

PETER GARRIOCH AT ST. PETER'S, 1837

CREDIT FOR whatever new light this article may shed upon early Minnesota history should be given to Peter Garrioch, a maternal uncle of the writer. He was born on July 5, 1811, on an island in Lake Winnipeg, where his parents were forced to encamp while on a journey from Norway House to Swan River in the interior of Rupert's Land. An Indian squaw cared for the mother, who with other members of the party continued the journey next morning as if nothing unusual had happened. Peter's mother was Nancy Cook, a daughter of William Hemmings Cook, governor of York Factory under the Hudson's Bay Company, and his wife, Mary. The latter was the youngest daughter of Matthew Cocking, a well-known explorer who traveled to the Blackfoot country from Hudson Bay in 1772-73, and kept an interesting and valuable journal of his trip that is now in the Public Archives of Canada.¹

Following the example of his noted forebear, Peter Garrioch adopted the practice of keeping a diary. Although this record has survived only in fragmentary form, it is nevertheless a document of much interest and value to the historian. The present writer is now engaged in editing for publication this journal, which records experiences in what are now Manitoba, North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, the Missouri country, Illinois, and Ohio, and covers the ten-year period from 1837 to 1847. Extracts from it are quoted in the present article.

Garrioch's journal opens with a day-by-day account of a trip made in 1837 by Red River cart and canoe from the Red River settlement at Fort Garry to St. Peter's at the

¹ Peter Garrioch married Margaret McKenzie, eldest daughter of Kenneth McKenzie, the famous fur trader who organized the upper Missouri outfit of the American Fur Company, built Fort Union, and was widely known as the "King of the Missouri."

junction of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers. The diarist left "old Orkney Cottage," the family home on the Red River near Middlechurch, on June 14 with a party composed of both traders and emigrants. Among its members were some of the hardy Scotch folk who founded the "Scotch Grove" settlement in Iowa. Garrioch, who had been employed as a teacher in an Anglican school for boys at St. John's, now a part of Winnipeg, started south in 1837 in search of higher education, with a view to entering the ministry of the Anglican church. All proceeded as far as Fort Snelling, where, after various interesting experiences, they arrived safe at 2:00 P. M. on July 27, just forty-three days after leaving Fort Garry.

Big things, which engrossed the diarist's attention, were then on foot at Fort Snelling. These were the negotiations between the United States government and the Chippewa of Minnesota, which resulted in the treaty of 1837. Garrioch describes the proceedings as follows :

July 27. Thursday. . . . The American Government were in the act of forming a treaty with the Chippewas of the Mississippi. The delegate appointed to conduct the operation was Governor [Henry] Dodge of the Wisconsin Territory. I spent the greater part of this day in listening to the remarks of the Governor, and to the eloquent speeches of the Chippewa chieftains.

July 28. Friday. Spent the greater part of this day also at the place of treating, which was a shade previously erected for this purpose. Several lengthy and most eloquent harangues were delivered by two or three of the principal chiefs during the treaty. The rest of the chiefs, about twenty in number, did not appear to take any part in the way of speaking, but spent their time in consulting with each other, and dictating to those who addressed the Governor and the Assembly.

The land to be purchased from the Chippewas, amounting to about a million and a half acres, was valued at \$800,000; out of which \$100,000 was to be received by the Chippewa half-breeds, and \$70,000 by the American Fur Company, for old debts due by the nation to that Company. The remainder, after the above deduction, was, according to the treaty, to be paid to the Chippewas concerned in twenty installments, covering twenty years.

The treaty, by which the Chippewa ceded to the United States a large tract of land between the St. Croix and the Mississippi, was signed on Saturday, July 29. In his entry for the following Tuesday, August 1, Garrioch again refers to the treaty:

The last of the provisions allowed by Government to the Chippewas, during the treaty, was given out to-day. The whole allowance, I understood, was to be 100 barrels of Indian corn, 60 barrels of pork and 60 barrels of flour; the pork weighing, each barrel, 256 lbs., and the flour and Indian corn, each barrel, 196 lbs.

Unfortunately, Garrioch did not take advantage of the opportunity to give a more detailed picture of the twelve hundred Indians who, according to Major Lawrence Taliaferro, the Indian agent at Fort Snelling, had assembled for the treaty.²

The St. Peter's settlement to which Garrioch went in the summer of 1837 included a number of small settlements about the mouth of the Minnesota, or St. Peter's, River. Chief among them was the little hamlet now known as Mendota, across the Minnesota from Fort Snelling. When a cart caravan left the Red River settlement for the south, its stated destination was not Fort Snelling, but St. Peter's, where were located the headquarters of the American Fur Company. As Garrioch uses the term, it embraces the entire group of hamlets at the mouth of the Minnesota. He himself lived in the Baker settlement; yet he speaks of having spent the winter at St. Peter's, and it is to St. Peter's that he bids farewell when he leaves in the spring.³

According to Garrioch, the settlements about the mouth of the Minnesota River consisted of a number of small hamlets peopled by French, Swiss, Swedes, Indians, half-breeds of various nationalities, and a sprinkling of English-speaking Americans and Canadians, with an occasional Negro. The

² Return I. Holcombe, *Minnesota in Three Centuries*, 2:278 (New York, 1908).

³ Garrioch Journal, May 2, 1838. The term "St. Peter's" is sometimes used in the general sense in the present article.

largest of these scattered groups was, of course, the Fort Snelling garrison, which might be regarded as the center of the settlement. Captain Martin Scott of the Fifth United States Infantry was the commanding officer when Garrioch arrived in July, 1837, but he was replaced a month later by Captain Joseph Plympton of the same regiment.⁴ Prominent among the buildings at Mendota across the river was the home of Henry Hastings Sibley, then in charge of the American Fur Company's post and afterward a leading figure in the affairs of Minnesota and the Northwest. The trading post was at the southern terminal of an important land route from Pembina and Fort Garry to the United States—a route that crossed the Minnesota River at Traverse des Sioux and followed the south bank of the stream to its mouth. The traders there naturally had the first chance to obtain the rich peltries arriving from the North. It was there that most of those who traveled from Fort Garry with Garrioch first stopped on their arrival; although he himself, with a few companions, came down by canoe from Little Rock, and landed first at Fort Snelling. These companions, the "Messers Lindsey, Norton, Willson and Rogers," upon arriving at the fort, "hired themselves in the service of speculators," and Garrioch saw them no more. And it may be added here, that the present writer has never been able to identify them or trace their subsequent movements.

Next in importance to the fort and Mendota was another settlement, about a mile to the northwest of the garrison, known as Camp Coldwater, or the Baker settlement. It occupied the site of Colonel Henry Leavenworth's old summer cantonment. There were the trading headquarters of Benjamin F. Baker, a well-known independent trader. Not far away on the Mississippi was Massie's Landing, where there seems to have been another small group. On the

⁴Richard W. Johnson, "Fort Snelling from Its Foundation to the Present Time," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 8:430.

Mississippi also, on the present site of South St. Paul, was Kaposia, the village of Little Crow, one of a famous line of Sioux chiefs. A new Methodist mission was just getting under way at Kaposia, with the Reverend Alfred Brunson in charge. Connected with the mission as a teacher and farmer was David King, with whom Garrioch had many friendly visits, and of whom he thought very highly.

A number of individual settlers also were scattered over the St. Peter's area. Most of them hailed from the British Selkirk colony on the lower Red River in the neighborhood of the present Winnipeg. In 1823 and 1826, groups of these colonists, discouraged by floods, grasshoppers, and other unfavorable conditions in the Red River settlement, left for the United States and went to St. Peter's. Some of them settled there, and others found at least temporary refuge on the virgin lands of the Fort Snelling military reservation.⁵

In October, 1837, a few months after Garrioch arrived, Lieutenant E. K. Smith drafted a map of the Fort Snelling area and "took a census of the white inhabitants, exclusive of the garrison." According to his estimate,

The white inhabitants in the vicinity of the Fort were found to number 157. On the Fort Snelling side, in what was called Baker's settlement, around the old Camp Coldwater and at Massie's Landing, were eighty-two; on the south side of the Minnesota, including those at the Fur Company's establishments presided over by Sibley, Alex. Faribault and Antoine La Claire, were seventy-five. Seven families were living opposite the Fort, on the east bank of the Mississippi. . . . Lieutenant Smith reported that the settlers had "nearly 200 horses and cattle."⁶

After the excitement of the treaty-making was over, Garrioch went out to visit the Reverend Jediah D. Stevens, who had charge of a Sioux mission on Lake Harriet, in the present city of Minneapolis. Stevens, who was preparing

⁵ William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 1:215-217 (St. Paul, 1921).

⁶ Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1:218; Holcombe, *Minnesota in Three Centuries*, 2:81.

to go to New York City in connection with his missionary operations, was much in need of help. Until he should return, Garrioch consented to remain at the mission as general roustabout. The diarist has a great deal to say about the Lake Harriet mission, the Stevens family, and his experiences during the three and a half months of his sojourn at the mission. In connection with his duties there, he made frequent trips to Fort Snelling, and he soon became familiar with the principal people doing business in the neighborhood, and with the more important natural features and evidences of human activity in the vicinity.

In his entry for Sunday, September 3, Garrioch tells of accompanying Dr. Thomas S. Williamson, a missionary from Lac qui Parle, to Fort Snelling. Williamson, who was visiting the Lake Harriet mission, conducted religious services at the garrison that morning. Garrioch comments that "the congregation was very small, but the sermon was very good."

While returning from a visit to the Kaposia mission, on November 16, 1837, Garrioch examined a great natural wonder within the present limits of the city of St. Paul. Although he was told that this was Carver's Cave, it was probably the equally beautiful Fountain Cave, located a few miles farther up the river. It was often confused with the more famous Carver's Cave, which at this time was almost closed by limestone and debris that had fallen from the face of the bluff in which it is located. Garrioch describes his visit to the cave as follows:

On returning this morning with Mr. King from a visit to his Mission, I had the exquisite pleasure of witnessing one of the grandest and most majestic spectacles I ever laid my eyes upon. This was the celebrated and far-famed Carver's Cave. To such an one as myself, there is always something peculiarly enticing and enchanting in such specimens of Mother Nature's handiwork. As a matter of course, on this and on a subsequent occasion, I could not be satisfied without penetrating as far into the bowels of this subterranean vault as circumstances would allow. I proceeded from the entrance with one solitary companion, taking the lead myself, till our torches, either from the

rarified state of the atmosphere or from some other cause, refused to sustain and protract their united effulgence. We were, of course, left in blackness of darkness, and, being now at least 250 yards from the mouth of the cavern, it was not without some difficulty, and a little anxiety once more to behold the Sun, that we effected our escape from the gloomy and direful abode of spectres, hobgoblins, and other sweet and tender creatures of fancy.

The width of this beautiful cave, at the entrance, was about 30 feet, and its height 18 feet. Upon entering it, we were introduced into a spacious concave apartment; and, upon proceeding, we discovered several others, intercepted only by narrow passages formed by the force of the stream of water running through the cave and washing away the sand from between the contiguous and more consolidated rocks. The apartments diminish in size, however, as they approach the head or termination of the cavern.

The water running through the cave, and which doubtless has brought it to its present form, is a beautiful, crystal stream, and as pleasant to the taste as any water I ever tasted. The sand, with which the walls are in a great measure lined, is the best specimen that has ever come under my notice. Both to the sight and to the touch, there is no small affinity between it and wheat flour run through a moderately coarse sieve.

Report says, that a soldier and two Indians formerly penetrated so far into this cave that they were never heard of any more. This report is only for children and old women who wish to have something to talk about. I said to myself, it is more than probable that they fell into some gulf and were immediately metamorphosed into sturgeon, or some other fish, as it was with Weesukachak in days of old, when he was thrown into the midst of the water and cried out, "Let me be a sturgeon!"

On October 11, the diarist had his first view of the famous Falls of St. Anthony. He records his impressions in the following terms:

I had the pleasure of seeing for the first time, today, the celebrated falls of St. Anthony. I must say, however, that I was very much disappointed. They indeed present a pleasant view to the eye of a stranger, or to him who has never heard anything more of them than the name; but to one who has been accustomed to hear them spoken of in a manner calculated to awaken curiosity, and comes hither with high expectations, it is inevitable that they should prove a disappointment. The fall of water may be from ten to fifteen feet, and the precipice over which they fall extends over the entire breadth of the river. These falls are altogether too little to be considered grand, and too large to be considered beautiful. The greatest satisfaction I enjoyed in visiting the falls, and what I considered most worthy of

admiration, was the various and brilliant hues the waters assumed while tumbling, and, as it were, sporting themselves over the edge of the precipice.

While he was at the falls, Garrioch examined the sawmill erected by soldiers from Fort Snelling in 1821-22. "Here also to-day," he writes, "I first saw a water sawmill. My curiosity being highly excited, I took pleasure in examining the ingenious invention. When I had arrived at the close of my investigations, I had the conceit to think I could construct one." On this same excursion, Garrioch visited the famous Minnehaha Falls, then known locally as the Little Falls, or Brown's Falls, of which he says: "I should have stated that there is a little cascade of about fifteen or twenty feet in breadth, with a fall of water of about thirty or thirty-five feet, two miles north-west of Ft. Snelling, which is highly beautiful and engaging."

Judging from the entries in his diary, Garrioch was not very happy at the Lake Harriet mission. But he had promised to remain until Stevens returned and he resolved to make the best of it. The keeping of that promise, however, thwarted the diarist's cherished plan of going south by steamboat to some place of higher learning before the river froze. Unfortunately, Stevens returned on the last boat of the season, which arrived at Fort Snelling on November 10. When he reached Lake Harriet, he told Garrioch that the boat would be leaving in two or three hours, for there was grave danger that it would be caught in the ice so late in the season. So there Garrioch was, seven and a half miles from the boat landing, night coming on, and without a conveyance to take him and his luggage to the fort. His feelings that night are expressed in his diary:

O what a disappointment! Here is cross upon cross; but if it be the Lord's will I am quite reconciled. I did not know what to do. I sometimes thought of taking my trunk on my back and setting off. Being obliged to submit to Fate, I retired to bed with a leaden heart, and, after musing a while on my sad disappointment, I embarked for the Land of Nod.

“Not being able to reconcile my mind to Mr. Stevens' Yankie notions, I concluded to seek for another home,” writes Garrioch on November 15. “With this in view, I went down the following day to the Methodist Mission at the Little Crow village.” He hoped that he might learn of a late boat on which he might still go south. When he received little encouragement, he decided to remain for the winter and make the best of it. In making this decision, he was influenced also by Martin McLeod, then a trader in Baker's employ, with whom he had discussed his predicament on the previous day at Camp Coldwater.

According to Garrioch's entry of November 15,

The prospect [of getting down the river] appearing very doubtful, from the advanced period of the season, I readily made up my mind to improve the kindness which Mr. McLeod had proposed on the preceding day; that is, of keeping a school at Mr. Baker's premises. Accordingly, after securing the unanimous consent of McLeod, King and others, I concluded to teach the school, for the magnificent consideration of 50 dollars and my board for the long period of *6 months*.

It is possible that Garrioch knew McLeod before they met at Fort Snelling, as the latter spent two months at the Red River settlement in the winter of 1836-37, when Garrioch was teaching there. A common interest in books and education almost certainly would have drawn the two men together. The proposal that Garrioch open a school is an early evidence of McLeod's interest in education, for in 1849 he became the author of the “Act to establish and maintain Common Schools” in Minnesota which was passed by the first territorial legislature.

Garrioch's somewhat humorous entry of December 1 reveals that the school actually was established:

Opened my school on the heterogenous system. The whole number of brats that attended, for the purpose of being benefited by my notions, on my philosophical plan, amounted to thirty. This number was composed of English, French, Swiss, Swedes, Crees, Chippewas, Sioux and Negro extraction. Such a composition, and such a group of geniuses, I never saw before. May it never be my privilege to meet with such another. It staggered my gifts, talents, and all the

powers of "me sowl" to keep up with the brights. I question whether an antiquarian of the most celebrated longevity ever existed, from old Methusalum down to Her Highness the Queen of Old England, who could produce a specimen of such dolts and dunderheads as were clustered together in my school. Birds of a feather flock together!

Thus was organized and opened what seems to have been the first public school supported by local funds in the neighborhood of what are now the cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

There are only a half dozen more brief entries in this section of Garrioch's journal. They deal with the experiences of the succeeding winter months, but in none of them does the writer refer to the subsequent doings of the "dolts and dunderheads" under his care. That the school operated for not longer than five months is indicated by his final entry, dated May 2, 1838, in which he says: "After spending an easy but somewhat dreary and unpleasant winter at St. Peter's . . . I made arrangement with the Captain of a steamboat, which arrived the evening before, for a passage to the Prairie . . . and in 24 hours I found myself on the banks and shore at Prairie du Chien."

Garrioch visited St. Peter's again in 1840 and in 1844. Of the latter trip, which took him as far as Galena, he left a complete journal. There, in his entry for July 11, 1844, he makes his first mention of the settlement that was to become the Minnesota capital: "Arrived at St. Peter's. Went down to St. Paul's and took up lodgings with one [Henry] Jackson." But that is another story.

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