

Canadian War Museum Finding Aid
John McLatchie Collection
Accession number 19980115-005

Dates: 17 April – 23 June 1885

Extent: 12 letters, 24 x 16 cm.

Biographical Sketch: John McLatchie was born in West Templeton, QC, in 1842. He worked as a land surveyor at the beginning of the Riel Rebellion, and was later recruited into the Intelligence Corps at the rank of Lieutenant. He knew many of the Metis fighters because of his survey work for the Land Script Act.

McLatchie died in 1908 in Calgary, AB. He is buried in Beechwood Cemetery, Ottawa, ON.

Language: textual material in the fond is in English.

Scope and Content: This collection consists of letters from John McLatchie, Dominion Land Surveyors, to Maggie. The letters follow his campaign from Qu'Appelle to Swift Current, Batoche, Battleford and Fort Pitt, giving accounts at each battle, the number of men in the company and events that occurred during the Campaign, as well as shows the attitudes of the men towards Louis Riel and Big Bear. Prominent men such as General Middleton and Colonel Otter are mentioned in the letters, which also give insight into a Dominion Land Surveyor in the Batoche Campaign.

Arrangement: This finding aid has been arranged numerically by file number. Letters are chronological and a synopsis of each has been included. All letters can be found in file number 58A 1 126.3.

Detailed Listing:**58A 1 126.3**

Letter number	Contents
1	<p>Qu'Appelle, 17 April 1885. Left Winnipeg on Monday morning and arrived in Qu'Appelle on Tuesday. Found that no horses were provided. Have 40 horses right now, and expect 16 more tonight. Their rifles will be arriving tomorrow and figures he will be leaving for the front by Sunday at the latest. Has heard reports that Riel is moving to Battleford and is uniting with the Indians. Thinks that there will not be a problem with Riel, but they may have some trouble with the "Indians". Their party consists of 20 Surveyors and 30 new people, and they are going under the name the "Intelligence Corps". Not sure what the 30 new people will be doing, but the Surveyors are to act as guides in traveling over the country. They are getting quite bored just sitting around. "Since I started writing, we have been ordered on short notice to fall in." 3pp on 2 sheets.</p>
2	<p>Swift Current, 20 April 1885. Wishes he could have written before they left Qu'Appelle, but they were ordered by General Middleton to report to General Laurier and had only an hour to move out. Received their rifles yesterday, and an outfit of Bronco Ponies. Sprained his finger while trying to tame his new horse. He expects that they will be joining Colonel Otter on the way to Battleford to be a Signal Corps, guides, scouts or Cavalry troops. Some of the men object to being called a scout or Calvary because they did not come for that purpose. 1p on 1 sheet.</p>
3	<p>Swift Current, 21 April 1885. Have been ordered to start tonight in two parties across country. McLatchie's party is to go down the south branch of Saskatchewan to scout in case of an attack on the streamer going down the river with provisions for General Middleton's party at Clarks Crossing on the South Branch. The other party goes north to join Colonel Otter's command on the way for the relief of Battleford. The second party took 45 carts, loaded with provisions. As far as he [McLatchie] can understand, Gen Middleton's party does not have any provisions to advance with until the boat can get there and that no action will be taken unless they are attacked by the "half-breeds." Will be joining the 90th Battalion when they reach Clarks Crossing. Does not know if he will be wanted as a sharpshooter or not. 4pp on 1 sheet.</p>
4	<p>Elbow, South Branch, 26 April 1885. Left Swift Current on Wednesday and they arrived in Elbow on Friday night. Were disappointed because two couriers from Battleford brought news that instead of joining him, they were to form a line of pickets from Swift Current to Long Lake on the Qu'Appelle river to intercept any "half-breeds" or others going</p>

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	<p>south. Will most likely split into six parties, be stationed about 15 or 20 miles apart, and will have to patrol between the camps everyday. The men are very dissatisfied with the new arrangements, as it does not give them the chance to distinguish themselves. Had they known that this were the plans, they would not have come at all. Now on par with the Mounted Police, and realized that General Middleton did not want the Surveyors.</p> <p>Man arrived from Moosejaw in camp this morning and agreed to wait until they could write more letters. Says that General Middleton's troops were to advance on Thursday on Batoche and attack Riel. General Middleton has 900 men and there are 350 at Prince Albert that can be called. He figures that he will be kept in Elbow at least for a couple of months. If they attack Riel then they may expect some "half-breeds" to come south within a week. Understands that they are to arrest all that come this way. If after they ask a person to halt twice then they are to send a bullet after them. 4pp.</p>
5	<p>Little Arm Creek, 2 May 1885. Have moved out eastward from Elbow to form a line of pickets across the country (province). Camp is formed of 3 Surveyors and 7 men, 17 miles east of Elbow. The other surveyors elected him as Captain of the Picket. Keep 3 on guard every night, 3 hours each. 1 surveyor and 2 men and one man and one surveyor take a trip 12 miles east of camp and 8 ½ miles west everyday. Has just heard that the "Breeds" at Prince Albert took General Middleton by surprise, and though the General did not lose, the "Breeds" got the best of the fight. 1p on 1 sheet.</p>
6	<p>Batoche, 11 May 1885. Shortly after writing from Little Arm Creek, they were ordered to advance to Batoche. When they arrived, found out that they had been fighting with the "Breeds" and the "Indians" for two days. Have a square containing about 8 acres enclosed with sods from up to 6 feet high. They lie in trenches all night and will have to do the same tomorrow. They were out with the troops supporting the Gatling gun in an attack about 2 miles down the river. The "Breeds" have rifle pits all along the riverbank for 2 miles down the river. Believes that this fight may continue for months at the rate that they are going right now. 700 "Breeds" and "Indians", and 1000 troops here. They have taken some prisoners that were trying to steal cattle for the "Breeds".</p> <p>On Saturday during the first attack, 2 men were killed and about 7 or 8 wounded, 5 or 6 wounded yesterday and about the same number today. "Breeds" shot one priest in the leg while he was sitting in his</p>

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	own house. 4 priests and a number of nuns in a house that stands near the bank of the river. 4pp on 2 sheets.
7	<p>Batoche, 13 May 1885.</p> <p>Since writing two days ago, Batoche has fallen and Riel and Dumont have gone down the river. Reported that the “Breeds” have given up over 100 rifles today. While scouting, AW Kippen DLS was killed. About noon, the whole force was ordered to take Riel’s position. Two companies of William’s Battalion were ordered to the left, and then the 10th Royals, 90th Winnipeg Battalion, Boltons and French scouts and their Corps on the left (sp?). The exchange commenced about 1 o’clock and lasted until 6 in the evening. They got possession of Riel’s papers, his prisoners, etc. 5 killed and 16 wounded in the battle. Took 5 “half-breeds” and “Indians” prisoner. Two have died already. Have captured all the important men except Riel and Dumont. Leave for Prince Albert tomorrow. Gardner DLS and Wheeler DLS were wounded in the battle. 1p on 1 sheet.</p>
8	<p>Prince Albert, 19 May 1885.</p> <p>On the second day after the battle of Batoche, moved down the river to Prince Albert. Figures that he will not be going to Battleford as they are going in the reverse direction right now. Riel has been taken and several others of “minor importance”. They now have all the principal men except for Dumont. About 16 men had a chase with a man (supposedly Dumont), however his horse was too fast. Writes what it is like to be in the trenches. Believes that Corps did a fair share of the work, and there was only one wounded who took part in the charge. Feels that the General is pleased with his troops. The charge was a surprise to the General as it was organized by the troops. Describes the rifle pits. Believes Riel has been sent to Winnipeg for trial. Thought that they might bring him to Prince Albert (where they brought the rest of the men), but saw him board a boat. 6pp on 3 sheets.</p>
9	<p>Battleford, 30 May 1885.</p> <p>On the way to Battleford, crossed at Fort Carleton. Most troops came by 4 steamers, but McLatchie’s Surveyors and part of the French scouts came by land. If they do not take more decisive action against the “Indians”, then they will have some trouble getting volunteers to go out again. Most of them feel that the “Half-Breed” prisoners deserve some sort of punishment. Astounded at the reports from newspapers. The only newspaper that he has found that tells the truth is the Winnipeg Times of 14 May [1885]. Toronto papers give all credit to the Grenadiers; the Montreal Star to the Boltons, French Scouts, and the Grenadiers; Winnipeg Free Press blows up the 90th and, to make up the wounded numbers, included Wheeler on the list (he was wounded 2 days before). Grenadiers may have received credit, however the command was given by</p>

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	<p>Colonel Williams and 2 Companies of the Midland Battalion and then followed up by the Grenadiers. French were not ordered out, but they moved some of the wounded into the ambulance. Contends that he [McLatchie] was the first to enter the Batoche House. Frenchman that was standing in front of the window only to get shot was only there to gain notoriety. Relates story of how he went to the house and to dispel all the newspapers' stories.</p> <p>Off to Fort Pitt and to wipe out Big Bear. 4pp on 2 sheets.</p>
10	<p>Fort Pitt, 5 June 1885. Yesterday, had to make it to Big Bear on a forced march. Have now joined General Strange who has about 300 men. General Strange had an engagement with the "Indians" last week, however they were outnumbered (and the "Indians" had good position), so they retired to Fort Pitt to await reinforcements. The "Indians" then moved camp, and, if Gen Strange had followed up, then Big Bear would have been defeated. 40 or 50 Mounted Police took possession of the "Indian" camp. The Police also retreated during the night with 3 wounded being unable to hold off the "Indians" after dark. They are certain that the Police killed at least 8 men and 2 "squaws". Several prisoners escaped the "Indians" and showed up at General Strange's camp. Recounts some of the stories that he has heard about Big Bear. 1p on 1 sheet.</p>
11	<p>Fort Pitt, 12 June 1885. Just arrived back to Fort Pitt. The trip after Big Bear was worthless. They are to join General Strange with about 200 men and the Midland Battalion in case they find Big Bear. Had they followed up when they got there, as Major Steele with 50 mounted police was on his trail, they would have caught him. However his group delayed and Big Bear got away. General Strange also retreated to Fort Pitt instead of fighting him. Remarks that he does not want to be in the Army anymore as they waste too much time. Doest not think that they will catch Big Bear. 4pp on 1 sheet.</p>
12	<p>Fort Pitt, 23 June 1885. Big Bear has gone to Turtle Lake and coming up with Otter's command. Returned to Fort Pitt on Saturday and have been resting for 2 days. Prisoners that had been taken by Big Bear have been returned healthy. If Otter cannot catch Big Bear then he will likely fall into the clutches of Col Irvine at Irene Lake. Expects to head to Battleford soon and then on his way home. 2pp on 1 sheet.</p>

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