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**The Acton Free Press**

G. A. DILLS, Editor  
Established 1875

# His Excellency Goes "Down North"

by ISABEL C. ARMSTRONG, Ottawa  
President of The Canadian Women's Press Club

His Excellency, the Governor-General, has definite proof that there is a Santa Claus and that he lives in the far north of Canada. He met him, in fact, during the past summer when he made a trip to the Western Arctic by the Mackenzie River route. This is the story as it was told to the writer by a member of the party that accompanied Lord Tweedamuir on this journey by river boat and portage transport arranged by the Hudson's Bay Company:



His Excellency The Governor-General

"We left Good Hope on the Mackenzie River about half past seven o'clock in the evening and had not proceeded many miles down stream when we were hailed by a canoe containing the queerest collection of individuals. The ship hove to, to allow the canoe to come alongside, and out stepped a funny little man with a red face, wearing a parka and muskrat skins trailing all around him. Following him was a tall, dignified gentleman with a long white beard, dressed in a very ornate white moose-skin coat and leggings. Behind him was a large man in a yellow parka carrying a tom-tom and snow shoes and also generously adorned with furs of various kinds.

"The little man in front suddenly proclaimed in a loud voice, 'Make way for His Most Enfrosted Majesty'. . . . Of course we were approaching the Arctic Circle and this was King Santa Claus, accompanied by the Arctic Bard and Priest, arriving to examine us before allowing us through. The captain was asked several searching questions, but Santa Claus eventually was satisfied and ordered his Bard to read the proclamation allowing His Excellency to proceed and giving him a welcome to the north. It was the general opinion that this was the first time that any ceremony comparable to crossing the equator had been enacted

dozen chickens and also a horse left with the owner about five miles from Fort Simpson. We stopped there early in the morning to take on wood. The bank was steep and covered with large boulders. The horse went ashore successfully but by the time we left the new owner had been unable to persuade him to climb the bank and was clearing a track. "Extraordinary cheerfulness amongst the people seems to be a trait common in

His Excellency. The usual order was to make a tour of inspection and visit places of outstanding interest. The Grey Nuns were very proud of the nursery and maternity wards in their hospital at Fort Smith. When asked whether these were used much, we were told they had not been used lately but five babies were expected in the month of August and they hoped they would not all arrive at once. "A number of Indian and Eskimo chil-

The great difference between Fort Simpson and previous posts along the route was the wonderful gardens. All sorts of vegetables were grown and somebody even had produced melons. His Excellency was presented, there with a square of caribou skin on which had been beautifully worked a map of the Mackenzie River showing his route from Edmonton to Aklavik.

"Talking of gardens, the fathers and lay brother running the mission at the moment at Good Hope are keen gardeners. It was amazing for the party to see a fine crop of vegetables so far north. In fact, the fathers are carrying out experiments in crop growing for the Dominion Experimental Farms. The most striking thing at the Fort, however, was the Roman Catholic Church built seventy years ago by Father Pettit, assisted by Father Ansel, members of the Oblate Order. Originally the church was built without nails and all building and carving done by mission art of local materials. The barrel ceiling was painted blue and spattered with gold stars. Around the walls were decorative paintings in vivid colors produced by mixing local dyes with fish oil. The Indians were attracted by the bright colors. To make them feel more at home, Pettit gave the various angels dark hair and eyes instead of the more usual golden hair and blue eyes.

"A feature of the stay at Fort Macpherson was a walk along the river bank to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police barracks. In the North West Territories all dogs have to be tethered during the summer to prevent danger to the population. They are tied to a stake, usually on the sea shore, by a not very long steel chain. Owing to the good fishing in the river at Fort Macpherson, the police col-



His Excellency choosing a fly from his book before he attempts to lure the fish of northern waters



The Governor-General in a reflective moment during his journey into the North

crossing the Arctic Circle and we hope it is not the last." The expedition had been on its way "down north" for several days after setting sail when the incident occurred. First it was necessary to fare forth on a scow pushed by a steamboat down the Clearwater, because of low water, to reach the stern wheeler, "Athabasca River," in which the first part of the voyage was made. Then there was an eighteen mile portage from Fort Fitzgerald to Fort Smith—named after Donald Smith, afterwards Lord Strathcona—and embarkation there on the "Distributor," a similar but slightly larger edition of the "Athabasca River."

A query, "His Excellency does not mind hardships in travel?" was met by a prompt answer, "There really were not any and I do want to say how excellent the arrangements were made by the Hudson's Bay Company. Lord Tweedamuir had a most comfortable cabin, in fact two knocked into one, I think. The cook took very good care of us. Of course, it got colder as we went towards the Arctic, but that simply was a matter of putting on an extra sweater.

"We were quite an imposing procession as we advanced through lake and river. The 'Distributor,' a flat bottomed boat, had two flat bottomed scows, about one hundred feet long, secured one ahead of the other in front. These scows were loaded with provisions, petrol, etc., for the northern posts. On the roofs were secured canoes, dog sleds, with a liberal supply of dried fish which was to be used as dog feed during the winter. We also had quite a floating farmyard and barnyard chorus in the mornings. The 'Distributor' was used as a restaurant by the inhabitants of each post where she stayed long enough for a meal. For the consumption of the passengers and visitors there were carried three bullocks, two sheep, three pigs, one turkey, about two

the north. It is curious how the latest mechanical devices are used there not to complicate but to simplify life. At the pleasant and historic post, Fort Chipewyan, His Excellency was shown a replica of a sundial which Sir John Franklin erected during one of his visits to enable the Indians to tell the time. The present one is on the original site but the Indians prefer to get their time by radio. At each stop practically the whole population turned out to greet and welcome

dren from the Roman Catholic school, the girls dressed in black with white Eton collars, were at the pier at Fort Resolution and waved assorted flags. At Providence the children from the Roman Catholic school presented a picturesque appearance in bright colors, pinks, browns, purples, with gay green scarves on their heads. We visited the spotlessly clean school and a concert was given for His Excellency by the children who had been rehearsing for the event since December.



Lord Tweedamuir strides over the tundra on an inspection-tour where Radium was found in 1930



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