

People of the West

A Short Story Timeline

By David M. McGowan

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The following stories are works of fiction. Any similarity between these stories and any historical recording of events is accidental and highly unlikely. Any similarity between the characters depicted and any actual people, either living or dead, is accidental, highly unlikely and very flattering.

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Reviews for D.M. McGowan

Cold Coffee Press on "The Great Liquor War"

“Great storytelling, true-to-life cowboy experience with US and Canadian history”

“Nuggets of history told within a great story of human experience”

On Line Book Club on “The Great Liquor War”

“Action-packed and entertaining!”

“My enthusiasm remained high all the way to the end.”

Author Barbra Martin on “Homesteader: Finding Sharon”

“I didn't want to put the book down”

Paul Johnson of Reader’s Favorite on “Homesteader: Finding Sharon”

“A satisfying plot with enough action to keep the reader turning pages”

Barbra Casto of Reader’s Favorite on “Homesteader: Finding Sharon”

“Absorbed not only in the story, but the history”

Editor/Journalist Carl Stewart on “Partners”.

“A fast-paced and good read and I recommend this book highly”

Western Fiction Review on “Partners”

“Partners is a well told story that entertains and educates”

Cold Coffee Press on “The Making of Jake McTavish”

“Incredible story telling”

On Line Book Club on “The Making of Jake McTavish”

“A quick and enjoyable read”

“Skillful setting and mood descriptions”

Tom Cole, musician, songwriter, entertainer on “The Making of Jake McTavish”

“Well developed characters perfectly weaved into places and times

Cold Coffee Press on “Gunfighters, Thieves, and Lawmen.”

“Very enjoyable read.”

From Georgia Coon on “Partners”: This book was incredible. I read this all in the same day - couldn’t put it down.

From Maple Tyler on “Partners”: Brilliant story. It is a delightful story that I have loved reading. I really was hooked on this book from the beginning to the end.

Novels by D.M. McGowan

The Great Liquor War (1998, 2015) **

Partners (2008)

Homesteader: Finding Sharon (2009) **

The Making of Jake McTavish (2016)

Gunfighters, Thieves and Lawmen (2019)

Boundaries (2023)

(** Hank James series)

Short Stories by D.M. McGowan

Marker of Stone

Lucky

Into the Mountains

Stealing Janet’s Cattle

A Voice from Beyond

Deacon

Invasion!

Sure, I can do that!

Blizzard

What We Need Is a Good Cattle Dog.

Several of the new covers on the republished versions of earlier works and the cover for the new release, “Boundaries” were created by Samantha Zwicker of <https://hojanueva.org/>

Check out what Samantha and her partner, Dylan Singer, are doing in Peru. They also display some award-winning videos (including an Emmy) at that site.

Forward

The way history was presented in school always upset me. Students were told how kings, prime ministers and presidents did this or that resulting in some type of follow-up months or years later. With very little research beyond teachers' instructions, it was possible to discover that kings, prime ministers and presidents didn't do much of anything that didn't increase their "electability" or their treasury. Sometimes they were forced to do something outside those parameters by the common man whether they be called peons, serfs or merchants. Or because the common man uncovered what they were trying to hide.

The problem with many – and I do mean many – historical records are that, as Winston Churchill said, "History is written by the victor." As a result, those ideas or efforts that lead to change are often hidden behind the brightness emitted by the victory.

Stories from Canada's past parallel history from all around the world and support these ideas and demonstrate that the actions of mankind can and will be noble and degrading, moral and evil, intelligent or demonstrating the thought pattern of stone.

From the Canadian Prairies there are stories of the gallant militia soldiers quelling vicious riots by the ungrateful peasants. It doesn't take much research to discover that little of that was true. Slightly more study will reveal that those "ungrateful peasants" had every justification in displaying a violent reaction to the treatment they had received from Ottawa. (Or any other distant and uncaring body such as England and, much earlier, France.) The gallant militia or sometimes the Noble Mounted Police, ill-equipped, ill-trained and altogether ill-prepared performed slap-stick comedy for longer than necessary but still somehow achieved a conclusion to whatever crisis had initially presented.

Their results, despite how they managed to achieve them, support the title of "gallant" or "Noble". When the militia was sent to the North West Territories during the "Rebellion of 1885" (aka North West Rebellion) they were supplied with less than half of the equipment, supplies, livestock and ammunition they needed for the job. Re-supply was almost too late and only helped by a commandeered paddle wheeler on the Saskatchewan River. Had the Métis tactics been left in the hands of their military leader, Gabriel Dumont, and not been subject to political interference, the militia would have done well to even survive, let alone succeed.

Likewise, the North West Mounted Police force was never funded well enough to achieve the goals demanded of them. Less than 250 men were initially sent (1874) to quell whiskey traders that almost equaled them in number. The number designated as their "wards" by Ottawa, that is the Cree, Blackfoot and Assiniboine, exceeded their numbers by at least 20 times. Despite that, on more than one occasion, when the Interior Ministry failed to supply reservations with the promised beef, or when Indian agents supplied spoiled supplies, the Mounted Police bought cattle from their own inadequate funds to feed their "wards".

Yes, those out on the land, the police officers and soldiers on site, performed in a noble and gallant manner, but usually despite the lack of help from their so-called superiors.

Such stories and actions are certainly not unique to Canada and are mirrored in greater amounts in history from all around the world.

The stories in this collection are about real people not idols or public figures. In some cases, the stories, although fiction, parallel those related by people involved in similar circumstances. They can all be considered people of western North America; one story, though it takes place in the US Midwest includes a Canadian character. Diary entries, first-hand accounts or personal experience supplied the ideas that grew into stories; often from a short sentence into several pages. The idea for the first one, for example came from a diary entry by a European who I hope the reader recognizes by the end.

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1793 Marker of Stone

At the beginning of the Fraser River gold rush of 1858 twenty-eight men, miners from California, formed a party and made their way to Fort Langley. From there they ascended the Fraser, found gold in two spots but were unhappy with how fine it was and the difficulty in capturing it in their pans. They trekked through the country, checking the Thompson and Nicola Rivers. They continued to find fine flake gold but they also found members of what they called the Thompson River Indians.

They also found a young woman who took particular interest in Jack McLennan the foreman or Captain of the group. I suspect there was a relationship there, but we will never know for sure. She did return to their camp one night late and warned them all to leave the country or they would be killed. After that she walked off into the dark.

The miners broke camp, left everything but their firearms, ammunition, jerked meat, and one blanket each and struck out down river in the dark. A week later the 28 miners were 5, all of them wounded. Two more would eventually die of their wounds leaving 3 survivors.

There was obviously a lack of communication and understanding between these miners and the natives. A misunderstanding undoubtedly initiated and exacerbated by those of European ancestry who tended to disregard or ignore the needs and desires of aboriginals.

The Thompson tribe involved was, a few months later, almost eliminated because of retribution from other miners and from down-river, traditional enemies.

Shortly after reading this account from one of the survivors, Edward (Ned) Stout, I read parts of a diary by one of the early North American explorers. In his entries the explorer mentioned several times how friendly and accommodating the natives were. I began to wonder if they were actually friendly or just hoping the beastly strangers would leave before they had to be eliminated.

What was communication like in this instance? Were they speaking French, English or one of the Cree dialects? Was it all sign language? Perhaps they were using “Chinook” a trade language used along the Pacific Coast from California to Alaska.

Marker of Stone

By D.M. McGowan

1

When I had seen eighteen winters, I left the village and traveled toward the rising sun for two days. On the third day I turned toward the home of the cold wind, and began a circle back toward the village. I searched for meat, but I found strangers.

In the high land where the rivers flow in all directions, I began to hear strange, loud noises. Soon my nose could see the smoke of a poor fire, but the noises were nothing that I knew. I worked closer so that my eyes could tell my ears and nose what was causing this unknown thing.

At a place where the bank of the river is quite flat, there were many strangers. There was a family of Carrier people, who live in that land, and two of these strangers looked like the Cree people, that come from beyond where the sun rises. I had not seen these people until that time, but had been told of them.

The other strangers were as nothing I had seen. They wore strange clothing, and all but one had faces covered in hair. Even the one whose face I could see had much hair under his nose. I had heard of white men who traded for furs along the shores of the Great Water, and saw that these men were like that.

I knew then why I had not taken any meat during my hunt. These noisy strangers had chased all the game ahead of them.

Moving back from their camp, I circled wide toward my village. I hurried to carry the news of the coming strangers to my father.

I cannot say why I began to travel from our village, for it was not a thing done by others. It made me different. There was a time when I was lost and very hungry and I ate the meat of a deer. From that day I was not the same as my own people who only eat fish. I was still welcome in my father's home, but all looked at me with different

eyes. Because I was different, I knew of the strangers and could warn my father and the village.

"Are they like the others?" my father asked, when I had told him of the noisy camp that I had found.

"I was not yet of this world when the others came," I reminded him. "Only my father can know if these men are like those who came from the sea."

I waited for my father's third wife to serve me food, before continuing. "I have heard my father's story of the yellow-skin men many times, and because of his great skill as a story teller, I do not believe these men who camp on top of the mountain are the same. One man has hair and skin the color of fire, and they all have much hair on their faces."

My father nodded, and then quietly smoked his pipe for the time it might take an eagle to soar across our valley.

"When the others came, some of them were good, and some were bad," he finally said. "One of our people who is a great boatman and fisherman is the son of the daughter of one of the good ones. One of our best carvers and his sister also carry the blood of a good man of yellow skin."

"But many of the strangers cast up by the Great Water were not good men! All of their children have brought great trouble to our people. These children have been cast out of the village, or sent to the spirit world."

He paused, removed his pipe stem from his mouth, and smiled at me. "Perhaps those sent beyond have learned better ways."

"From our neighbors, the Bella Bella, we have also heard many stories about the men who trade for furs on the Great Water. But we know that our good neighbors sometimes have bad memories, so we must see these things for ourselves."

He drew on his pipe before continuing. "You must return to this camp of noisy strangers that you have found. Offer to show them what they search for. You will spend time with them, then tell the council if they are good men, or bad men."

"What is it they search for?" I asked.

My father shrugged. "Fish? Furs? Perhaps to watch the eagle soar? Strangers have strange ways!"

"And if they are good men?" I asked.

My father shrugged again, puffing on his pipe. "We will show them kindness, and peace."

"And if they are bad men?"

My father removed the pipe from his mouth, and his eyes became hard as winter wind. "Then we will show them peace!"

I hastily finished my meal, and then returned up the Great River to the top of the mountain.

There is a good place to camp at the top of the trail where I waited for the strangers, hoping to watch as they settled for the night. When they arrived, I could see they were fewer in number. The Carrier people had left them so that now they numbered ten white men, and two Cree.

Since the making of camp is the work of woman, the Cree did not help but stood near one side of the clearing leaning on long sticks. When the strangers were busy with fire and cooking, I made myself known to the Cree.

I thought I had given the warriors enough warning, but perhaps their long time with the hairy ones had dulled their senses. When I appeared they were much afraid, and pointed the long sticks at me.

The Bella Bella told stories of sticks that held death inside. It was said these sticks would let death out, hidden in smoke. Only those who faced the stick would see death.

From the camp, in a language my father had taught me, a voice cried, "Stop!"

The Cree froze, still pointing the sticks at me, but glancing quickly at the one who spoke.

Slowly I bowed toward the Cree, then toward the speaker, who was walking toward us. This one who gave orders was the only one who wore no clothes made of animal skins, and had less hair on his face than the others.

"I welcome you to the home of the people of the sea," I greeted, in the language he had used.

"You speak French!" he remarked.

He did not sound happy to hear me use this language. I knew my use of this tongue would not be great for I only spoke it with my father who had taught it to me. But it was rude for this stranger to put the poor use of my father's teachings before my face.

Perhaps the stranger could see in my face that I was unhappy, for he bowed low and asked me to step aside. I did not understand this, but took a step to the side, and bowed in return.

"Welcome to our camp," he said. "Come, eat with us!"

I nodded in agreement, but did not speak, concerned that my use of their language might offend them.

When we had eaten much burned meat and drank a brew of boiled leaves, the chief of these strangers asked my name. When I told him, he looked puzzled, then said, "I will call you 'Rascal', because you appear from nowhere, scare everyone and seem to take pleasure in this."

He then told me his name, which I could not understand. Reaching out to his coat, I pinched the material and asked, "What is this called?"

"It is cloth," he said. "Wool."

"I will call you 'Wool'," I advised, "for you wear strange clothes."

Several of the strangers laughed, though I had returned their leaders insult with one of mine. Then the leader said something in another language, and those who had sat with faces of stone, smiled.

I learned two things about these men. They had not been taught good manners, but did not seem to mind when these bad manners were returned. It also appeared that not all of them spoke this language taught to me by my father.

"How is it you speak the French?" Wool asked me.

"I have learned from my father," I replied. "This language was taught to him before he was a man by those who came from the Great Water. They also taught him another language, which I have not learned to speak."

I could see that Wool was made unhappy by what I said, though he tried to hide this distress while lighting his pipe.