interested in the history." But he was not ignorant of the potential of the site to the fur traders. Chet always thought the most probable location for

---

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 360.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 425.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 320.

a fort was at the site where archaeologists found Acton House, years after his death. He did not farm around the cellars and chimneys of the last fort for obvious historic reasons and because the uneven ground was not suitable for cultivation with machinery.<sup>46</sup>

Chet evidently had plenty of reasons to dislike many of the people who visited the historic sites. Although the last fort was marked and commemorated by a cairn, rumours about the other forts, cannons, kegs of rum and other buried treasure attracted the attention of many uninvited treasure hunters. After years of putting up with the nuisance of these souvenir seekers, Chet finally took his cultivator and plowed right over the eastern most fur trade post(15R) in order to obscure the surface and dissuade further unwelcome visitors.<sup>47</sup> Had Chet Brierley disliked the historic sites, he could have blocked the protection, preservation and commemoration of the ruins of the fur trade posts at Rocky Mountain House.

The Brierleys main contact with a heritage agency was with the Historic Sites and Monuments Board. The government established it in 1919 to recognize and commemorate nationally significant historic sites in Canada. With representatives from each area of the country, it chose a limited number of sites for commemoration each year and marked them, usually with a simple cairn and a plaque.<sup>48</sup>

In 1923 the government appointed Judge F.W. Howay from Vancouver to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board to represent the west. An amateur historian, Howay took his appointment on the Board seriously and worked hard to find

---

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 385.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 365.

<sup>48</sup>C.J. Taylor, Negotiating the Past: The Making of Canada's National Historic Parks and Sites (Montreal & Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), pp. 30, 62.

suitable sites for commemoration in the Canadian west, especially British Columbia.<sup>49</sup>

It is hard to establish who first suggested that the Rocky Mountain House posts should be commemorated. Local sentiments certainly held the chimneys in high regard but the existing records show no appeal by the community for official recognition of the sites. In 1924, H. Everard Edmonds, Secretary of the Historical Society of Alberta wrote Harkin and informed him that the chimneys "of Rocky Mountain House west of Red Deer" were still standing.<sup>50</sup>

Harkin apparently had Howay investigate the Rocky Mountain House site. He wrote: "When on page 3 he speaks of Rocky Mountain House I am quite at a loss as to which fort he means; for there were at least half a dozen forts which at different times bore that name."<sup>51</sup> The next day he added more to the story and concluded that he needed to do more investigation into the forts at the site.<sup>52</sup>

At the May, 1925 annual meeting of the Board, Howay tabled a list of Western Canada sites he thought worthy of consideration for commemoration for the period 1925 to 1929. His list included Fort Carlton, Henry House, Fort Alexandria and Rocky Mountain House. The Board apparently discussed the forts and then carried a motion moved by Howay and seconded by Dr. Coyne which recommended "That further action be left

---

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., pp. 86-7.

<sup>50</sup>March 17, 1924, W. Everard Edmonds, Secretary of the Historical Society of Alberta to J.B. Harkin, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1.

<sup>51</sup>April 15, 1924, Howay to Harkin, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1.

<sup>52</sup>April 16, 1924, Howay to Harkin, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1.

in the hands of Judge Howay for investigation and report."<sup>53</sup>

At the May, 1926 meeting, Howay moved and Dr. Webster seconded:

That Rocky Mountain House, on the North Saskatchewan, be declared a site of national importance in view of its connection with early trade, discovery and exploration towards the westward, and that further action be deferred till the next meeting of the Board.

The Board carried the motion and continued its investigations into the fort sites.<sup>54</sup>

Before the next meeting of the Board, A.O. Wheeler, Executive Secretary of the Canadian National Parks Association wrote Harkin. He enclosed a resolution passed by the Canadian National Parks Association that, acting on "representations made by the Grand Council of the Native Sons of Canada," the ruins of the Hudson's Bay Company post at Rocky Mountain House be preserved.<sup>55</sup>

Having already declared Rocky Mountain House "a site of national importance," at the May, 1927 meeting, the Board approved the following motion:

ROCKY MOUNTAIN HOUSE

Built in 1799 by the Northwest Company. David Thompson wintered here in 1800-1, 1801-2, 1806-7 and from here he set out in 1807 for the discovery of the Columbia river. It was for over fifty years the most westerly and the most southerly post in the Blackfeet

---

<sup>53</sup>May, 1925, extracts from the May 19, 1925 HSMB meeting, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1.

<sup>54</sup>From the minutes of the HSMB meeting, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1.

<sup>55</sup>March 25, 1927, A.O. Wheeler, Executive Secretary of the Canadian National Parks Association, Sidney, Vancouver Island, to Harkin, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1.

country and remained in operation till 1875.<sup>56</sup>

In January, 1928 Harkin wrote W.S. Lecky, Secretary, Canadian Committee, Hudson's Bay Company, Winnipeg. He stated that the Rocky Mountain House site was of national importance, asked permission to mark the site accordingly and requested "control" over 2.33 square metres (25 square feet) of land upon which to place a memorial.<sup>57</sup>

In response to Harkin, Lecky stated that he thought the historic site was in the southeast corner of section 20 or perhaps in section 17. He suggested the parks department find out its actual site requirement and then ask again but he foresaw no problem getting a small piece of land for the memorial: "Section 20 is actually under lease, so we would have to arrange with the lessee but do not anticipate there will be any trouble."<sup>58</sup>

Harkin apparently consulted various officials in order to establish the proper location of the fort site. In March, 1928, J.M. Robertson, Deputy Minister, Department of Public Works for Alberta wrote Harkin about the best location for a memorial. He suggested two locations for the cairn at Rocky Mountain House, one across the river, just west of the Rocky Mountain House townsite and the other "one-quarter mile [0.4 kilometres] north of the log shack."<sup>59</sup> The first made sense

---

<sup>56</sup>Moved by Judge Howay and seconded by Dr. Webster. May 20, 1927, from the minutes of the HSMB meeting, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1.

<sup>57</sup>January 19, 1928, J.B. Harkin to W.S. Lecky, Secretary, Canadian Committee, HBC, Winnipeg, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1.

<sup>58</sup>January 26, 1928, W.S. Lecky, Secretary, Canadian Committee, HBC, Winnipeg to J.B. Harkin, Commissioner, Canadian National Parks, Ottawa, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1.

<sup>59</sup>March 19, 1928, J.M. Robertson, Deputy Minister, Department of Public Works, Alberta, to Harkin, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1.

since its location east of the river made it accessible to more traffic. Anyone who actually visited the site of the fur trade posts had to cross the river on the ferry which served the travelling public until 1947 when the government built a bridge. The second suggested location for the cairn, north of the old log cabin, sat near the railway and the logical location for a new highway. Either site was sure to attract more visitors than the remote site beside a small municipal road on the bank of the North Saskatchewan River.

Harkin also utilized the expertise of other agencies during his assessment of the site. D.H. Minchin, Timber Inspector filed a report with the Crown Timber Agent in Calgary in May, 1928. After looking at the building marked on maps as the "Old Log Cabin," Minchin suggested that it was not the site of a Hudson's Bay Company post but that it was built by a settler much later. He recommended the memorial be built at the site of the chimneys which also included:

earthworks which appear to have been the ruins of the stockade, and also what appears to be the remains of trenches surrounding the ruins.

In order to enclose these ruins it will require an area of [52 metres by 61 metres] 170' by 200'. This would be a frontage of 200' parallel with the road allowance and a depth of 170'. The chimneys and fire places are about [3.05 metres] 10' apart at a distance of [39.35 metres] 129' back from the road allowance, and I would suspect that at the time the masons erect the monument that they might be instructed to repair the chimneys for preservation.

The site is a desirable location on the main highway, overlooking the Saskatchewan River and would certainly attract the attention of the travelling public.

It is my opinion that a plot of ground [2.33

metres] 25' square would not do justice to the site.<sup>60</sup>

At the May, 1928 meeting, the Board agreed to erect the memorial with the inscription it approved the previous year.<sup>61</sup> In the fall of that year, Howay shied away from the idea of a 51.85 by 61 metre (170' x 200') parcel of land and insisted instead on a 2.33 square metre (25 square foot) plot of land adjacent the road. He wrote:

Personally I very much doubt whether the Hudson's Bay Company would grant to the Board a piece of ground of the size suggested . . . . The plan shows it right along the roadside and making quite a gap in the frontage.

Even if the company would do so I fear that it would be most disastrous if the Board should load itself up with acreage carrying ruins -- all of which would mean a continual bill of expense. . . .

My suggestion is to apply to the H.B. Co for a piece of land 25' square [2.33 metres square] adjoining the roadway and in the location indicated on the plan you sent me. In that connection the existence of these ruins might be mentioned and some of the correspondence on the subject indicating the local desire for the preservation. . . . The company might be asked in a nice way whether they would consider fencing in and protecting what still remains -- in the interest of history.<sup>62</sup>

Based on Howay's letter, Harkin wrote the HBC requesting

---

<sup>60</sup>May 11, 1928, D.H. Minchin, Timber Inspector to The Crown Timber Agent, Calgary, Alberta, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol 1.

<sup>61</sup>May 15, 1928, HSMB meeting minutes excerpt, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1.

<sup>62</sup>October 22, 1928, Howay to Harkin, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1.

that it donate the parcel of land necessary to construct the monument and consider fencing the additional remains in the area.<sup>63</sup> Richard Penson, Acting Secretary, Canadian Committee, HBC, Winnipeg, responded to Harkin's request on November 30, 1928 saying that the land was already sold to Mabel A. Brierley family, just three weeks earlier.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, on December 11, 1928 Harkin asked Mabel A. Brierley for the same parcel of land he requested from the HBC the month before.<sup>65</sup> She also claimed that she had no right to give a piece of the land to the Board as she only held "possession by agreement of sale. Until I have paid the last payments, and hold the title in my own name, I really do not own the land."<sup>66</sup> She volunteered to forward the request to the HBC.

On February 11, 1929 she wrote again that she was willing to sign a transfer over to the government and that she had received permission from the HBC for the transaction.<sup>67</sup> A letter dated May 14, 1929 reveals another wrinkle in the transfer of the land to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board. The author of the letter, identified only as F.S.M., wrote F.H. Peters of the Topographical Survey Branch in Ottawa. He noted that although Mabel Brierley donated the 2.33 square metres (25 square feet) requested for the memorial, it lay in the northeast corner of section 17, not 20 as requested by Harkin. This new legal description

---

<sup>63</sup>November 16, 1928, Harkin to Lecky, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1.

<sup>64</sup>Nov 30, 1928, Richard Penson, Acting Secretary, Canadian Committee, HBC, Winnipeg, 93 Main Street, to Harkin, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1.

<sup>65</sup>December 11, 1928, Harkin to Mrs. Mabel A. Brierley of Rocky Mountain House, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1.

<sup>66</sup>January 4, 1929, M. Brierley to Harkin, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1.

<sup>67</sup>Feb 11, 1929, Mrs. Mabel Annie Brierley to Harkin, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1.

referred to land immediately adjacent and south of the chimneys. The letter requested a survey of the plot as soon as possible.<sup>68</sup> Regardless of the fact that Harkin asked for the wrong piece of land, the Brierleys by this time owned all the land on which all the various fort sites were later found. By December 20, 1929, the small parcel of land appeared on a map of that area as the historic site, donated to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board by Mabel Brierley.<sup>69</sup> The actual transfer of the title took until late 1930. J. Chisholm, Assistant Deputy Minister of Justice in Ottawa, informed the Deputy Minister of the Interior, also of Ottawa, on November 28, 1930 that the registration for the land transfer had to be done in London, England and had therefore caused a delay.<sup>70</sup> A title search at the North Alberta Land Registration District, Edmonton, revealed that the land at the monument, .0057 of a hectare (.014 of an acre), was transferred to the Department of the Interior, on December 3, 1930. The HBC retained all mines and minerals.

Once the Board knew the necessary land was forthcoming, it approved construction of the monument. At the May, 1930 meeting, the Board approved a motion, moved by Howay and seconded by Judge Crowe, that the site of Rocky Mountain House be marked in 1931 instead of Fort Victoria as originally proposed.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup>May 14, 1929, F.S.M., to F.H. Peters, Topographical Survey Branch, Ottawa, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1.

<sup>69</sup>December 20, 1929, Plan of Rocky Mountain House Historic Site, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1.

<sup>70</sup>November 28, 1930, J. Chisholm, Assist. D.M. of Justice, Ottawa, to Deputy Minister of the Interior, Ottawa, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

<sup>71</sup>May 16, 1930, Extract from the minutes of the HSMB meeting, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1. On July 29, 1930, Harkin sent the text for the memorial plaque at Rocky Mountain House to the Architectural Bronze & Iron Works, Lansdowne & Royce Avenues, Toronto 4, Ontario and asked them to forward a blue-

On July 8, 1931, Harkin wrote J.M. Wardle, Chief Engineer, National Parks of Canada, Banff, and told him to erect monuments at five sites in the west including Rocky Mountain House.<sup>72</sup> The next month Harkin instructed Wardle on the details of how to erect a monument. The stones were to come from the North Saskatchewan River or from a site near the railway but they were not to use stones from the ruins. Harkin told him to use a wooden scaffold and timber forms when building the monument, to install a steel picket fence which would be forwarded when he was ready for it and to leave the site level and clean when finished at the site. The detailed instructions seem to indicated that building cairns for the Board was a task new to Wardle and his crews.<sup>73</sup>

Although the crew built the cairn, the fence did not arrive in time for them to install it. On October 6, 1931, Harkin wrote Mabel Brierley, instructing her that an iron picket fence was being shipped to her from Western Steel Products of Winnipeg and for her to take delivery of it until the crew arrived to install it.<sup>74</sup> Wardle's report to Harkin

---

printed layout for the Board to approve. NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1. The company completed the work on January 20, 1931 and forwarded a total bill of \$170.20 which the Department paid January 29, 1931. Legal expenses associated with the transfer of the land to the Crown totalled \$32.55. March 23, 1931, John Quigg, Lawyer, Red Deer to the Department of the Minister of Justice, Edmonton, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2. The letter included a list of his activities and expenses related to getting the title for the memorial plot transferred from HBC to Brierley to HSMB. April 22, 1931, RG-84, NAC, HS10-36, Vol. 2. The DOI payed John Quigg, Barrister, Solicitor, Notary, etc. of Red Deer \$32.55 for services rendered completing the land transfer.

<sup>72</sup>July 8, 1931, Harkin to J.M. Wardle, Chief Engineer, National Parks of Canada, Banff, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol 2.

<sup>73</sup>August 6, 1931, Harkin to J.M. Wardle, Chief Engineer, National Parks of Canada, Banff, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

<sup>74</sup>October 6, 1931, Harkin to M. Brierley, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

dated November 27, 1931 gave details of the installation of the memorial and problems with supplies. He also mentioned that the North Saskatchewan River was eroding the riverbank and was approximately 22.9 metres (75 feet) from the site of the cairn.<sup>75</sup> This erosion problem, recounted below in a separate section of this report, continued until 1973 when corrective measures prevented further destruction of the site.

With a monument in place, the people of Rocky Mountain House decided to unveil it, pre-empting an official ceremony. Harkin found out about the event after a review of the ceremony appeared in the Edmonton Journal, the Calgary Herald and other newspapers in late November, 1931. Mayor Kirby of Rocky Mountain House introduced Alberta Premier Brownlee and other guests. Harkin then wrote Wardle in Banff and asked him what organization unveiled the Historic Sites and Monuments Board plaque.<sup>76</sup>

In response to Harkin's inquiry, Wardle checked with the contractor hired to erect the cairn and reported to Harkin that neither knew of any unveiling until after the event.<sup>77</sup>

Harkin apparently pursued the issue further and W.J. Kirby, Mayor of Rocky Mountain House wrote him April 1, 1932, defending the action.

The monument was unveiled under the auspices of the Local Assembly of the Native Sons of Canada who we understand were more or less responsible for bringing the matter to the attention of the

---

<sup>75</sup>November 27, 1931, Wardle to Harkin, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

<sup>76</sup>See the November 17, 1931 issue of the Calgary Herald. November 20, 1931, Harkin to J.M. Wardle, Chief Engineer, National Parks of Canada, Banff, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

<sup>77</sup>December 11, 1931, Wardle to Harkin, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2. December 29, 1931, Harkin to Howay of the HSMB, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

Department and requesting the erection of a marker for this historic spot."<sup>78</sup>

Howay's reaction to the letter was prompt and pointed.

I want to say emphatically that I myself on my own initiative brought up the site after having seen a photograph of the ruins and spoken to the late Mr. J.A. Jaffrey, Provincial librarian of Alberta. The whole matter was settled and done before the Native Sons of Canada woke up to the fact."<sup>79</sup>

Who first came up with the idea of commemorating the forts at Rocky Mountain House is hard to determine. Nevertheless, the locals and members of the Board at times failed to communicate their actions to each other.

Once the cairn was in place, the Board hired Mabel Brierley to act as the caretaker for the site. Her duties included keeping the site clear of weeds, cutting the grass, keeping the fence painted, regular inspection of the facility in order to suggest repairs, as well as making an estimate of the number of visitors to the site. For this work she received, beginning on January 14, 1932 when she signed the contract, \$25.00 per anum.<sup>80</sup> Although a complete review of the correspondence between Mabel Brierley and her successor Jean Brierley and the Board is included as Appendix A to this report, a few details warrant mentioning here.

In the 1932 annual report on the condition of the site, she estimated that approximately 500 visitors stopped at the

---

<sup>78</sup>April 1, 1932, W.J. Kirby, Mayor of Rocky Mountain House to Harkin, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

<sup>79</sup>April 23, 1932, Howay to Harkin, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

<sup>80</sup>December 16, 1931, Harkin to Brierley, NAC, RG-84, HS-10-36-1.

site."<sup>1</sup> This number increased over the years, dropping only when poor weather made the roads impassable. She did not always manage to do the work herself. In fact, her children did much of the maintenance, especially when she was sick. However, she always supervised the efforts and took responsibility for their work."<sup>2</sup>

In 1936, heavy spring flooding washed away much of the bank at the cairn and only about 9.1 metres (30 feet) remained between the top of the bank and the cairn. She suggested action immediately to stop the erosion."<sup>3</sup> Her concern for the erosion of the bank continued throughout her reports and those of her daughter-in-law for the next four decades. Federal, provincial and county bureaucrats as well as Hudson's Bay Company employees regularly renounced any responsibility for protecting the site from the encroaching river. By 1973, when the work began to berm the site and protect it from further erosion, an entire section of the last fort had fallen into the river."<sup>4</sup>

On October 19, 1937 Mabel Brierley wrote Harkin and suggested that if she was supplied with a register book for visitors she could install an appropriate place for it."<sup>5</sup> The official response indicated the level of importance of the

---

<sup>1</sup>October 27, 1932, Mabel A. Brierley to Harkin, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

<sup>2</sup>July 11, 1933, M.A. Brierley to Harkin, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

<sup>3</sup>April 27, 1936, Mabel A. Brierley to Harkin, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

<sup>4</sup>For additional information about the attempts to arrange for repairs to the riverbank, consult the correspondence for the following dates in Appendix A. May 20, 1938, June 1, 1938, July 21, 1938, July 10, 1950, May, 1952, March 4, 1955, April 28, 1955, June 19, 1964, July 8, 1964, September 3, 1969.

<sup>5</sup>October 19, 1937, Mabel A. Brierley to Harkin, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

site in the national system. "As regards your request for a visitors' register I regret to say that it is not the practise of the Department to supply these to the smaller sites."<sup>66</sup>

Although the Board considered the Rocky Mountain House site a "smaller site," R.G. Williams, Secretary to the Rocky Mountain House Board of Trade, wanted its location marked better. In June, 1938, he requested that the Board erect a sign at the road, just 0.8 kilometres (0.5 miles) north of the site, so that tourists would be attracted from the road, nearly completed, that would connect the area to the Banff-Jasper Highway, or as he called it, the "Jasper Scenic Highway Route."<sup>67</sup> A Board representative passed the request on to the Department of Public Works in Alberta which erected an appropriate sign.<sup>68</sup>

Later in 1938, as the result of a letter from Mr. James A. MacKinnon, M.P. of Edmonton West, Howay suggested that the old chimneys at the fort at Rocky Mountain House be repointed in order to prevent further deterioration.<sup>69</sup> A local mason, George Findlater, provided an estimate of \$90.00 to 110.00 for the work and completed the task after official approval.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup>November 3, 1937, F.H.H. Williamson, Controller to Brierley, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2.

<sup>67</sup>June 20, 1938, R.G. Williams, Secretary, Rocky Mountain House Board of Trade to HSMB, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

<sup>68</sup>June 29, 1938, Williamson, Controller to H.W. Macpherson, Highway Commissioner, Dept. of Public Works, Alberta, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

<sup>69</sup>September 24, 1938, F.W. Howay, HSMB to F.H.H. Williamson, Controller, National Parks Bureau, Ottawa, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

<sup>70</sup>January 4, 1939, Brierley to Williamson, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2. Estimated that the cost to have Findlater repoint the chimneys was between \$90.00 and 110.00. January 23, 1939, Williamson to Howay, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2. For between \$90 and \$110, the chimneys could be repointed to prevent further deterioration.

In 1939, the Board decided to accept an additional donation of land from Mabel Brierley in order to include the chimneys in the historic site. The additional property was 67.1 metres by 50.3(220' by 165').<sup>91</sup> She donated the additional on the condition that the government agreed to take care of the site properly. She also included plans for a steel turnstile to replace the steel gate.<sup>92</sup> Howay also recommended that the chimney repairs be done at the same time and that once the work was completed the Historic Sites and Monuments Board should unveil the new facility.<sup>93</sup> Although Mabel agreed to donate the land, she apparently needed time to work out the politics of the donation. She wrote in April, 1939: "I am sorry I have not answered your letters before this, I have been waiting for my husband's approval of the transaction."<sup>94</sup> At the annual meeting of the Board on May 31, 1938 it approved a resolution, moved by Howay and seconded by Dr. Webster: "That the Board approves the preservation of the two remaining chimneys of Rocky Mountain House, that a secondary tablet be affixed thereto, and that the site offered by Mrs. M.A. Brierley be accepted."<sup>95</sup> It also approved another resolution about the site. Moved by Howay and seconded by Dr. Webster:

That the following inscription for the proposed

---

<sup>91</sup>January 23, 1939, Williamson to Howay, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

<sup>92</sup>Feb 6, 1939, Mrs. Brierley to the Board, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

<sup>93</sup>Feb. 15, 1939, Howay to Williamson, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

<sup>94</sup>April 25, 1939, Mabel A. Brierley to the Board, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

<sup>95</sup>May 31, 1939, HSMB minutes, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

secondary tablet be confirmed:

These remains are preserved as a rare example of the primitive chimneys built by the fur-traders in their forts long before this region had a settled population.

Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.<sup>96</sup>

While in the area that fall, Judge Howay went with Charles Snell, the man who surveyed the historic site, to see the proposed new area. Howay expressed delight at the chance to see the fur trade post site, saw that the repointing made the chimneys look very good and suggested signs be put up to keep people from taking things from the site. He also mentioned that he wanted to be involved in the unveiling of the larger site.<sup>97</sup> Finally, in a letter a few days later he suggested a way to build up the importance of the site and prevent vandalism by educating the public about historic sites.

If and when this memorial is erected I wish that the builder be supplied with one of those little plaques with the words "This site belongs to the people of Canada" and with that quotation from Tennyson: "Love thou thy Land." I noticed, as I reported to you that this plaque is absent from Kootenae House, Fort Assiniboine and Rocky Mountain House. To my mind it adds dignity and shows Canadian interest.<sup>98</sup>

Although Mabel Brierley worked hard to keep the site

---

<sup>96</sup>June 1, 1939, HSMB minutes, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

<sup>97</sup>September 13, 1939, Howay to Williamson, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

<sup>98</sup>September 18, 1939, extract from letter by Judge Howay, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

presentable to the public, she sometimes had to remind the Board of its responsibility to the monument. One June 8, 1940, the day she signed the additional property over to the Board, she reminded its representative that one of her conditions for giving the property to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board was that the Board erect and maintain a fence. She wanted to see this part of the agreement fulfilled."

Mabel's report on the condition of the site for 1940 mentioned a new record. More visitors than ever before had visited the site, perhaps as many as 1000.<sup>100</sup> Her report the next year analyzed some of the reasons for the increased interest. "It has been impossible to keep track of the number of visitors, this season. So many English and Australian soldiers have added to the increasing numbers of U.S.A. tourists are visiting here every day."<sup>101</sup> The increased traffic to the site was not without its problems. In 1943 she once again hired the local mason, George Findlater. This time he repaired a post that was damaged. She did not know who did the damage except that it happened "while a large convoy of Army Trucks were turning there."<sup>102</sup>

Her compensation for attending to the historic site rose with the increased size of the property. Effective April 1, 1941 her pay for looking after the site rose to \$50.00 per annum.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>99</sup>June 8, 1940, M.A. Brierley to Williamson, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 2.

<sup>100</sup>Oct 28, 1940, Mabel A. Brierley, caretakers report, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 3.

<sup>101</sup>November, 1941, Mabel A. Brierley, caretakers report, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 3.

<sup>102</sup>August 5, 1943, Brierley to the Commissioner, National Parks of Canada, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 3.

<sup>103</sup>March 7, 1942, C.W. Jackson, Chief Executive Assistant, Dept. of Mines and Resources to Mr. Gibson, NAC, RG-84 HS-10-36-1.

After Mabel and her youngest daughter Dawn moved into Rocky Mountain House in 1950, she continued her job as caretaker for the historic site until 1955. In 1953, she reported the theft of the gate from the site and that she had turned the matter over to the local RCMP.<sup>104</sup> On April 6, 1953, Constable J.E. Mead of the detachment at Rocky Mountain House forwarded the results of his investigation to his superior. He was unable to track down the culprit. On January 1, 1953 a fire broke out at the Brierleys and many people helped fight it but none of them took the gate or knew anything about it. "It might be stated that this site is a favourite spot for young people parking in cars, but checks have failed to indicate who might have been there prior to Jan. 11th."<sup>105</sup> Mabel arranged for a replacement gate at a cost of \$28.50.<sup>106</sup>

Although she loved the work, by the fall of 1955 Mabel decided to give up looking after the historic site. She tendered her resignation and suggested that Jean Brierley be hired. Jean was Mabel's daughter-in-law, having married her son William.<sup>107</sup> A.J.H. Richardson, Superintendent of Historic Sites in Ottawa, accepted her letter of resignation as caretaker effective December 31, 1955 and passed on her recommendation that her daughter-in-law be appointed in her place. The Separation Report attached to this letter listed "Poor Health" as the reason for the resignation.<sup>108</sup> Jean

---

<sup>104</sup>January 20, 1953, Brierley to the Director of National Parks Branch, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 3.

<sup>105</sup>April 6, 1953, J.E. Mead, Constable Reg. No. 13035, at Rocky Mountain House, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 3.

<sup>106</sup>May 25, 1953, Brierley to the Department, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 3.

<sup>107</sup>October 18, 1955, M. Brierley to Director of Parks, NAC, RG-84 HS-10-36-1.

<sup>108</sup>October 25, 1955, A.J.H. Richardson to Mabel Brierley, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 3.

Brierley applied to take over the job as caretaker and stated that she knew the work as she had helped Mabel Brierley on several occasions. She also stated: "My husband has an agreement for sale for the farm, where the site is situated and we are living there now."<sup>109</sup> Richardson appointed her as the caretaker of the site for \$100.00 per annum as of January 1, 1956. The attached Employees Questionnaire listed Jean Margaret Jeannette Brierley as a housewife. Her maiden name was Richardson and she was born Nov. 13, 1912 at Rowley of Scottish and Irish descent. She was married to Mr. William Brierley. Her education consisted of eight years of schooling in Alberta, all at the elementary level. She spoke and wrote English well.<sup>110</sup> In 1958 her pay for taking care of the site rose to \$110.00 per annum.<sup>111</sup>

The activity recorded in the annual site reports for the next few years listed nothing unusual about the site. In 1967, the Board approved a new plaque with the following inscription:

#### ROCKY MOUNTAIN HOUSE

The original post, where David Thompson wintered in 1800-1, 1801-2 and 1806-7, was established a short distance upstream from here by the North West Company in 1799. After the Nor'Westers merged with the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821 it continued to serve as a trading post during the winter season until the Blackfoot Indians forced the traders to withdraw from the area temporarily in 1861. The post was rebuilt on this site and served from 1866 to 1876 when the

---

<sup>109</sup>Oct 17, 1955, Mrs. Jean Brierley to Director, National Parks Branch, RG-84 HS-10-36-1.

<sup>110</sup>October 26, 1955, J.A. Hutchison, Director to Mr. Cote, NAC, RG-84 HS-10-36-1. November 15, 1955, A.J.H. Richardson to J. Brierley, NAC, RG-84 HS-10-36-1.

<sup>111</sup>April 1, 1958, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 3.

traders moved to the new town of Calgary.<sup>112</sup>

In the late 1960s, the Fur Trade and Indian Tribes committee of the Board studied the Rocky Mountain House site. Acting upon its report, in 1969 the Board recommended that the site commemorated in 1931 be incorporated into a national historic park that would also include the sites of the other posts. The park was to interpret three major themes: the fur trade in general, David Thompson and the role of the Peigan (Blackfoot) Indians.<sup>113</sup>

Setting up a park at Rocky Mountain House solved two problems for the Board. First, beginning in the 1930s, local citizens and politicians had continuously pressed for additional development at the site and the proposed development promised to answer their demands. Also, development at the site would include preventing further erosion of the riverbank, a topic of much concern to the local constituents. Secondly, developing a park at Rocky Mountain House fulfilled the Board's stated objective of developing at least one site in each province.<sup>114</sup>

The approval in principle to develop the site brought about a new level of activity to the sites of the fur trade at Rocky Mountain House. Integral to park planning was a careful study of historic and archaeological evidence of the still to be identified fur trade posts within the boundaries of the new park.

---

<sup>112</sup>March 20, 1967, P.H. Schonenbach, Assistant Chief, Canadian Historic Sites Division, to Miss Betty McArthur, Jas. H. Matthews & Co. (Canada) Ltd., Nipissing Road, Milton, Ontario, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 5.

<sup>113</sup>January 8, 1969, John I. Nicol, Acting Director, National and Historic Parks Branch, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa to Mr. J.H. Gordon, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister (Conservation), NAC, RG-85/1, Vol. 1.

<sup>114</sup>Taylor, 187-8.

Various historians mentioned the existence of the posts when they wrote about the Rocky Mountain House area. The first was Joseph Burr Tyrell. While editing David Thompson's Narrative in 1916, he tried to piece together the available information and understand the chronology of the forts. Tyrell based his writings at that time on only two posts at the site, but by the 1930s he acknowledged that at least three existed.<sup>115</sup> His confusion is understandable since the location of the five posts was not fully understood until after archaeologists completed their investigation in the late 1970s.

In 1952, an article by E.S. Gish entitled "The Problem of the Forts," detailed the idea that more than three forts inhabited the site at Rocky Mountain House.<sup>116</sup> Gish's thesis renewed interest in additional historical research and archaeological excavations at the site. A graduate student's research seldom has much influence on an historic site, but in this case the student was fortuitously connected with a member of the university community with a special interest in historic sites.

In 1944, after the death of Judge Howay, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board appointed M.H. Long, professor of history at the University of Alberta, to represent Alberta on the Board.<sup>117</sup> As a student under Long, Gish's research received considerable attention from the man responsible for the recognition of historic sites in the province. Therefore, in the early 1950s, Long began mentioning Gish's research to other members of the Board. This research provided many important details about the sites including the startling

---

<sup>115</sup>Smyth, 1976, pp.165-169.

<sup>116</sup>Article by Gish entitled "The Problem of the Forts" 1952, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 3.

<sup>117</sup>Taylor, p. 126.

revelation that the commemorated site was not the oldest fort at the site, as was assumed when it was designated in the 1920s, but the last of a series of forts.<sup>118</sup>

In addition to historic research, as early as the late 1950s, archaeologists expressed interest in digging at the fur trade posts. In October, 1958, a Glenbow Foundation team including Dr. R.G. Forbis and Hugh Dempsey visited the Rocky Mountain House fur trade posts site. Using maps, photographs and a metal detector, they tentatively identified a fur trade post at the site now known as 13R, at the west end of the park property.<sup>119</sup> In late 1960, Richard Forbis, Ph.D. wrote a letter on Glenbow Foundation letterhead to J.D. Herbert, Chief of National Historic Sites Division. He suggested that Herbert hire him to do archaeological work at the commemorated site for a total cost of \$4,650.<sup>120</sup> Herbert's initial response was that he did not see much chance that the site outside the fenced area owned by the Crown could be dug but he would investigate further to see what he could arrange.<sup>121</sup> He apparently got permission to go ahead with a dig at the site but then had to report to Forbis that, due to some error, project money was not available for a dig at Rocky Mountain House in the 1961-1962 year. Most of the available funds for that year were going to the work at the Fortress of Louisbourg

---

<sup>118</sup>December 27, 1951, Long of the HSMB to Childe of Historic Parks and Sites, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 3.

<sup>119</sup>Claude F. Vaucher, "Rocky Mountain House 1966: Archaeological Investigation of a Hudson's Bay Company Fort (FcPr2) on the North Saskatchewan River." Unpublished manuscript on file with Archaeology Branch, Parks Service, Environment Canada, Calgary, 1968, p. 48.

<sup>120</sup>December 14, 1960, Richard Forbis, Ph.D. on Glenbow letterhead, to J.D. Herbert, Director of National Historic Sites Division, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 3.

<sup>121</sup>January 19, 1961, Herbert to Forbis, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 3.

although money might be available in the 1962-3 fiscal year.<sup>122</sup> Herbert submitted a request for funding for work the next summer in late 1961. Finally, on June 6, 1962, Herbert sent Forbis a contract for two months of work for a total cost of not more than \$5,600. Ten days later Forbis replied stating that he could not accept the work. Due to tardiness of the Treasury Board decision to approve the contract, some of his men had taken work elsewhere.<sup>123</sup>

Indeed, Forbis himself had also taken work elsewhere, but not far away. During the summer of 1962, he conducted test excavations at a fort in the grounds of the present park for the Glenbow Foundation. The site, 13R, is the westernmost site and was later identified as Acton House/Rocky Mountain

---

<sup>122</sup>February 28, 1961, Herbert to Forbis, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 3.

<sup>123</sup>November 29, 1961, J.D. Herbert letter regarding Summer Program of Archaeological Investigation, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 4. "The following sites are proposed for excavation during the coming summer: (1) Rocky Mountain House, Alberta, to be excavated under contract with the Glenbow Foundation. The contract would presumably be along the lines proposed by Dr. Forbis last year, i.e. a two-month field season at a cost of approximately \$4,650. The site is given priority because of the danger of erosion by the North Saskatchewan River. At the same time, Acton House and the XY Post, both nearby, will be investigated. This was approved by the Assistant Deputy Minister last year but was cancelled due to the planning situation."

January 16, 1962, Forbis to Herbert, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 4. After a letter from Herbert on December 29, 1961, this letter replied with an interest in doing a dig at the Rocky Mountain House site with a new budget of \$5,450.00, \$800 more than the previous budget but still reasonable according to Forbis. Numerous letters followed haggling over the contract.

June 6, 1962, Herbert and Forbis contract, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 4, not signed by Forbis as the work did not go ahead. Copy of contract to dig at Rocky Mountain House site cost not to exceed \$5,600.

July 16, 1962, Forbis to Herbert, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 4. Letter saying that the dig could not go ahead. Due to lateness of Treasury Board decision, some of his men had taken work elsewhere.

House, a Hudson's Bay Company post from 1799 to 1835.<sup>124</sup> William C. Noble, of the University of Toronto, completely excavated the site the next summer.<sup>125</sup>

Interest in working the site at the chimneys still continued. Finally, in 1966, archaeologists partially excavated site 1R, the commemorated site, for the National Historic Parks and Sites Branch in Ottawa and confirmed that it was the most recent Rocky Mountain House fort.<sup>126</sup> Archaeologists surveyed the remaining areas of the park for potential additional sites but found none at this time.<sup>127</sup> The local newspaper reported that excavations at the chimneys site were underway. In addition to Claude Vaucher, a Professor of Archaeology at University of Calgary, Richard Forbis also oversaw the work and hired "three girls and one boy from the university who have been studying archaeology." He also hired six high school boys from the Rocky Mountain House area to help with digging.<sup>128</sup> The results of this work established the size of the fort and its buildings, confirmed its dates as those of the last known fort from 1865 to 1875, and also gave a clear indication of the extent of river erosion of the site

---

<sup>124</sup>Donald M. Steer and Harvey J. Rogers, "Archaeological Investigations at an Early Nineteenth Century Fur Trading Post, Rocky Mountain House National Historic Park, 1975-77," 1978, p. 20.

<sup>125</sup>William C. Noble, The Excavation and Historical Identification of Rocky Mountain House, (Ottawa: Canadian Historic Sites: Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History - No. 6, National Historic Sites Service, National and Historic Parks Branch, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa, 1973).

<sup>126</sup>Steer and Rogers, p. 20.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>128</sup>July 27, 1966, Excavation at the Old Fort, article in The Mountaineer and Western Weekly, Rocky Mountain House, NAC, RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 5.

and the need for its protection.<sup>129</sup>

The remaining forts were not unearthed until the 1970s. However, in 1969, Seafort Oil Company unearthed human remains while trenching northeast of the Rocky Mountain House fur trade sites. Mr. and Mrs. John Nicks of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alberta removed additional remains in early April. According to a regional newspaper, "Sites of the uncovered forts and recent burial discovery have been cultivated fields for many years."<sup>130</sup> Acting on information from the Nick's, Mark Skinner, an undergraduate anthropology student, excavated 12 graves at site 17R, the Seafort Burial Site. In his 1972 thesis, he dated the remains to the period 1825 to 1850 and suggested that the graves were associated with the HBC Rocky Mountain House fort for the period 1835-1961.<sup>131</sup>

Archaeologists conducted exhaustive investigations of the full site after the government purchased the farm from the Brierleys in 1970. A site survey from 1975 to 1977, called 14R, sought evidence of any additional forts. It revealed two previously unidentified fur trade post sites. As indicated on Map 1, they were designated as 15R and 16R.<sup>132</sup> Site 16R was investigated by the archaeological division of parks in the summers of 1975, 1976 and 1977. The site was tentatively identified as the North West Company Rocky Mountain House

---

<sup>129</sup>Claude F. Vaucher, "Rocky Mountain House 1966: Archaeological Investigation of a Hudson's Bay Company Fort (FcPr2) on the North Saskatchewan River." Unpublished manuscript on file with Archaeology Branch, Parks Service, Environment Canada, Calgary, 1968.

<sup>130</sup>May 23, 1969, "Skeleton Found Near Rocky Fort Site" article in the Red Deer Advocate, NAC, RG-85/1 Vol. 1.

<sup>131</sup>Steer and Rogers, p. 20.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

fort, 1799-1821.<sup>133</sup> Detailed excavations at 15R confirmed that it was the HBC Rocky Mountain House fort for the period 1835-61. Excavations at 16R covered almost 98% of the site and proved that the site was the North West Company post from 1799 to 1821.<sup>134</sup>

In 1980, the park reinterred the remains of twelve intact historic burials and two other bones which were taken from 17R during excavations in 1979. The new burial site is at a depth of one to 1.5 metres deep and lies northeast of the Visitor's Reception Centre and west of site 1R.<sup>135</sup>

While the archaeologists conducted their investigations, government officials met to discuss the future of the site. On May 8, 1967, officials representing the Alberta government and the historic sites service of the federal government met to discuss development options for the fur trade posts.

The province had done work at an older fort site near the federal site, 13R. The provincial site was upstream and of greater historic interest. Duplication of information and facilities was deemed inappropriate and the group suggested that the federal government take over all the sites and interpret them as a group. They were not sure how to proceed with this recommendation.<sup>136</sup>

In late 1968, S. Sheridan, Head of Long Range Development Planning, National Historic Sites Service in Ottawa prepared a brief on the development options for Rocky Mountain House for Mr. Lesaux. The report recommended development of Rocky Mountain House III (Site 1R) over a four year period but

---

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., p. xx.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>135</sup>D.N. Steer, "Rocky Mountain House Burials Reinterment," 1980.

<sup>136</sup> May 8, 1967, Report of meeting with Province of Alberta regarding historic sites at Rocky Mountain House and Buffalo Jump. NAC, RG-85/1 Vol. 1.

continued riverbank erosion kept the park service from doing anything with the site.<sup>137</sup>

By early 1970, the park planning process was still dealing with the major problems with the site. Land acquisition was the first major obstacle. Erosion of the river at the federal site was another concern but would not be allowed to create an expensive amount of work as the protection of the site was not worth a great cost. The development plan included a land area with two major intrusions. The first was an oil well at the east end of the property and the other was the Brierley residence and farm buildings at the centre between the forts. The municipal road was also listed as a problem as it passed through the site. At this date the province was planning some signs to mark its site (13R) and provide minimal interpretation.<sup>138</sup>

In May, 1970, a progress report on the development plans for the site reviewed some old problems and one interesting new threat to the site. Engineers reported that the riverbank was still eroding badly and that 6.1 metres (20 feet) of the fort had fallen into the river. No action was recommended to stop the river's erosion. The Interpretive Trailer was to open in 1970(it did not arrive until 1975) and power was to come 610 metres (2000 feet) by pole from the gas plant until underground wires could be installed. However, a new threat endangered the entire site. The Water Resources Division, Department of Agriculture, was planning a dam either just downstream from the sites or as far as 1.6 kilometres (one mile) upstream. It would be built in the next 20 years and

---

<sup>137</sup>October 24, 1968, S. Sheridan, Head, Long Range Development Planning, National Historic Sites Service, Ottawa for Mr. Lesaux, NAC, RG-85/1 Vol. 1.

<sup>138</sup>January 12, 1970, W. McKim, Regional Director, Calgary to Director in Ottawa, Attention - Mr. H.J. Mitchell. NAC, RG-85/1 Vol. 1.

would raise the water to an elevation of 3,290 and have a reservoir 42.7 to 45.75 metres (140 to 150 feet) deep, flooding the entire site of the fur trade posts. The report stated:

We believe the Department of Agriculture should be advised of our concern regarding the dam location, its affect on the Historic Site from flooding, and the aesthetic aspect. Perhaps their awareness of the danger to the site will add impetus to further investigate locating the dam upstream.<sup>139</sup>

The Alberta government never proceeded with a dam at this site.

In late 1970, the Crown purchased, from Jean Margaret Jeannette Brierley, of Rocky Mountain House, 219.12 hectares (541.04 acres) of land for \$75,000.00. Jean was Mabel Brierley's daughter-in-law. The exact description was:

Pt. NE 17, Nw 17, Pt. SW 17-39-7-W5M = 116.77 hectares (288.32 acres)

S 1/2 20-39-7-W5M = 63.17 hectares (155.97 acres)

Pt. SW 21-39-7-W5M = 39.18 hectares (96.75 acres)

The mines and minerals were retained by the Crown and the Hudson's Bay Company respectively on the subsurface rights.<sup>140</sup>

In 1971, the park plan called for demolition of the farm buildings, additional investigations into the archaeological potential of the site and further planning.<sup>141</sup>

In May, 1972, government officials decided that some of the land was extraneous to the current needs of the park and leased portions of the property to the following persons for

---

<sup>139</sup>May 14, 1970, McKim to Mitchell, RG-85/1 Vol. 1.

<sup>140</sup>December 2, 1970, NAC, RG-85/5, Vol. 1.

<sup>141</sup>Rocky Mountain House Conceptual Development Objectives and Plan, Rocky Mountain House Project Team, H.A. Tatro - Team Captain, R.J. Harmer, R. Innes, K. Seel, D.E. Smyth, D.N. Steer, 1976, p. xi.

agricultural purposes. P. Vant Bosch leased area 3, comprising 41.3 hectares (102 acres), for grazing or haying and P. Smith leased area 5, consisting of 12.15 hectares (30 acres) and area 6, containing 39.29 hectares (97 acres), for haying purposes only. The other areas offered for lease received no bids but the park decided to make them available if bidders could be found.<sup>142</sup>

In 1974, Ottawa approved additional staffing for research into Rocky Mountain House. As the development was being speeded up, two positions, of one person year each, were approved for an historian and an archaeologist. The target date for completion of the Rocky Mountain House installation was set at 1978.<sup>143</sup>

The first interpretive tool for the Rocky Mountain House fur trade posts became available in 1974. A letter in October reported that the Rocky Mountain House trailer exhibit was almost completed and it would join the travelling museum caravan from November 1974 through the end of April, 1975 at which time it would move to the site at Rocky Mountain House for May 1, 1975. The trailer was well marked as a government of Canada project and included brochures explaining the Rocky Mountain House site and proposed developments.<sup>144</sup>

In April, 1975, parks established a Rocky Mountain House Project Development Team. It consisted of operations, research, planning and interpretative specialists. These

---

<sup>142</sup>May 19, 1972, John I. Nicol, Director, National And Historic Parks Branch, to Mr. J.H. Gordon, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, (Conservation), Dept of In. and N. Aff., NAC, RG-85/5, Vol. 2.

<sup>143</sup>August 22, 1974, L.H. Robinson, Director Western Region, Parks Canada, to P.H. Bennett, Ottawa, NAC, RG-85/1 Vol. 3.

<sup>144</sup>October 30, 1974, Ross Innes, Area Supt., Alberta, Historic Parks and Sites, to W.C. Turnbull, Director, Western Region, Parks Canada, NAC, RG-85/1 Vol. 3.

people prepared a report entitled "Rocky Mountain House Conceptual Development Objectives and Plan" which outlined "the collective resources, restraints, potentials and proposals for the various aspects of the project development."<sup>145</sup>

In 1976, the park removed a parking lot at site 1R which allowed visitors to pull off the road to visit the cairn. The road past the cairn was also closed although portions of it remain as part of the access road through the park.<sup>146</sup>

In 1978, the park purchased land from Alberta government on which the Acton House/Rocky Mountain House(13R) site sat.<sup>147</sup> After this acquisition, all the known forts at Rocky Mountain House were within the new national historic park.

### Conclusions

This review of the history of the land at the Rocky Mountain House fur trade posts in the era after the fur trade recounts various interesting events and suggests additional areas of research and interpretation at the site. Local and regional familiarity with the sites of the fur trade posts at Rocky Mountain House created an atmosphere of expectation that some government agency would recognize the historic significance of the sites and protect, preserve and commemorate the ruins. Although recognition by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board came relatively quickly in the late 1920s, work to protect the sites from erosion from the adjacent river took many

---

<sup>145</sup>Project Team, p. VI.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>147</sup>Alberta Culture, Historic Resources Division, Archaeological Site Inventory Data sheet for 13R, Borden No. FcPr-1, HBC Acton House.

decades. The site did not attract enough attention from regional or national agencies to merit substantial research, planning or development until the 1970s. In the meantime, a family farming operation encompassed all the sites of the ruins of the posts and, with the exception of the one fort which still boasted standing chimneys as a marker, the land over most of the archaeological ruins was tilled for crops and grazed by domestic animals. Subsurface disturbance was minimal since no other industrial development threatened the buried remains of the posts. Members of this farmer's family served as caretakers for the monument until the government created a park and bought the land in 1970. Subsequent park planning and development removed all obvious evidence of the farming operation from the site. The information in this report, therefore, recounts the specific human activity on the land now encompassed by the Rocky Mountain House National Historic Park boundaries in order to allow archaeologists, planners, interpreters and other park personnel to understand the history of this property since the cessation of fur trade activity at this site in 1875.

Areas worthy of further research for this time period are many. Additional study of the timber and farming operations on the site could be interpreted to explain the evolution of western Canadian culture from the native period through the exploration, fur trade and settlement periods. Interviews and cultural resources should be collected while members of the farmer's family who lived on the farm are still alive. Also, a better understanding of the farm implements used to cultivate the soil over the fort ruins could help archaeologists understand the level of disturbance caused by these activities. This research should also be pursued with the remaining members of the family. Finally, more information about the roles of various government agencies in the 1960s and 1970s is necessary if a more detailed chronology

of the administrative history of the park is required. Nevertheless, this report reviews the main events at the site of the Rocky Mountain House fur trade posts for the century after the cessation of trade.

Bibliography

Bert, Phyllis

Stories of the Pioneers of the West Country: Celebrating the 50th Jubilee of the Founding of Rocky Mountain House, Alberta, 1912-1962, Phyllis Bert, Rocky Mountain House, 1962.

Canada. National Archives.

RG-84, HS10-36, Vol. 1-6, Central Registry Files for Rocky Mountain House.

RG-85/1, Vol. 1-3, RG-85/5, Vol. 1-2, Land Department Files.

Dempsey, Hugh A.

A History of Rocky Mountain House, Ottawa: Canadian Historic Sites: Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History - No. 6, National Historic Sites Service, National and Historic Parks Branch, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa, 1973.

Gish, E.S.

"A Study of the History of Rocky Mountain House." Master's thesis, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, 1952.

Matheson, Charles Winfield

AA History of Rocky Mountain House." Master's thesis, University of Alberta, Calgary, Alberta, 1959.

Noble, William C.

The Excavation and Historical Identification of Rocky Mountain House. Ottawa: Canadian Historic Sites: Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History - No. 6, National Historic Sites Service, National and Historic Parks Branch, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa, 1973.

Philips, Dawn

Interview with Dawn Philips by David Finch, August 14-15, 1990, Rocky Mountain House, Alberta.

Smythe, David E.

"The Fur Trade Posts at Rocky Mountain House." Manuscript Report Series 197, National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Parks Canada, Ottawa, 1976.

Steer, Donald M. and Harvey J. Rogers

"Archaeological Investigations at an Early Nineteenth Century Fur Trading Post, Rocky Mountain House National Historic Park, 1975-77." Calgary, 1978.

Steer, D.N.

"Rocky Mountain House Burials Reinterment." Calgary, 1980.

Tatro, H.A. - Team Captain, Rocky Mountain House Project Team,  
R.J. Harmer, R. Innes, K. Seel, D.E. Smyth, D.N. Steer,  
"Rocky Mountain House Conceptual Development Objectives and  
Plan." Calgary, 1976.

Taylor, C.J.

Negotiating the Past: The Making of Canada's National Historic  
Parks and Sites. Montreal & Kingston, London, Buffalo:  
McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990.

Vaucher, Claude F.

"Rocky Mountain House 1966: Archaeological Investigation of  
a Hudson's Bay Company Fort (FcPr2) on the North Saskatchewan  
River." Manuscript on file with Archaeology Branch, Parks  
Service, Environment Canada, Calgary, 1968.

Appendix A

Correspondence Regarding the Historic Site

Dec 16, 1931

Harkin to Mabel A. Brierley

RG-84 HS-10-36-1

The caretaker's contract was offered to (and accepted by on Jan 14, 1932) M.A. Brierley for \$25.00 per annum.

July 14, 1932

Mabel A. Brierley to Harkin

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

In a condition report on the monument, she being the caretaker for the site, she reported that one stone was loose near the top of the cairn.

September 5, 1932

Mabel A. Brierley to Harkin

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

Responding to a letter from Harkin on August 24, 1932, she states that her son repaired the cairn using cement left the previous summer and that no charge would be forwarded for the work.

October 27, 1932

Mabel A. Brierley to Harkin

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

The monument was in good condition and she estimated about 500 visitors for the season.

July 11, 1933

M.A. Brierley to Harkin

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

"Owing to a lengthy illness, I have been unable to personally attend to my duties as part time caretaker of the Rocky Mountain House Monument. My son however has been taking care of the grounds, and upon inspection, I find the Monument in good condition, and the grounds clean and trim."

November 1, 1933

Mabel A. Brierley to Harkin

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

Stated that poor roads kept visitation to a minimum from October 1 to May 1 but about 700 people still visited the site in the summer.

October 30, 1934

Mabel A. Brierley to Harkin

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

Fence needed painting and was painted for \$3.25 for paint and \$6.00 for labour. Between 600 and 700 people visited the

site.

June 15, 1935

Harkin to Brierley

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

DOI authorized her to pay up to \$9.25 for the fence painting and \$3.00 for gravel for the site

October 24, 1935

Mabel A. Brierley to Harkin

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

Owing to a wet season, there were few visitors, about 500.

April 27, 1936

Mabel A. Brierley to Harkin

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

Heavy spring flooding washed away much of the bank at the cairn and only about 9.15 metres (30 feet) remained between the top of the bank and the cairn. She suggested action immediately to stop the erosion.

October 7, 1936

Mabel A. Brierley to Harkin

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

Condition report said all was good at the site and it entertained about 600 visitors.

December 14, 1936

Brierley to Harkin

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

complained that she had to use her own tools to maintain the site. Did not ask for tools or compensation.

October 19, 1937

Mabel A. Brierley to Harkin

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

She suggested that if she was supplied with a register book for visitors she could install an appropriate place for it. She also warned that the river bank was eroding further.

November 3, 1937

F.H.H. Williamson, Controller to Brierley

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

"As regards your request for a visitors' register I regret to say that it is not the practise of the Department to supply these to the smaller sites."

November 12, 1938

Mabel A. Brierley to Harkin

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

General condition of the site good but fence needed repainting

and gate needed repair. Visitation about 500.

Jan 4, 1939

Brierley to Williamson

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

Estimated that the cost to have Findlater repoint the chimneys was between \$90.00 and 110.00.

Feb 6, 1939

Mrs. Brierley to ???

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

She agreed to donate the additional land if the government agreed to take care of the site properly. She also included plans for a steel turnstile.

"The river bank you enquired about is falling away continually."

April 25, 1939

Mabel A. Brierley to Harkin ???

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

Gave her approval for the transfer of the land to the HSMB and said the delay was due to getting her husband to agree.

"I am sorry I have not answered your letters before this, I have been waiting for my husband's approval of the transaction."

May 31, 1939

HSMB minutes

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

Moved by Howay and seconded by Dr. Webster:

That the Board approves the preservation of the two remaining chimneys of Rocky Mountain House, that a secondary tablet be affixed thereto, and that the site offered by Mrs. M.A. Brierley be accepted.

Carried

July 10, 1939

Brierley to ??? at HSMB

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

The tablet was cleaned as per his instructions and Findlater had started the repointing of the chimneys but would not be done for some time. As of another letter on Sept 17, 1939, he was still not done with the task.

Sept 30, 1939

Mabel A. Brierley to Harkin ???

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

Mrs. Brierley stated that the work to the site was done and presented the bill from the contractor, Mr. Findlater. Three items not on the original estimate were added when Howay

visited the site earlier in the month.

The total cost for the work, including the extra ordered by Howay, was 109.60.

Nov. 10, 1939

Mabel A. Brierley to Harkin

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

Condition of the monument good and about 700 people visited the site.

April 4, 1940

Williamson to Brierley

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

Williamson forwarded the forms for her to sign to give the .486 hectares (1.20 acres) of land for the larger site.

June 8, 1940

M.A. Brierley to Williamson

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

She reminded the park representative that part of her deal giving the land to the HSMB included that the Board erect and maintain a fence. She wanted to see this part of the agreement fulfilled. June 8, 1940 is the date on the official document that transferred the land to the HSMB.

September 9, 1940

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

Findlater forwarded a bill, okayed by Brierley, for \$4.50 for affixing the plaque to a chimney.

Sept 24, 1940

George A. Findlater to Williamson

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

As per the request through Mrs. Brierley, Findlater quoted a cost of \$85.00 for labour and materials to fence in the monument area with page wire fencing and tamarack posts. He stated that he needed to know as soon as possible if the work was to go ahead as the season was getting late for digging post holes.

September 30, 1940

Williamson to Findlater

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

Gave approval for the fence. The work was to be done as soon as possible. Findlater was to give the bill to Mrs. Brierley who would then forward it to Williamson.

October 1, 1940

Findlater to Williamson

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

In response to a letter from Williamson asking about his

marital status for taxation of income purposes he wrote:

"I am a single man, born in Scotland Dec. 17th 1888, bricklayer by trade, quite willing to pay defence taxes ect. so you can act accordingly."

Brierley said he was the only bricklayer in the area.

Oct 12, 1940

Williamson to Brierley

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

In response to a bill for \$43.22 for a job quoted by Findlater as 30.00, he agreed to pay the bill but warned her to keep the expenses within the budgets allowed in the future.

Oct 22, 1940

Findlater to Williamson

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

He submitted a bill of 84.67 for building the fence at Rocky Mountain House site. The original quote was \$85.00.

Oct 28, 1940

Mabel A. Brierley, caretakers report

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

All neat and tidy. More visitors than ever before, perhaps as many as 1000.

Nov. 1941

Mabel A. Brierley, caretakers report

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

There was nothing to report out of the ordinary as to the site's condition.

"It has been impossible to keep track of the number of visitors, this season. So many English and Australian soldiers have added to the increasing numbers of U.S.A. tourists are visiting here every day."

March 7, 1942

C.W. Jackson, Chief Executive Assistant, Dept. of Mines and Resources to Mr. Gibson

RG-84 HS-10-36-1

As the land now in question had become .486 hectares (1.20 acres), Brierley was to be paid \$50.00 per annum, effective April 1, 1941.

Dec 7, 1942

Mabel A. Brierley, caretakers report

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

The site condition was good.

"There were very few visitors this year, owing to the deplorable condition of the road."

August 5, 1943

Brierley to the Commissioner, National Parks of Canada  
RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

Findlater had completed the repairs to the post that was damaged. The cost of \$5.00 she quoted earlier she suggested that a cheque be made out for that amount. She did not know who did the damage except that it happened "while a large convoy of Army Trucks were turning there."

Nov 7, 1943

Mabel A. Brierley, caretakers report  
RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

The fence was badly rusted and she estimated that paint and labour for the job would total \$10.00.

September 25, 1944

Kenneth Hunley to ???

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

bill of \$5.00 for painting the fence, 6 and two thirds hours at .75 per hour

Nov 3, 1944

Mabel A. Brierley, caretakers report  
RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

The condition of the site was good.

Oct. 24, 1945

Mabel A. Brierley, caretakers report  
RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

The condition of the site was good.

Nov 5, 1946

Mabel A. Brierley, caretakers report  
RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

She reported that a few stones were loose and the fence needed painting for a cost of about \$12.00. She was still not able to get anyone to fix the damage to the gate post.

August 25, 1947

Brierley to Controller of National Parks  
RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

She forwarded a bill of 16.00 for repairs to the chimneys and gate posts. C. Dempster of Rocky Mountain House did the work.

Dawn Brierley painted the fence for ten hours at \$.60 per hour for a total of \$6.00.

Nov 3, 1947

Mabel A. Brierley, caretakers report  
RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

The condition of the site was good.

Nov. 1, 1948

Mabel A. Brierley, caretakers report

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

All good except new gravel needed for a cost of \$10.00 and the gate needed minor repairs, the cost of which she had not been able to get an estimate.

August 15, 1949

Brierley to Dept

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

She forwarded a bill for \$12.00 for getting four loads of gravel to the site and spreading it.

Oct 26, 1949

Mabel A. Brierley, caretakers report

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

All ws good at the site except for a \$15.00 cost to paint the fence.

Oct 28, 1950

Mabel A. Brierley, caretakers report

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

The condition of site good but needed a new set of fenceposts as well as a coat of paint on the fence and some gate repair. The latter she was unable to have done due to lack of men to do the work.

August 2, 1951

Brierley to dept

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

She forwarded a bill for \$5.00 from Boyden's Sheet Metal of Rocky Mountain House for repairing the chimney site.

Nov 9, 1951

Mabel A. Brierley, caretakers report

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

The site was clean and in good repair.

Nov 3, 1952

Mabel A. Brierley, caretakers report

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

The site was clean and tidy with no need for repairs.

January 20, 1953

Brierley to the Director of National Parks Branch

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

She reported that the gate was stolen from the site and that she had turned the matter over to the local RCMP.

April 6, 1953

J.E. Mead, Constable Reg. No. 13035, at Rocky Mountain House

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

He reported on the theft of the gate but was unable to track down the culprit. On January 1, 1953 a fire broke out at the Brierleys and many people helped fight it but none of them took the gate or know anything about it. "It might be stated that this site is a favourite spot for young people parking in cars, but checks have failed to indicate who might have been there prior to Jan. 11th."

May 25, 1953

Brierley to dept

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

The cost of replacing gate totalled \$28.50 with an additional paint cost of \$7.75.

Nov 6, 1953

Mabel A. Brierley, caretakers report

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

The site was clean and neat.

Nov 4, 1954

Mabel A. Brierley, caretakers report

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

The site was in good condition but all the posts needed replacing for a total cost of \$32.00.

Oct 17, 1955

Mrs. Jean Brierley to Director, National Parks Branch

RG-84 HS-10-36-1

Jean offered to take over the job as caretaker and stated that she knew the work as she had helped Mabel Brierley on several occasions. Also stated: "My husband has an agreement for sale for the farm, where the site is situated and we are living there now."

October 18, 1955

M. Brierley to Director of Parks

RG-84 HS-10-36-1

Mabel tendered her resignation and suggested that Jean be hired. Jean was Mabel's daughter in law, having married her son William.

October 25, 1955

A.J.H. Richardson to Mabel Brierley

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

Richardson accepted her October 18, 1955 letter of resignation as caretaker at the site effective December 31, 1955 and passed on her recommendation that her daughter-in-law be appointed in her place. Separation Report attached to this letter listed "Poor Health" as the reason for the separation.

October 26, 1955

J.A. Hutchison, Director to Mr. Cote,  
RG-84 HS-10-36-1

He mentioned the reason for Mabel's separation and that she was being paid \$100.00 per annum. He suggested that the job, with the same pay should go to Jean effective January 1, 1956.

Nov. 15, 1955

A.J.H. Richardson to J. Brierley  
RG-84 HS-10-36-1

He appointed her as the caretaker of the site for \$100.00 per annum as of January 1, 1956. The attached Employees Questionnaire listed Jean Margaret Jeannette Brierley as a housewife. Her maiden name was Richardson and she was born Nov. 13, 1912 at Rowley of Scottish and Irish descent. She was married to Mr. W. Brierley. Her education consisted of 8 years of schooling in Alberta, all at the elementary level. She spoke and wrote English well.

Feb 1, 1956

Jean Brierley, caretaker, to the Director  
RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

A couple of rocks were loose and the cost to repair the cairn was about \$5.00. Just 8.85 metres (29 feet) of land separated the edge of the river bank and the fence.

August 12, 1957

Jean Brierley, caretaker, to the Director  
RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

She forwarded a bill of \$21.00 for painting the fence.

Sept 23, 1957

Jean Brierley, caretaker, to the Director  
RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

The site was in good condition overall and only needed minor repairs.

April 1, 1958

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

A signed copy of Mrs. J.M.J. Brierley's new contract, providing pay of \$110.00 per annum.

May 7, 1959

Jean Brierley, caretaker, to the Director  
RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

The site was in good condition but she could not remove some of the graffiti.

June 25, 1962

Jean Brierley, caretaker, to the Director  
RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 4

The site was in good repair except that the fence needs paint. The estimated cost for paint was \$6.00 and labour was \$12.00. She also complained on an attached letter that work done two years previously was not yet paid for even though she had forwarded the bills. On July 19, 1962 Herbert forwarded invoices for the men who did the work to sign but regretted that he could not approve payment for the materials if she could not provide receipts.

May 23, 1963

Jean Brierley, caretaker, to the Director  
RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 5

The site was in good condition but posts needed replacing for \$30.25, the fence needed painting for a total cost of \$34.70 and the cost to replace two rocks at top of cairn was \$3.25.

Appendix BCorrespondence Related to Erosion Problems

Important to any future research at the site of the fur trade posts was the continued preservation of a site which for decades had slowly toppled into the North Saskatchewan River as the river eroded the north bank at the site of the most recent fort.

The caretakers had for years warned the Board of the continued erosion of the site but every level of government rejected responsibility for protecting the site. The correspondence regarding the river erosion is included as Appendix B to this report. In summary, in the late 1930s, based on the complaints by the caretaker of the site and the Banff Park engineer's inspection of the damage, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board approached the Alberta government and asked it to prevent further erosion to the site. The province rejected responsibility for the problem based on the fact that the road was a municipal responsibility. In the late 1940s the province again rejected the suggestion that it do something about the erosion, estimated the cost of protecting 800 feet of riverbank at the site as \$40,000.00 and stated that it was not willing to pay for the work. If the erosion continued, it would just as soon realign the road as pay for river work. During the 1950s, both levels of government again renounced any responsibility for protecting the forts from river erosion even though they admitted that someone ought to do something. In the 1960s, R.N. Thompson, M.P. for Red Deer wrote Arthur Lang, Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources, insisting that the sites be preserved from further damage. Lang downplayed the importance of the sites and stated that they were not worth the money necessary to stabilize the river bank. Thompson disagreed with Lang's analysis of the importance of the sites and upbraided him for not taking better care of an important national historic site. Even as late as 1970, when planning for the park was well underway, the correspondence shows a reluctance to spend any considerable amount of money to protect the sites from the river. Finally, in 1973, park engineers directed the construction of an embankment to protect the national historic park from further erosion by the waters of the North Saskatchewan River.

November 27, 1931

Wardle to Harkin

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

Wardle gave details of the installation of the memorial and problems with supplies. He also mentioned that the Saskatchewan River was eroding the riverbank and was approximately 22.9 metres (75 feet) from the site of the cairn.

May 20, 1938

E.J. Garrett, Junior Engineer to C.M. Walker, Supervising Engineer, Engineering and Construction Services, Banff, Alberta

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

Garrett inspected the riverbank and noted nothing unusual about the river flow but erosion at the riverbank immediately adjacent the historic site was advancing quickly. He recommended that cribbing be installed to protect the site.

Garrett also noted that pothunting, scavenging and similar activities were taking place.

He also noted that Mr. C. Brierley had fenced the old fort area and this action kept out cows but not the sheep.

He included ten photographs which showed the condition of the site, the memorial cairn and the riverbank.

Edge of riverbank to the edge of the fence at this point, in 1938, was 14.34 metres (47 feet).

June 1, 1938

T.S. Mills, Department of Mines and Resources, to F.H.H. Williamson, Controller, National Parks & Forests Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, Ottawa

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

Based on the above report by Garrett, Mills suggested that the Alberta government be approached to take care of the riverbank near its road and such action would solve the erosion problem near the cairn.

July 21, 1938

E.D. Robertson, Superintendent of Maintenance, Department of Public Works, Government of the Province of Alberta to F.H.H. Williamson, National Parks Bureau, Department of Mines and Resources, Ottawa

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

J. McQueen, District Engineer for Red Deer for the Alberta government, reported "that no serious erosion has taken place since the record flood of 1915 and he also states that unless a heavy expenditure was made nothing of permanent value could be accomplished, as the heavy erosion takes place at times of extreme and near extreme high water."

Robertson then stated that no funds were available for any work at this site.

McQueen's report, attached to the above letter, stated that the road by the cairn was a local road in I.D. 403 and not a provincial highway. The district collected no taxes for the previous two years, had no money to pay for improvements and was not likely to get any soon. The only way McQueen could see to accomplish the work would be with relief labour, if a foreman experienced in doing the work could be found.

Feb 15, 1940

C.H. Snell, surveyor reporting on the condition of the bank near the site

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 2

road had been moved to the north side of memorial area and the bank was eroding 20.32 to 30.48 centimetres (8 to 12) inches each year

Nov 4, 1948

Jas. McQueen, Sup of Maintenance, Dept of Public Works, Alberta to J. Smart, Controller, Dept of Mines and Resources

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

The cost of protecting 244 metres (800 feet) of riverbank at the site would be \$40,000.00 and AB was not willing to pay for that kind of work. The government would just as soon realign the road as pay for river work.

July 10, 1950

Professor M.H. Long to Colonel C.C. Childe, Acting Sup of historic Sites, Dept of Resources and Development

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

Long was sent to review the Markerville and Rocky Mountain House sites.

In his report he said that riverbank erosion was dangerous to the site and that something should be done if at all possible. Childe responded on July 21, 1950 that nothing was possible.

1952

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

cost associated with protecting the site from the river once again deemed to costly

March 4, 1955

A.J. Hooke, Minister of Economic Affairs, Alberta to Hon. Jean Lesage, Minister of Resources and Development, Ottawa

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

mentioned the problem of river erosion of the bank yet again and asked him to do something about it

April 28, 1955

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

plans for the site showing riverbank

attached to a report showing the work to be done to save the bank

feds said the road was a provincial responsibility

Feb 1, 1956

Jean Brierley, caretaker, to the Director

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 3

a couple of rocks were loose

cost to repair the one rock about \$5.00

just 8.85 metres (29 feet) between the edge of the bank and the fence

June 19, 1964

R.N. Thompson, M.P. for Red Deer to Arthur Lang, Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 5

pointed out that the fort ruins were in jeopardy of being washed away due to the river's continued erosion of the bank and asked him to visit the site on his upcoming trip through the area and get something done.

July 3, 1964

Lang to Thompson

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 5

said little of value could be done with the 1R site and that no money was worth spending

July 8, 1964

R.N. Thompson, M.P. for Red Deer to Arthur Lang, Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources

RG-84, HS10-36, Volume 5

disagreed with Lang over the importance of the site and said that a river diversion into its original channel was all that was necessary and not an expensive job of riprapping

June 2, 1969

"Save Chimneys" article in the Red Deer Advocate

RG-85/1 Volume 1

The river at this date was about 6.1 metres (20 feet) from the cairn and the chimneys and the reporter suggested that something had to be done soon or the whole site would fall into the river. He suggested moving the cairn and the chimneys and even though this would meet with opposition, he felt it was better than losing the facility altogether to the river.

January 12, 1970

W. McKim, Regional Director, Calgary to Director in Ottawa, Attention - Mr. H.J. Mitchell

RG-85/1 Volume 1,

Rocky Mountain House issues and problems

land negotiations were complicated by the attempts to also get land for a buffalo jump and the Cochrane Ranch

erosion of the river at the federal site was a concern but should not be allowed to create an expensive amount of work as the protection of the site was not worth great cost

The development plan included a land area with two major intrusions. The first was an oil well at the east end of the property and the Brierley residence and farm buildings at the

centre between the forts.

The municipal road was also listed as a problem as it passed through the site.

At this date the province was planning some signs to mark its site and provide minimal interpretation.

May 14, 1970

McKim to Mitchell

RG-85/1 Volume 1,

Engineers reported that the riverbank was still eroding badly and that 6.1 metres (20 feet) of the fort had fallen into the river. No action was recommended to stop the river's erosion.

The Interpretive Trailer was to open in 1970 and power was to come 610 metres (2000 feet) by pole from the gas plant until underground wires could be installed.

Water Resources Division, Department of Agriculture, called for a dam either just downstream from the sites or as far as 1.6 kilometres (one mile) upstream. It would be built in the next 20 years and would raise the water to an elevation of 3,290 and have a reservoir 42.7 to 45.45 metres (140 to 150 feet deep).

"We believe the Department of Agriculture should be advised of our concern regarding the dam location, its affect on the Historic Site from flooding, and the aesthetic aspect. Perhaps their awareness of the danger to the site will add impetus to further investigate locating the dam upstream."

1973

Bank adjacent site 1R was stabilized to prevent further erosion.

Rocky Mountain House Project Team xi

1975

Top bank above the previously threatened bank area near 1R was pressure seeded in 1975 to promote growth.

Rocky Mountain House Project Team xi

Appendix CThe Brierley Family History and Farming Operations

With the exception of a small amount of land that was donated to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board in the 1930s, most of the property surrounding the fur trade posts became part of a busy family farm in the early 1920s. The Brierley family lived on the site west of Rocky Mountain House from the 1920s to the 1970s. Their family history is typical of early settlers in the Canadian west and explains much of the development of the land upon which the historic park now sits.

Mabel Annie Folley, the eleventh of twelve children, was born in Ireland in 1891 to a British supply officer who had served in India and his wife from the Isle of Wight. Her father died when she was three or four years old and she moved to live with a sister in Exeter, England when she was 16 years old. She ate a Macintosh apple at the Canadian booth. She liked the fruit and decided to move to Canada. She arranged for a job in Canada and came to work at a store in Carseland. She also helped the family by making the meals and doing housework, six days a week, for \$8.00 per month.<sup>148</sup>

While living at Carseland she met and married Chester Brierley. He was often away as long as six months at a time, leaving Mabel to manage the affairs of the home. After they moved to Rocky Mountain House, she walked the 4.8 kilometres (three miles) to town to sell eggs and butter and used this income and the \$25.00 per month her husband sent from his paycheck to cover the mortgage on the farm.<sup>149</sup>

Mabel was known in the Rocky Mountain House area for her hospitality. The family often fed men riding the rails during the depression as the tracks passed by to the north of the farm.<sup>150</sup> One visitor left a remarkable impression on the family. While making breakfast once morning, she answered a knock at the door to find a man requesting breakfast. She invited him in even though she knew he was a convicted murderer, just released from prison. When the man boasted about the short three year term he had served, Mabel became concerned for the safety of her family. After breakfast the man noticed the inadequacy of the woodpile beside the house and the attempts by the sons to split more wood for the fire. He stopped sleighs loaded with logs which regularly passed by the farmhouse transporting timber from the south side of the river to the railway tracks to the north and demanded a log from each load. As he was infamous in the community, the men

---

<sup>148</sup>Dawn Philips interview by David Finch, August 14, 1990, Rocky Mountain House, Side 2 - counter number 325.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 275.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid., Side 2 - counter number 130.

driving the loads complied and the visitor to the Brierley home helped the boys cut and split enough wood to see the family through the winter.<sup>151</sup>

Although Mabel's experience was similar to that of many other women in the Canadian west after the turn of the century, she also contributed greatly to the preservation of the Northwest Company and Hudson's Bay Company fur trade post ruins at the Rocky Mountain House sites. Mabel Annie Brierley passed away on August 11, 1973.<sup>152</sup>

The flashy cowboy Mabel married in 1910 was Chester (Chet) James Brierley. His grandfather and family emigrated from England to Utica, New York. His father, Chester Driggs Brierley, was the fifth child in his family. They moved to Minnesota. When Chet was six weeks old, they moved on to Seattle only to find it ravaged by fire. Forced to find work elsewhere, they moved again looking for work and his father took a job in the lumber camps in Twin Rivers, Washington. When Chet was eight years old, a tree fell on his father and killed him. As the eldest son, Chet became the "man" of the household and staunchly opposed his mother's remarriage when he was 12 years old. Always enchanted with the lumber industry as a child, Chet left home in his teens and worked in the forest, bringing out trees. At seventeen, he came to Canada and worked at a ranch called the British Colonization Ranch, a ranch which raised horses for the British Army. He moved on to work at other ranches and met Mabel at a picnic at Carseland.<sup>153</sup>

The couple exchanged marriage vows at Langdon, Alberta on June 14, 1910. Chet took up the railway grade building business to supplement what little they could earn from the farm they bought midway between Carmangay and Barons. For the first two years, the couple lived in a tent.<sup>154</sup> Soon the first of nine children arrived and in 1919 the family moved to Carmangay to be close to a school for the children.<sup>155</sup> In the winter of 1919 Chet worked at the Phoenix lumber camp near Rocky Mountain House in order to keep the farm. Seven years without a crop and the failure of Chet's construction business eventually forced the family to give up the southern Alberta land. In November, 1922, the family moved to the farm west of Rocky Mountain House.<sup>156</sup>

---

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., Side 2 - counter number 105.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 450.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., Side 2 - counter number 260.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 015.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 020.

<sup>156</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 025.

As a result of losing the farm in southern Alberta, all the Brierley farm land at Rocky Mountain House was in Mabel's name. Chet did not want any of his other business ventures to affect the viability of the farm. His personality is revealed through the recollections of his youngest daughter, Dawn Philips. According to her: "The thing most people remember him for was his loud voice." He yelled at his sheep to get them on the ferry to cross the North Saskatchewan River to go to market at Rocky Mountain House and people in the town heard his voice booming up from the river. He also had a hot temper and was impatient with anyone who tried to trick him. He was also compassionate. Although the family was not rich, it was better off than some in the area and he regularly loaned money to people. Even after his death in 1947, people from the community continued repaying their debts to Mabel.<sup>157</sup>

Although the ferry provided a free crossing of the North Saskatchewan River many months of the year, it could not run once the river began to ice up in the fall and when the ice was breaking up in the spring. Chet's many business dealings required that he go to Rocky Mountain House often, almost daily. If the ferry could not run and the ice was not thick enough to drive on, he drove across the railway bridge in his International pickup truck. Railway employees drove spikes alongside the track to discourage unauthorized use of the bridge but Chet just carried a 6.36 kilogram (14 lb.) post maul and pounded them down. The railway police caught him crossing the bridge once and hauled him before the local magistrate. Fined \$25.00 and with no way to get home unless he crossed the guarded bridge and risked another fine. Chet got his friend, the local police chief, to distract the railway police with an invitation to dinner while he drove home.<sup>158</sup>

His youngest daughter, Dawn, remembers her father with the following synopsis:

He liked the outdoors, hunting, horses, being important, the ranch, the Calgary Stampede, cowboy hats, flowers and a nice yard. Whiskey in moderation, being a lumberman, Indians, his sisters, Christmas, nice dishes and tormenting his children. He disliked Englishmen, even though he was one, and married one. It was an Englishman who felled the tree that killed his father so he carried the dislike for the English all his life. He disliked nice clothes. To my knowledge, he owned probably no more than three dress suits in all his adult life. He disliked phoney people, his stepfather, most of his

---

<sup>157</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 275.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 230.

neighbours, women who wore makeup, Social Credit, lazy people and Eddie Brent, the town mayor and magistrate.<sup>159</sup>

Chet Brierley visited a doctor in Rocky Mountain House in March, 1947 and found out he had cancer. His friends convinced him to go to Minneapolis for surgery at Northwestern Hospital later that spring. He went on one last pack trip into the mountains in September and passed away in hospital in Rocky Mountain House on December 1, 1947. He was 58 years old when he died.<sup>160</sup>

The Brierley family home sat on a full cement basement and measured 9.1 by 9.1 metres (30' by 30'). As shown in the accompanying illustration, it boasted five bedrooms in addition to the kitchen, dining and living rooms. Front and back porches completed the structure. A picket fence surrounded the house and its yard. The house was frame construction and well built. The interior, except the kitchen, was stripped with lath, plastered and then painted with calamine. The kitchen was covered with linoleum and held in place by linoleum strips. The dining room and living room had hardwood floors. The outside of the house was painted cream with green shingles and green trim. All out buildings were frame construction and painted light grey with white trim. The barn had a round roof and cement foundation. Chester Brierley loved flowers and kept a well-kept lawn and several beautiful flower beds. The house had no running water or electricity until 1944 when a new well was drilled on the north side of the kitchen and running water and a bathroom were installed. A Delco power plant provided electricity which was stored in 24 batteries. Additional electricity came from a wind charger located on the top of a 9.1 metres (30') tower in the northwest corner of the yard. A cable, strung along the fenceposts to the adjacent farm where one of the Brierley daughters lived, provided an emergency telephone line after Chester's death. In 1950, regular telephone service arrived at the farm. A battery operated radio provided entertainment at the farm.<sup>161</sup>

Other interesting recollections by the Brierley children fill out the story of life at the farm. In 1926 or 1927 a bad forest fire almost took the farm buildings. The air was thick with smoke and the family feared for the farm and their lives. Although it was February, it had not snowed all winter. As the fire got near, the family packed some belongings in order to evacuate to Rocky Mountain House. Once on the trail, near

---

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., Side 2 - counter number 522.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid., Side 1 - counter number 210.

<sup>161</sup>Dawn Philips, personal communication, September 19, 1990.

the chimney site, the weather turned calm. Snow fell and put out the fire.<sup>162</sup>

Some interesting pets also lived at the farm. In 1943, German prisoners of war found a young moose and turned it over to Chet. He took it home and it lived at the farm for a few months until one day it took sick and died.<sup>163</sup>

---

<sup>162</sup>Ibid.

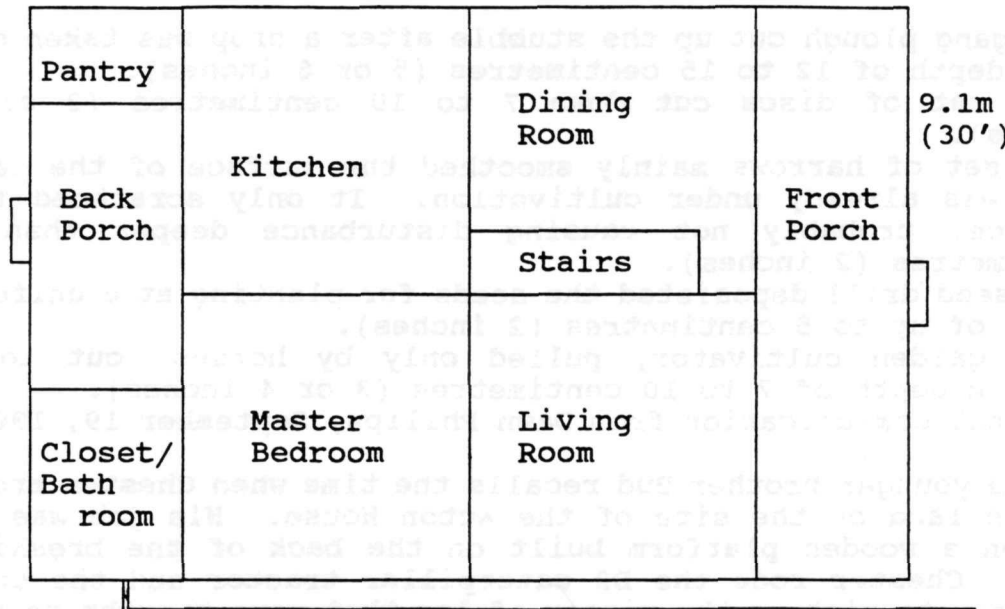
<sup>163</sup>Ibid.

BRIERLEY HOME - Built during summer of 1923

Main floor

↑ North

2.4m (8') 4.6m (15') 4.6m (15') 2.4m (8')

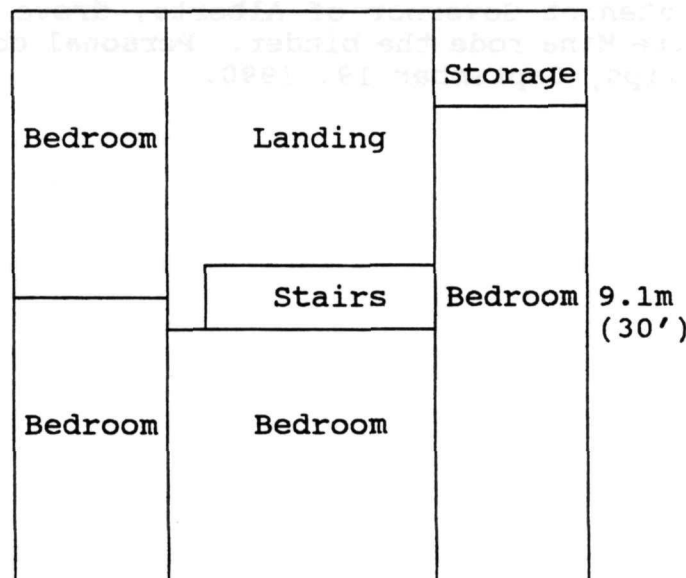


Sewer line installed in 1944

Second floor

↑ North

2.4m (8') 4.3m (14') 2.4m (8')



Appendix D

Machinery used at the Brierley Farm

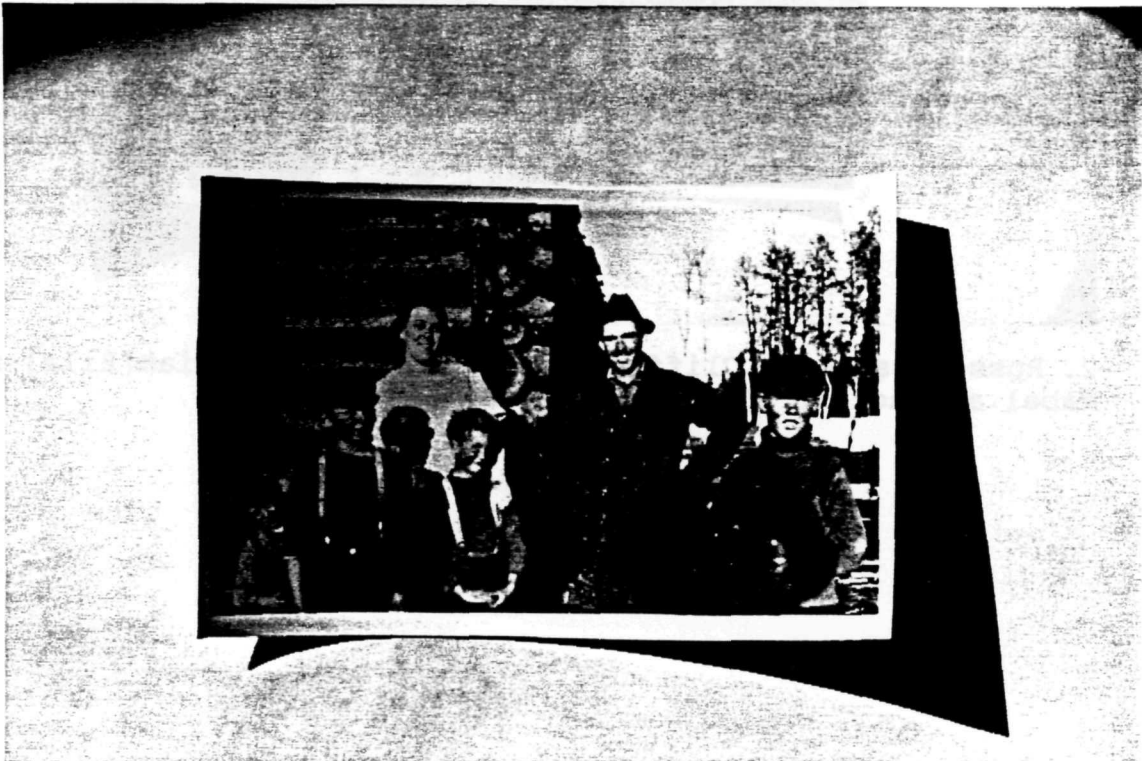
1. A breaking plow cut to a depth of 17 to 20 centimetres (7 or 8 inches) and was used to break previously uncultivated land.
  2. A gang plough cut up the stubble after a crop was taken off to a depth of 12 to 15 centimetres (5 or 6 inches).
  3. A set of discs cut down 7 to 10 centimetres (3 or 4 inches).
  4. A set of harrows mainly smoothed the surface of the land that was already under cultivation. It only scratched the surface, probably not causing disturbance deeper than 5 centimetres (2 inches).
  5. A seed drill deposited the seeds for planting at a uniform depth of up to 5 centimetres (2 inches).
  6. A garden cultivator, pulled only by horses, cut to a maximum depth of 7 to 10 centimetres (3 or 4 inches).
- Personal communication from Dawn Philips, September 19, 1990.

Dawn's younger brother Bud recalls the time when Chester broke up the land on the site of the Acton House. His job was to sit on a wooden platform built on the back of the breaking plow. Chester rode the D2 caterpillar tractor and the sons job was to pick up the pieces of log that were brought to the surface. He feels that it was some of the timbers of the Acton House. Personal communication from Dawn Philips, September 19, 1990.

One year Chester hired Art Hunley, the neighbour to the west, to cut the crop in this field. Art's sister Helen, who later became the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, drove the tractor while Art's wife Mina rode the binder. Personal communication from Dawn Philips, September 19, 1990.

Appendix E  
Brierley Family Photographs

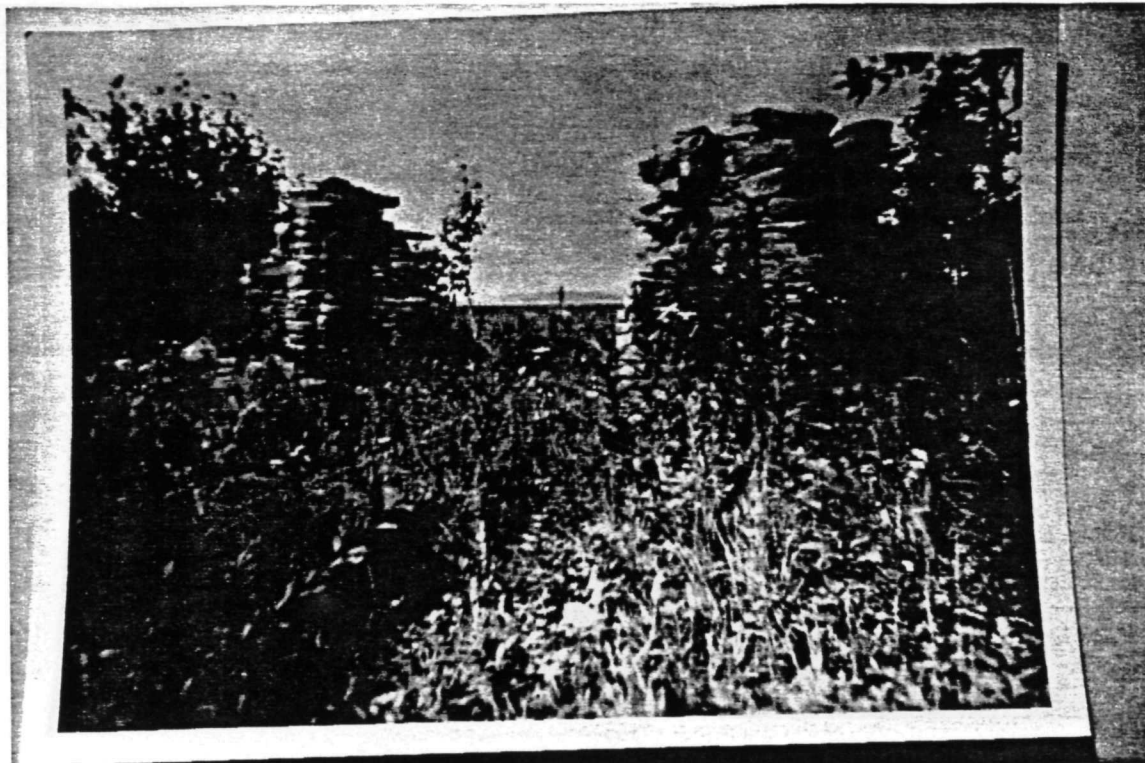
The following photographs offer a glimpse into the life of a family that did not own a camera. These photographs were taken by others and given to the Brierleys and therefore create an outsiders perspective on this interesting family.



1. Part of the Brierley family at the mill at which they lived the first winter at the farm site. Late 1922 or early 1923. Left to right, Clifford, William(Bill), Mabel, Leonard, unknown man and Russel.



2. Russel(Barney), Clifford, Leonard, Edna, William(Bill) and Mabel at back in 1924 or 1925.



3. Chimneys at HBC post site before repairs, probably in the 1920s.



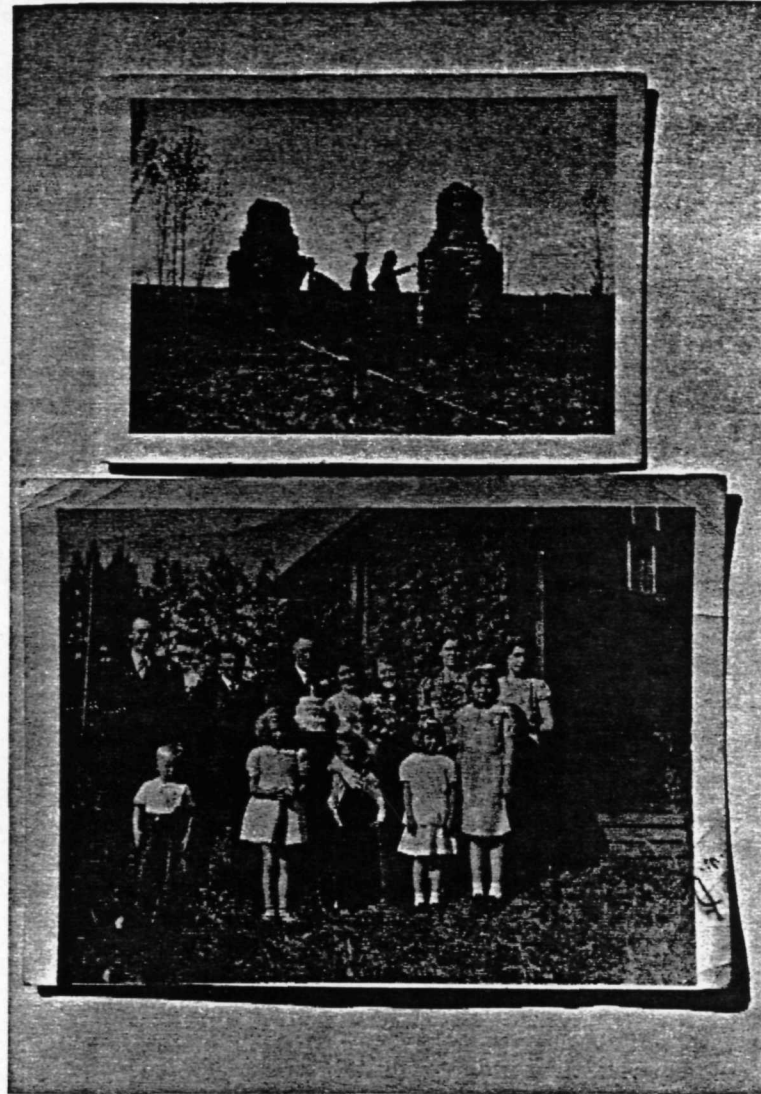
4. Unknown event at the historic chimneys site in the 1950s. Kneeling in front row, left to right, Wally Shier, bakery owner and town councillor, Bob Barber, town councillor, at far right, Stan Hooker, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce manager. Back row, second from left, Mrs. Manning, sixth from left, Mabel Brierley, eleventh from left, Bill Kirby, ninth from right, Alberta Premier Ernest C. Manning, seventh from right, mason George Findlater who repointed the chimneys.



5. Mabel Brierley, age 62, in 1954.



6. Mabel and Chester in the family living room in 1942 or 1943. The mounted deer head was one of four trophy heads which hung in the room.

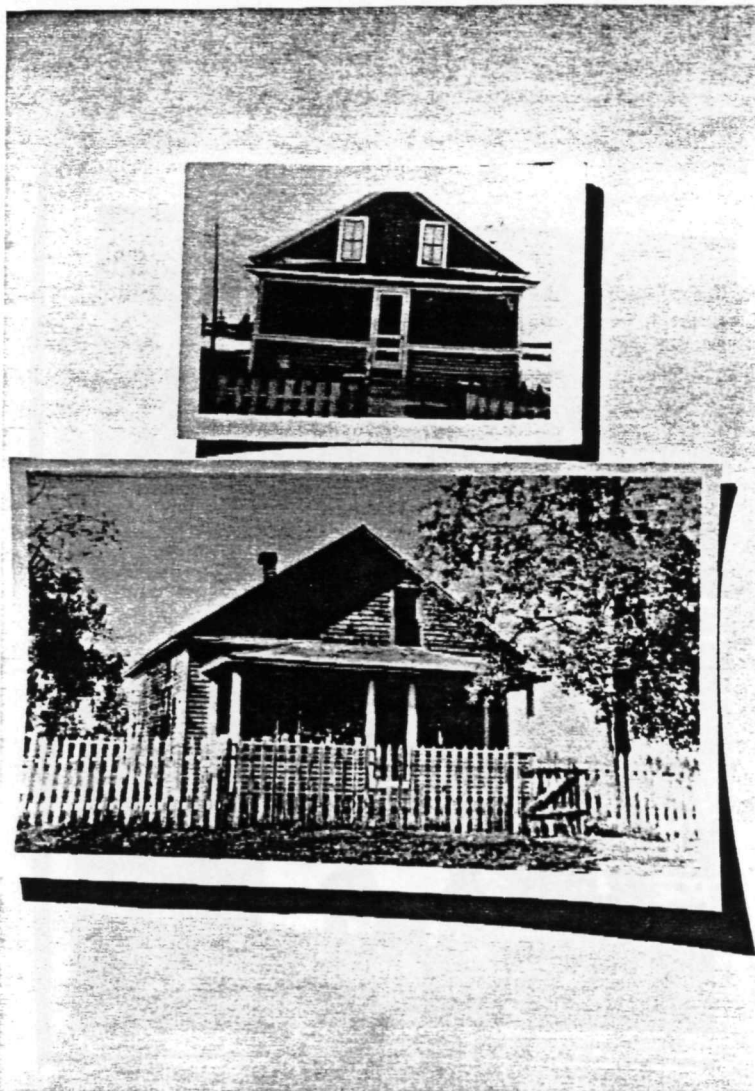


7. Chet at left with two airforce men in 1942 or 1943 at chimney site.

8. Wedding in Rocky Mountain House, 1939, Chester, second from left in the back row and Mabel, third from right in the back row.



9. Brierley home in the late 1922 or 1923 before the porch was added. Clifford Brierley in foreground.



10. Brierley home in 1950 when Mabel and her two remaining children moved to Rocky Mountain House.

11. Brierley home in the late 1920s, before it was painted in 1932.



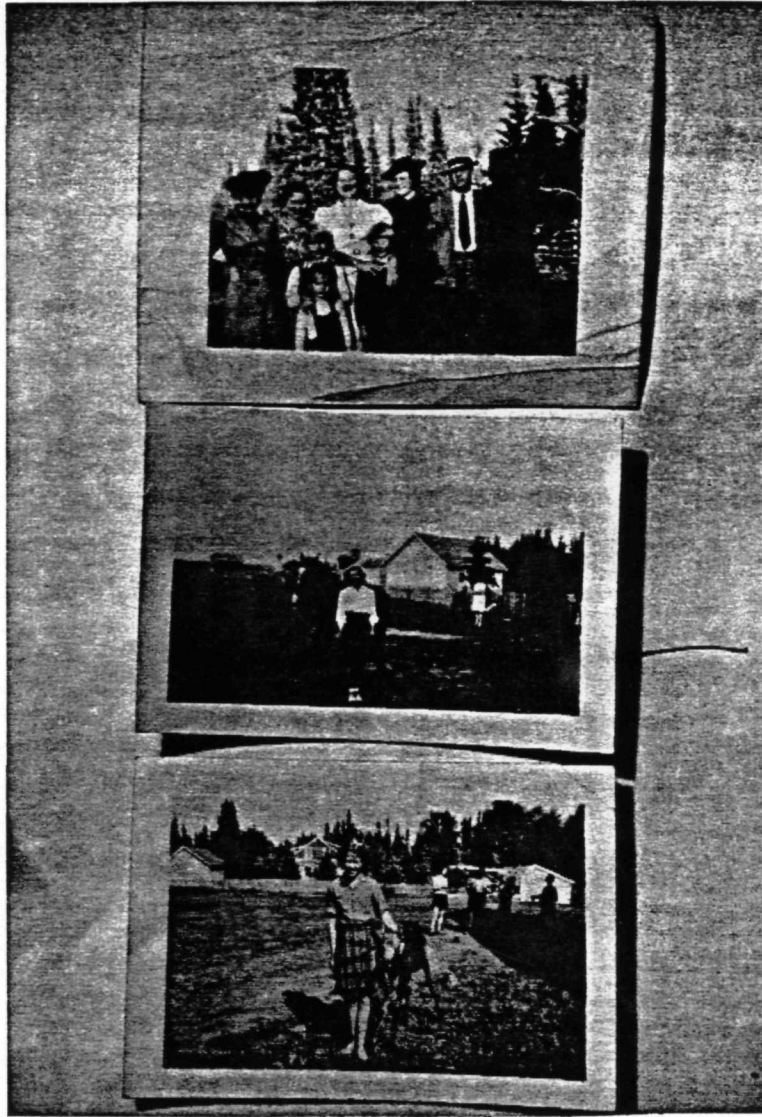
12. A 1943 view of outbuildings and from left to right, Dawn, Gilbert(Bud) with dogs Fly and Tip, and an American army officer who went with Chester on a hunting trip.

13. Gilbert(Bud) on Phylis, a horse bought from the indians, and Dawn on Fly in 1942 or 1943. Buildings, left to right, house and chicken house.



14. Unidentified airmen in 1942 or 1943. Horse at left was named Aberhart, one of Chester Brierley's least liked politicians. Building at right is the machine shed.

15. Three English airforce men, in 1942 or 1943. Mabel was a member of the I.O.D.E. and regularly entertained airforce men at the farm during the war. Buildings, left to right, barn, woodshed, house and corner of chicken house.



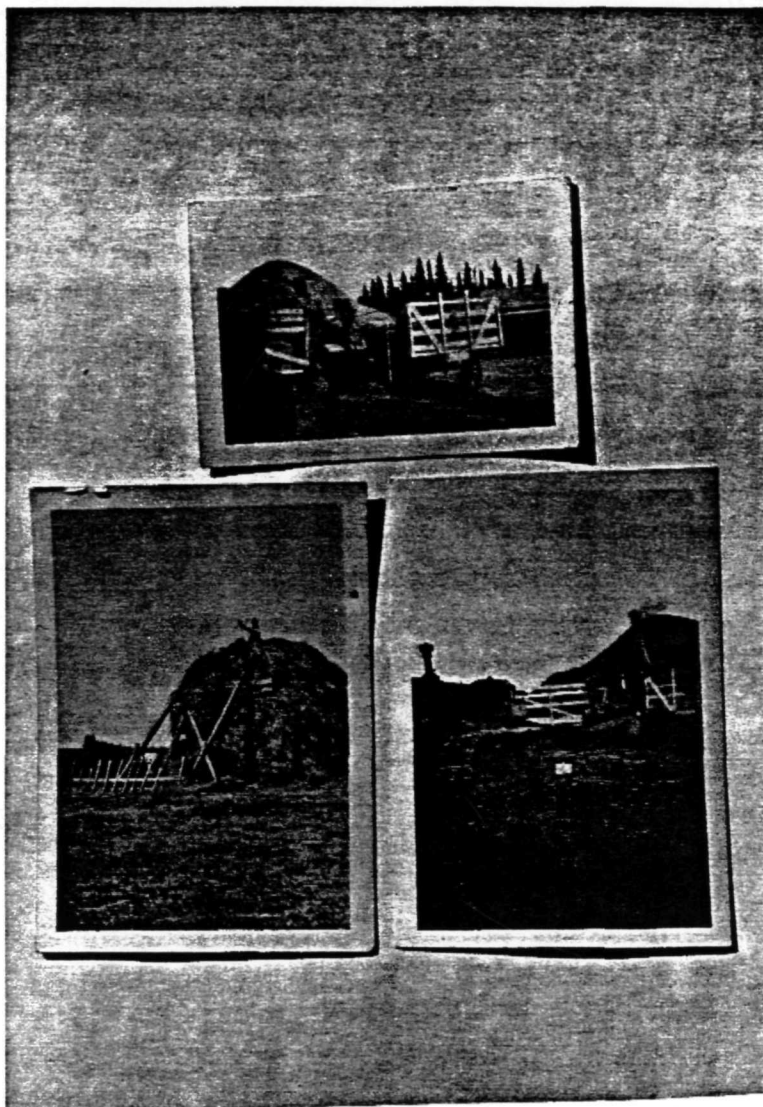
16. Left to right, Mrs. Atkins, her niece from England Sylvia Robins, two Atkin's sons, Mabel, Dawn, unknown lady, HBC land supervisor Ted Atkins and Chester.

17. Dawn and Chubb in 1946. Woodshed at right.

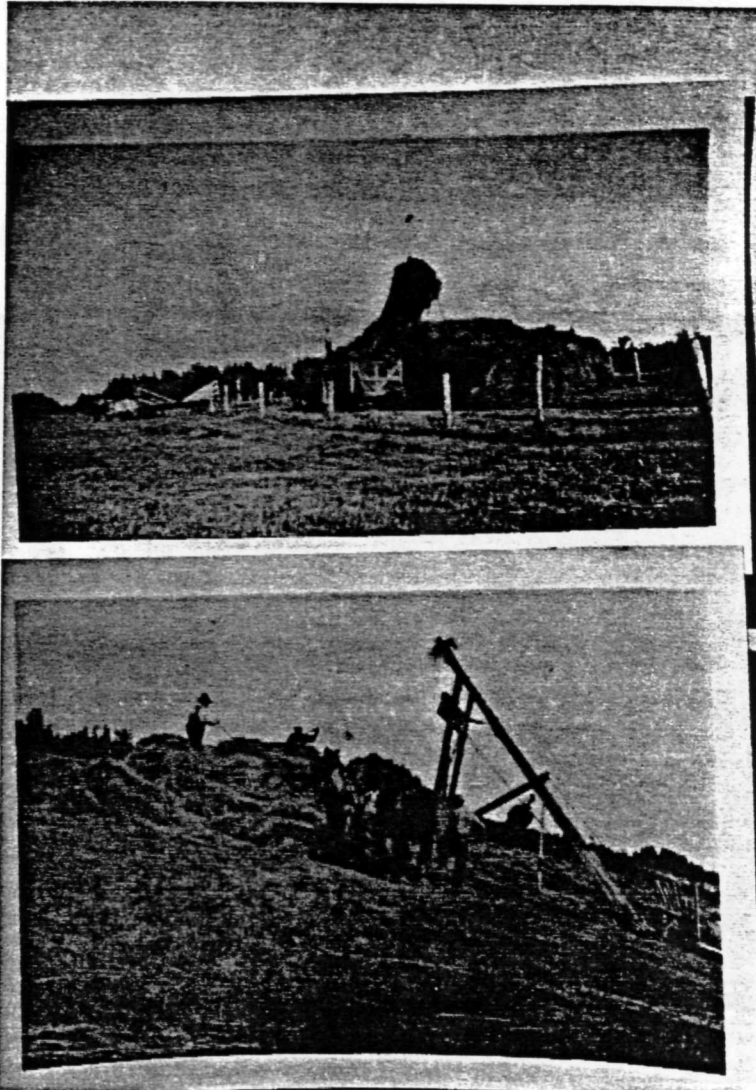
18. Dawn with the pet moose in 1944.



19. Chester Brierley with the pet moose in 1944.



20. Thrashing operations, 1942.  
21. Putting up hay with Chester at the top of the stack.  
22. Thrashing operations by the house, 1942.

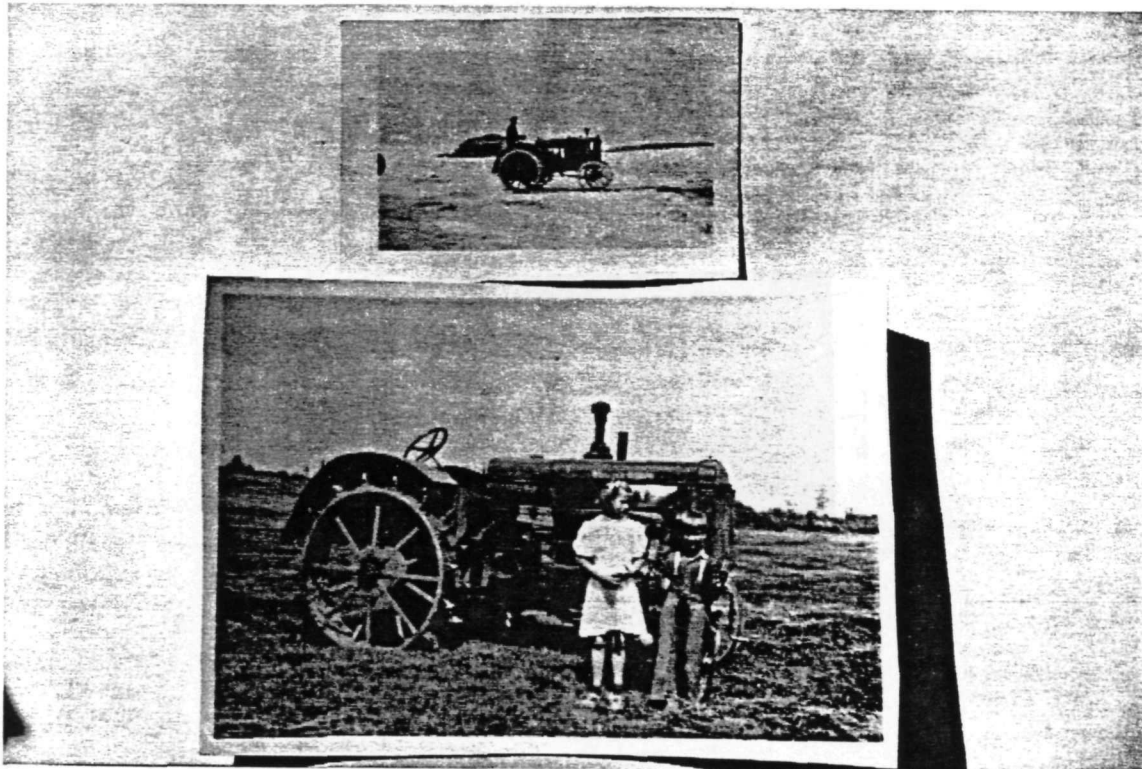


23. Stacking hay with hayfork in the late 1930s.

24. Stacking hay with overshot stacker in 1943. Dawn drove the horses for this operation.



25. Chester, on hay sweep, haying with horses in 1943. He did all the haying with horses. Dawn and Gilbert(Bud) in foreground.



26. W40 McCormack Deering tractor in 1943 with William(Bill) on it.

27. Dawn and Gilbert(Bud) in front of W40 McCormack Deering tractor in 1943.



28. Chester Brierley arranged for the driveway to the house to be cleared for his funeral in 1947. Bunkhouse and garage to the right of the bulldozer.

