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HIGHLIGHTS:

- account of rescue of Mrs. Delaney and Mrs. Gowanlock
- John Pritchard's last days
- argument for monument to John Pritchard

ARTICLES CONTINUED...

Unity Herald and Weekly Star, June 24, 1936

CAPTIVES OF BIG BEAR

by Jean Ritchie

FEW episodes in the North West Rebellion of 1885 aroused more public interest and sympathy than the captivity in the camp of Big Bear, of Mrs. Gowanlock and Mrs. Delaney. Neither

of these ladies had been very long in the west and both had spent their early life in eastern Ontario.

Mrs. Gowanlock had been married the October before to Mr. Alexander Gowanlock, a Toronto (?) who was engaged by the Government to build mills on the Indian reserves near Frog Lake in what were then the North West Territories. It was while Mr. Gowanlock was east procuring supplies that he was married. He had many interests in the West having tried his hand at being farmer, mill-(?), speculator, vendor, store-keeper and mill owner. His greatest success had been in Battleford where he had a store.

Mrs. Delaney had been brought up near (?), her grandmother having established the family on a farm on the Aylmer River more than seventy years before the start of the North West Rebellion. Her husband came from the same locality, and had been in the lumber business before going out west. It was some of the big lumbermen of the Ottawa Valley who recommended Mr. Delaney for the post of mill instructor in the North West. He had been three years in the West when he took his bride there in 1882. His first winter was passed at Onion Lake, for the Frog Lake district was then still a wilderness. When Mr. Gowanlock arrived with his bride in the late autumn of 1884 the Delaneys were well established. Even in those two years the way of getting to the west had changed. The Delaneys had come by way of Sarnia to Chicago and from there to St. Paul, and on to Winnipeg. From Winnipeg they travelled by the Canadian Pacific line to Brandon, from there they took the construction (?) to Troy. The rest of the trip was by (?) over the prairie. The Gowanlocks took the C.P.R. to Owen Sound, and there they boarded a boat which took them to Port Arthur. From Port Arthur they travelled by train to Winnipeg and on as far as Swift Current. There they procured a (?) of provisions for their trip across the prairie.

It was a hundred and ninety-five miles from there to Battleford, their next objective, and they travelled by buckboard. For four nights they lived under canvas and in the

daytime they passed several prairie caravans drawn by oxen and driven by half-breeds and Indians. Mrs. Gowanlock stayed in Battleford six weeks, while her husband went on to Frog Lake, where he had thirteen men working on (?) and mills.

On the trip from Battleford to her home, Mrs. Gowanlock met many whose names were afterwards mentioned in the reports when the trouble began. Mr. Ballentyne, of Battleford, accompanied the couple as far as Fort Pitt, and they spent a night at the home of Mr. McLean. The next morning they left for Onion Lake and there they were welcomed by Mr. Mann and his family. After a night's rest they proceeded to Frog Lake.

The Delaneys were overjoyed to receive the newcomers. The Gowanlock home was two miles farther on, and while her husband went over to do some last fixing of furniture, Mrs. Gowanlock remained to cheer her new friend with news of the outside world. A little of the atmosphere may be had from a peep at Mrs. Delaney's story of the time:

"Ours was a happy home," she wrote, "I grew to like my surroundings, I became fond of my Indian proteges, and to crown all, in December last, Mrs. Gowanlock came to live near us. I felt that even though a letter from home should be delayed, that I would never feel as lonesome as before. My husband was generous to a fault. He was liked by all the bands -- our white neighbors were few, but they were splendid people, fast and true friends, and I might say since Mrs. Gowanlock arrived I felt at home: I looked upon the place as my own, and the Indian children as my children, the same as my husband looked upon the men as his care, and they regarded him as a father. It was no longer to be a lonely life. It was to become a life of usefulness, joy, labor, peace and contentment. Such was the vision of the future I had about the middle of last winter.

Mrs. Gowanlock's home nestled in a pretty valley, on Frog Creek. There was a simple house, a store, and beside the brook, the mill. The only sound to be heard was the noise of the workman's hammer, and its echo brought back from the hills around. The nearest white neighbors were at Frog Lake settlement, two miles away, but there were others close by. The day after the bride arrived they all came in to shake hands with her, and to chat in Cree, of which language she knew very little.

The Indians supplied the Gowanlocks with fish all winter, twice a week. In return they received sugar, tea, and prints, etc. from the store. Though the thermometer went as low as sixty degrees below zero, the air was so bracing that it did not seem as cold as an Ontario winter. Mrs. Gowanlock thought the country the most beautiful she had ever seen, and everything seemed to point to a peaceful and happy future.

Writing at that time, she said: "Nothing of an eventful nature transpired during those two months, the mill was about completed and Williscraft and the other men were discharged with the exception of Mr. Gilchrist, who assisted my husband. The machinery was all in position and everything done but finishing up, when on the seventh of March, two men, strangers, made their appearance at the mill and asked for employment. They said they were weary and worn and had left Duck Lake in order to avoid the trouble that was brewing there. One was Gregory Donaire and the other Peter Blondin; my husband took pity on them and gave them employment. They worked for us until the massacre. They were continually going to and

PICTURE WITH CAPTION: John Pritchard guarding the captive ladies, Mrs. Gowanlock and Mrs. Delaney

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(Photocopy has words missing on the right and left of this article)

JOHN PRITCHARD PIONEER OF PRE-REBELLION DAYS  
CROSSES GREAT DIVIDE

... OF FAMOUS PLAINSMAN RECALLS STIRRING DAYS OF WAR,  
... WAR, INTRIGUES, FRIENDSHIP, AND THE HARD-  
SHIPS OF OLDTIMERS

Author, William Bleasdel  
... written of Adolphus Nolin  
... John Pritchard, two heroes  
... , of first-hand knowledge.  
... day of the massacre, Cam-  
... employees of the Hudson's  
..Company post, was captured.  
... his life to his acquaintance  
... Indians. He was a prisoner  
..months before making his es-

By

... M BLEASDELL CAMERON

... Pritchard is dead.

... a handful of Canada's six  
... million of understanding  
... these four words mean any-  
... They should mean a great  
... all of them.

... after noon on the 2nd of  
... 5, two men, mugs of strong  
... in their hands, sat in a  
... Oncepphayo's reserve at Frog  
... the old Northwest Territor-  
...Canada. Their hands shook as  
...allowed the tea in great gulps  
... ly their nerves, after being  
... illing and stunned witnesses  
... htful scene of blood. One was

What Of The Women?

... der what's happened to the  
... It will be terrible for them.  
... be possible, do you think,  
... help them in any way?"  
... e got to!" The short man's  
... doggedly. "They can't be left  
... mercy of these demons." He  
... and looked at his companion.  
... n Scotch--the white in me--  
... who speak English are not  
... with these Indians today. I  
... all right, but I may not. I  
... ow. I wish I did. They may  
... here any minute, the devils,  
... me out without giving me  
... say good-bye to my family  
... in half expecting that. But  
... French--in part; you're not  
... ch danger. They'll be afraid  
..you; Riel might be angry. Find  
... has the women. Then we'll  
... can't get them out of these  
... hands, somehow."

... young man left the tent.  
.....  
... er Indians he learned that  
... he women was in the lodge  
... hoose, a murderer of that  
... rning, with his Cree wives.

... dark, smooth-faced, athletic  
... of twenty-five; the other a  
... compactly-built, black-whisk-  
... in past forty, with an even  
... Said one:  
... the Indian's lodge. He did  
... than glance at the white  
... cowering there, dazed by  
... and grief, her face deathly  
... wide eyes mirroring the  
... that sudden blow that had  
... ended her when her beloved  
... fell dying at her side, a  
... as before. It would not  
... for Nolin to appear as a  
... the poor, distraught mooni-  
... Instead, he said casually,  
... you have a white wife now."  
... The Indian nodded. "Uh-huh." He  
... important though he was  
... not to show it.

... are lucky," Nolin pursued.  
... look at me. Here am I, a man  
... yet I have no white wife.  
... I get (?). No wonder you  
.....

Manichoose was flattered, but he raised a deprecating hand. "I am not proud," he objected. "What is a wife, more or less to me? If you want this white woman, I will sell her to you."

Nolin shook his head. He sighed. "No. You would want too much. I am very poor. I could not buy her."

"You may have her for two horses," said the Indian.

"Two horses? I knew I could not buy her. That is a fearful price. I have only one horse. I will pay it for her."

"Two horses," the Indian insisted stolidly.

Nolin rose. "Wait a little," he said, "perhaps I can get another. Then I will buy her."

Passing out, he spoke for the first time in an even voice to the white woman: "Take courage! Don't despair. You shan't be harmed. I'll get you away from this fellow."

He went back to his companion, John Pritchard -- "Johnny" Pritchard always to his friends, the kindly, simple, Scotch halfbreed native of Manitoba, who died the other day.

"He wants two horses for Mrs. Delaney," Nolin told Johnny. "He won't take less. And I've only one."

#### Uses Cunning

... (Adolphus Nolin was the  
... man's name -- he lives at  
... Lake, Saskatchewan, today)

"Well, it's all right," Pritchard answered. "I've two. Take one of mine."

Pritchard had secured a large A tent, the property of the Hudson's Bay Company at Frog Lake, earlier in the day. He had set it up in the Indian camp and installed his wife and family of young children.

Nolin took the two horses to the lodge of Manichoose, tied them to the cart outside and entered. He came out with Mrs. Delaney and escorted her to Pritchard's tent.

#### Mrs. Gowanlock Bought

A little later the two men induced a third halfbreed, Pierre Blondin, to purchase the release of Mrs. Gowanlock from her Indian captor for a horse and \$30. She also was lodged in Pritchard's tent. Blondin's subsequent conduct eliminated him as deserving of the praise due the others.

For two months these two faithful and intrepid halfbreeds, Pritchard and Nolin, guarded the afflicted and helpless white women day and night and kept them safe from the Indians.

Nolin slept across the door of the tent. One night -- he was just dropping to sleep -- he awoke suddenly vaguely conscious that someone had stepped over him in the dark. He sat up and struck a match. Two Plains Indians, Nacotan and Nacesoo, squatted between him and the white women. In the momentary flash he noticed on the ground alongside Nacotan a Winchester. The match flickered out, and in the succeeding blackness Nolin stretched forth a stealthy hand and slid the rifle to that side of him farthest from the Indian.

A lamp was lit. Genevieve, a halfbreed girl, roused by the men's voices, came in from an adjoining tent. "Shame on you!" she cried, in Cree, to the Indians. "Let these poor women alone, you skunks!"

#### Steals Gun

Nacotan missed his gun. His uneasiness showed itself when he discovered it in the hands of Nolin.

Eventually, the Indians were induced to leave. The inducements consisted in the fact that the Indian wanted his gun and could not recover it on any other condition: but also, they received a payment of tobacco and clothing.

When General Strange struck the Indians on May 28th at Frenchman's Butte, the two women, with the aid of Pritchard and other halfbreeds got safely into his camp. To a newspaper reporter, Mrs. Delaney said:

"I was put into an Indian tent and left there until nightfall, when John Pritchard came and purchased my release

with horses, and I believe both Mrs. Gowanlock and myself owe to him our escape from terrible treatment and subsequent death. On four different nights Indians approached our tent, but the determination of Pritchard and some other halfbreeds saved us."

That Mrs. Delaney, stunned as she was by the shocking events of the day, should have been somewhat confused as to the exact details of what happened, is not surprising. Her release came only four hours after the tragedy, or sometime before nightfall, and while both had a part in arranging it, Nolin, and not Pritchard, actually accomplished her deliverance and brought her out of Manichoose's lodge.

#### Praises Pritchard

Mrs. Gowanlock supported Mrs. Delaney in regard to Pritchard in the following words:

"Like Mrs. Delaney, I dread to imagine the treatment to which we would have been subjected had it not been for Pritchard."

The government of the day very justly awarded pensions to these poor women, so cruelly widowed. Had it not been for Pritchard, they would never have needed pensions: they would not have lived to require them. Pritchard, to the day of his death, was never awarded anything, and of course now he never can be. Efforts were to be made this year to secure some compensation. His heroic part in caring, at no little danger to himself, for these white women went unrecognized.

His only reward ...  
the satisfaction of which no one  
could deprive him--the consciousness  
of a good act faithfully and ...  
performed.

I called on him a day or two be-  
fore he died. I told him--what ...  
Kennedy intended trying to ...

...  
already knew -- that Mr. ...  
the government in his case, and ...  
we who were familiar with the ...  
he had played were prepared to ...  
him any support in our power. ...  
given a small pension--\$25. a month  
even, say--he would be protected...  
against actual want at least in ...  
old age. The flame of life was ...  
ing low, pain racked his ...  
frame, but his homely face light...  
He was pleased and gratified. ...  
the fact that at least he was to...  
recognition, even more than the ...

seized him. He shivered all night ...  
roused no one: he hated to be ...  
trouble. Next day he was severely ...  
ill. The doctor was called. Johnny...  
he said, was suffering from ...  
bronchitis. On the afternoon of ...  
tember 13, beautiful warm ...  
he drifted peacefully out--to his ...  
ward in another world. He got

in this.

It would have been a gracious ...  
on the part of the Canadian govern-  
ment to recognize Pritchard's ...  
service by a small pension during  
his lifetime. It didn't. This year..  
is erecting handsome cairns com-  
memorating dramatic and significant  
events in the history of Canad ...  
West. One is at Frog Lake, ...  
nine men, including the husbands ...  
these two white women were ...

of money, particularly satisfied...

Suggests Memorial

His illness seemed to give him... sense of shame. He said to me:

"I am not much like what I was... when you saw me last."

He was eighty-five when he died. Despite his age, he was still ... able to work and proud of it. He.. frequently employed at odd jobs ... the old town of Battleford, where.. lived. On Friday of the week before he was working about the grounds of the town hall. The day ... warm and he perspired profusely. Mr. Adams, the town secretary, ... monstrated with the old man, ... told that he was working ... hard--to take it easier. He was,... Johnny did not think so.

At 9:30 that evening he went ... the newstand to buy a paper. ... after he went to bed a severe ...

himself, at his post beside the ... agent, performing his duty of ... in the face of intimidative ... threats from infuriated savages ... till Quinn fell at his feet before.. assassin's bullet.

Pritchard deserves a monument. Let him have it! This would not ... generosity--it is too late for that Call it selfishness if you choose... the patriotic spirit and pride ... jealously says that the bravery and high purpose of our heroic ... shall not go unrecorded. Pritchard was a true Canadian. His skin was.. dark, but his heart and his life were white. He was a good man, and we... should be proud that he was a pro... duct of the good soil of Canada.

It is time that Pritchard's ... conduct receives the recognition ... deserves. The government cannot ... now reward him in person, but it possible, since it is too late to pen- sion him, to honour him in a more

Why not a monument to Pritch- ard? Probably no single event ... those troubled days of '85 was ... deeply significant, more worthy ... permanent remembrance, than ... splendid service rendered to ... two defenceless and unfortunate white women from the East by ... Pritchard, the sterling halfblood na- tive of the old West. Oblivion ... not be allowed to overtake ... deeds as his. They are a part of ... heritage. They should be commem- orated in bronze as an inspiration ... future generations of Canadian youth.

Pritchard deserves a monument ... more than his protection of the ... white women. He was a ... servant of the government ... deserter. He stood, on this ... of April, at grave personal ...

enduring and important way. ...  
monument to John Pritchard's ...  
And it remains the only thing ...  
we can give him.

(ARTICLE HAS A PHOTO OF JOHN PRITCHARD  
AND OF ADOLPHUS NOLIN)

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