

A HISTORY OF EDMONTON DIVISION R.C.M.P.
VETERANS ASSOCIATION

On July 8th., 1874 a newly formed contingent of two hundred and seventy five men left Fort Dufferin, Manitoba under the command of Commissioner G. A. French. This was the real beginning of the North West Mounted Police. An organization formed to bring law and order to the west.

This force travelled to Roche Percée where on August 28th., 1874 it was divided into two divisions. One of these divisions was under the command of Inspector Jarvis who travelled to Edmonton, arriving October 27th., 1874. Many of the men in this division were to form the Edmonton Division of the Veterans association in later years.

The R.C.M.P. Veterans Association however, really got its start in Vancouver B.C., prior to the spring of 1913 when several ex-members met and were talking over old times, spinning a few yarns and enjoying each others company.

It was decided that an advertisement be put in the newspaper stating that a meeting would be held and for all interested to attend. One of these was Reverend H.C. Lewis Hooper who after leaving the force studied for the ministry and returned to Canada where he became rector of All Saints Church on Victoria Drive in Vancouver.

The Reverend Lewis Hooper made available the sunday school in the basement of his church for the first meeting which was held on May 19th., 1913 with about seventy members present.

The members present enthusiastically declared that an association should be formed and a motion to that effect was carried.

Elected at the first organizational meeting were:

President: Lt. Col. L.W.Herchmer - Ex-Commissioner
Vice President: Lt. Col. J.H.McIllvee DSO - Ex Asst/Commr.
2nd., Vice President: Major A.E.Snyder - Adjutant
Secretary: P.S.Howard
Treasurer: C.R.Filtness
Chaplain: Rev. H.C.Lewis Hooper
Executive Committee:

H. desBarnes
S.H.Goodall
S. Burgoyne
W. Latimer
G. Mathewson
A. Meaken

A committee was appointed to prepare by-laws and a constitution. The meeting adopted as one of the main objects for which the association was formed, "To hold itself as a body at the service of the Government of Canada when called upon" Also to assist in every way, the parent body.

Ex-member of other Cities started forming similar Divisions at that time but the World War intervened delaying many of these

Divisions from formalizing their organization. Many of the men joined a volunteer Reserve force with the older men becoming a home guard unit.

After the war, interest was renewed in the formation of Veterans Associations in many Cities. A meeting was held in Edmonton on November 6th., 1919 with one hundred and twenty seven men in attendance.

On September 2nd., 1920 an Annual General meeting was held in Vancouver with Dr. E.A.Braithwaite, J.D. Nicholson and P.H.Tucker from Edmonton in attendance. There was considerable discussion about a suitable place to establish the Headquarters and eventually Edmonton was chosen. Several years later, it was moved to Calgary and eventually transferred to Ottawa.

The Original charter of the R.N.W.M.P. Veterans Association in Edmonton was issued on January 14th., 1924.

During these early years, one annual function which was always well attended by members and wives was the annual dinner and dance held at the MacDonald Hotel in February of each year. One of the special features on the dinner menu of these affairs was the inclusion of buffalo meat with the main course.

Unfortunately, minutes of early meetings have been lost and the actual size of the membership is not known.

The association did flourish however and a new charter was issued to "G" Division Edmonton R.C.M.P. Veterans Association on December 9th., 1948.

A small piece of the history of the force came into play when in 1886 The Officer Commanding Lethbridge Sub/Division planted a tree at his quarters in Lethbridge. In 1945, a limb from this tree was used by E.E."Buck" Buchanan to make a gavel. As a member of "G" Division "Buck" donated the gavel to the Division and it was used at all meetings until 1980 when it was finally retired to a place of honour and it was replaced at the meetings with a new gavel presented to the Division by our then Twin Division in Montreal.

In 1950 it was brought to the attention of the members that gravesites of members in the R.N.W.M.P. Veterans plot at the Edmonton cemetery were being neglected. This was quickly rectified and a committee was appointed to maintain the sites and report periodically if need be on any maintenance requirements.

On September 26, 1951 eight members including our President and secretary attended at the R.N.W.M.P. plot where a wreath was laid and a ceremony held by the Chaplain of the Canadian Legion who was present at the time and graciously offered his services for this particular occasion.

In November 1951 the regular meeting was held in the Army, Navy and Airforce Club Room with 21 members in attendance.

Comrade Buchanan was elected President for the coming year giving him the opportunity to wield the gavel which he had so generously donated to the Association. It was at this same meeting that a decision was made to have the entertainment committee locate suitable premises for future meetings of the association.

In January 1952 the Association started to hold regular meetings at the Sargents Mess R.C.E.M.E. Edmonton.

Considerable discussion took place over a period of time with regard to changing the Association name from R.N.W.M.P. Veterans Association to R.C.M.P. Veterans Association. This change was authorized at the Annual General Meeting and the change was officially noted at the September 1953 meeting.

The Annual Banquet was held in November 1953 and Neil Primrose Q.C. offered a duck dinner which was accepted with pleasure.

In March 1954 The President and Secretary made the presentation of a large colored framed picture of Her Majesty the Queen in her Coronation robes to Lieut., Smaile of the 38th., Squadron R.C.E.M.E. to be placed in the Sargents Mess as a token of our appreciation for having been allowed the use of their premises and facilities for our meetings.

At the September 1954 meeting unanimous approval was given to having a letter of congratulations drafted and sent to The Honourable Mr. Justice Neil Primrose on his appointment to the Supreme Court.

For the first time, the association decided to have an annual Banquet with both members and wives, or lady companion. It was held November 24th., 1954 with a good turnout. The cost was \$ 5.00 per couple or \$ 3.00 for single. The Banquet was considered to be a great success.

Once again it became necessary for the Association to find new quarters in which to hold regular meetings. This time, it was at the 418 City of Edmonton Squadron R.C.A.F. Auxiliary Airmens Lounge on Kinsway Avenue. Only three meetings were held on these premises in February, March and April 1955 then more permanent accomodation was found in the Board Room of St. John Ambulance Headquarters, 110 St., and Jasper, Avenue.

In March 1956 Commissioner H Darling of St. John Ambulance was presented on behalf of our association with framed colour photograph of Her Majesty the Queen to hang in the Boardroom. Prior to this date, Commissioner Darling had refused to allow any pictures to be hung in their premises. He was delighted with our gift which he had given special status so that it could be hung in their boardroom..

In 1957 the Association was approached by The representative of "Scarlet and Gold" Mr. L.B. Benjamin who gave a short talk to the members and propped an Annual Benifit Ball which would be sponsored by our Association. His organization would attend

to the organization and running of the Banquet and he assured the members present that in his opinion at least \$ 1,000.00 could be raised for our Association. After several months of consideration, Mr. Benjamin was given the go-ahead.

Mr. Benjamin attended of meeting in January 1958 and presented the Association with a cheque for \$ 1,500.00 and advised that there would be a further settlement when all bookkeeping was completed.

In the spring of 1958 the City of Edmonton Archives & Landmarks Department made plans to build the Braithewaite Cairne and Placque and unveil it in late spring or summer. Since the placque carries the name of our Association as one group responsible for its erection, a \$ 25.00 donation was made to the project. The unveiling took place in early June with several of our members present.

In March of 1959 we had a visit from Mr. Gieb of the Royal Life Saving Society who gave a short talk on the work of their Society and he stated that they were looking for a organization to sponsor a trophy for annual competition among their branches.

It was decided that such trophy be purchased and presented to the Royal Life Saving Society. This was done at a cost of \$ 60.00 The trophy was presented to the Society at the Examiners dinner and at that time they proposed the appointment of a member of the R.C.M.P. Veterans Association as an honorary member of their association. It was decided that the post should be filled by our President.

A ten plot grave site in Beechmount centary was obtained in 1959. It was named the R.C.M.P. Veterans plot. Our total membership at the time was seventy nine. This plot has since been filled by ten of our respected members.

In 1960 the wives of "G" Division members formed a womans auxiliary to our association and it has been active along with our Division. Although their present strength small, they provide a great deal of incentive and assistance to our members.

For many years, our Division had to move to new quarters periodically. Among the places meetings were held two included the hospitality rooms of local breweries. Finally in 1961 arrangements were successfully completer to hold our monthly meetings at the R.C.M.P. Sargents Mess in "K" Division headquarters. The regular monthly meetings have been held there ever since.

During 1962 and 1963 long term negotiations took place which opened up the opportunity for members of our Association to obtain coverage through M.S.I.) Medical Sergical Insurance.

A mixed social was held in the "K" Division Mess on November 26, 1963 which rounded out what had been an otherwise rather quiet year. The members expressed their appreciation to the O.C. :K: Division for having allowed the Association the opportunity to use the Mess for this social event.

A movement began in early 1964 to examine the possibility of moving Dominion Headquarters from Calgary to Ottawa to better serve the entire Association. The final result was that the move was made at the end of the year. This move was closely examined to determine how the move would effect our Division.

In March 1965 the necessity of a Liason Officer between "G" Division and Headquarter in Ottawa was given approval and Comrade Fred Oswin was appointed. Since that time, this appointment has been found to be unnecessary as the current President and Secretary act a liason with Headquarters.

Also in 1965, a great deal of attention was being focused on civil defence and the Alberta Government Telephones put on a demonstration of civil defence co-ordination. Most of the members and their wives were in attendance at the display which was considered to be a great success.

In 1965 "G" Division got directly involved in the political aspect of capital punishment and sent a resolution to Ottawa proposing the retention of capital punishment in the Criminal Code. Since that date, the matter has been supported by the membership of "G" Division who now have taken the position of supporting re-enstatement of capital punishment for certain types of murder and especially first degree murder.

During 1966 and 1967, large turnouts at the regular meetings resulted in some of the meetings being again held in both th hospitality rooms of Bohemian Maid and Labatt's Breweries in Edmonton. This problem was overcome when "K" Division moved into its present location at 109 St., and Kingsway Avenue where the Sargents Mess is adequate for all regular meetings.

In May of 1967 "G" Division was contacted ty the City of Edmonton who advised that they were setting aside a small piece of land to the memory of the late Constable Edgar Millen of the R.C.M.P. who was killed by "The Mad Trapper" Johnson. This piece of land is situated in the area of the city where Millen grew up. The city was proposing that a cairne be erected and our involvement was requested.

In June it was learned that the piece of land had been officially set aside and a \$100.00 donation was made by "G" Division toward construction of a cairne. It was also decided that the cairne should become our centennial project.

Many of our members donated money toward the project and the fruits of our labour were officially unveiled and dedicated on Friday May 31st., 1968 at 2:00 PM with His Honour the Lieutenant Governor and the Honorable Mr Justice Neil Primrose officiating. Along with many of our own members in blue blazers, regimental ties and medals, two classes of students from school where Millen had attend were present at the ceremonies.

By 1968 social functions had become a very large part of the activities of the organization and two such functions about this time stand out from the rest. They were two bus trips, one in 1968 and the other in 1969 to Mynarski Park at Penhold where the members of "G" Division and their wives were able to watch the R.C.M.P. Training centre recruits being put through their paces.

In 1970, a collection of mementos, photos and news articles of interest to our members and the Force was started. Over the years, this collection has grown to a fairly large exhibit and gives the viewer a little insite into the Force in "Our" time.

Most members of the Division became involved in various activities during 1973 and the R.C.M.P. Centennial celebration was a much talked about subject for many months.

The ladies auxiliary were finally able to obtain a room in "K" Division in May of 1973 in which to hold monthly meetings at the same time as the Association was meeting in the Sargents Mess.

Some of the R.C.M.P. Centennial celebrations which our members attended included Ceremonies at the Blood Indian Reserve in Southern Alberta where both the Indians and the R.C.M.P. provided some of the entertainment. The function at the Legislative grounds was well attended by our members as well, The celebrations also carried over into 1974 with members in attendance at functions all over the Province.

Some members of the Ladies auxiliary wrote their story of tales of the R.C.M.P. And published a book entitled Red Serge Wives. Members of the Association assisted where they could to help distribute and sell the book which was a great success.

For many years the position of Division Chaplin had been vacant but in October 1974 Comrade J. Barford was nominated and accepted the position.

In 1974 our President C.T.A.Hutchings was kept busy attending functions as representative of our Association among those attended were the function at which Honorary Membership was conferred on Liet-Governor Grant MacEwan. Representing the Association at the Boy Scouts Annual Jamboree on ice. The President and his wife also represented the veterans at a dinner honouring the Force, at Canadian Forces Officers Mess at Namao.

The president and members participated in the Canada Day exercises held on the Legislative Grounds. Also, on August 5th., the Division was invited to attend the ceremonies held in connection with the opening of Fort Edmonton.

The President and Comrade Jack Stewart represented the Division in the annual Klondike Days parade and during the year several members attended various schools in the region to assist with various project being sponsored by the students regarding the Centennial.

One of the highlights of the year was contribution by members to the purchase of and installation of a memorial window in All Saints Cathedral in honour of the first enlisted member of the Force, Arthur Henry Griesbach. This took place on sunday October 27th., in the form of a Church parade with representation by both Veterans and serving members.

After a very hectic year of Centennial celebrations, the next two year seemed tame and uneventful. This gave the members an opportunity to contact retired members of the Force with a view to having them join the Association. This membership drive was quite effective and increased our membership substantially.

One event in 1977 was considered very detrimental to the Force and the Association did its part to put pressure where it would do the most good. An ex-member Jack Ramsay who left the force because of a disagreement with how the Force should operate was appointed Omsbudsman with the Alberta branch of the department of Indian Affairs with the responsibility of investigating complaints and allegations of treaty right violations, assess native policing on reserves and examine the liason roles between the department, band constables and the RCMP. Fortunately Mr. Ramsay didn't last in the position for very long and no serious damage was done by his appointment.

The members purchased a Bingo game the previous January and after the occasional meeting, the auxiliary ladies would join the members and have a rousing bingo game with donated prizes or cash.

In late 1977 several news articles put great pressure on the Security & Intelligence section of the Force for working outside the law in order to protect the country. The Association in an effort to get the public behind the Force began distributing buttons on which the following words were emblazoned. "THANK GOD WE HAVE THE RCMP" The President M.W.(Mac) MacKenzie on Friday January 6th., 1978 presented the first button issued in Alberta to the Solicitor-General the Honorable Roy Farran, as he was the first Minister who arose in the Provincial Legislature in defence of the Force. This presentation received both newspaper and TV coverage.

In October of 1978 members, family and friends along with members of Edmonton Division had the pleasure of meeting in the "K" Division Mess to help celebrate the 100th., birthday of comrade Fred Bard. At the time, comrade Bard was the oldest living ex-member of the Force.

In the spring of 1979, the President Mac MacKenzie sent a copy of a brief to Alderman E.H. Leger of the Edmonton City Council regarding the Parole system and how it relates to parolees convicted of violent crimes in the hope that the City of Edmonton would assist in putting pressure on Government officials to reduce the number of offenders of violent crimes from being given early parole. Although this matter was discussed at all levels of Government, little if anything has changed or appears likely to change in the near future.

It was during 1979 that through the efforts of our President, "G" Division became twinned with Montreal Division and it was hoped that this would bring the two Divisions closer together and help promote friendship and understanding with our Quebec counterparts.

An application was made to hold the Annual General Meeting in Edmonton. This privilege was granted for the spring of 1982 and members of the Division made many suggestions on how to finance the venture. It was finally decided that one of the best ways would be to sell belts and "T" shirts displaying the RCMP crest. A great deal of credit must go to comrade Harold Routledge who succeeded in selling Thousands of dollars worth of our products. Many other members also sold a large number of items and we had no difficulty in financing the A.G.M.

Also in 1979 the Edmonton Northlands was preparing to celebrate its 100th., birthday. Among the ideas they were attempting to organize was an appropriate tribute to the N.W.M.P. One major project being examined was a theatre style building to house a 180 degree giant screen, three dimensional and multi speaker sound re-creation system to project three special events. The first was the swearing in of the first Mountie N.W.M.P. No. 1 A.H.Griesbach. The second was the saga of the hardship filled 900 mile trek west of "A" Troop from Roche Perce to their last camp at Rat Creek before arriving at Fort Edmonton. which was then situated on the site of the present Legislative buildings.

The third was to provide three life size statues to be placed at the entrance to the attraction. They were to be of "A" Troop commander Inspector William Dummer Jarvis on horseback. The legendary tough "A" Troop Sergeant-Major Sam Steel and the first Canadian Mountie A.H. Griesbach.

Unfortunately funding for this ambitious project could not be found and the entire idea had to be scrapped in 1980.

Edmonton Division was given the honour of hosting the 1982 A.G.M. and most of 1980 was spent in organizing and preparing programs and tours for the event.

In September 1981 Comrade Mac MacKenzie chairman of the A.G.M. committee reported that fund raising was progressing well with donations from the Province, some large corporations and an exerted effort on the part of members in selling belts, T shirts and the like and in this regard special mention had to be made of comrade Harold Routledge who had sold more than all the other members put together.

Also in September of 1991 one of our long time associates Mrs., Lillian Smith celebrated her 100th., birthday and members of the Division put on a party to help her celebrate the occasion. At the party, she was presented with the Lt., Governors Certificate and our Division members presented her with a plaque to commemorate the occasion.

Early in 1982 the Ladies W.A. was called upon to lend assistance with the many programs, tours etc., planned for the A.G.M. They had been quietly but efficiently making arrangements in this regard and their assistance was invaluable in the overall handling of this large undertaking. Their members stepped forward and volunteered to assist at the reception desk, acting as guides for groups on tour etc.,

The A.G.M. ran from May 21 to May 23 1982 at the Four Seasons Hotel. It was one of the best on record. The meals were delicious, the Edmonton Firefighters Band excellent and the company delightful.

After the event was over, the committee tallied all the bills and receipts and it was found that the Division ended up with a healthy financial surplus which was carefully invested for future use by the Division.

In September 1982 it was decided that some of our surplus funds should be used to upgrade the equipment of the Secretary/Treasurer by purchasing a new typewriter and adding machine. Consideration was also given to purchase a new photocopying machine to replace the old gestetner. This was done in January of 1983 when a Canon 200 copier and some filing cabinets were purchased.

As our membership includes many who are a little long of tooth and hard of hearing, it was decided that we should also look into purchasing a P.A. System of some sort for use at all regular meetings.

A long time supporter of our Division A/Comm'r G.B. McClellan (retired) passed away in January 1984. Our Division in recognition of his long time support decided to look into the possibility of placing a bronze plaque in his honour on the wall in All Saints Cathedral near the stain glass window commemorating Arthur Henry Griesbach. This proposal was agreed to by the McClellan family and the church however, due to renovations at the church it was some considerable time before the plaque could be installed.

Once again grave sites at the RCMP plot were filling up and the Division decided to purchase three additional plots which had become available. This was accomplished in March of 1986.

The A.G.M. was held in Calgary in May 1986 at which time the Guidon was officially presented to the Veterans Association and each Division was presented with a Division Guidon flag with the Division name thereon.

The Flag was presented at the September 1986 meeting and it was decided that henceforth it be displayed during all regular meetings and that it should be carried during all official ceremonies such as the November 11th., parade.

Ass't Commr Dave Whyte retired from the Force in March 1987 and as he was moving to B.C. the membership requested his attendance at our regular meeting at which time he was presented with a retirement gift in appreciation for his assistance and friendship during the past several years.

1988 saw a concentrated effort by members to increase the membership of the Division. It was noted that although a few retired members of the Force joined our Ranks each year, many were not heard from. This resulted in a gradual increase in the number of applications for membership.

In June 1988 a new I.D. card was developed for all Veterans and as the year progressed, the members with the co-operation of "K" Division Ident section were able to have photos taken and the I.D. cards were produced. This was not completed until the fall of 1989.

In February 1989 our long time Secretary-treasurer H.H.C. (Holly) Hervey submitted his resignation as Secretary-treasurer due to poor health. He continued to attend meetings when his health permitted. Without his dedication to his position over the previous twelve years, much of this history would not be available.

A new committee was formed to update our By-laws as this had not been done for many years.

Commissioner Inkster had requested authority to amend R.R.&O's to allow members of the Force of Sikh faith permission to wear a turban with the uniform of the Force. Much ado was made of this fact during 1989 and one Division of the Veterans Association took legal action in this regard. Edmonton Division members gave very serious consideration to the subject and after a great deal of soul searching on the part of the membership, it was decided that our Division would not take an active part in any action to prevent the uniform change.

Comrade Charles R. Whittaker of our Division turned 100 in June 1989 and on June 27th., at our regular monthly meeting, a large turnout was present to assist him to celebrate the occasion. He was presented with a plaque from "K" Division Headquarters, A certificate of congratulations and appreciation from the Boy Scouts, A plaque from Branch No. 150 Strathcona Royal Canadian Legion, a letter from Commissioner N.D. Inkster and Edmonton Division provided a huge birthday cake.

Our Division received a request from Dominion headquarters in November 1989 asking that members look into the possibility of helping in community work in co-operation with the regular members of the R.C.M.P. Sgt. Gesey had been appointed by the C.O. "K" Division as co-ordinator between the Force and the Veterans Association.

At our regular meeting in January 1990, Sgt. Gesey outlined several areas where our members could assist the Force and several members immediately volunteered to fill those positions requiring immediate help. One area of assistance was in the processing of regional requests for films, literature and Video for presentation at Division levels throughout the northern part of the Province.

In February 1990 it was learned that Edmonton would be the host city for the International Law enforcement Olympics and a large number of veterans volunteered to assist in such things as operating the souvenir store, driving vans and assisting at many of the venues.

The By-law committee presented their proposal to the meeting in April 1990 and after careful consideration they were passed unanimously.

The International Law Enforcement Olympics were a great success thanks in part to the many members of our Division who gave so selflessly of their time and efforts. The Veterans Association took advantage in a small way of the Olympics and we were successful in selling a large quantity of belts, T shirts and other accoutrements before and during the games. As we had a rather large supply of stock left over after the games, a committee was struck to control and sell this stock. Our share of the profits would be earmarked for the A.G.M. in Edmonton with 25% being donated to Crime Stoppers.

Edmonton Division made a bid to host the A.G.M. in 1993 and we were succesful in this regard.

A committee to oversee the preparations for the A.G.M. was struck in February 1991 with Comrade Mac MacKenzie as chairman with power to add members as and when necessary.

A special purchase of vintage wine was made complete with an appropriate label for the A.G.M. Arrangements were maded to store the wine in the winery until the time of the meeting.

It was at this same meeting that S/Sgt Gesey made available to the meeting for future use, some sound equipment of the Force. He advised that this equipment was available for as long as we had a need for it.

As the cost of living rises each year so does the cost of operating the Division. It was therefore decided that the annual dues of the Division will be \$ 20.00 per year starting in January 1992

At the March 1991 meeting a report was made on a letter from Cst. A. Findlay of Aboriginal Policing Services requesting the R.C.M.P. Veterans Association sponsor a Scholarship. This matter was tabled until it could be carefully studied and our responsibility in such a venture could be determined.

As this brings up to date, the history of the Division as at June 1991, the membership stands at two hundred and twenty eight members, associate members and honorary members.

All of which is respectfully submitted for your information.



D.G. (Don) Fraser