

A LETTER FROM THUNDER BAY BIVOUAC

Prince Arthur's Landing 1870

Thomas Scott (1841–1915), author of the following letter, was born at Perth, the son of Irish immigrants Thomas Scott (c1800-1851) and Margaret Thompson (1814-1900). He enlisted with the Perth Volunteer Corps (Militia), ranked an Ensign, at the time of the Trent Affair in 1861, the same year that he founded the Perth *Expositor* newspaper. He was Captain of the Perth Infantry Company when called out to face the Fenian threat of 1866. Three years later, in the fall of 1869, when Metis leader Louis Riel (1844-1885) declared a Provisional Government and occupied Fort Garry (Winnipeg), Scott, by then a Captain of the 42nd (Lanark & Renfrew) Militia Regiment, was appointed a Captain in the 1st Ontario Rifles.

The 1st Ontario Rifles, composed of militia volunteers from across the province, were part of the 'Red River Expeditionary Force'; a mix of British regulars and Canadian Militia sent to suppress the Metis resistance. The expedition left Toronto at the end of May 1870, travelled by rail to Collingwood on Georgian Bay, crossed Lakes Huron and Superior by steamer, and, landing at Fort William, established a camp on the shores of Thunder Bay¹.

From that camp, on June 27, 1870, Captain Thomas Scott wrote this letter to his friend John William Douglas (1840-1915), son of Robert Douglas (1812-1854) and Caroline Cox (1818-1868), a lawyer practicing at Perth and a fellow militia officer with the 42nd (Lanark & Renfrew) Regiment.

The original letter was donated to the Perth Museum in 1942 by Ruben Weston Douglas (b.1884) of Haileybury and John McIntyre Douglas (1876-1954) of Rideau Ferry, sons of John William Douglas to whom it is addressed. The original has since been lost. This transcription has been taken from a version published in the Perth *Courier* on October 14, 1942.

Prince Arthur's Landing²,
Thunder Bay Camp
June 27, 1870

Dear John:

I was glad to receive a letter from you last evening per *Chicora*³ and I must thank you for its length and general information about matters in Perth contained therein. The most of the letters I receive from Perth are short and the writers seem to think a person a long distance from his native place has no wish to hear of trivial (in their eyes) matters. This is a great mistake, anything, even a dog fight, is acceptable. Since arriving in camp here I have found it necessary to cut my letters short owing to the want of facilities for writing. You know it is no easy matter writing a long epistle on your knees while sitting on the ground. But as you, however, have very kindly written me, I will endeavor to give you as much information as possible.

¹ At the Department of Public Works station.

² The camp site was named 'Prince Arthur's Landing' in honor of Prince Arthur, third son of Queen Victoria, who was serving with the expedition.

³ Sidewheel steamer SS *Chicora*, chartered by the Militia Department to move troops and supplies. Built in England in 1864, converted to a barge in 1920.

To begin, you are aware we left Toronto on the 31st May and arrived here on the 3rd June. The sail from Collingwood to Ft. William⁴ is a most delightful one and all enjoyed it immensely. Our campground is beautifully situated: 15 miles from us on our left front is Thunder Cape; on our front is Pie Island and on our right is McKay Mountain. Then, there are two pretty islands in the bay called "Welcome Islands". I don't believe there is a prettier harbor in America.



Camp at Prince Arthur's Landing Camp, 1870, by William Armstrong
(Courtesy of Collections Canada)

There is a small 'village' at the landing composed of two small stores, a tavern called 'Hotel de Flaherty'⁵, two or three private residences, and a large number of government buildings, sheds, stables, etc. The 60th⁶ are encamped here. Our camp is about 700 yards down on the bay shore to which a road was made by the 60th before our arrival. Midway between the village and our camp, Fort Arthur⁷ is being built and is now nearly completed. It is earth work about the size of Fort Wellington⁸. One of the guns is to be mounted on it and a company of the 2nd Battalion⁹ is to garrison it commanded by the senior captain of the 2nd (Captain de Bellefois¹⁰). Six companies of the 60th have gone on, some up the road and others up the Kaministkwia¹¹. The whole force would have been away from here before this, but the government road built by Dawson¹² is totally unfit for travel in many places, although he represented it as alright long ago.

⁴ Established in 1803 by the Northwest Company and named Fort William in 1807. A fur trade post was first established at the mouth of the Kaministiquia River in 1684 by French trader and explorer Daniel Greysolon, Sieur du Lhut. Now a part of Thunder Bay, Ontario.

⁵ Established in 1868 by James Flaherty (1846-1892).

⁶ British 60th Regiment of Foot (King's Royal Rifle Corps), 1st Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Randle Joseph Feilden (1824-1895), later General and British MP.

⁷ Now part of Thunder Bay Ontario.

⁸ The fort at Prescott, Ontario.

⁹ Québec Rifles (Militia).

¹⁰ L. C. A. L. de Bellefeuills, Captain No. 1 Company, Quebec Rifles.

¹¹ Kaministiquia River.

¹² A road from Lake of the Woods to Fort Garry (Winnipeg), surveyed by Simon James Dawson (1818-1902) in 1858 but on which construction only began in 1868.

He [*Dawson*] has a couple hundred men in his employ and about all they do is eat and draw their pay. There has been a fearful amount of mismanagement in this whole affair. Col. Bolton¹³ chartered two American propellers¹⁴ at \$400 a day each and they have been laying more than half the time doing nothing. Just fancy the *Algoma*¹⁵ being chartered for thirty days at \$300 per day and lying at the Sault for twenty days without ever getting up steam. The *Arctic*¹⁶ has been laying here for five days at \$400 per day and doing nothing but draw the pay. But such things must be I suppose.

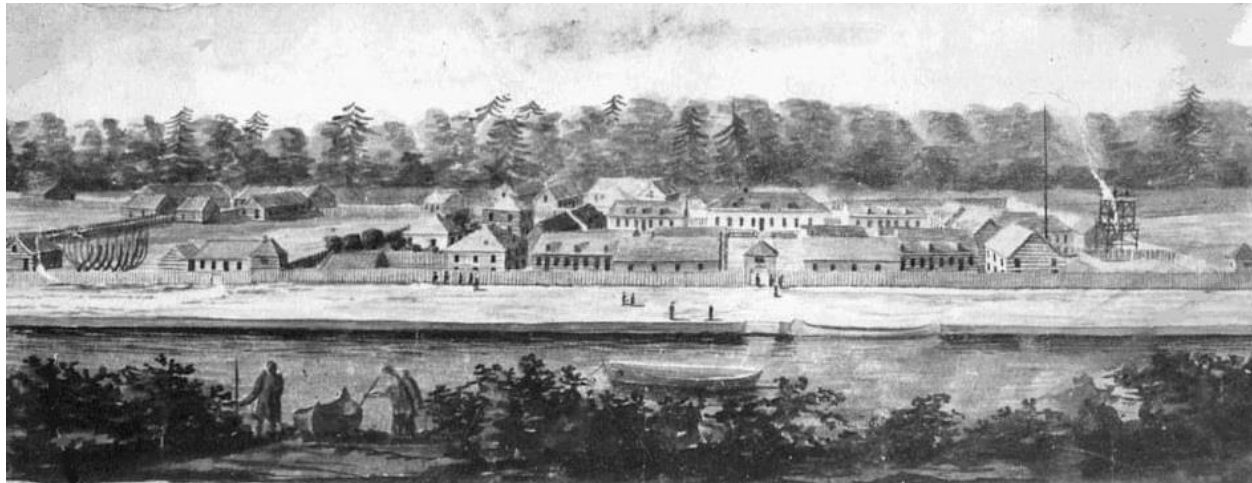


Simon James Dawson
(1818-1902)

About two miles up the road, Dawson had a bridge built over a gully. On the opposite side, is a very high and steep hill sufficient to kill the best of horses. Wolseley¹⁷ had the course changed by 200 yards and struck upon the main road and it is now a level piece of road. This Dawson is a humbug and appears to know devilishly little about road building.

Fifteen men from our battalion and fifteen men from the 2nd were sent up the river yesterday in charge of a lot of boats for the Shabondewan¹⁸. The boats are nearly all up now.

Since we came here our men have been employed in fatigues, very little drill. Just think at 2:00 drill this afternoon, there was one sergeant and one man on parade, the most of the men are engaged at the fort. Sailing and fishing are the principal amusements for the officers.



Old Fort William
(Courtesy of Thunder Bay Museum)

¹³ A Royal Artillery officer on Colonel Wolseley's staff.

¹⁴ The American flagged propeller driven vessels SS *Brooklyn* and SS *Shickluna*. The *Shickluna* towed two schooners, *Pandora* and *Orion*.

¹⁵ Sidewheel steamer SS *Algoma*, mailboat serving Collingwood to Fort William route, chartered by the Militia Department to move troops and supplies. Built 1839, formerly named *City of Toronto* and *Racine*, abandoned 1877.

¹⁶ Propeller steamboat SS *Arctic* owned by Lake Superior Transportation Company, built 1864 at Cleveland, foundered off White Rock, Lake Huron, in 1893.

¹⁷ Colonel (later Field Marshal and Viscount) Garnet Wolseley (1833-1914), commander of the expedition.

¹⁸ Shebandowan - A village on the Kaministiquia River, about 80 Km west of Thunder Bay.



HBC Factor John McIntyre (1817-1899)
(Courtesy of Thunder Bay Library)

Fort William is four and a half miles from our camp. It lies two thirds of a mile up from the mouth of the Kaministkwia. There is a strong stone block house, dwelling houses, in all about a dozen buildings painted white surrounded by the stockade. Mr. McIntyre¹⁹ is the agent here. His family is the most hospitable I ever met. He has three daughters and a niece, all very fine girls. I had an introduction a few days after my arrival and have spent many pleasant evenings there since. We go by boat in about fifty minutes. Mr. McIntyre has the only piano in this part of the world. The young ladies can sing and play very well. At the store here, everything that you can get at a general store in Canada is kept and the prices are about the same. The liquor is ahead of everything I ever tasted before. Rum is the favorite with us, no headache the next morning.

A short distance from Fort William a man named McVicar²⁰ lives, above that, a Mr. McKellar²¹. I have visited these families frequently. Miss Mary McVicar²² was at Fort Garry all the time of the trouble there; interceded with Riel for poor Scott's²³ release and shortly afterwards left Fort Garry for her home here, coming by St. Paul²⁴ and Toronto. She says Riel can gather fully a thousand men in a few days and they are splendid marksmen and horsemen. We have floating barrel targets at different ranges in the bay and when the men are not on fatigue, they are practicing firing. The men of both battalions are generally good shots, but we do not anticipate any fighting, however Wolseley believes in being prepared for any emergency.

We had a visit from several Indian chiefs who came from Rainy Lake last week. Mr. Monkman²⁵ arrived here on his way home last week, 45 pounds of tobacco presented to him by Prince Arthur²⁶ to be given to the Indians was stolen from him by some of the hands on board the *Arctic*. Setter²⁷, Schultz²⁸ and Donald A. Smith²⁹ arrived here by the *Chicora* last evening.

¹⁹ John McIntyre (1817-1899), aka Governor McIntyre, was chief factor of the Hudson's Bay post at Fort William from 1855 to 1878.

²⁰ Robert McVicar (b.c.1798), a former Hudson Bay Company Factor living a short distance north of Fort William.

²¹ John McKellar (1833-1900), a prospector, mining promoter, and later municipal politician. Thunder Bay's McKellar General Hospital (now part of Thunder Bay Regional Hospital) is named for him.

²² Victoria (not Mary) McVicar (c.1838-1899), daughter of Robert McVicar of Fort William.

²³ Thomas Scott (1842-1870), 'Canada First' activist and rapid Orangeman, prominent in an attack on Metis held Fort Garry. Arrested by Riel, convicted by the Provisional Government of treason, he was executed in March 1870. Not to be confused with letter writer Thomas Scott.

²⁴ St. Paul, Minnesota.

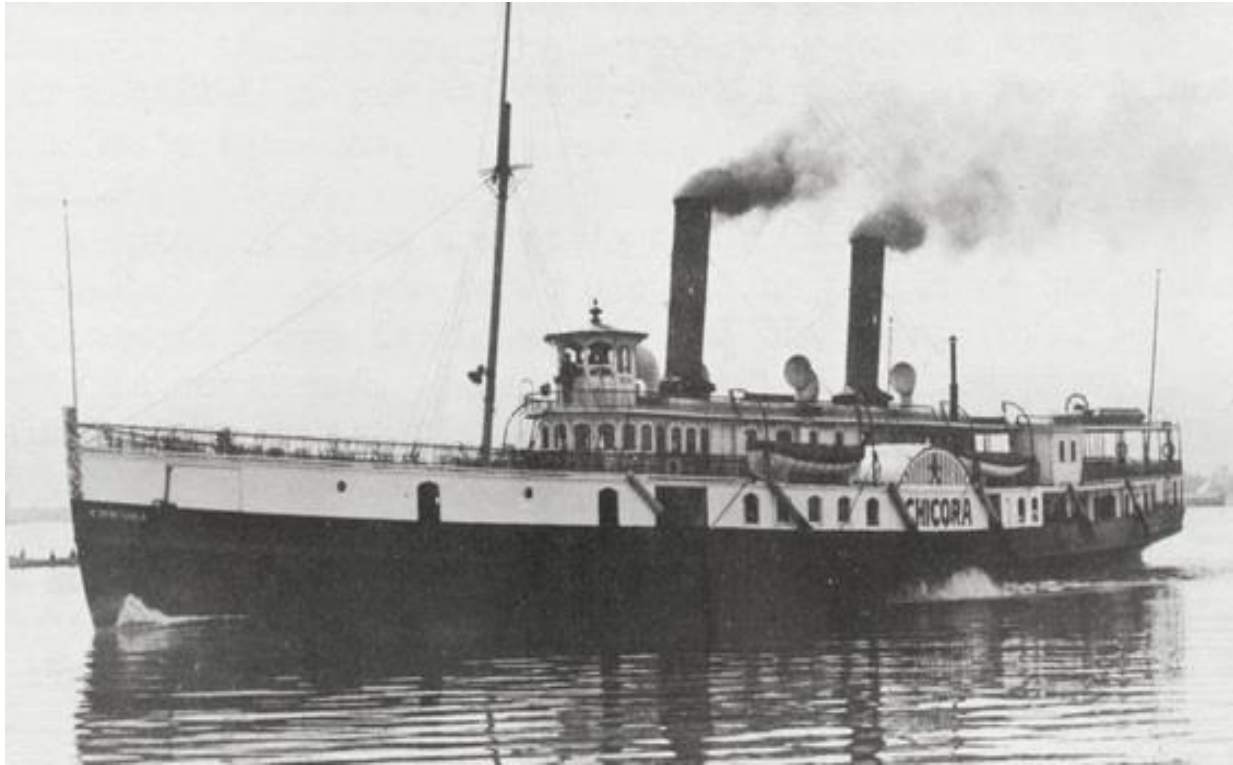
²⁵ Joseph 'Old Joe' Monkman (1810-1899), an anglophone Metis, former employee of the Hudson Bay Company. He had served as guide when Charles Mair and John Christian Schultz made the 400 mile trek by snowshoe in February 1870, from Winnipeg to the railhead at St. Paul, Minnesota, on their trip to Ontario to agitate against Riel.

²⁶ Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught and Strathearn (1850-1942), third son of Queen Victoria, was serving as an officer with the 60th Regiment (King's Royal Rifle Corps). He was later Canadian Governor General 1911-1916.

²⁷ John James Setter (b.c.1833/37), a protestant anglophone Metis from Portage la Prairie where he worked as a schoolteacher. He had been among those imprisoned by Louis Riel at Fort Garry in December 1869.

²⁸ John Christian Schultz (1891-1900), a leader of the 'Canada First' political movement had been arrested and imprisoned by Louis Riel in late 1869, but escaped and, with Charles Mair (1838-1927), travelled to Ontario to agitate for Canadian Government action against the Louis Riel and the Metis.

²⁹ Donald Alexander Smith (1820-1914), head of eastern operations for the Hudson Bay Company, had been appointed by Prime Minister Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald in December 1869 as a special commissioner to help defuse tensions in the Northwest. Later a director of the Canadian Pacific Railroad.



Sidewheel Mail Steamer SS Chicora

Last evening Miss McVicar showed me a photo of Charlie Mair³⁰ and his wife. She is well acquainted with them. She has promised me letters of introduction to a number of families at Ft. Garry and I hope I will be able to meet as friendly people as I have here. Jim McLenaghan³¹ is clerking in McIntyre's store³² at present, but he is to be sent up to Mutawin³³ to take charge of the new post there. I will bet he will soon be sick of it for he will see none but Indians and he cannot talk Indian.

The force will leave here by detachments of one or two companies and the whole will rendezvous at Ft. Francis where fresh orders will be issued. Each captain has been furnished with a copy of orders for our guidance. There will be five boats per company and each boat is to carry out three tons of extra stores in addition to 13 men and arms, etc., and thirty days provisions. A good load for three pair of oars.

³⁰ Charles Mair (1838-1927), a leader of the 'Canada First Party', was born in the village of Lanark, Ontario. He had been a clerk in his father's store at Lanark until he secured a position as paymaster on the Dawson Road project in 1868. Shortly after he was married at Fort Garry in 1869, he and his wife (Eliza McKenney) were arrested by the Metis and Mair was sentenced to death. He and Christian Schultz escaped and made their way to Ontario to agitate against the Metis. After Louis Riel was captured in 1885 Mair worked hard to have the Metis leader executed and eventually succeeded.

³¹ Identity uncertain, but probably James McLenaghan (1848-1919), born Drummond Township, son of Nathaniel McLenaghan (1811-1896) and Jane Morris (1813-1899), married Sarah Unsworth 1882, living at Portage Prairie, Manitoba, in the c1880, died Los Angeles, California.

³² The Hudson Bay Company store run by John McIntyre (1817-1899).

³³ Mutawin/Matawin, a Hudson Bay Company trading post about 100 Kms west of Thunder Bay and 100 Kms south of Shebandowan. Location of present day Matawin Provincial Nature Reserve.

Tuesday afternoon, June 28

We are expecting the *Algoma* this afternoon. Capt. Macklem³⁴ and thirty men of his company are to leave for the Shabondowan tomorrow morning to take up the boats. Capt. Jarvis³⁵ informed me that Nos. 6 and 7 Companies are to be the headquarters, consequently we will be the last company of our battalion to leave; the Quebec battalion will follow. Our men and the 2nd do not pull very well yet.



Colonel (Later Major General) Garnet Wolseley
(1833-1913)
(Courtesy of LAC)

There is a creek thirty feet wide dividing the two camps and any of our men who go there [*the Quebec Regiment's camp*] are slapped into the 2nd guard room. Yesterday one of the boys went over a little drunk. The adjutant of the 2nd ordered several men to take him to the guard room. They tried to do so but he pitched them about pretty lively. A large force was called on and our fellow's hands and feet were tied, and he was then carried to the guard tent. I was captain of the day for our regiment, and I sent over part of our guard to bring him back. He was untied after being brought over but he was bound to be back and give the French hell. I ordered the handcuffs to be put on him. He then quieted down. Our guard tent is a short distance from the creek, the door facing it. The prisoner on looking across the creek noticed some of the French washing their clothes. With a yell he made a charge down the bank and into the creek but the current being very swift it took his feet from under him, and he was carried down the stream. Our guard chased him and recaptured him. It was comical to see the Frenchmen bolt from the creek when they heard our

fellow yelling for a knife and charging down on them. This morning he got seven days confinement and fatigues.

It is rumored here today that General Lindsay³⁶ is coming up by the *Algoma* on his way to Fort Garry with Riel's pardon in his pocket³⁷. This matters little as far as Riel is concerned for there are dozens of our men who have taken a solemn oath to have his life. His pardon, if he stays in the country, will be his certain death.³⁸

³⁴ Thomas Macklem (1844-1912), Captain of No.3 Company, Ontario Rifles. From Chippawa, Ontario.

³⁵ Scott seems to have mistakenly written 'Capt.' rather than 'Col.'. The reference is to Lieutenant-Colonel Samuel Peter Jarvis (1820-1905), commanding officer of the 1st Ontario Rifles.

³⁶ Sir James Alexander Lindsay (1815-1874). Lindsay had been sent from Britain in early 1870 to wind-up the British Army presence in Canada but found himself the senior British officer present when the Red River Resistance erupted a few months later, and thus in overall command of all military forces in the country.

³⁷ This was nothing more than bivouac rumor. Riel did not receive a pardon.

³⁸ The men of the 1st Ontario Rifles were anglophone Protestants, mostly members of the Orange Lodge, and very hostile toward Roman Catholic Metis Louis Riel, leader of the Red River Resistance. They were almost as hostile toward their fellow Red River Expedition soldiers, the largely Catholic 2nd Quebec Rifles.

Col. Wolseley and the 60th intend to leave Fort Garry for Montreal this fall. It is doubtful if the colonel will manage this as it will very likely be the end of August when we arrive at Winnipeg.³⁹ I will write again.

My respects to Ned Pink⁴⁰ and others.

Yours, etc.
Thomas Scott



Thomas Scott (1841-1915)
(Photo courtesy of Manitoba
Historical Society)

When the Red River Expeditionary Force was disbanded at Winnipeg, Scott returned to Perth but went west again in 1871 as Brevet Lieutenant Colonel commanding 200 reinforcements sent in response to threats to Manitoba by the Fenian Brotherhood. From 1871 Scott remained at Winnipeg, where he and his brother David (1840-1928) started a furniture manufacturing company. Thomas Scott was later elected Mayor of Winnipeg, then to a seat in the Manitoba Legislature, and later sent to Ottawa as MP for Selkirk. When the second Riel Rebellion broke out in 1885 Scott raised and equipped the 95th Manitoba Grenadiers for service at Fort Qu'Appelle. Thomas Scott died at Winnipeg, February 12, 1915.

For a more detailed account of the life of Thomas Scott, see *Thomas Scott: Publisher, Warrior, Merchant, Politician* on this site <https://www.perthhs.org/documents/thomas-scott-shaw.pdf>

- *Letter transcribed by Christine Spencer (2006). Annotated by Ron w. Shaw (2022)*

³⁹ Thomas Scott and the Ontario Rifles finally reached Winnipeg (Fort Garry) on August 24, 1870 only to find that Louis Riel and his followers had fled to the United States.

⁴⁰ 'Ned' Pink is unidentified, but apparently some relation to brothers William James Pink (1843-1922) and Thomas Pink (1841-1925) who established a furniture factory at Perth in 1871. William Pink was later Mayor of Perth 1887-1888.