

Partners for a Season

By Glen Robert Belbeck

This article was first submitted to Alberta's Heritage Park Historical Society in August 2013. It summarizes what the author knows about two early Dominion Land Surveyors who were in business together in the Calgary, NWT area in the summer of 1883. Their names were Charles Everard Wolff and Archibald Westmacott McVittie, both Provincial Land Surveyors from Ontario.

During the latter part of the 19th century many changes happened to the land and the people of Rupert's Land and the North West Territories, which the Dominion government of Canada bought from the Hudson's Bay Company in May of 1869. Part of the settlement price with the Hudson's Bay Company, and some year's later with the syndicate known as the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), involved claims to some of the lands in Manitoba and the North West Territories. Those claims could not be settled until the land was divided into parcels, an activity owned by the Department of the Interior. This federal government arm decided the methods by which the plains would be surveyed, chose whom to use to venture west to do the work of subdivision, and was instrumental in adjudicating disagreements with those already on the lands with prior claims of ownership. Dominion Land Surveyors (DLSs) were among those who first went west to divide the great ocean of grass into parcels of land designed to support the homesteading efforts of the great waves of settlers who were anticipated to arrive in the North West Territories following the completion of the CPR. At Heritage Park in Calgary, Alberta there is an early log cabin, rough but strongly built on the west bank of the Elbow River, and occupied by a DLS in the late fall of 1882. In a photo taken by the early CPR photographer John Cornelius Soule in August 1883, there is a cabin that looks much like the Heritage Park cabin. On the building next door is a sign "Wolff & McVittie". This is their story, as we know it in the summer of 2013, exactly 130 years later.

Charles E. Wolff was the grandson of the well-respected and locally-famous Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Joseph Wolff, an Austrian-born orphan who had been adopted by a

British Army officer. Alexander entered the British Army in 1801 at the age of 13, fought with the British Army under the Duke of Wellington between 1804 and 1815 against Napoleon and the French, and somewhat ironically was given a land grant in Val Cartier, Quebec for his retirement. He later became the commander of the 11th Battalion of the Quebec Militiaⁱ. Charles' father was Dr. James John Fitzgerald Wolff, one of eight children of Lieutenant Colonel Wolff. Charles E. was born on June 29, 1846 in Quebec City, the third of five children and second sonⁱⁱ of Dr. James and Mrs. Elizabeth Dodds Taylor Wolff. The names of the other children who have been found in various Canada census records are brother James Fitzgerald (b. 1841), sister Julia (b. 1844), brother H. H. (b. 1856), and brother S. M. (b. 1858)^{iv}. At an early age Charles was indentured to an East Indian sea merchant, and as a result earned his Captain's certificate^v. In 1872, he started the study of Land Surveying under a Provincial Land Surveyor (PLS) named Robert Sparks of Ottawa, Ontario, and in the spring of the next year qualified as a PLS for Ontario. By the end of 1875, Wolff also was qualified as a Quebec Land Surveyor^{vi}. Over the next few years, Charles was involved in a number of boundary surveys in Ontario, and likely during this period was a member of the firm "Sparks, Wolff and Patrick", presumably located in Ottawa. On April 18, 1879, Charles Wolff received DLS commission number 0035 in Ottawa, Ontario.

Archibald W. McVittie was born on May 05, 1858 to Thomas M. (born in Ireland) and Bessie (born in Scotland) McVittie of Toronto, Ontario. He was the second son and fourth of eight children^{vii} born to the McVitties, offspring of half-pay military British Army officers of the Napoleonic Wars^{viii}, who had come to Canada about 1830 to take up land grants near Lake Simcoe. In the census records found for 1861, there is an older brother Chris (b. 1850), sister Kate (b. 1853), brother Thomas (b. 1854), and younger sister Mary (b. 1860)^{ix}. By the census of 1871, there is also a brother Henry (b. 1864) and brother Walter (b. 1866)^x. In 1872, Archibald's family moved to Barrie, Ontario where his father owned a hardware store, and he was soon articling with Maurice Gaviller, PLS. Apparently he attended Upper Canada College to study architecture, sometime after starting with Gaviller. Due to his young age when he had completed his article period, Archibald was not sworn in as a PLS until July 1879, just after he turned 21 years of age.



Figure 1 – August 1883 photo – McVittie on extreme right¹

Early the next year Archie opened his own office in Barrie^{xi}. In December 1880, Archibald W. became the first partner with a firm headed by Thomas Kennedy, an architect in Barrie, and he remained a partner there until August 1881. In the census of 1881, a sister Bessie (b. 1863) is living in the Barrie, Simcoe North, Ontario household of Thomas and Bessie McVittie – seven of the eight children are still at home^{xii}! In early 1882, McVittie entered into a partnership with Kennedy and Holland, with offices at 88 York Street, Toronto as well as in Barrie, Ontario. But this partnership would last only until about December 1883^{xiii}. Archibald Westmacott McVittie received DLS commission number 0103 in Barrie, Ontario on March 30, 1882.

By the end of the year 1880, the Dominion of Canada had already been subdividing the North West for over 10 years. Lieutenant-Colonel John Stoughten Dennis had been sent to the Red River colony in August 1869 by the Minister of Public Works to begin surveying land holdings for future settlers. Although Dennis was instructed not to disturb the holdings already established by the Metis settlers, previously surveyed as early as April 1813 by Peter Fidler the chief surveyor of the HBC, those 1869 activities helped to trigger the first Metis rebellion that year. From about 1871 to 1880 the DLSs involved had subdivided a total of 16,256,000 acres or 101,600 farms of 160 acres each^{xiv}. Most of the subdivision work had been in Manitoba and the District of Assiniboia, although the 5th Initial Meridian (IM) had been produced from the Fort Edmonton area south to the International Boundary by July 30, 1880. Charles Wolff started his work in the west the next spring. We have no evidence that he knew Archibald McVittie before then, but there was an opportunity for this to have happened, as they were both PLSs in Ontario and recent DLSs. Perhaps they were destined to have a chance meeting for the first time on the prairies which led to their partnership by August 1883. Without the existence of personal diaries, all we can do is identify those places and circumstances that perhaps facilitated their meeting.

The DLS was required to follow the “*Manual Shewing the System of Survey of the Dominion Lands*”, published from time to time by the Minister of the Interior for Canada. When the candidate had written and passed the DLS examinations that ensured he was suitable for this new type of land subdivision, he was expected to know and follow all instructions therein. Township orientation was related to True North using Polaris, distances were to be measured multiple times using calibrated chains, and special methods were used to denote the corners of townships, sections, quarter-sections and town sites. Most DLSs were from Ontario and Quebec and were previously licensed as PLSs in their home province. They would have had, as a result of the PLS designation, experience in managing crews in remote areas. But nothing they experienced in the eastern bush would have matched the conditions they were to face in the North West Territories.

Here is what likely faced Charles Wolff that first spring he went west – 1881. Our first record of him and his crew of seven is on Saturday, June 25, 1881 when he is busy surveying the northeast boundary of Township 08, Range 01 west of the Second IM, in the southeast part of the current province of Saskatchewan^{xv}. This is in the vicinity of Manor, Saskatchewan, southeast of Moose Mountain Provincial Park. In his crew was his Assistant, a man named John P. A. Sproule who had been living in Wolff’s house earlier that spring in Ottawa^{xvi}, and Charles’ brother H. H. Wolff – Picketman. In addition to these two positions there was a Starke - Cook, Lacombe - Choreman, Taylor - Freightman, Sherick - Moundman, and Swalwell - Chainman^{xvii}. The best guess is that these other five men were hired in the west, but that is not yet proven. The end of the CPR rails was Portage la Prairie that spring and the CPR syndicate had just set up an office in Winnipeg. Charles Wolff and his Ottawa, Ontario crew likely travelled to Winnipeg by rail, by way of Kingston, Toronto, Sarnia, Chicago, St. Paul, and then the Pembina Railway north down the Red River valley. Perhaps they took the train to Portage la Prairie as well, although since the CPR was gearing up to construct a rail line just west of Portage la Prairie, there may not have been passenger service in May. The crew would have traveled about 10 days west from Portage, Manitoba to the Manor, Saskatchewan area, then known as the District of Assiniboia (*Figure 2*). Normal movement was by horse and Red River Cart, with all their provisions, equipment, tools and weapons aboard. A good guess would be that the trip from Ottawa to Manor took Charles and crew about 25 days in total, meaning that the 35 year old Wolff left his wife and young family at home in Ottawa just before June 1st. During that summer he covered an area 19 townships wide (114 miles) by 4 townships high (24 miles), doing scattered Township outline surveys. The last entry in his official field book for that season was made on Wednesday, October 12th, when his crew finished work in the northeast corner of Township 05, Range 19 west of the Second IM. This is west of Colgate, Saskatchewan and southwest of Weyburn, Saskatchewan. By that time of year, it can get quite cold on the Prairies, so he and his crew likely headed for Brandon, Manitoba, where the first official CPR passenger train had arrived the day before – October 11, 1881. That trip would have been approximately 350 kilometres, initially along the cart trail to Wood Mountain that the crew noted on their survey notes in Township 8, Range 18, about 15 miles northeast of where they ended the season’s work. The trip back to civilization at Brandon would have taken about two weeks. A plethora of cart trails criss-crossed the prairies in the era (North West Territories Trails^{xviii}). Charles Wolff and H. H. Wolff would have been back in Ottawa by Thanksgiving, which in those years was celebrated on a Thursday in November.

During the early years of the 1880s, the Indian tribes started to move to their roughly-mapped out reserves. The

cont'd on page 20

severe decline in the bison population that happened about 1879, forced them to begin to rely on the Federal Government for food. Cattle ranches were on the increase as well, bringing in herds from the US, in some cases to feed the Indians on the reserves. Some Township outline surveys were occurring west of Fort Calgary. The CPR decided to choose a southerly route through the mountains to Kamloops, BC, using the Kicking Horse pass. In spite of the CPR's severe financial difficulties, they managed to lay out 161 miles of new rail line in 1881, and the end of the line was at Oak Lake, MB^{xix}. In the season of 1881, there were a total of 73 DLS survey crews, up from 55 DLSs the year before, working in the North West Territories, producing 23,300 miles of surveyed lines^{xx}. Many of them returned to their homes in Ontario or Quebec during the late October and early November timeframe, as the weather became worse and the number of daylight hours available for land survey work shrank. The word would spread to their PLS colleagues, about the Dominion Land Surveys going on in the North West Territories.

The next spring a newly-certified DLS named Archibald McVittie joined the ranks of the surveyors heading west, whose number in 1882 totaled 92 surveyors and their crews^{xxi}. While the beginning of the survey season was significantly delayed due to flooding in Manitoba and washouts on American and the CPR railroads, McVittie is already recording his field notes on Sunday, June 18, 1882, and had apparently started work on Friday, June 02, 1882^{xxii}. In his crew of nine, Archibald had hired his older brother



Group of Dominion Land Surveyors – Winnipeg, Manitoba. C.E. Wolfe is in back row on right end^{xxiii}
Glenbow Archives NA-878-7

T.T. McVittie as his assistant, Hayes – Chain, Campbell – Chain, Moloney – Axeman, Stephen – Axeman, Ridsdale – Axeman, Wilkinson – Axeman, Cook – Campman and Staley – Cook. McVittie must have been expecting a lot of trees in the areas he was assigned! The McVittie crew was in that first work area, between modern day Touchwood and Raymore, Saskatchewan, until the middle of July. One month later he and his crew had started work just inside the current border between Saskatchewan and Alberta, straight east of Calgary, doing the outline surveys for Township 23 and 24 west of the Fourth IM. We can guess at the manner they travelled and the route they took to get to their job sites – it would have been similar to the way Charles Wolff came the spring before, except that they may have found that the CPR rails went somewhat west of Brandon to the Oak Lake, Manitoba area. Archibald may have been waiting in Winnipeg for better weather conditions to travel west, and attended the initial meeting of the Association of Dominion Land Surveyors on Monday, April 24th, but he does not appear in the photograph containing C. E. Wolfe that was taken during that period. It would be a reasonable guess that the two single McVittie brothers left Ottawa in early May of 1882.

Charles Wolff was in Winnipeg already by that late April 1882 period, as he appears in the back row on the right side of the photograph taken to mark the occasion of the formation of the DLS association. With one year of North West experience under his belt, he had most likely decided to get an early start. For DLSs getting paid by the mile surveyed, the weather and logistical risks were all theirs. But the

weather didn't cooperate that spring – almost 100 inches of snow had fallen in the Winnipeg area that winter of 1881/2, causing severe flooding when it melted in April. Perhaps because he was upset with the late start, Charles Wolff didn't put a date on any page of his field book for work in Saskatchewan that year, nor for that matter on most of the field books for his crew's work in Alberta. Without a copy of his detailed field report, which may still exist in the Department of the Interior files, we do not really know when he started his 1882 season's work. We assume that his first set of work was directly beside the area he finished the previous October – Township 07 to 12, Ranges 18 and 19 west of the Second IM. And we believe that he then ended up the summer working in Townships 13 to 16, northwest of Medicine Hat, Alberta later that summer. We know all those field books are examined in Ottawa by December of 1882. The last block of Townships for which the Wolff crew did outline surveys was Ranges 22 to 24 west of the Fourth IM, almost halfway between modern-day Lethbridge

and Calgary. We can make an educated guess that Charles Wolff and his crew made a re-provisioning trip to Calgary before starting to work west of Fort Macleod.

This guess is supported by what is recorded on a plan of survey dated February 24, 1883. That plan shows just to the north of a cabin labelled “A.W. McVittie” and marked by the pink star, one that is labelled “J. Sproule” – the assistant of Charles Wolff, marked by the orange star. We know there is a connection by early 1883!

McVittie’s movements in the summer of 1882 are easier to follow, as he was diligent to note the date on almost each page of his field books. He and his crew did three sets of Township outlines, each one closer to Calgary than the previous one. On October 19, 1882, the McVittie crew made their last measurement along the northeast corner of Township 22, Range 17 west of the Fourth IM. This was about 13 miles northeast of Bassano, Alberta. His crew of nine was still intact, and at that point in the year it would have been an easy decision to head for the settlement at the confluence of the Bow and Elbow Rivers, even though none of them had likely visited it before. The trip of 130 kilometres would have taken 5 days, so by October 25th the crew would have arrived in the Fort Calgary area. It was possible they met up with Charles Wolff and his crew getting ready to head south to the Porcupine Hills about a week later. Some

of the McVittie crew may have decided to head to the end of the CPR line at what is today Maple Creek, Saskatchewan, a trip that would have taken them about eight days. From there they would have made their way back to Winnipeg and then Ottawa, where they may have been home again by the 1882 Thanksgiving time.

The first date on any of Wolff’s field note books done during the 1882 season is November 08, 1882, when he and his crew are working in Township 07 to 12, Ranges 29 and 30 West of the Fourth IM and Range 01 West of the Fifth IM. This seems unusually late in the season, but Wolff may have proceeded hoping for a chinook effect that is sometimes felt in that part of Alberta. The Wolff crew took a break between November 17th and 28th, a Christmas break between December 21, 1882 and January 01, 1883, and finally a 3 week break in February 1883. This 1882/1883 field book is also the first one to record the names of his 1882/83 crew members: Sproule – Assistant; Nols – Chainman; Sherrick – Picketman; Barriseaut – Moundman; Alor – Cook; McCraig – Moundman; Drothe – Chainman; Joseph – Rodman; and Cox - Moundman^{xxv}. Sproule and Sherrick are the only ones still with Charles Wolff from the 1881 season. It must have been a miserable time for these gentlemen, living in tents all winter in the windiest part of the prairies where wind turbines now turn the wind’s energy



McVittie Plan of Survey for SW14-24-01W5^{xxiv}
Library Archives Canada

into electricity. The breaks in the work that we see in the field books were likely spent in Fort MacLeod, some distance to the east. For instance, the Wolff crew was only about 22 miles west of Fort Macleod when they took a Christmas break on December 20, 1882.

While Charles Wolff was spending his winter days shivering on the prairies or sheltering in the Porcupine Hills of southwest Alberta, Archibald McVittie warmed his hands and feet in the cozy log cabin on the west side of the Elbow River, in the small settlement that was springing up around Fort Calgary. He was likely making some good connections at the local hotels east of the Elbow River and at the NWMP barracks as well. It is not known if his brother Thomas T. McVittie remained in Calgary for the winter, as some reports say he went to British Columbia as early as 1879^{xxvi}. Based on the April 1881 census returns and the McVittie crew list in the District of Assiniboia in June 1882, that earlier 1879 move of the older McVittie brother to the Kootenay mountains seems baseless. It is most likely that Thomas stayed in Calgary for awhile, and was likely the brother who is a business partner with Archibald McVittie in about 1885 in Calgary.

The CPR rails had reached Maple Creek, Saskatchewan at the end of the 1882 construction season, and anticipation was high that the trains would soon be running between

cont'd on page 22

Calgary and Winnipeg. Archibald McVittie's presence near Fort Calgary proved fruitful, as he was soon linked with Wesley Orr, a land speculator. In February of 1883 Archibald was working on a topographical survey of the claim of a Metis squatter named Louis Rousselle. Louis, an HBC employee since 1847, had settled down on the east side of the Elbow River in 1880 on a rise of land north of Scotsman's Hill in what is modern-day Inglewood. His farm can be seen just to the south of the Hudson's Bay store that was built soon after the I.G. Baker Company built the NWMP barracks at the confluence of the Elbow and the Bow Rivers in the fall of 1875. Rousselle had made an earlier petition for recognition of his rights as a squatter, but to no avail. The McVittie survey plan signed on February 24, 1883 shows where the boundaries of SW Section 14, Township 24, Range 01 west of the Fifth IM would be located when the township was eventually subdivided. The buildings that were believed to be in place before 1877 were noted in red, and the locations and names of businesses were also noted on the plan. Ten days before signing the plan of survey, Archibald McVittie apparently offered Louise Rousselle \$10,000 for his claimed land^{xxxii}. It is believed that McVittie, working with Wesley Orr, did indeed purchase the Rousselle claim during the middle part of 1883^{xxxiii}. The DLS named Charles LaRue started the subdivision of Township 24 on July 20, 1883 and the plan was approved, confirmed and signed on March 08, 1884, more than one year after McVittie's offer to purchase Rousselle's claim and the signing date on the plan^{xxxiv}.

The CPR photographer's picture (*Figure 1*) showing the "Wolff & McVittie" sign has a Glenbow Archives' assigned date of August 1883. An advertisement appearing in the September 14, 1883 "Number 3 Edition" of the weekly Calgary Herald mentions C.E. Wolff and A. W. McVittie as "Dominion Land Surveyors, Architects, and Real Estate Agents". So we can confidently conclude that they were in business together by the summer of 1883. The Calgary Herald also stated in that mid-September advertisement that they had offices in "Macleod and Calgary, NWT". This timing fits well with Charles Wolff's crew's activities in 1883, as they surveyed outlines in several areas of the District of Alberta to the southeast of Calgary between Township 05 and 20, all the way from the modern-day Saskatchewan/Alberta border to the Fifth IM south of Calgary. Charles' brother H. H. Wolff had rejoined his crew by this time as well, after a one-summer hiatus. We know that Archibald was in Fort Macleod in mid-April of 1883, as he signed affidavits concerning his field books done during 1882. He was engaged as a Town Surveyor by the Department of the Interior to survey the new town site for Fort Macleod on the south bank of the Oldman River. The survey of that Town Plot ran from August to November 1883^{xxxv}. It is likely that McVittie set up a temporary office in Fort Macleod as an operations centre, which may have evolved into a more permanent office to take advantage of the growing opportu-

nities in the southern part of the District of Alberta.

What seems unclear is whether or not Charles Wolff ever lived in the Calgary area. He and his crew ended the 1883 season surveying the NE corner of Township 06, Range 03 West of the Fourth IM^{xxxvi}. This is 40 miles SE of Medicine Hat, which that year was the headquarters for the DLS efforts in the North West Territories. It is likely that Wolff travelled back to Medicine Hat to report to the manager of the surveys – William F. King, on the way back to Calgary or Fort Macleod. Wolff may have headed from Medicine Hat to Ottawa for Christmas with his family, as passenger rail service from Medicine Hat to Winnipeg was in place by June 11, 1883^{xxxvii}. Then Charles could have followed the normal railway route via the US to Ottawa. Charles must have cut his family visit short though, as we know that on January 19, 1884 Wolff was located back in Macleod, signing affidavits regarding the field books from 1883. So it is likely that he was running the Macleod office of "Wolff & McVittie" during the early part of 1884. McVittie was reportedly working hard on the survey of the Calgary town site for the CPR in Section 15 of Township 24 Range 01 West of the 5th IM. By April of 1884, Archibald was hard at work for the Department of the Interior on a "Town of Calgary" plan one section west of the CPR's survey, in Section 16. He signed the plan of that area, which today is on the south side of the Bow River, to the east of the 14th Street Bridge, on July 18, 1884^{xxxviii}. It is possible that Charles Wolff and his crew helped out with the Calgary, NWT town site survey in 1884, but the names of the crews working on that survey are different than Wolff used in 1883.

The survey season of 1883 had been the most memorable accomplishment of the Dominion Land Survey group, as they set a record that has never been bested anywhere in the world. William King's team of 119 DLSs and with support staff of over 2,000 assistants, cooks, labourers and teamsters subdivided 27,234,000 acres, or 170,212 farms of 160 acres^{xxxix}. That is almost the same area as the whole of England. The close of 1883 saw the CPR rails constructed from 74 miles east of Medicine Hat to the summit of the Rockies west of Lake Louise, Alberta. The following couple of years were somewhat anticlimactic for the profession. In 1884, only 71 DLSs were employed, surveying an additional 40,218 farms of 160 acres^{xl}. Tensions were rising between squatters and ranchers with several court cases heard in Fort Macleod. William Pearce, a civil engineer and land surveyor who had been appointed to the Dominion Land Board and appointed as Inspector of Land Agencies in 1882^{xli}, was investigating Metis river lot claims along the South Saskatchewan River. In July of 1884, Louis Riel returned from exile in the US and was urging all dissatisfied people in the North West to unite to press their case on Ottawa^{xlii}. On March 19, 1885, the Metis formed a provisional government and established an armed force at Batoche with Louis Riel president and Gabriel Dumont as military commander^{xliiii}. As part of the Government of Canada's response, the

Dominion Land Surveyors' Intelligence Corps, commanded by Captain J. S. Dennis, was formed in late March of 1885. By April 2nd they proceeded by Pullman coach from Ottawa to Winnipeg by way of Chicago and St. Paul, arriving on April 11, 1885. Charles Edward [sic] Wolff was listed as a member of that force, a lieutenant from Ottawa^{xxix}. Two days later martial law was declared in Calgary, partly due to the Metis situation and partly due to unrest among the railway workers there^{xi}. Amongst all the turmoil, the CPR rail line between Montreal and Winnipeg was completed on May 6th, 1885, allowing direct transport through Canada instead of traveling via Chicago^{xii}. The last shots were fired in the Riel Rebellion on June 03rd at Loon Lake, Saskatchewan between Sam Steele's troops and the Frog Lake Cree^{xlii}. The subdivision of land was done by only 13 DLSs that summer, with an additional 2,448 farms made available by the end of 1885^{xliii}. The biggest accomplishment in the west that year was the completion of the CPR railway, with the last spike driven home on November 07th at Craigellachie, British Columbia.

It seems, based on the research done to August 2013, the relationship between Wolff and McVittie is at an end sometime during 1884. Neither DLS does any Township Outline work that year or the next. Wolff goes off to war in the early spring of 1885, using his Captain's experience to drive a relief boat across Lake Winnipegosis during the Riel Rebellion. Wolff appears again in 1886, both as a contrib-

utor to a monument to a Perth, Ontario colleague – Lieutenant Kippen – who was a member of the “Surveyors Corp of Scouts”^{xliv}, and as a Township subdivider in the Porcupine Hills area of southwest Alberta. His eight man crew includes one J. Sproule – Assistant, and J. Sparks (likely a nephew) – Mound and Axeman, and work continues in the area during August and September. He apparently set up an office in Fort Macleod with an Ottawa DLS friend, A. F. Cotton, during 1887^{xlv}. Wolff again did Township subdivision surveys in the summer of 1888, northeast of Calgary, again with the faithful J. Sproule as his assistant, completing the field work on September 19^{xlvi}. That November 20th Charles Wolff is back home in Ottawa where he signs affidavits concerning his summer's work. Sadly, early the next year – February 03, 1889 – he dies from typhoid-pneumonia, at the young age of 42 years^{xlvii}. He leaves behind his wife Esther Sparks Wolff, a daughter Alletha (b. 1875) and a son James C.S. (b. 1878).

The years following the short partnership between “Wolff and McVittie” go somewhat better for Archibald Westmacott McVittie. After his surveys for town sites for Calgary in Sections 15 and 16 for the CPR and for the Department of the Interior respectively, he continues with land development-related work and branches into other ventures in Calgary, NWT. He is involved with the bidding

cont'd on page 24

for the bridge construction over the Elbow River for the soon-to-be incorporated town of Calgary with Col. Macleod in early 1884, and is part of a company, likely with his brother Thomas, known as the “McVitty Bros”, who are surveyors, real estate and mining agents^{xlviii} in 1885. Archibald is also involved with a Thomas Cochrane, Dr. Andrew Henderson and others in a company called “Calgary Lumber Company” at Mitford^{xlix}, three miles west of present-day Cochrane. In March 1885, McVittie is the spokesman for the Bridge Committee for the Elbow River bridge in the Mission area. In 1887, he signed three plans – the completed town of Calgary site in Section 15 for the North West Land Company (a British-Canadian syndicate handling town site sales in 47 communities for the CPR), a subdivision plan called “218A” for James Barwis, owner of part of the southeast quarter section 22, Township 24, Range 01 west of the 5th IM across the Bow River from Calgary near the trail to Fort Edmonton, and most interestingly McVittie signed a plan called “A.2” of a survey done on the successful Rousselle claim east of the Elbow River, which is now owned by Wesley Orr. It appears that he then moved to join his brother Thomas McVittie, LS (Land Surveyor) in Fort Steele, BC by the end of 1887, where they shared an office with the Fort Steele Assay Office^l. While he did return to Calgary in February 1888 to sign a plan at the Registry Office, he is listed as living in Fairmont, Kootenay District, BC the next month, in the proceedings of the fifth annual meeting of the Association of the Dominion Land Surveyors (ADLS). Sometime before the end of 1890, Archibald became an LS in British Columbia. This undated picture may have been from that time.

A fitting tribute for the early Calgary DLS was a kind gesture by a fellow DLS named Richard Jeremy Jephson, who in December 1896 registered a plan of survey called “A3-Calgary”, for a part of western Inglewood. It contains a short three block street named after the departed McVittie – called “McVittie Avenue”. It lies between the CPR tracks on its west end and the road allowance between Sections 11 and 14 on its east end and is now known as 11th Avenue. The Smithbilt Hat factory is on the western end of that street, and quite a number of residences are on the eastern part of the street.

A.W. McVittie was a restless soul, as he stayed in the Kootenay valley for less than ten years. In 1895, at the invitation of Thomas Kennedy his former partner in Barrie, he returns east and apparently practices in Ontario until about September 1897, when we find him back in Fort Steele at the inaugural meeting of the Board of Trade. He is soon engaged in a company that advertises in the April 1898 edition of the Fort Steele “Prospector” as “A.W. McVittie, T.T. McVittie, Charles Estemere and T.H. Taylor”. Late the next fall he even marries a Prescott, Ontario girl named Emily Louise Lesley, in Fort Steele^{lii}. They have a son Archibald, Jr. the next year – June 1900, followed by a daughter Margaret in May 1902. During this period he does one further Alberta subdivision survey for the Department

of the Interior, in the Blairmore part of the Crowsnest Pass, where his older brother Thomas is listed as his Assistant.

Just after Alberta becomes a Province in 1905, we see the results of McVittie’s renewed presence in Alberta, as he starts a series of surveys in the Lethbridge area, where almost all plans of survey are signed in Medicine Hat. This activity continues from April 1906 until about March 1910, when he signs the last affidavit for an Alberta plan of survey, from his new home – Victoria, BC^{liii}. It appears that Archibald had an incurable urge for real estate speculation even from his early days in the Elbow River area when he partnered with Wesley Orr. In a reference to his Uncle Archy, Bruce Hutchison mentioned that “...the collapse of the land boom [in late 1914] ruined his Uncle Archy”^{liv}. It may have been that the 21 plans of survey he registered in Alberta in the 1906-1910 period for subdivisions in Lethbridge was the basis of his paper-only fortune, and the Great War killed that along with many fellow Canadians.

McVittie spent his last years in the Oak Bay area of Vancouver Island, where he died on August 24, 1926. Of further note on his immediate family, Archibald McVittie, Jr. travelled to New York City where he prospered on Wall Street, married a local named Meg Bossi, and by 1942 was about to serve with General MacArthur’s staff in the Pacific. Hopefully he had an office job there! His daughter Margaret Emily apparently married someone named Mr. Pressey, and was in Europe on vacation with her brother and cousin Bruce and Dot Hutchison in May 1937^{lv}. Archibald’s wife Emily had a long life after his passing, and lived in Victoria, BC until her death in March 1966 at the age of 95, forty years after Archibald’s death^{lvii}.



McVittie in mid-career^{li}
Glenbow Archives NA-1046-7

cont'd on page 26

There is more to the story of “Wolff & McVittie” I’m sure, especially the McVittie part! We can only guess how they came to meet, but they seemed destined to get along. Both were second sons, had one grandparent at least who was a veteran of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, both started articling under a PLS in Ontario the same year, and both surveyed in the District of Assiniboia during 1882. As we continue the attempt to document their careers, the obstacles they faced and overcame in helping our country during its infancy seem daunting. Their first markings of land boundaries in the ocean of grass live on as governing objects for our land parcel ownership and oil and gas rights management systems in Western Canada. As a result of the DLSS efforts, by the end of 1900 almost 82,000,000 acres had been subdivided, representing over 510,000 potential homesteads. The CPR and the Hudson’s Bay Company were eventually able to claim the lands that were their due. Many immigrants were able to get a fresh start in a land that was freer, even if the weather was not as forgiving as the area they had just departed. Downtown Calgary still shows the influence of the streets and avenues first laid out by McVittie near the confluence of the Bow and the Elbow Rivers.



Archibald McVittie in about 1920'
Glenbow Archives NA-3447-1

Glen Robert Belbeck, B.Sc. graduated from Survey Science, University of Toronto in 1980 He can be reached by email at: outfofsocks@gmail.com for further discussion.



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- iii 1851 Canada Census
- iv 1861 Canada Census
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- vi Association of Ontario Land Surveyors – Reports of Committees - Page 152 of unknown year – biography after death.
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- viii Web Family History article by Robert W. Allen, BCLS, CL @ <http://www.mcvittie.co.uk/McVittie%20Brothers.htm>
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- xi B.C. Historical News - Fall 1993” - page 28
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- xiv Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for the year 1883 – Page xix
- xv Field Notes of Township Outlines – Townships 7 & 8, Ranges 1, 2 & 3 West of 2nd Principal Meridian – Field Book #1275
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- xvii Field Notes of Township Outlines – Townships 7 & 8, Ranges 1, 2 & 3 West of 2nd Principal Meridian – Field Book #1275
- xviii Atlas of Alberta Railways
- xix Eye on the Future, written by Henry C. Klassen – Page 68
- xx General Report of Operations from 1869 to 1889, Topographical Surveys Branch, Department of the Interior – Page 22
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- xxviii The Elbow - A River in the Life of the City, by John Gilpin – Page 35
- xxix The Elbow - A River in the Life of the City, by John Gilpin – Page 28
- xxx Field Notes of Survey of Fort Macleod town site – Field Book #3004
- xxxi Field Notes – Township Outline Surveys West of the 4th Meridian – Field Book #2529
- xxxii THE CALGARY HERALD – MINING AND RANCHE ADVOCATE AND GENERAL ADVERTISER – Volume 1 Number 3 – September 14, 1883
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- xxxv Report to the Deputy Minister – Department of the Interior – 1898 – Page xvii
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- xli Tales of the CPR, by David Laurence Jones – Page 35
- xlii <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/northwest-rebellion>
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- xliv www.rootsweb.ancestry.com – June 25, 1886 Perth, Ontario Courier article
- xlv Laying Down the Lines, by Judy Larmour – Page 162
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- iii British Columbia, Canada, Marriage Index, 1872-1935
- iiii SPIN2 Website – Government of Alberta – courtesy of Ed Titanich – Supervisor of Land Surveys Unit
- liv The Far Side of the Street, by Bruce Hutchison – Page 44
- lv Glenbow Archives – NA-3447-1
- lvi The Far Side of the Street, by Bruce Hutchison – Page 116
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Sites to See

<http://webapp.geod.nrcan.gc.ca/geod/publications/publications.php?locale=en>

This set of *Guidelines for Real Time Kinematic (RTK)/Real Time Network (RTN) Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) Surveying in Canada* has been prepared by Natural Resources Canada, Surveyor General Branch to assist the surveying community in Canada through sharing what we view to be best practices. The guidelines have been prepared in response to needs expressed by the Federal, Provincial, and Territorial members of the Canadian Council on Geomatics (CCOG) and to provide Professional Surveyors with a set of concise and easy to follow best practice guidelines for achieving centimetre level RTK/RTN surveys.

Guidelines for RTK/RTN GNSS Surveying in Canada