

MCGILL UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES
ACC. NO. 909B/13
REF. 5

Daly Street
Ottawa

7 April 1873.

G. M. Dawson Esq^r
Montreal.

Dear Sir,

Your letters of the
11th ult^o and 5th inst: reached
me this morning.

Before leaving
Pembina I had instructed
Mr Ward — the Commission
Secretary — to give you full
information in reply to your
questions to him. I also
asked Dr Burgess who had
begun to make a botanical

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Collection

collection before your
appointment was announced,
to write to you giving such
an account of the country
and the requirements of a
naturalist in the Northwest
as he thought might be
useful to you.

The commission will
move westward from Peabody
at as early a date as
possible — I do not think
the movement will take
place before the 15th of May.

I intend to visit the
Lake of the Woods and as
much of the country between

it and the Red River as maybe
practicable in the early summer
months. I shall ask the Dominion
Government for the use of a
small steam launch, canvas
and crews to explore so much
of the Lake as is connected with
the boundary line being surveyed.

I shall take a staff of
photographers with me. I
have invited Mr Campbell
the United States Commissioner
to accompany me - and yesterday
I received a telegraphic message
from him saying that he
has written in reply and intends
to be at Pembina by the end of
this month. It is desirable

that your attention should first
be directed to this district —
from the Lake of the Woods to
the Red River, and it will
probably be most convenient
for you to accompany
Mr. Campbell and myself, at
all events for so long a time
as our movements will be
convenient for your work.

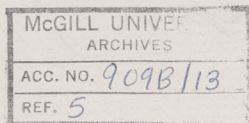
Dr. Burgess has kindly offered
to assist you in making
collections — He will, however,
accompany the astronomers
and surveyors moving westward
from Red River while you
are occupied to the eastward.

~~One~~ Of the points to which
it is desirable your special

attention should be directed
are the changes which may
have taken place in the
water level, channel, shore
line, and forest margin at
the North West Angle of the
Lake of the Woods during the
last 50 years.

The matter may be
more clearly understood
when I mention some
circumstances which it
will be satisfactory to
elucidate:

The boundary line in
the neighbourhood of the
N.W. Angle is described as
following the middle of
the waters of a bay and
terminating at "the most



North

north western point of the
Lake" — a point defined by
stated magnetic courses and
measured distances from
"a monument erected on the
"nearest firm ground."

Latitude and comparative
longitude are also recorded.

The only trace of a
monument now to be
found, is under 18" of
water — or was so in last
September — and the most
north western point deduced
from this monument by
running the recorded
courses and distances
was found to be within
a few feet of a spit of

dry land running out from
the shore of the bay.

Old frequenters of the
neighbourhood stated their
opinion that during last
September the water stood
five feet (5') higher than
usual. The questions to be
answered are: —

What evidences are there
of recent changes having
taken place which make
present appearances consistent
with the description of the
locality as it was 40 years
ago? Was the site of the
monument 40 years ago
firm ground?

Is the spit of land

a more recent formation?

I may note that one or two old beaver dams are to be found at the head of the bay.

Within the last three months I have seen specimens of two or three kinds of metal said to have been found in the River Pembina - flowing eastward into Red River along the 49th parallel of latitude - The source of the river is located by some in British Territory and by others in United States Territory - but without doubt parts of it are in each of these countries. It is also reported that the

river bed cuts through coal seams — and that iron ore is to be found there. I need hardly say that the discovery of workable iron and coal in the neighbourhood would be of vast importance not only to the N.W. Territories but to the Dominion.

There is every likelihood that workable coal deposits may be found in the neighbourhood of the Mackenzie River — far to the westward — and that they may be rendered available for great distances by means of river transport. The discovery of coal in the

of the 49th parallel - I
trust you are now about to
have an opportunity to supply
an important link in
completing the Natural
History of the whole continent.

You mention you desire to
meet me here. I should
be glad to wait for your
coming, but I have so
much business to get through
elsewhere that I cannot
delay. I propose to leave
Ottawa this evening -
perhaps for Montreal, in
which case I should call
upon you; but probably
I shall go westward on

eastern section of the country
would help to complete a
chain of supply from
Vancouver's Island to Nova
Scotia. Locally, its importance
could hardly be overestimated,
since wood for fuel is not
to be found over large areas
of country.

It is generally supposed
that an extensive desert
district stretching northward
through the United States
crosses the international
boundary ~~beyond~~ into British
Territory beyond Kilt's River.
I have not been able to

discover that this region —
about 300 miles in breadth
on the 49th parallel — has
been explored. In approaching
it, alkaline streams and lakes
are to be met with. A history
of the true character of this
region will be of interest and
importance: — its capabilities
and limits have yet to be
recorded. Various scientific
explorers have examined the
belt of country in the
latitude of the Saskatchewan
and others in connection
with Railroad surveys have
recorded the natural history
of latitudes to the south

my way back to Pembina
where I desire to arrive by
the 20th inst.

As I may not be able
to go to Montreal - I would
ask you to consult with
Mr Bissett - the Secretary
of the Hudson Bay Company
at Montreal and to obtain
from him information
about presents suitable for
Indians, and as to their
cost and whence they may
be obtained. If you
find that they are most
easily procurable at
Montreal - and that you
are in a position to select
them - I would authorize

The routes to Pembina are

1. Via Collingwood & Thunder Bay
2. " " Duluth & Moorhead
3. " " St Paul & Moorhead

The 1st & 2nd depend upon the opening of Lake navigation & the former is out of the question.

The 3rd is most expeditious —

From Moorhead, Pembina may be reached by either steamer or stage coach. The coach covers the distance in two days — the steamer in from three to four days.

The whole journey from Montreal to ~~the~~ Moorhead by rail & on by stage in 9 days. Cost without extra baggage between \$70 & \$80.

you to expend \$500.00
(five hundred dollars) on this
account.

Amongst the articles to be
purchased I would mention
boxes of (00) percussion caps,
clasp knives, sheath knives,
colored glass beads, - chalk,
barley corn, and bugle. white
predominating are favorite kinds
- & cheap jewellery, particularly
earrings. Firearms are of
course most highly valued by
Indians, but of these we could
not afford to carry many.
A similar remark applies to
shot and bullets. but of
cheap gunpowder in
small flasks we could

advantageously take a large
supply. Should you find yourself
unable to attend to this matter
in person — I shall be obliged
by your enquiring if there be
any one qualified and willing
to act as my agent in the
business at Montreal, — and
by your making provisional
arrangements to be carried out
by the agent after communication
with me. There is no pressing
need to make these purchases.
If the articles arrive at Pembina
by the 1st of August they will
be in time for my purposes.

In haste

Yours very sincerely
D. Cameron