

PROSTOR PRO HOSTA

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“RAPTUROUSLY ENCORED”: R.B. NEVITT’S ACCOUNT OF NWMP THEATRICALS AT FORT MACLEOD

Assistant Surgeon R. B. Nevitt’s letters from Fort Macleod, Alberta, in the mid-1870s offer evidence that North West Mounted Police theatricals had other justifications besides merely breaking the monotony of existence. Nevitt’s letters reveal that Mounted Policemen presented two conflicting images of themselves in their theatricals: an endearing humanized image, often evoking the spectators’ laughter, when they appeared onstage as low-status characters or victims of oppression; and a courageous, powerful, even superhuman image, evoking a response of wonder and admiration, when they performed in magic shows. The Mounted Police, in all their theatrical evenings, tended to promote the cultural values of the European and the white North American. In so doing, the Mounted Police were perpetuating a program of “cultural assimilation” initiated by the British government in 1837 and embraced by the new Confederation of Canada in the 1860s and 70s.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said writes of the need in the nineteenth century to develop an ideology to justify European imperialism and to ally that ideology with military, economic, and political methods. Said concludes, with Willaim Appleman Williams, that „imperialism produces troubling self-images, for example, that of ‘a benevolent progressive policeman.’”¹ Williams notes that the United States used this policeman image in justifying its interference in international politics through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and also in quashing domestic disturbances within the United States. Williams writes, „But in truth the benevolence abroad was like the help at home: it went to a minority of the population. And the policeman became ever more energetic in whacking the skulls of strikers and blacks at home, as well as thumping feisty natives abroad.”²

¹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 76.

² William Appleman Williams, *Empire as a Way of Life* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980), p. 113.

The NWMP was also fond of characterizing itself as an arm of two benevolent, progressive policemen—the British Empire and the Canadian Government. Several accounts of the NWMP and its role in ‘developing’ the Canadian West have flirted with this benevolent self-image. In recommending to Prime Minister John A. MacDonald the formation of a new police force, the Adjutant-General Colonel Robertson-Ross emphasized that a “large force is not required, but the presence of a certain force . . . will be found to be indispensable for the security of the country, to prevent bloodshed and preserve peace.”³ The main intent of the Royal Proclamation of 1763 had been “to protect Indian land from direct alienation,” as Barbara J. Mayfield writes, and the NWMP was fond of portraying itself as the Indians’ protector.⁴ In *Forty Years in Canada*, for example, Sam Steele refers to the “reckless men” from south of the U.S./Canada border who “ruined the Indians.” The implication is that the Indians needed protection from these ruffians. To his credit, Steele also notes that the Indians were “still powerful and of a war-like character” and that they represented a danger to white settlers.⁵

The benevolent, progressive policeman was not entirely concerned with protecting what it consistently referred to as the child-like native; other ends were in view, such as the dissemination of British and white North American culture and influence. In 1837, after the Select Committee on Aborigines had made its report, the British government “established a policy for the cultural assimilation of all native peoples.”⁶ The new Canadian government retained this policy of assimilation, and the establishment of the NWMP was one way of insuring that assimilation took place. The Mounted Policemen exerted cultural pressure in upholding the law and, in their off-hours, celebrated European and white North American culture in the many theatrical entertainments they produced. In a way, the colonial policeman was still benevolent and progressive; he believed in the idea of progress and in the superiority of European and white North American technology and culture. To pass that technology and culture on to the denizens of the Canadian West was, in many cases, construed as an act of kindness.

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Richard Barrington Nevitt was an acute observer of the theatrical evenings at Fort Macleod precisely because he was not a typical Mounted Policeman. Nevitt did not come from England or Ontario, as many of his fellow Mounted Policemen at Fort Macleod did; he was an American, born in Savannah, Georgia on 22 November 1850. At the age of fourteen, Nevitt dodged the Confederate draft and sought shelter in Canada. In 1865, he enrolled in Bishop’s College School in

³ A.L. Haydon, *The Riders of the Plains* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1971), p. 16.

⁴ Barbara J. Mayfield, “The North-West Mounted Police and the Blackfoot peoples, 1874–1884,” *Diss. Univ. of Victoria* 1979, pp. 29–30.

⁵ Col. S.B. Steele, *Forty Years in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild and Stewart, 1915), pp. 53–54.

⁶ Mayfield, p. 37.

Lennoxville, Quebec. He graduated from Trinity Medical School, with a Bachelor of Medicine degree, in 1874. When he joined the Mounted Police as an Assistant Surgeon in 1874, he accepted a salary of \$1000 per year, over twice as much as a first-year constable in the Force would have earned. Nevitt was also an artist; he drew and painted many landscapes and portraits during his four-year stint in the Canadian West. He was not expected to enforce the law—only to mend the injuries caused by lawlessness or misfortune—and he was capable of a more humanistic approach to the denizens of the Canadian West than most of his fellow Mounted Policemen at Fort Macleod. He was sincere in his attempt to learn the Blackfoot language, and he made an effort to learn about Blackfoot culture. On 15 February 1875, Nevitt walked two miles in cold weather to take part in a dance at Crowfoot's encampment. He then described the event in detail to his fiancée, writing, "I carried on a desperate flirtation with no less than four squaws; they made me get up and dance again and again."⁷ As Assistant Surgeon at the Fort, Nevitt eventually supervised a twelve-bed hospital. In a local history of Fort Macleod, Nevitt's tactics in treating native patients are applauded:

Among the hospital's patients was Blackfoot Chief Crowfoot, just before the Treaty Number Seven negotiations in 1877. It is said that the consideration he received while at the hospital figured in the success of the negotiations. Dr. Nevitt attended to Crowfoot, and other Indians, and wore the robes of the medicine man to gain the confidence of the patients.⁸

Through his four-year stint at Fort Macleod, Nevitt maintained a detailed correspondence with his fiancée Elizabeth Eleanor Beaty, daughter of the Managing Director of the Toronto Leader. In 1878, Nevitt retired from the Force and embarked on a medical career in Ontario. He died in 1928.

Established in 1874, Fort Macleod was the site of the Mounted Police's first forays into the theatre. Although Penelope Routledge suggests that the earliest dramatic entertainment "credited to any area in the North-West"⁹ was presented in October 1876, there is reference, in Nevitt's letters, to a concert, which included at least one minstrel show routine, on 17 March 1875.¹⁰ Concerts, magic shows, skits, and plays were performed, using Mounted Policemen as actors, both within the fort—a recreation room was available to the men, but at least one account places most of Fort Macleod's entertainments in the mess hall—and in the town that grew up outside the fort.¹¹

Typical of the Victorian theatre, Mounted Police theatricals at Fort Macleod were usually long and diverse, sometimes lasting three and one half hours. Ne-

7 R.B. Nevitt, *A Winter at Fort Macleod*, ed. Hugh A. Dempsey (Calgary: Glenbow-Alberta Institute, 1974), p. 54.

8 M. MacDonald, ed., *Fort Macleod—Our Colourful Past* (Fort Macleod: Fort Macleod History Book Committee, 1977), p. 43.

9 Penelope Routledge, "The North-West Mounted Police and Their Influence on the Sporting and Social Life of the North-West Territories, 1870–1904" Diss. Univ of Alberta 1978, p. 37.

10 Nevitt, p. 78.

11 Joy Duncan, ed., *Red Surge Wives* (Edmonton: Centennial Book Committee, 1974), p. 45.

vitt wrote his fiancée, in a letter dated 25 February 1878: "Dramatic Club gave a splendid entertainment tonight—one of the best they have given. It was rather long—as you may imagine when I tell you that I have just come home and it is now half past eleven."¹² On 8 January 1883, the evening's entertainment consisted of five parts, with songs, clog dances, ballads, recitations, and plays.¹³ Although the plays and songs performed were an outgrowth of European and white North American culture—many of the same songs and plays had been popular on London and New York stages—Nevitt's earliest accounts show that several of the spectators were of native ancestry. Later accounts either ignore the composition of the audience or concentrate on the Mounted Policemen of rank who attended.

The foreignness of early Mounted Police entertainments, in the eyes and ears of a native audience, is aptly described in Nevitt's letters. Nevitt's description of that first concert on 17 March 1875 mentions only one spectator, the Metis wife of a prospector:

Last night about 7:30 the concert began. Some of the songs were very good and appropriate; others were very amusing. [Cst. J.W. Beattie] was dressed as a darkey and burnt corked. His appearance so frightened Mrs. Glen [born Adelaide Belcourt], the half-breed wife of John Glen, that she rushed shrieking from the room.¹⁴

Nevitt attributes Mrs. Glen's response to her "half-breed" naivete in the ways of the European and white North American. A few days later, on 30 March 1875, Nevitt described a more desirable aboriginal response, this time to an evening of fireworks which followed a day of athletic games. Nevitt writes: "In the evening, a grand pyrotechnic display excited the wonder and admiration of the aborigines—rockets, squibs and firecrackers keeping up an incessant din."¹⁵ The wonder and admiration of the natives is a response that would be elicited in several Mounted Police theatricals at Fort Macleod.

Magic shows, especially popular in the 1870s at Fort Macleod, were intended to evoke native admiration and to enhance the Mounted Policeman's image. References to specific tricks are scarce, but we can glean from the available evidence that the policeman's/magician's physical courage and proficiency at arms were emphasized. The first recorded magic show at Fort Macleod was presented in October of 1876 after a cricket game. The program, arranged by Staff-constable Tim Dunne (who took part in theatrical evenings at Fort Walsh, as well), started with his presentation of 'Feats of Legerdemain,' a series of tricks. "As Penelope Routledge writes, "Sub-constable Needham followed his act with his composition of the 'Fort Macleod gallup' played on some musical instru-

¹² Letter to Elizabeth Eleanor Beaty, 25 February 1878, Richard Barrington Nevitt Fonds, Glenbow Institute, Calgary, Alberta. (All further references to letters not published in *A Winter at Fort Macleod* will be from this collection.)

¹³ Routledge, p. 38–40.

¹⁴ Nevitt, p. 78.

¹⁵ Nevitt, p. 84.

ment.”¹⁶ We do not have a synopsis of Dunne's act, but Capt. Burton Deane, in his papers, offers a description of magical feats which were popular in garrison theatre at the time. Deane was a respected officer and a participant in Mounted Police theatricals both at Regina and Lethbridge; and before his recruitment into the NWMP, he performed in magic shows, notably in Gibraltar in 1871 while he was a lieutenant in the Royal Marines. His Gibraltar program consisted of twelve tricks, many with exotic-sounding names like the Enchanted Rings of Poly-crates, the Wizard's Legacy, the Devil's Pill, the Spanish Salad and Magical Transformation, Illused Kindness and Cabalistic Restoration.¹⁷

Most of Deane's tricks were standards; they involved pulling eggs from a hat or a seemingly endless supply of ribbon from one's mouth, or transforming paper shavings into coffee and milk in two vases. Other of his deceptions had a distinctly martial quality. In “Spirit's Writing,” for example, the name of a recently deceased personage (apparently chosen by an audience member) appeared in blood on the naked arm of the magician. And in his climactic “Devil's Pill,” the sleight-of-hand hinged upon a moment when a spectator was asked to aim a loaded pistol at a ball in the magician's hand. We may surmise from “Spirit's Writing” and “Devil's Pill” that the garrison magician emphasized his physical courage and obliviousness to pain as well as his powers of mental concentration and clairvoyance. The implicit message—that the conjurer was physically, mentally and spiritually gifted—would not be lost on an enthralled audience. Nevitt's description of the rehearsals for Tim Dunne's theatrical evening at Fort Macleod demonstrates that the performers were perhaps unaware of the message implicit in their magic show. In fact, Nevitt does not mention Dunne's routine but passes the evening off as “a sort of penny reading,” performed with the sole purpose of breaking the monotony of early Mounted Police life. In a letter dated 13 October 1876, Nevitt wrote, “The men are going to get up some sort of celebration this evening consisting of songs & readings—a sort of penny reading. It will make a desirable break in the monotony of existence.” This theatrical excursion was merely a means of passing the time in an agreeable way, according to Nevitt. “After the whole thing is over,” he wrote his fiancée, “I shall give you a slight account of it.”¹⁸

Nevitt records two other magic shows, performed by Mounted Policemen—evidence that magic shows continued to be popular for some time. On 29 March 1877, Nevitt mentions purchasing a ticket for another of Dunne's magic shows: “On Saturday evening there is to be an Entertainment—sleight of hand &c by Sergt. Dunne. I have just been purchasing my ticket. I do not expect to be very much entertained but for the sake of passing the evening I will go.”¹⁹ Nevitt did not list the ticket prices, but it is clear that the organizers of the event intended to make money or, at least, to recoup production costs. At any rate, Nevitt did not

¹⁶ Routledge, p. 37.

¹⁷ Burton Deane Fonds, Glenbow Institute, Calgary, Alberta.

¹⁸ Letter to Elizabeth Eleanor Beaty, 13 October 1876.

¹⁹ Letter to Elizabeth Eleanor Beaty, 29 March 1877.

hold Dunne's act in high esteem; he did "not expect to be very much entertained." On New Year's Eve, 1877, Nevitt saw another magic show which garnered a laudatory review: "After dinner Sergt. [Dunne?] performed some very good sleight of hand tricks and after a little singing the guests dispersed."²⁰

Despite having some misgivings over the quality of these early theatrical events, Nevitt soon found himself involved as a scene-painter. The organizers evidently went to some expense, enlisting Nevitt to paint flats, for a performance on 13 January 1877. This production was directed at a public audience; it was performed outside the fort, at Conrad's Store. (The store-owner Charles Conrad was an old Confederate soldier from Virginia, and it is possible that he lent the Mounted Policemen his store as a special favour to Nevitt.) The performers, in rehearsal, created a hideous din; Nevitt wrote laughingly that the actors "make night hideous in the recreation room with their rehearsals and singing over the songs." But Nevitt took his scene-painting duties seriously enough to spend an entire day getting all in readiness. He wrote to his fiancee on 12 January: "I have been all day long painting scenes for the Theatre!! So amongst my many accomplishments I will be sure to fall on my feet somewhere."²¹ On the day of the event, there was a blizzard that limited even horse-drawn traffic. As Nevitt reported, this neither stopped the enthusiastic audience from attending nor hampered its response. The presentation included several music hall numbers and an operatic comic duet. Nevitt wrote to his fiancee the following day:

The show last night proved a grand success. The singing was with one or two exceptions bad—but "Turn him out" was happily rendered. The House was crowded and I dare say paid something towards the expenses of the evening. [Const. P.] Brooks sang two songs—he has a good tenor voice and sang well. The comic duet—from the opera (?) of *Genevieve de Brabant*—by Brooks & Stone was very good indeed. A good many local hits in the force took well with the audience.²²

This is the first time in Nevitt's letters that he mentions the expenses incurred by an evening of Mounted Police theatricals. The fact that the organizers incurred some expense to produce the entertainment of 13 January 1877, and that they enlisted Nevitt's fairly competent services as a scene painter, signals a new seriousness of purpose behind such evenings.

Nevitt's letters demonstrate that theatrical evenings were soon a regular occurrence at the Fort, that these evenings were meticulously planned, and that organizers occasionally realized a profit. On 29 January 1877, Nevitt wrote: "We had a meeting of the Dramatic club tonight and found that we made \$30.00 by Saturday nights entertainment after paying all expenses."²³ By mid-1877, the Dramatic Club was producing as many as two evenings of entertainment per month, and Nevitt was involved in its organization. On 7 August 1877, Nevitt

20 Letter to Elizabeth Eleanor Beaty, 3 January 1878.

21 Letter to Elizabeth Eleanor Beaty, 12 January 1877.

22 Letter to Elizabeth Eleanor Beaty, 14 January 1877.

23 Letter to Elizabeth Eleanor Beaty, 29 January 1877.

wrote: “In the evening after dinner—I had to preside at a meeting of the Dramatic Club—which kept me until now which is about 10 o'clock.”²⁴ When, on 27 January 1877, the Fort Macleod Dramatic Club gave another evening of entertainments—including a reprise of the popular “Turn Him Out”—Nevitt turned his attention away from the stage and toward the auditorium:

Last night the Dramatic association gave another Entertainment. It was capital. They performed ‘Turn Him Out’ a second time had some new songs and a Burlesque—which was exceedingly laughable. To me the motley appearance of the audience was of more interest than the singing or acting on the stage—what did all these bright eyed Blackfeet girls & boys know of what was going on—and what impressions did they carry away with them.²⁵ Nevitt was starting to become aware of the native audience and of the effect theatrical evenings were having on that audience. The image Nevitt leaves us with is of a widening cultural schism, of an audience alienated from the action onstage and possibly misinterpreting it.

On 3 February 1877, Nevitt ventured into the town outside the Fort to see a “magic lantern” show. His account of that event demonstrates that the Mounted Policemen had little theatrical competition from the townsfolk. Nevitt writes: “in the evening I went down to see the show—a magic lantern. It was the poorest apology for a show that I have ever seen. Mrs. Hyde the wife of the proprietor sang a couple of songs. But she was so horribly nervous and moreover had such a weak piping little voice—that one could not help pitying her and she certainly added nothing to my pleasure.”²⁶ On 27 March 1877, Nevitt added: “We are not without our theatre here but it is open only once in two weeks. You see our means of amusement are very limited indeed.”²⁷

The Dramatic Club went on producing entertainments even through the hot summer of 1877. On 20 July, Nevitt wrote:

Saturday was an exceedingly hot day—the hottest I ever saw in this country—the thermometer in the shade registered 109° at 2.30 p.m. After [a cricket match] we got up some races and in the evening after dinner we had the theatre. Here it was intensely hot and disagreeable the acting too was not as good as it had been but I do not wonder at that on account of the excessive heat.²⁸

The Fort Macleod theatricals were not limited to the winter months when Mounted Policemen tended to be confined to the fort for lengthy periods. The Mounted Policemen were able to afford a day or two in the summers for their recreation and entertainment, as well.

On 8 December 1877, Nevitt accorded his own company a rave review. He wrote, “On Friday, that is last night, we had our Theatricals. I was not able to get in until rather late. But they were very good. The best I think they have had.” He proceeded, in a letter written the next day, to describe the production in detail:

²⁴ Letter to Elizabeth Eleanor Beaty, 7 August 1877.

²⁵ Letter to Elizabeth Eleanor Beaty, 29 January 1876.

²⁶ Letter to Elizabeth Eleanor Beaty, 4 February 1877.

²⁷ Letter to Elizabeth Eleanor Beaty, 27 March 1877.

²⁸ Letter to Elizabeth Eleanor Beaty, 20 July 1877.

I came in as Crozier and Brooks were singing "What are the wild waves saying". They sang it very well. It was followed by Sergt. Norman singing "Nancy Lee" a sailor's song. He has a very nice voice – he was rapturously encored. Then came a farce "Hunting a Turtle" Mrs. Turtle as rendered by Trumpeter Bogle was exceedingly well done. After that we had a burlesque of the opera of Fra Diaralo. . . . It was very good, the two female characters were taken by Bogle who was the Innkeepers daughter and by Boswell who was the lady who was robbed by the daring brigand.²⁹

On an evening such as this, the actors commonly poked fun at that other feature of their new-found environment which made their lives wretched—the lack of feminine companionship. Trumpeter Bogle developed a theatrical line of business in consistently playing female leads—a reversal of the breeches roles of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is significant that most theatricals were part of a longer program which often included a day of cricket, a dinner, and a dance to follow. Before or after the entertainment, young recruits sometimes had an opportunity to strike up a conversation with some desirable female. This was incentive enough for young policemen to go onstage and to exhibit whatever talents and charms they might have possessed.

In 1878 and after, the Mounted Police began to set higher standards for themselves in their theatrical evenings at Fort Macleod. The Dramatic Club had matured from penny readings and magic shows to operettas and burlesques. Officers often involved themselves in the proceedings.³⁰ For example, Nevitt saw Charles Dickens' son Francis, who spent several years in the Canadian West as an NWMP officer, perform at least once with the Dramatic Club. Nevitt was able to offer faint praise for the younger Dickens' performance (even failing to mention the title of the play). "The Dramatic Club's entertainment was exceedingly slow," he wrote in a letter to his fiancée. "Mr. Dickens acted pretty well but the pieces were slow—and people some way did not seem to be in the best of spirits—even the music appeared to drag in some unaccountable way."³¹ Nevitt frequently mentions, in his letters, that NWMP officers were also in attendance as spectators at such events. On 12 April 1878, Nevitt sat beside Colonel Macleod at a performance of *The Area Belle* and a burlesque of *Ali Baba*. He writes to his fiancée:

I came in last night after the theatre and as it was late I went to bed after scribbling you a very few words. I had of course taken a reserved seat and had good company, [Sub, Insp. Lief. N.F.] Crozier on one side and Antrobus on the other. I had hardly taken my seat when the Col. who was sitting two or three seats in front beckoned to me. I went up and he insisted on my taking a vacant

²⁹ Letter to Elizabeth Eleanor Beaty, 9 December 1877

³⁰ Penelope Routledge writes, Fort Macleod had its C-Troop Dramatic Club, which presented musical and dramatic entertainments. Officers weren't afraid to get involved—just as their wives hadn't been at dances and other early dramatic events: Sergeant Turner, for example, performed the „Canonball Act“ in a burlesque circus; constables were involved in other segments of the show, held on Dec. 20, 1882. (p. 39)

³¹ Letter to Elizabeth Eleanor Beaty, 2 February 1878.

seat by Mrs. Macleod which I did. I must say altho' it was meant kindly by the Col. I would have preferred my chosen place. The programme had first the Area Belle followed by a song or two and then the burlesque of Ali Baba. This was very well gotten up and reflects the greatest credit upon the Association. Morgiana's part was splendidly taken by Bogle and in his eastern costume he looked like a beautiful houri—Ali Baba was taken by Clark—a refined and very swell gentleman of the road and a very great villain was his second in command, Has-sarashi—with the most hideous get up—the whole was well done.³²

By 1878, one could reserve a seat at Mounted Police theatricals; a class-based system had been set up in the theatre, whereby NWMP officers were entitled to the best seats in the house.

In the last year of Nevitt's stay at Fort Macleod, the Mounted Police were beginning to lose interest in exciting wonder and admiration with magic shows. Conversely, they became more interested in demonstrating their own humanity by acting in scripted comedies and burlesques. Nevitt recorded no magic shows after 1877, but he does mention several scripted plays including The Area Belle and Ali Baba. These plays, with their emphasis on verbal comedy, no doubt appealed to Europeans and white North Americans; they were not intended to appeal to a native audience. The Area Belle, for example, features a British setting, British characters, and an emphasis on spoken English. Set in London, the play centres on the adventures of a fickle young girl who cannot choose between her two beaux—a policeman and a soldier. Neither of the suitors can afford to be caught alone with the Belle in her house, and so they find themselves hiding ignominiously in cupboards and closets. At the end of the play, the two jealous lovers decide that the Belle is not worth arguing over and they both cease paying her any attention. The Area Belle offered Mounted Police performers an opportunity to poke fun at themselves and to share with British immigrants in the audience a nostalgia for the Old Country. By moving away from entertainments which relied on physical action and toward entertainments which relied on language for their effect, the Mounted Policemen began to exclude Indians from the proceedings.

Between 1874 and 1878—the duration of Nevitt's service in the NWMP—Mounted Police theatricals at Fort Macleod served to reaffirm the cultural values of European and white North American immigrants in the Canadian North-West. The influences of British melodrama, music hall, and opera, and of the American minstrel show, are apparent throughout. A kind of cultural hegemony was stealthily (and perhaps unconsciously) in practice here; even at the earliest known Mounted Police entertainments, Metis and Indian spectators were often alienated. They either left the auditorium shrieking, as Mrs. Glen had done, or they sat and watched in “wonder and admiration.” When the Mounted Police began to produce scripted plays with British settings and British characters, the native audience was excluded altogether. It is difficult not to see this alienation and exclusion as part of a more systematic disenfranchisement of the native, espe-

³² Letter to Elizabeth Eleanor Beaty, 13 April 1878.

cially as he/she was, through the late 1800s, removed from hereditary lands and barred from practicing the sacred and theatrical Sundance. An extract from a report made by Supt. Burton Deane, from Fort Macleod, on 30 June 1898, poignantly reveals this cultural double-standard. Deane writes:

The "Blood" Indians seem to be in a perplexity, they want to have a Sioux dance, without a medicine pole, and they say their Agent tells them they must not hold it, and that he holds 6 months' imprisonment over the heads of any Indians who participate in it. . . . They say that they gave up the Sun dance but will not give up this dance, our Scouts also said they did not want to enforce the prohibition.³³

„PŘIJATI S OVACEMI“ ZPRÁVA R.B.NEVITTA O DIVADELNÍM PŮSOBNÍ VE FORT MACLEOD

Autor článku aplikuje post-koloniální teorii na studii o North West Mounted Police theatre (divadlo Severozápadní jízdní policie), které působilo v pevnosti Fort Macleod (stát Alberta) v letech 1874 až 1878. Zkoumáním William Appleman Williamsovy koncepce koloniální moci autor demonstruje, že jízdní policie ve snaze získat podporu veřejnosti a upevnit svou autoritu zobrazuje sama sebe ve svých večerních divadelních představeních jako laskavé a progresivní strážce zákona. Ke vzniku těchto večerů vedla nutnost hájit zájmy kultury Evropanů a bílých Severoameričanů a potřeba rekultivace Indiánů.

Podrobná korespondence lékařského asistenta R.B.Nevitta z Fort Macleod z poloviny sedmdesátých let 19. století vykresluje živý obraz divadelnictví Severozápadní jízdní policie. Nevittovy dopisy prozrazují, že jízdní policie ve svých divadelních pokusech, které se odehrávaly jak v pevnosti tak ve městě, charakterizovala své členy jednak jako příjemné, zábavné lidské bytosti, ale také jako odvážné a silné nadlidi. Nevittovy dopisy, ačkoliv většina z nich nebyla zpracována, nabízí nový vhled do složení publika, které navštěvovalo divadlo ve Fort Macleod, dále do zákulisí organizace těchto večerů, a také umožňuje bližší seznámení s postoji a názory jízdních policistů, kteří se na představeních podíleli. Z Nevittova očitého svědectví vyplývá, že na jevišti NWMP vystoupil také syn Charelese Dickense Frances.

³³ RCMP records, 421–433, 1898, National Archives, Ottawa.