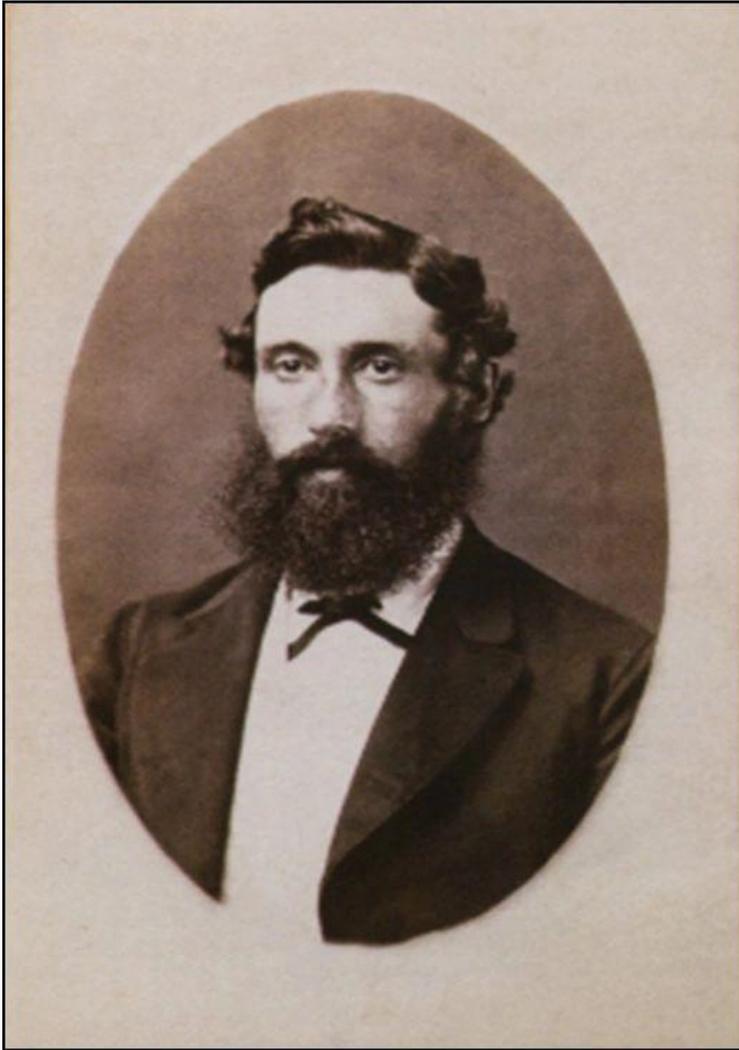


Richard Alexander was an Overlander (Part 1)

by Lisa Smith, Old Hastings Mill Store Museum, Vancouver - November 4, 2023

Richard Alexander, longtime well-known and respected manager of Hastings Mill in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, came to the West Coast the hard way—as an Overlander.



Born in Edinburgh, Scotland on March 26, 1844, Richard Henry Alexander immigrated with his parents James and Elizabeth Alexander and elder sister Isabella to Toronto while still in his childhood years. After graduating from the Model Grammar School in 1860, he enrolled at the University of Toronto with plans to study medicine but that tenure was cut short. Sufficient finances to continue his education were lacking after his mother died and his father decided to return to Scotland.

Together with other emboldened colleagues in the spring of 1862, 18-year-old Alexander made the decision to embark upon an extraordinary prospect—an overland journey from East to West across vast expanses of prairie and mountain range—to the gold fields in the Crown Colony of British Columbia. He would keep a daily record of his travels in a 5 by 3½ inch notepad and sent letters home to family and friends wherever he could find postal services.

Attracted by the glowing accounts of the gold mines of British Columbia, widely celebrated as the “Cariboo Diggings”, a large and well organized party comprising various nationalities, and which I was a Scotch Unit, agreed to push our way across the mountains to the favoured land, preferring that route to the shorter, but more expensive one (in money at least), by the Isthmus of Panama in order that we might spy out either the nakedness (or fertility) of the land.

Made up of various individuals from all walks of life, the Overlanders established a plan to converge at Fort Garry in the region then known as ‘Rupert’s Land’ for the mass departure westward. The first few weeks of Alexander’s journey were spent in relative

comfort. On April 23, he travelled with his party by rail from Toronto to Detroit, then onward by rail, steamer and stage through the states of Michigan and Wisconsin to Georgetown, Minnesota. From Georgetown the plan was to travel by the steamer *International* on her maiden voyage northward via the Buffalo and Red River to Fort Garry.

Much to their consternation upon arriving in Georgetown, the Overlanders learned that the *International* was still under construction and would not be ready to depart for several days. Soon everyone would be experiencing a condition that would dog them for much of the entire journey—hunger.



May 6th. In camp at Georgetown. Nothing much. It is a miserable hole of a place. The steamer is not nearly ready and we will be detained a week or ten days here. Went out shooting but game is miserably scarce.

May 8th. Went out shooting with Harry but met with no success. We are now living on Pemmican, a compound that tastes remarkably like tallow, and bread that we bake ourselves, which is remarkably like dough.

Pemmican would prove to be invaluable to the Overlanders. An 18th century fur trader named Peter Pond had learned the technique of making the food staple, traditionally a mixture of dried, powdered buffalo meat, melted fat and berries, from the Denesuline (Chipewyan) peoples of Canada's subarctic prairie regions. By the mid-1800s it was in

wide use at trading posts up and down the Red, Assiniboine and North Saskatchewan rivers as a non-perishable sustenance for residents and wayfarers.



Drying buffalo meat, White Horse Plains, Red River, Canada (Painted in 1899 by William Armstrong (1822-1914))

On May 26, the Overlanders finally reached Fort Garry, principle post of the Hudson's Bay Company, with a population of around 10,000 in the surrounding area. Alexander was "favourably impressed with the place, the fort being quite fine surrounded with a stone wall and bastions." All parties stayed for several days, arranging for the purchase of horses, oxen and carts. On June 10, they were on their way again, for the first time utterly reliant upon their beasts of burden.

June 12th. Travelled 8 miles over a pretty good road and camped for the night. The country through which we passed was a flat prairie with timber on the banks of the Assiniboine. Went out to a marsh after duck but got nearly eaten up with mosquitos. I had to give it up.

June 19th. The scenery through the last part of yesterday's march was very pretty, we made about 26 miles....crossed Pine Creek easily as the bottom was good and hard. Continued on through a rolling prairie for about 10 miles till we reached a lake.... I have been in the saddle all day. I like the life very well.

Like other travelers before them, the Overlanders followed the Carlton Trail, which had become an established 860-mile route between Upper Fort Garry and Fort Edmonton. Before becoming a well-used thoroughfare by fur traders, explorers, missionaries and settlers, it was an ancient migratory path for aboriginal hunters.

The Overlanders transported all their worldly goods, including canvas tents, tools, cookware and food stores, by wooden carts. Lightweight and maneuverable, the two-wheeled cart popularly known as the 'Red River Cart' had become a common sight across the prairies. Over the years, cart tracks became solidly embedded along sections of the Carleton Trail, reassuring travelers that they were following the correct path.



Red River cart



Cart tracks still faintly visible near Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan. Photo – Anita Mae Draper.

Crossing the interior plains of the region yet to become known as Saskatchewan, the Overlanders began to see increasing numbers of buffalo. One member of the party killed the first bull on July 18 and fresh meat was cooked for supper. Two men by the name of Harry Hamilton and A. Myers started out on foot the next day after more buffalo, but by late in the day had not returned to camp, as Alexander recorded:

July 20. Nothing has turned up of those fellows though a fire was lit on a hill behind us, and as soon as it was light a flag was put on a pole and parties (went) out in every direction all day. Another cold nasty night. Great anxiety is felt for them. I cannot bear to think of having to write to the Hamiltons and tell them of Harry's fate.

To everyone's relief, Hamilton and Myers eventually returned the following morning, having waited for daylight to backtrack to camp. Becoming separated from the main party was always a concern. There was little in the way of landmarks on the flat prairie and Alexander had his own experience a few days after Myers' and Hamilton's escapade:

July 27: In the afternoon, being pretty much out of fresh meat, Jones and I took horses and rifles and started out for a ride to see if we could come across a bear. We rode for a good while but saw nothing. I got off my horse to try my rifle at a large raven.

Startled by the gunshot, Alexander's horse reared and took off at full speed in the direction of camp. Jones gave chase astride his own horse, leaving Alexander alone on the prairie.

I started to walk it but it was further than (I) thought and it got quite dark and I could not find the camp. I knew that I could easily strike the trail (by daylight) and walk into camp so I did not feel at afraid, but I was afraid if I went on (in the dark) I might cross the trail without seeing it, so I got a lot of dry wood together and lit a big fire and lay down. Then I thought I wasn't giving them a fair chance if they were out looking for me so I halloed (I did not think I was over 2 miles from camp) and Jones fired off his revolver in answer. They had seen my fire. Got in about 10 pm.

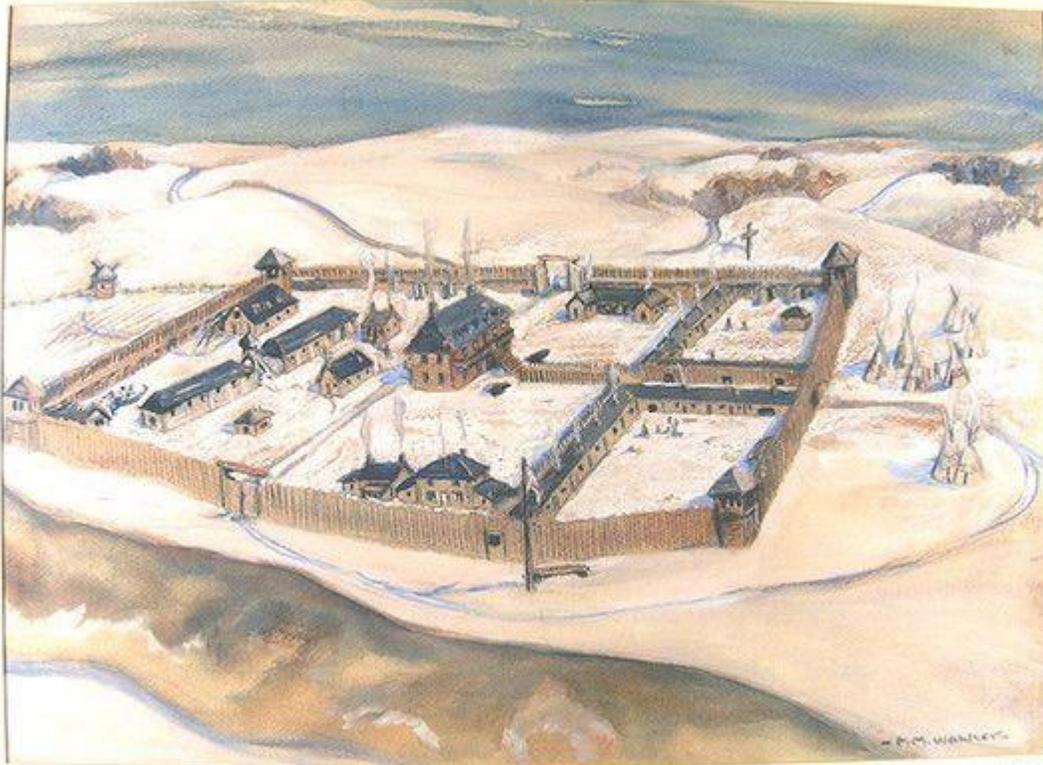


Courtesy Bill Graveland, *The Canadian Press* (1) Re-introduced purebred bison thriving on Sask. prairie | Globalnews.ca

On August 8, the Overlanders reached Fort Edmonton, the most sizeable community on their route since Fort Garry. The current fort was the fifth rebuild in the series of fortified trading posts that had been established in the area by the Hudson's Bay Company since 1795. Its massive palisade standing on a flat plateau overlooking the North Saskatchewan River enclosed several structures including barracks and the four-story home of HBC Chief Factor John Rowland. The younger men of the Overlanders, including Alexander, took some much-enjoyed downtime, dancing with local girls in a large room at the Rowland House.

At Edmonton we had a ball in the large room of the Fort on the night of our arrival, the ladies were the half-breed wives of the men of the fort, and the dances were all reels, etc. danced with great spirit. When you wanted a partner you never spoke (of

course that would have been no use) but you touched any of the women and walked off to your place....and presently the partner chosen would walk up to your side; after the dance was over the gentleman walked to his seat and the lady to hers.



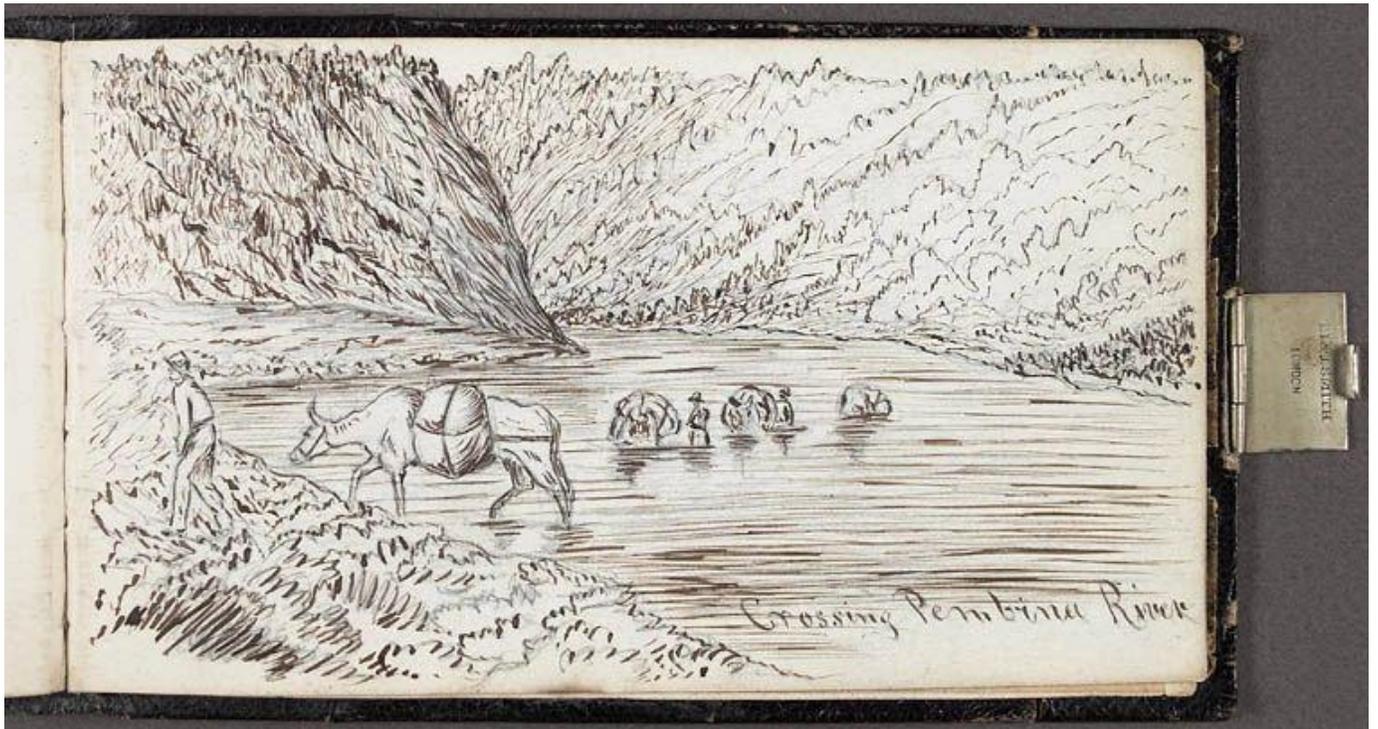
City of Edmonton Archives EAA-1-5 *Fort Edmonton in 1860*

Everyone's primary focus during the Fort Edmonton stopover was to prepare for the mountains that lay ahead. The Red River carts, which would be useless in steep, rocky terrain, were exchanged for saddles and backpacks. Here some members of the Overlanders would also part ways, opting to travel down the Bow Valley for their own chosen purposes.

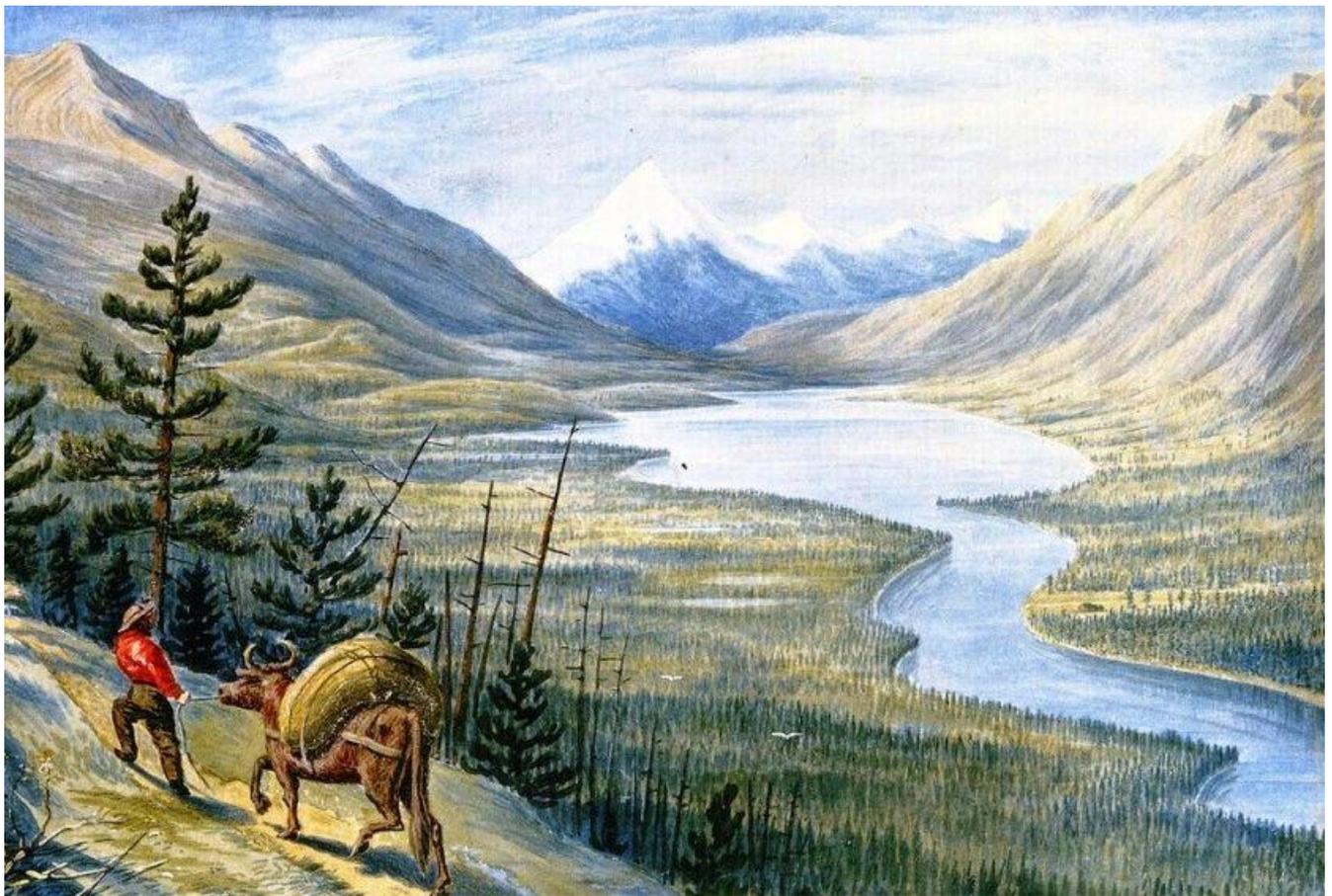
August 12. Sold all our surplus stuff by auction and then packed our animals and started at 2:30 pm for the settlement at Long Lake on route for Jasper's House. Crossed a creek, well bridged by the settlers. Roads awfully muddy...

August 20. Crossed the Pembina River today. Coal runs in seams along the bank. It is a very nice stream about 70 yards wide and water as deep to take you to the waist.

William Hind, an artist who had travelled with the Overlanders from Fort Garry, carried along a sketchbook and pencils. He captured several renderings of various scenic points along the journey and months later would also create watercolour paintings from memory.



Crossing the Pembina River. William George Richardson Hind, 1862. Library and Archives Canada Acc. No. 1963-97-1.85R

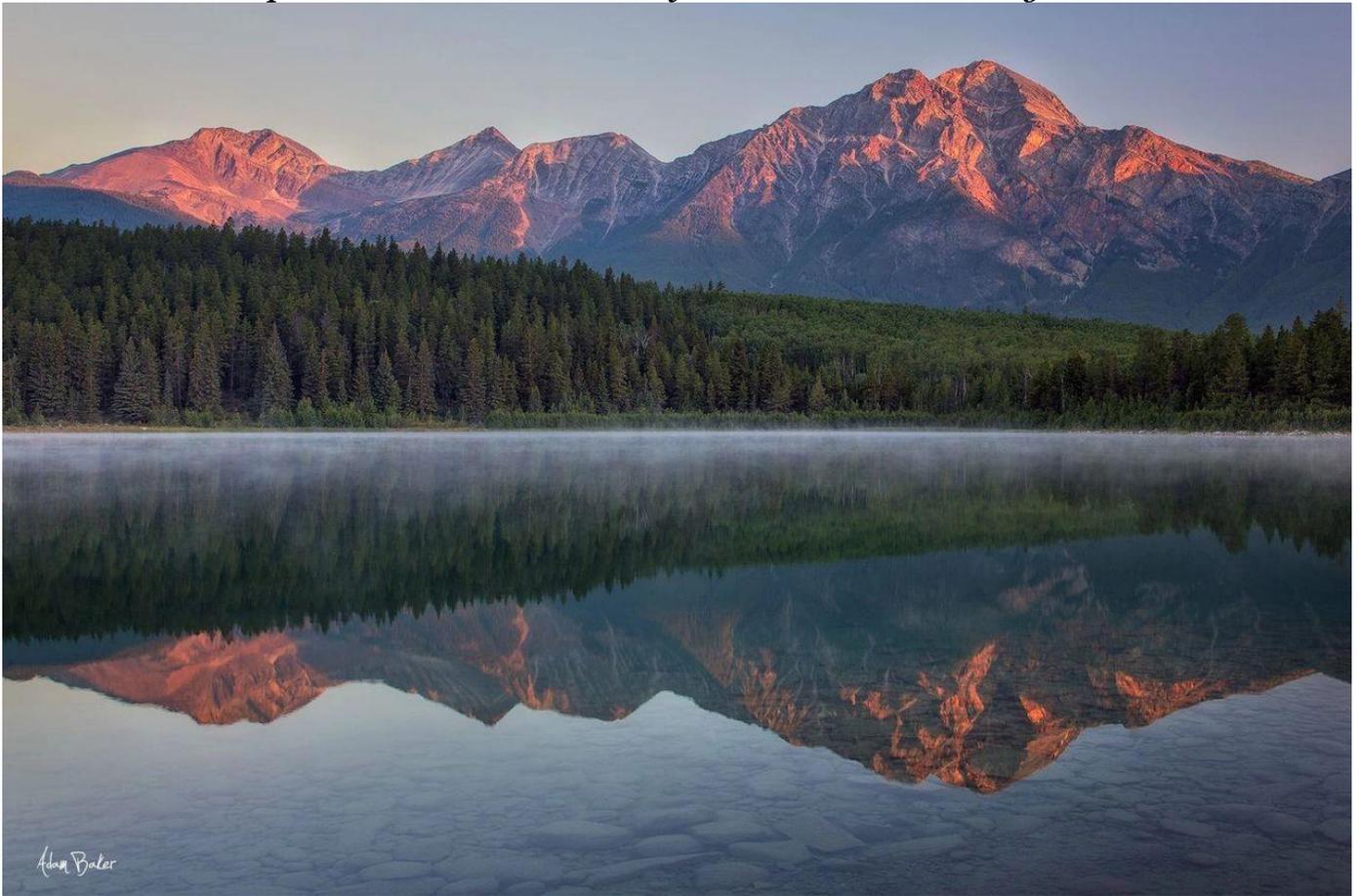


Near Jasper House. William George Richardson Hind, 1862.

Following the McLeod River, the Overlanders gradually pushed further westward. On August 28 Alexander recorded that “we had a splendid view of the mountains for the first time from a high bluff of the river.”

The sight of the legendary Rockies was awe-inspiring and clearly captured imaginations, including Alexanders....

August 31. All of the company have gone on today except ourselves as we have objected to travel today. Spent a good while this morning hunting up Alf's horse as the infernal beast wanders off on every opportunity. Busy getting ready to start off as I am to go off for our party to make canoes at Tete Jaune Cache. Had (Sunday) service. The mountains look splendid. There is one that just looks like Edinburgh Castle.



Was Richard Alexander referring to Pyramid Mountain near Jasper?



Edinburgh Castle

There would be many more mountains along the Overlanders' journey in weeks to come. Watch for Part Two of *Richard Alexander was an Overlander* next month.

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[Red River Cart | The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Fort Edmonton | The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[The Cariboo Gold Rush Artist William Hind](#)

Richard Alexander was an Overlander (Part 2)

by Lisa Smith, Old Hastings Mill Store Museum, Vancouver - November 30, 2023

Jasper House was a long-established Hudson's Bay Company Trading Post built to serve trappers, adventurers and explorers using the Yellowhead and Athabasca passes through the Rockies. The Overlanders found that they could not cross the Athabasca River at Jasper, so they travelled downstream, wading where necessary in parts "most awfully cold".

On September 4th, five members of the party including Alexander were delegated to push on ahead for Tête Jaune Cache with a guide named Joe. At Tête Jaune they would organize the construction of canoes to be in readiness for the rest of the Company. For a time the men followed the course of the Miette River, a tributary of the Athabasca. *September 6. Crossed the Mayette four times today on logs, sometimes fording it to our waist and water as cold as ice. Camped at dark, just after crossing the Mayette for the fifth and last time. Packing is pretty hard work but I am getting used to it. Rained last night.*

By the end of the first week of September, the lead group reached the Fraser River, a major milestone, for it would be the water course that they would follow for many weeks.



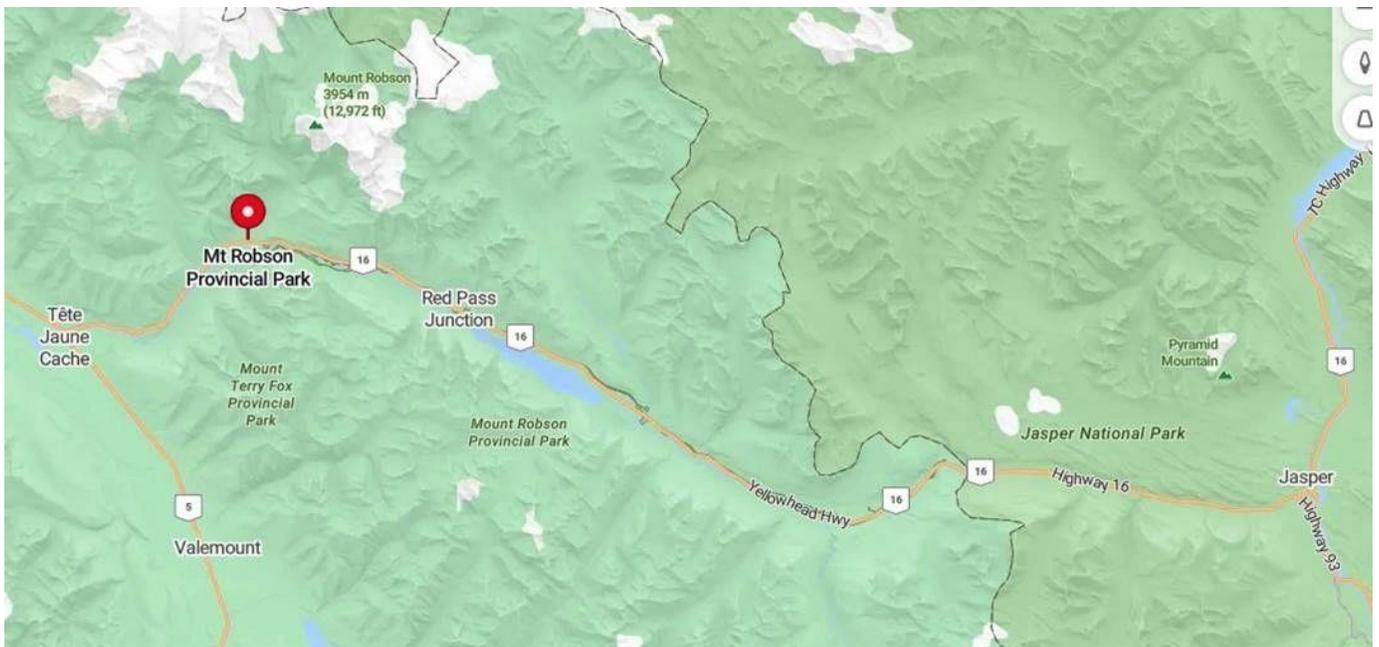
Upper Fraser River

The next morning, the men found themselves in a precarious situation.

September 7. Did not start until late this morning as everything was soaking wet as it had rained the whole night tremendously and we had to wait to dry everything. We had not very much rest you may imagine as we had little or no shelter and the rain ran in streams where we were lying. After going a very short distance, we found we were on an island and the stream had risen so much that we were unable to cross it. Joe the guide managed to get across and then returned to carry over a man named William Burgess and his pack. Alexander and George Thompson stripped naked and tried to cross with their packs tied to their shoulders but retreated back to the island side after being nearly swept away. It was agreed that the marooned party would remain on the island while Joe and Burgess backtracked to seek help from the rest of the Company, who were an unknown distance behind.

September 10. Still no sign of the Company. We are all beginning to feel very weak. If they don't come soon it will be very serious work for us. Took our last meal this morning, hardly a tin cup full of this soup made with a bit of beef about the size of your hand, and a thin piece of cake about the same size...

Much to everyone's relief the rest of the Company arrived a day later. The starving, stranded men were helped to shore and given a plentiful dinner. Although still extremely weak, they mustered enough energy to proceed to their next camp alongside a widening of the Fraser at Moose Lake.



Moose Lake centre left

By September 16 the Overlanders had arrived at Tête Jaune Cache, largely a Secwepemc community of tents and pit houses on the bank of the Fraser. The community's unusual name referred to the nickname for Pierre Bostonais, an Iroquois-Métis trapper and explorer with blond hair, who ventured into the area in the early 1800s. (Tête Jaune is French for "yellow head".)

The main purpose of the stop at Tête Jaune was to re-stock food supplies and commission local Indigenous craftsmen to build two canoes. Alexander enthusiastically recorded “we live first rate here on salmon, beef steak and berries.”

September 20. We spent some time in getting our canoes lashed together and our things on board but at last got off about 3 pm and camped at dark some 20 miles down the Fraser....our canoes are as steady as a house but are very heavily laden, as we have a good deal of dried meat, and we shipped a little water, ran aground once and had to get out, but nothing to speak of.

As days went on, the weather and river conditions became more challenging.

September 26. Started in good time but after a short time came to some pretty bad rapids and we had to put ashore and portage some of the things while three of us ran the canoes down, shipped a lot of water and got all wet....it commenced to rain and snow most furiously, so we camped on the left side of the river, a poor place, not much wood and everything wet, coats, blankets, etc.

On September 30, the Overlanders reached a part of the river known as “The Canyon”, about fifty miles upstream from Fort George and notorious for its treacherous rapids. The ‘Grand Canyon of the Fraser’ is actually comprised of an upper and lower canyon with a large, lake-like opening in between. The canyon lies within the rocky ridgeline of the Rocky Mountain Trench, known as the longest land-based feature on Earth. From time to time, the lower canyon develops a whirlpool capable of drawing in small boats.



Upper rapids above upper canyon, Fraser River. Catalogue # DCS01296. Courtesy Mike Nash

It was here in the Canyon that tragedy would occur, as later described by Alexander in one of his letters:

On Tuesday the 30th we came to the first canyon. It is a dreadful place, the rocks coming down to the river's edge and the whole being a roaring rapid.

The men roped the canoes together in a line. Carpenter and Jones paddled the lead canoe while Alexander and the others walked downstream along the cliffs. Meeting up on shore past the first set of rapids, the men discussed their next plan of action. Carpenter flatly stated that they would not be able to use the line. It was agreed that he and Alexander would attempt to paddle down in the largest canoe. The second canoe would be sent down empty in hopes that it would remain intact. The rest of the party would portage the baggage.

As I thought it rather dangerous I took off my boots and buckskin shirt before we started. We went at a tremendous rate for a short while when we got among some big waves and the canoe filled over the stern and went down. When it came to the surface again Carpenter was holding to the stern and I to the bow, the canoe then turned broadside to the current and rolled over and over. I then let go and swam for it. Carpenter I never saw again nor yet the canoe.....after swimming a distance of about three quarters of a mile I touched the shore but was so benumbed with the cold that I could not hold onto it, but drifted off again. Soon however, I made the shore again and dug my hands among the pebbles and pulled myself out of the water and lay there.

The portage group eventually caught up with Alexander. After taking time to build a fire and rest, they faced the dismal task of going through Carpenter's pack, which had been carried down with the portaged items. Alexander described an eerie find.

...Carpenter wrote something in his diary just before starting, which on examination proved to be the following as near as I can recollect. 'Arrived this day at the canyon at 10 a.m. and drowned running the canoe down. God keep my poor wife.' Was it not strange?



James Carpenter playing cards with an Overlander identified as 'Jones' one month before he drowned in the Canyon. Sketch by William Hind.

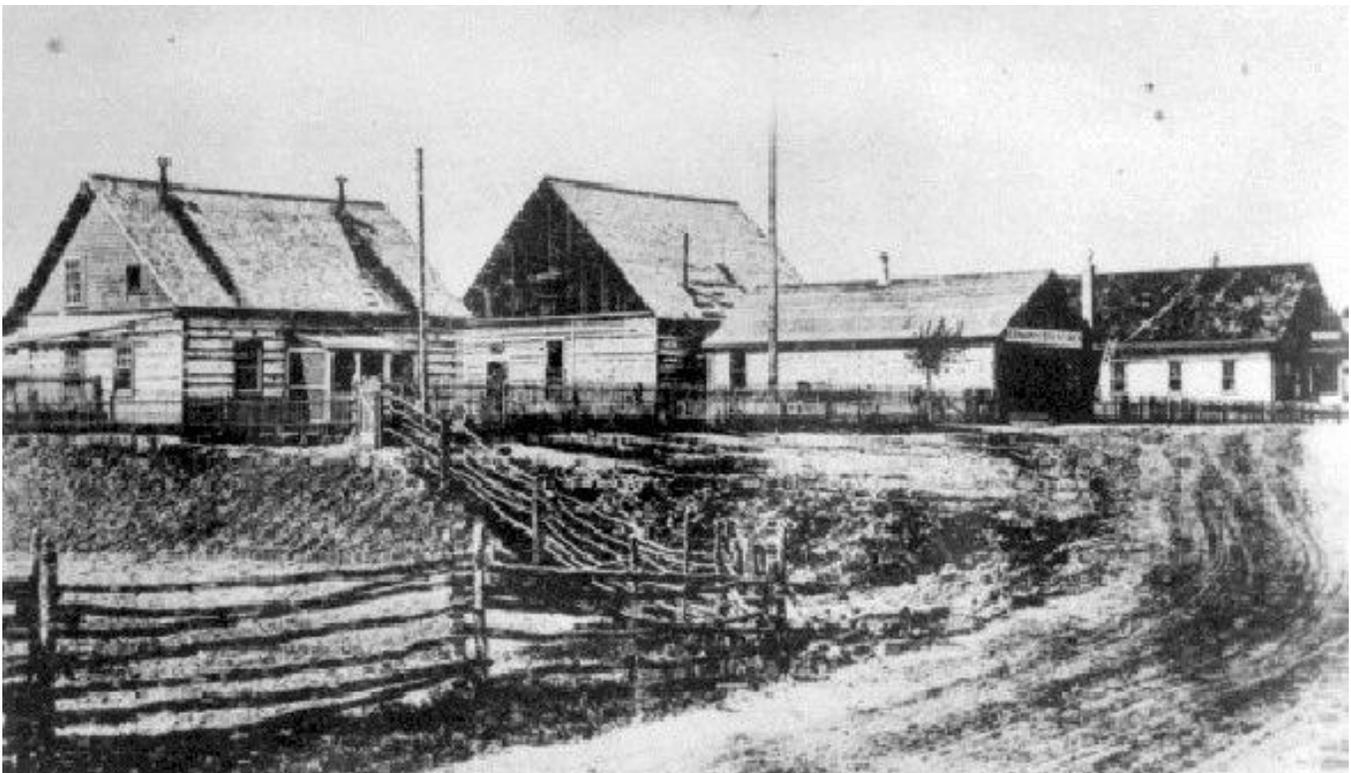
With the loss of the two canoes, the Overlanders had no choice but to continue on foot, abandoning whatever they could not carry.

October 1.we made packs of what we could carry and abandoned the rest, meaning to make our way along the river bank to Fort George. We had a hard travel of it as there was no beach and we had to climb several hills. We at last saw a canoe on the other side of the river and camped just opposite. If I feel well enough I am to try and swim across for it in the morning, which, God grant, I may be able to do. If I fail and am lost I wish this book to be forwarded to my father in Scotland. The address is on the fly leaf of this book.

The next day Alexander's plan to swim across was deemed too foolhardy. Instead, the men cut two lengths of a tree and lashed them together for an attempt to reach the canoe by an improvised raft.

October 2. Tom and I paddled across and found that it was our little canoe which we had turned adrift above the Canyon....It will carry the baggage and two of us by turns, which will be a great aid.

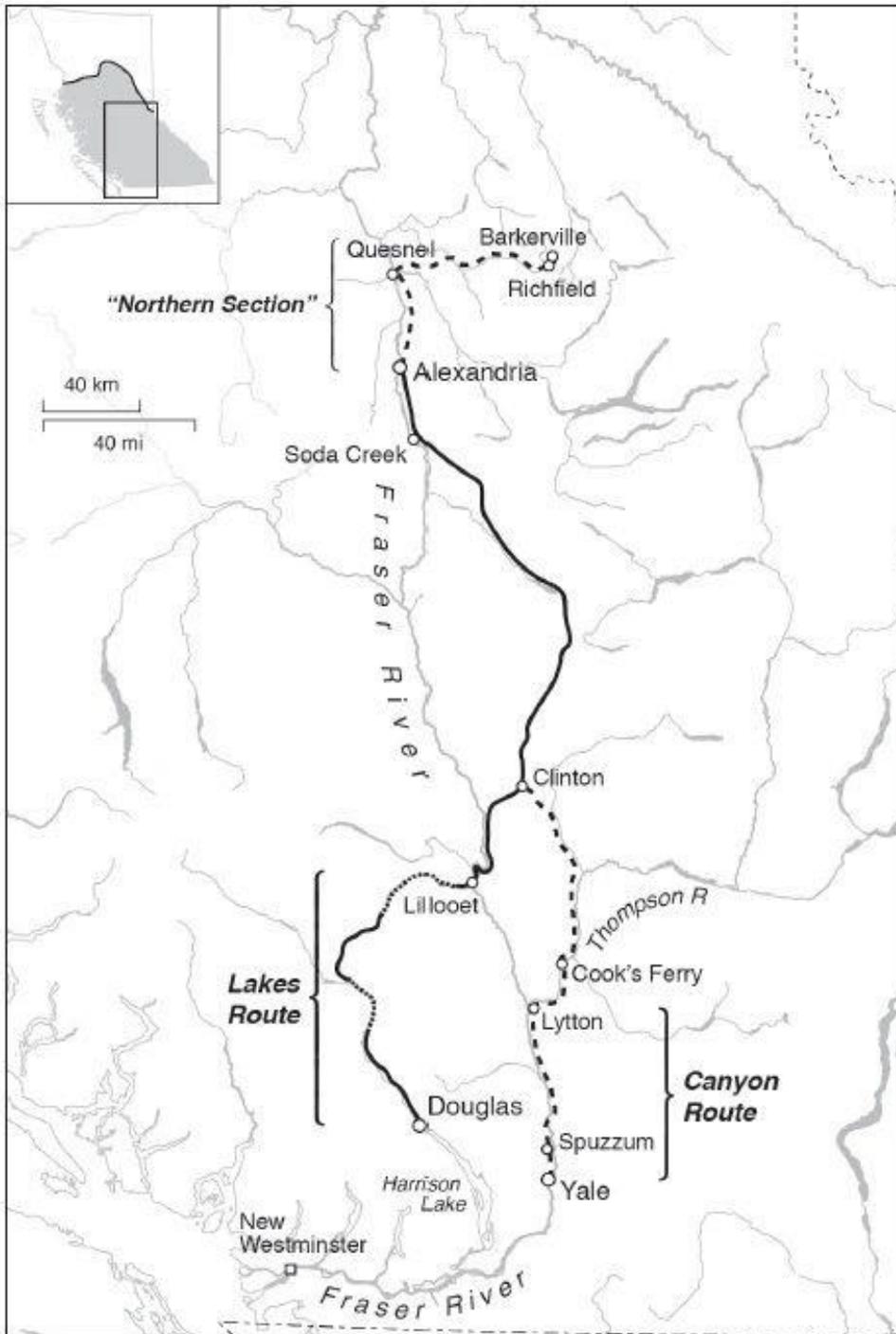
Six days later the men arrived in Fort George. With wintry conditions rapidly closing in, they only stayed for two days, purchasing two bushels of potatoes, a beaver, six salmon and 'a very fine canoe.'



Fort George, B.C. c. 1880

By October 13 they reached Quesnel, but any earlier plans to stake claims and extract the wealth of the 'Cariboo Diggings' were unceremoniously abandoned, "the prospect miserable, mining being all over for the season and nothing to do."

October 14. Things here are at an awful price—Flour 45 cents per pound, Potatoes 15 cents per pound, Fresh Meat 35 cents, Beans 45 cents, Rice 55 cents, Tobacco \$4.00, Bacon 75 cents. What we have to do is get to Fort Alexander. If we can sell our canoe here we will walk. It is 30 miles from thence to Lillooet; then by steamer a short distance and then walk again to Douglas and from thence to New Westminster. Good walking. Managed to make an arrangement with seven miners for our canoe for \$35.00, so we start tomorrow morning.



Adapted from map that accompanies Douglas to Newcastle, 15 April 1862, 5571 60/13, in University of Victoria Libraries, Early BC Maps.

The long and arduous journey was beginning to take its toll on Alexander.

October 16. Started this morning, feel very stiff and my feet very sore. After a walk of about a mile we came to a house kept by a man called McKenzie, and when we told him who we were, for the story that we were lost is all over the country, he gave us a plentiful breakfast. Went on till just dark when we made for where they are building a new steamer, and when we told them our story, they treated us very kindly, gave us flour, bacon, tea, sugar and told us to help ourselves to everything. I was quite sick this afternoon. The people are very kind. It is not begging—you just tell them you are broke and hungry and of course you get a meal. We made about 18 miles today. Roads better.

October 19. Passed a very poor night as I was very sick and am suffering from violent diarrhoea. Intend to stay over here today as I feel very unwell. Slept under a roof for the first time in six months, Mr. H.W. Handcock, Woodward and Menefee, Williams Lake, Mission Ranche, British Columbia.

October 23. Froze hard last night—very cold—and snowed a little. My moccasins with walking in the wet and mud yesterday are completely worn out. Had to put on my boots and got to a house kept by Cochrane, a Canadian. My boots hurt my feet so much that, as the road Company have a store here, I bought a pair of shoes for \$3.50 and left my boots.

The road which the Overlanders travelled upon was the brainchild of James Douglas, governor of the Crown Colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia. Douglas strongly desired a safer route to the gold fields of the upper Fraser River, bypassing the turbulent waters of the canyon. By late 1862, most sections of 'the Douglas Road' route, which began at the headwaters of Harrison Lake, had been completed under the governor's jurisdiction. The new Cariboo Waggon Road, which paralleled the canyon itself, was still under construction.



Governor James Douglas

With swollen and blistered feet, Alexander pressed on with his colleagues. They encountered more and more signs of civilization as they travelled southward and often relied upon the goodwill of homesteaders to provide food and shelter at the end of a long day's tramp.

October 26. Had breakfast and then made seven miles and then rested for a while, and then made six miles more and came to a house and found Tom Jones staying there. I am regularly used up, ill and feet very bad.

October 27. I am quite ill today and through the kindness of the owners of this place, I was allowed to stay over for the day.

October 30. Our road today lay over Pavilion Mountain and certainly the waggon road is a feat in engineering. It is 3½ miles from bottom to top. The road runs zigzag up the face of the mountain. I stopped for dinner at a house 22 miles from Lillooet owned by Captain Marttey.



Near Pavilion Mountain summit, late fall. Courtesy Steven Song.

Watch for the final installment of “Richard Alexander was an Overlander” next month. ***Special thanks to Mike Nash, David King, Mark Nielson and the Caledonia Ramblers for their assistance with this blogpost.***

Sources:

The Diary and Narrative of Richard Henry Alexander in a journey across the Rocky Mountains. Richard Alexander, 1862. Published by The Altruin Society, Richmond, B.C., 1973.

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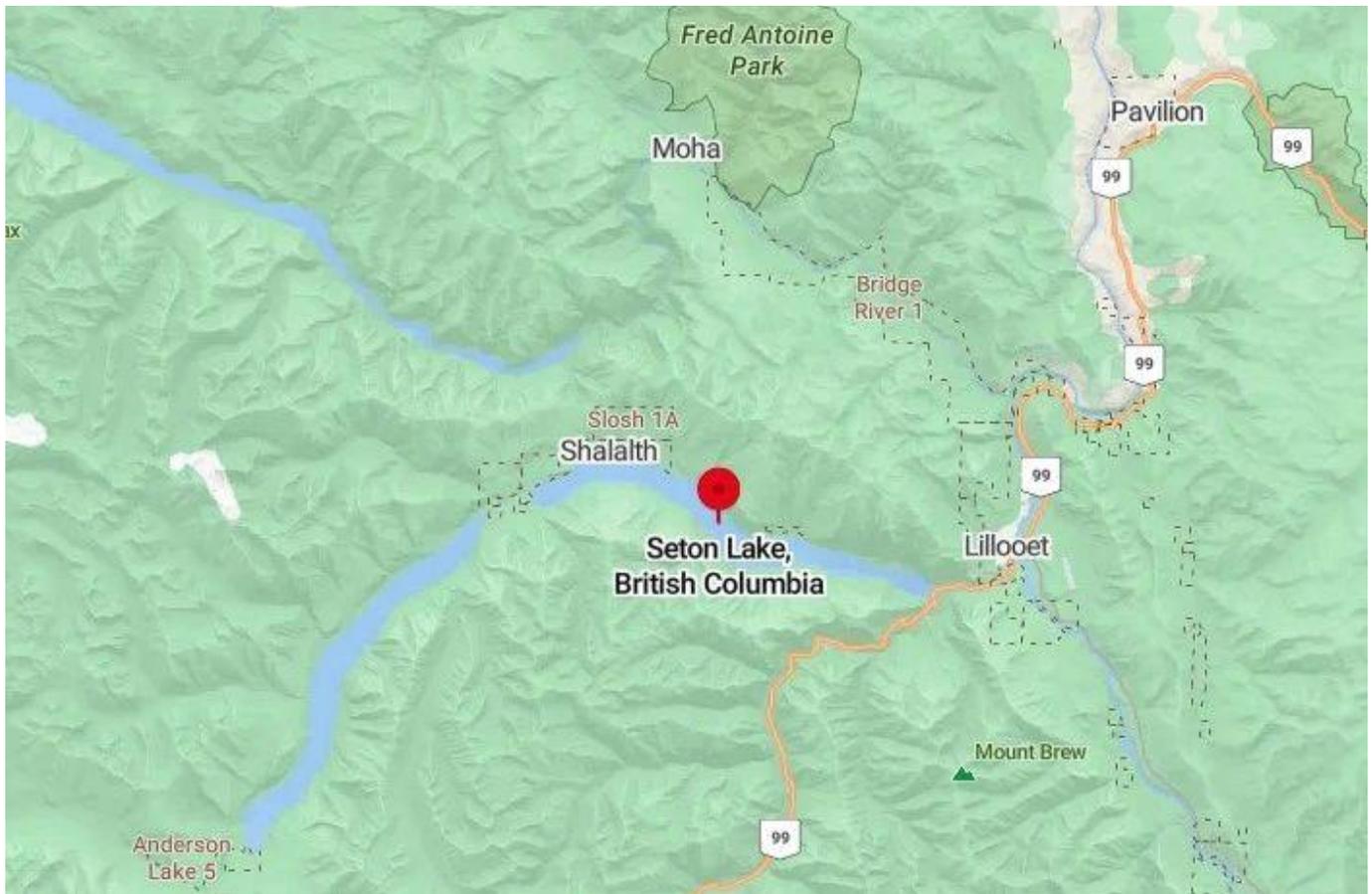
Richard Alexander was an Overlander (Part 3)

by Lisa Smith, Old Hastings Mill Store Museum, Vancouver - December 31, 2023

It was undoubtedly a relieved group of Overlanders who arrived in Lillooet on October 31. Once again they were able to sleep with a roof over their head at the Stage Hotel. They accepted a temporary job offer from the proprietor to chop wood.

November 3. Cut away at the wood today again. We are not able to make our salt at it, so are going to give it up and start tomorrow morning. Bought a shirt this morning as the only one I possess is in a disagreeable state with certain insects....When we came to settle with Herkimer he treated us very well, giving us \$5.00 more than we earned by a good way.

The men would put the rest of their wood-chopping proceeds towards obtaining steamer passage down Seton and Anderson Lakes. They travelled a total of thirty miles with relative ease (save for a 1½ mile long portage between the lakes) for the first time since their journey from Georgetown to Fort Garry so many months ago.



Each steambot ride cost \$1 per passenger and quickly used up the bulk of the group's finances. By the time they had travelled over a 'very rough road' and paid for steamer

passage down Lillooet Lake from Port Pemberton, they were once again virtually flat broke.

November 7. Spent our last dollar getting breakfast this morning and then started. Stopped at 16 Mile House and got a bit of dinner and think this was the only place where we have been grudging a meal, at least where they showed it, the stingy chap hinting that we ate too much.

The men also had the rare opportunity to read a newspaper. They obtained an October 25, 1862 issue of the *British Columbian*, which little doubt gave them some consternation.

I see by the British Columbian that the four of us are thought to be drowned. Our names were published at length in the paper.

ONE MAN DROWNED, AND FIVE MORE SUPPOSED TO BE.—We learn by late arrivals that of the party which came overland from Canada, Philip Leader, of Saugeen, C. W., was drowned about 250 miles above Fort George; and the following were supposed to be drowned: H. Fletcher, Montreal, who was employed in Holland's fancy store; Carpenter, Toronto; Alfred Hancock, Lawyer, Toronto; Richard Alexander, near Hamilton; Jones, from England. The grounds for believing that the latter five were drowned are as follows: They were twelve miles behind the main body, who encamped at the foot of the rapids, where they waited two and a half days for them, during which time they picked up some articles brought down by the current, amongst others a tobacco pouch known to belong to Fletcher. This information was obtained from the surviving party at the mouth of Quesnelle. Should this surmise prove true—which Heaven grant it may not—it will make seven, including poor young Robertson, who have been drowned of the overland party.

British Columbian, New Westminster, BC. October 25, 1862, p. 3.

The next day the group arrived at Port Douglas, a community winding down from its brief status as the second largest settlement in southern British Columbia after Yale. During the summer and fall of 1858, five hundred men had been commissioned to construct a road from the headwaters of Harrison Lake to Lillooet, 80 miles northward. By 1862 the Douglas Road route was in regular use, although in a few years it would be superseded by the 'Cariboo Waggon Road', now under construction in the Fraser Canyon itself.

With most of the road clearing crews long gone, there was little opportunity for employment anywhere. Once again, the men were compelled to offer their services as wood choppers, this time in exchange for free passage down Harrison Lake aboard the local steamer.



Harrison Lake. Courtesy Expose Nature: Harrison Lake, BC, Canada [OC] (5964 x 2674)

Nearing the final leg of their long journey, the men managed to work their way down the Harrison River by steamer, as usual offering their services to load and unload freight, chop wood and rely upon the hospitality of strangers:

November 11. There is a farmer at the mouth of the Harrison River about a mile and a half from where we got off the floating house. After a tiresome walk along the bank, which was all mud and dead salmon, and through bush so thick that we could hardly get through it, we got to the house. After a while the owner, without asking for it, ordered supper for the whole of us.



Harrison River estuary. Courtesy BCIT News. Research funding supports Harrison River restoration

Late in the afternoon of November 13, Richard and his one remaining colleague Alf, (the others had hired an Indigenous guide and departed earlier by canoe) arrived at New Westminster aboard the steamer *Henrietta*. Their overland journey was complete. Richard went to a hotel, told the proprietor that he was “strapped, wanted some meals and would leave his watch as security.” The proprietor generously agreed to the offer.



New Westminster, c. 1862. New Westminster Museum and Archives, IHPO6018.

New Westminster, incorporated as a city in 1860, was a ragtag collection of mercantile, hotels and residences sprawled along the north side of the Fraser River, approximately 5 miles inland from the Fraser River delta. In the year prior to incorporation, it had been established as British Columbia's capitol by Governor James Douglas.

One of the first priorities for the men the next morning was a visit with John Robson, editor of the *British Columbian* newspaper.

November 14. After breakfast went out to have a look around town. It is not much of a place but still decidedly good for four years growth. Called on the Editor of the British Columbian; he is to contradict the report of our being drowned. He talked a good while to us. He says it is useless to go to Victoria for work and that it is very hard to get anything to do here. When he heard how we were situated he lent me \$5.00 and told us to come and stay with him for a few days till we saw about us and he would give us something to do for our board.



John Robson. Courtesy Royal BC Museum, BC Archives Image A-01717

The British Columbian.

NEW WESTMINSTER, SATURDAY, NOV. 16.

FALSE REPORTS—WHO'S THE GUILTY PARTY.

Since undertaking the task of publishing the *British Columbian*, it has been our constant aim and earnest endeavor to avoid being made the medium through which to circulate either false or exaggerated statements regarding this Colony and its resources, choosing rather to be considered behind our contemporaries than to be the means of promulgating rumors and misrepresentations, calculated not only to injure the country ultimately, but to induce persons to migrate hither to their hurt. And if we have at times unwittingly published reports and statements which turned out to be incorrect, no one can more sincerely regret the circumstance than we do. It must, however, be very evident to any one at all conversant with such matters, that in a new country circumstanced as British Columbia is, with its rich mines, sudden discoveries, and mixed and erratic population, it is quite impossible to avoid altogether being led into such errors. And as we believe it is usual to make the unfortunate Editor bear all the blame,

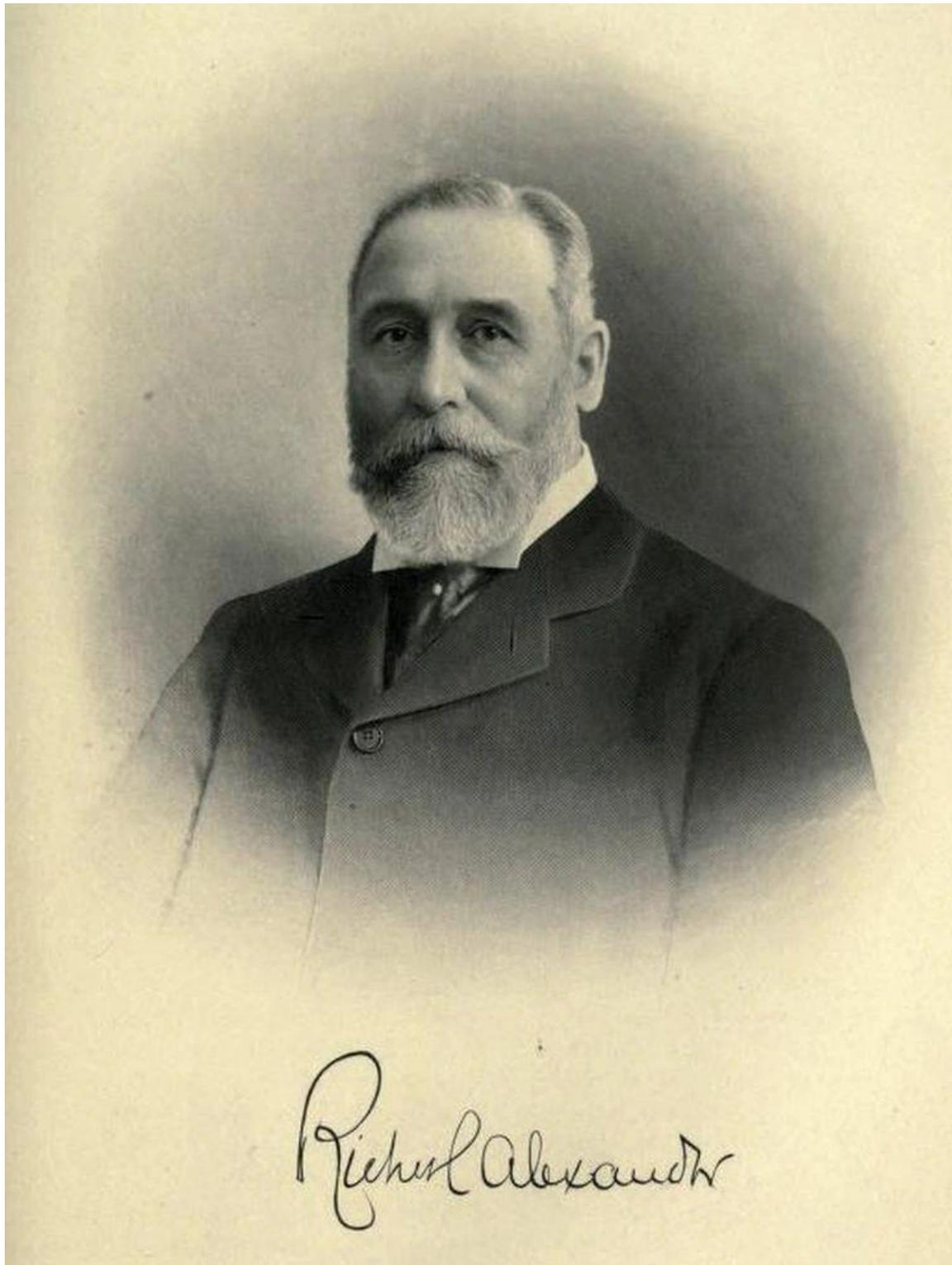
John Robson's retraction.

Richard Alexander's final diary entry seemed to strike a chord of bitterness regarding his experiences as an Overlander:

November 14. This then is the nature of the journey occupying a space of nearly seven months, which was to have been accomplished in a period of six weeks.

Alexander would achieve great success in years to come, parlaying his keen business sense into a lengthy managerial career with Hastings Mill. He never forgot those challenging months as an Overlander of '62, carefully preserving his diary and asking family members back in Scotland to forward the letters he had written to them. Years later, he would gather everything together to compile his personal account, *A Narrative of Incidents and Personal Adventures in a Journey across the Rocky Mountains in*

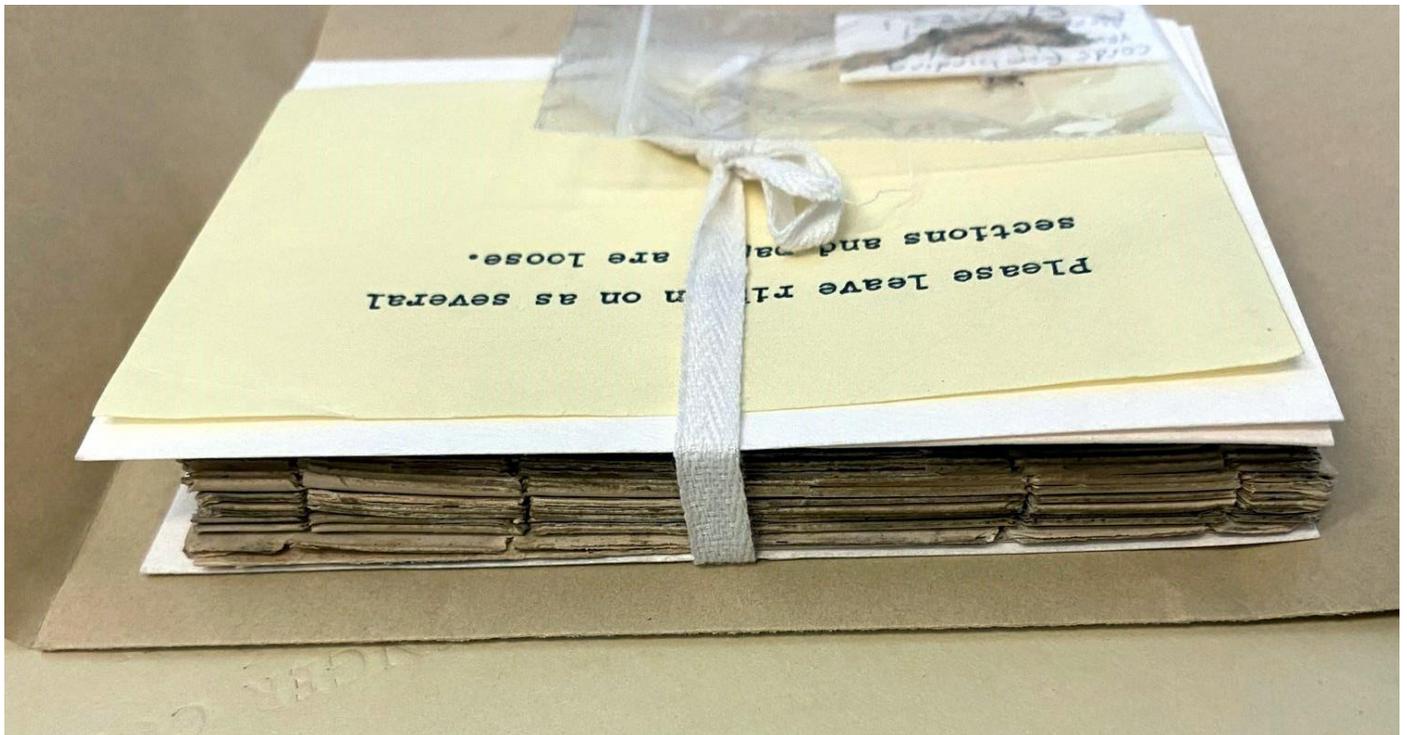
1862. No doubt he would have been pleased to know that the narrative was published in hardcover by the Alcuin Society of Richmond, BC in 1973, under the coordination of Neil Brearley, and is available to borrow from the Vancouver Public Library Central Branch. Typed copies of the narrative are also available to view at the BC Provincial Archives and Vancouver City Archives.



Richard Alexander c. 1900. Vancouver City Archives Item: 90-02.13

Richard Alexander's original diary remains in the care of the BC Provincial Archives. The following are some comments by Archivist Stuart Hill concerning the condition of the diary:

Unfortunately, the diary is in poor condition and awaiting conservation action. There is no longer a cover or binding. The signatures are held together with a temporary cover from the conservation team consisting of cardstock on the front and back with the item held together by a ribbon. It is stable whilst awaiting treatment, but should not be handled. Some of the pages appear to have been damaged and repaired by conservation. It doesn't appear to have been water damaged but given the limits on handling it at this time I cannot look closely enough to say this for certain. There is no evidence of any container it would have been carried in originally. I checked the accession register for any information about its origins. Unfortunately the archives did not keep very detailed accession information at that time but I can say that it was donated by Richard Henry Alexander's son, Richard Henry Hancock Alexander, on December 7, 1925, along with an original copy of the Hastings Sawmill Lease. At the time the only information recorded about a container was in the "location" field of the ledger, which says "B.C. + V.I. Industries Envelope". I doubt this was the original container and was probably just a company envelope R. H. H. Alexander put the items in before donating them to the archives. At the time this note would probably have been "good enough" for staff to locate it. It is quite small. Roughly 13 cm x 9 cm x 2 cm. The cover is missing but I would guess it had a hardcover at one point. Really just a tiny pocket notebook.



Richard Alexander's original diary. Image PR-1694 courtesy of the BC Archives

Special thanks to New Westminster Archives and Stuart Hill of the BC Provincial Archives for their assistance with this blogpost.

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