

RODERICK ROSS MACFARLANE, 1833-1920.

BY EDWARD A. PREBLE.

Plate VII

RODERICK ROSS MACFARLANE, a Corresponding Fellow of the American Ornithologists' Union since 1885, died in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, on April 14, 1920.

He was born in Stornoway, Island of Lewis, Scotland, November 1, 1833. His early years were passed in his native town where he attended the Parochial school and the Free Church Academy. He also spent nearly three years in the law office of the Procurator Fiscal of the Lewis District.

Related on his father's side to one of the officers of the old Northwest Company, and on his mother's to Sir Alexander Mackenzie, the famous explorer and also a member of the same great fur-trading corporation, it was only natural, when he reached early manhood, that he should cast his fortunes in the New World with the Hudson's Bay Company, at that time holding the exclusive fur-trading privileges over most of Canada, and being all-powerful in its government. He accordingly signed a five year contract as apprentice clerk in the service of this great concern, the oldest incorporated company in the world, and sailed from Stromness, Orkney Islands, on July 3, 1852, in the Company's ship *Prince of Wales* bound for York Factory on Hudson Bay. On August 18, being then under 19 years of age, he landed in the New World, where, with the exception of two brief visits to the land of his birth, he was to spend the remainder of a long and useful life.

His stay at York Factory was brief, and he then proceeded inland to Norway House and Fort Pembina (on Red River near the Manitoba boundary) where he served for a time as clerk and later was in charge of an outpost at Long Lake. In 1853 the Fur Trade Council, composed of the most influential of the officers of the Company, in recognition of the ability of young MacFarlane, appointed him in charge of Fort Rae on the northern shores of Great Slave Lake, and here he passed the next winter. The following summer (1854) he was in charge of Fort Resolution,

and in the autumn was made manager of old Fort Good Hope on the lower Mackenzie. The next winter he took charge of Fort Liard, on Liard River, the main western branch of the Mackenzie, later spent three months at Fort Simpson, the head post of the Mackenzie River District, and then resumed charge of Fort Good Hope where he remained through 1856.

In 1857, still with headquarters at Fort Good Hope, he made an exploratory trip to the lower Anderson River, at that time an absolutely unknown region. This trip, undertaken mainly to open the way to new trade channels but partly, perhaps, in obedience to a yearning for new scenes and adventures, was destined to be an event of considerable importance in the world of ornithology. On this journey, after leaving the valley of the Mackenzie, he descended successively the Lockhart and Anderson Rivers, named by him after brother officers in the Hudson's Bay Company. When within a few miles of the Arctic Ocean a large camp of Eskimo was encountered, the inhabitants of which plundered MacFarlane's small party, and brought his explorations in that direction to an end. Retracing his way on foot up the river, MacFarlane, with characteristic energy, procured a small canoe from an Indian encampment, and explored a part of the upper Anderson, and, reaching the Hareskin River by an overland march, descended it to the Mackenzie. Many years later, he was awarded the Victoria Arctic Medal, mainly in recognition of this exploration.

We have no evidence that up to this time MacFarlane had possessed any particular fondness for natural history, but the latent passion was shortly to be awakened. In the summer of 1859 Robert Kennicott, young and enthusiastic, was sent to the Mackenzie region by Professor Spencer F. Baird of the Smithsonian Institution. Necessarily making his headquarters at the posts of the Hudson's Bay Company, the only civilized settlements, his enthusiasm proved so contagious that his hosts, the fur traders, hitherto interested in the feathered and furred inhabitants only in a commercial or gastronomic way, forthwith became zoological collectors. The names of these men, whose labors of love during the next few years added so materially to the scientific knowledge of northern North America, including only those who worked in the Mackenzie Basin, number at least a score, and of this generous

company MacFarlane made by far the most complete and valuable collections. To the young fur trader, then in his early manhood, endowed with an alert and receptive mind, a splendid physique, and an indomitable energy, the enthusiastic example of Robert Kennicott furnished the inspiration needed to point out a pursuit which occupied his spare time and efforts for several years. His earlier collections were made mainly about Fort Good Hope, but his more important contributions came from Anderson River and the region adjacent. A brief notice of the history of Fort Anderson, a trading post built by him on that river, is necessary to a proper understanding of the situation.

Having secured the sanction of the Hudson's Bay Company MacFarlane began in the summer of 1860 to establish a trading post in the region explored by him in 1857, to trade with the Eskimo of Liverpool Bay and the adjacent Arctic Coast, as well as with the Hare Indians, a part of whose hunting grounds lay to the southward. Men were set to work cutting timber on the banks of the river at the point nearest the proposed site where suitable trees abounded. In June, 1861, the prepared lumber was rafted 80 miles down stream, and the post was built. It consisted of suitable houses and stores, surrounded by a heavy stockade with bastions at the corners, and a gateway dwelling which faced the river. The site was on the right bank of the Anderson, approximately in latitude $68^{\circ} 35'$. (Fig. 1.)

During this season, although his associates and their teacher Kennicott were busily engaged during their spare time at their respective stations in collecting birds and eggs and other objects of natural history, MacFarlane was fully occupied in the construction of his new trading post. It was Kennicott's intention to spend the next season in this new field, but urgent duties in the United States made it necessary for him to leave the north, and it was left to MacFarlane to prosecute the work alone. Accordingly, after the completion of the spring fur trade in 1862, he made the first of a series of overland journeys through the dwarfed timber and across the Barren Grounds to Franklin Bay. On these journeys, necessarily made on foot, he was accompanied by several Indians, and the different members of the party took separate courses, so as to discover as many nests as possible. Rendezvous

Lake, a locality which figures prominently in the biographies of many of the nesting birds of this subarctic region, situated on the border of the Barren Grounds, formed a sort of halfway station, where the various parties met by appointment and from which the accumulated collections were sent back. Continuing northeastward toward the Arctic Ocean, the line of march crossed the Wilmot Horton River, the spruce-clad valley of which was found to be the home of the most northern-venturing individuals of a number of woodland birds. After reaching the coast, MacFarlane and his native companions spent several days studying

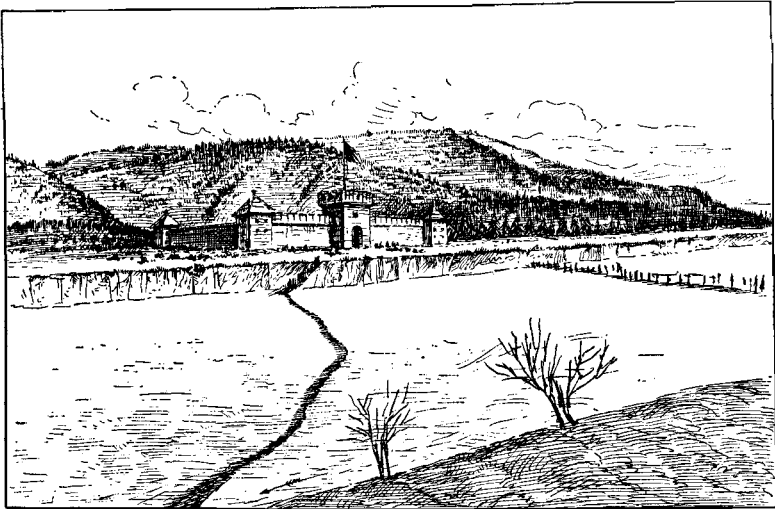
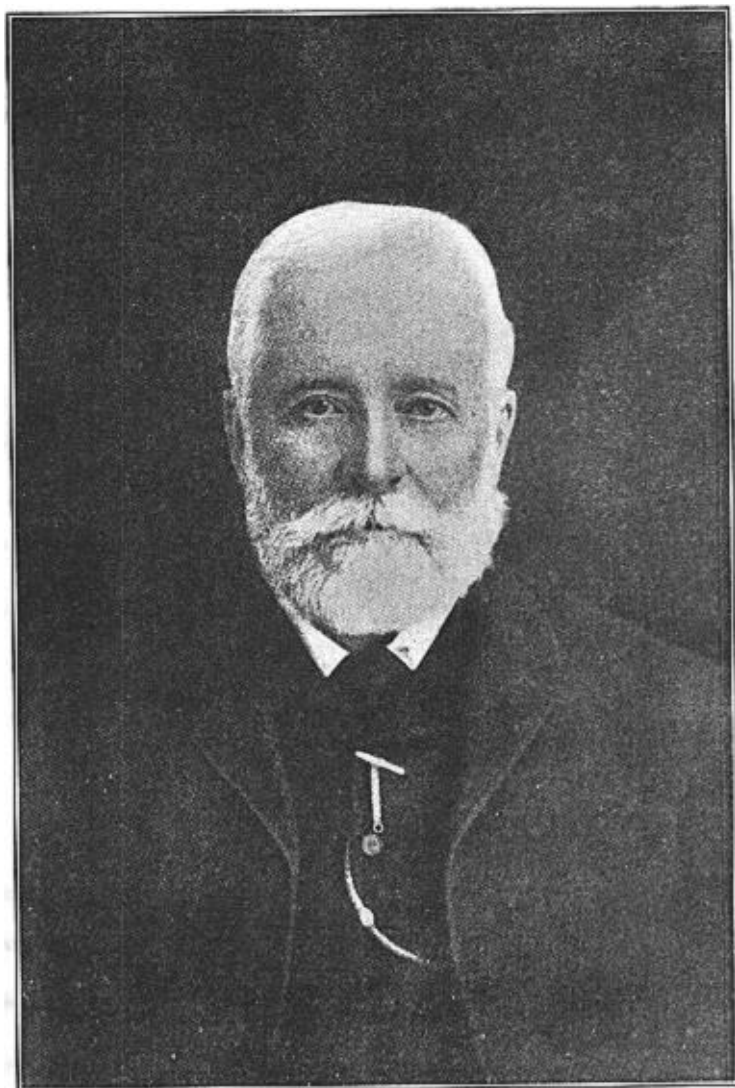


Fig. 1. FORT ANDERSON (from sketch by Emile Petitot, 1865.)

the terns, gulls, and shorebirds of Franklin Bay, after which the brave party, heavily laden with the precious specimens, retraced its way over the weary miles of tundra and mossy fen to the trading post.

In the following summer the journey was repeated on a larger scale. MacFarlane led one party over substantially the former route, while others followed parallel courses to the north and south, all assembling at Rendezvous Lake. Franklin Bay was again their objective, and was more thoroughly worked, a large island



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some distance off shore being included in the survey. Other similar trips were made in the same region in 1864 and 1865, and the work doubtless would have been continued for several years longer but for a very serious epidemic of scarlatina which ravaged the country in the winter of 1865-66, and resulted in the death of so many native hunters, both Indians and Eskimo, that further continuation of the remote post was considered unprofitable. It was therefore definitely abandoned in 1866.

As before intimated, MacFarlane's labors resulted in many important discoveries. The eggs and nesting habits of many birds, particularly waders, including Baird's Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Sanderling, Red Phalarope, and Eskimo Curlew, were first made known to naturalists, and many unknown plumages were obtained. Considering the circumstances under which these collections and observations were made, their number and general excellence were marvelous. Let us picture those little companies of natives under the leadership of their indomitable chief, toiling through the trackless wilderness, carrying on their backs not only their camping equipment and bedding but the collections made from day to day, climbing hills, wading swamps, fording rivers, through sun, and rain, and fog, assailed by countless hordes of insect pests, and hunting their food on the way. Shall one criticize the bird skins if they are not all models of excellence, or some of the eggs because they are emptied through a larger hole than is recommended in the manuals?

MacFarlane's catalogs of his collection made during these years, beautifully written by his own hand, and now preserved in the United States National Museum, bear the data of upwards of 5,000 specimens, mainly ornithological, but including also a large number of mammals, sent by him to the Smithsonian Institution. It should be stated in this connection that in many hundreds of cases a specimen meant to MacFarlane the nest and eggs, together with the parent taken for identification. In addition his contributions to the field of ethnology were numerous and of inestimable value.

After his forced abandonment of the fruitful field in the Anderson region, MacFarlane seems temporarily to have lost interest in natural history. Perhaps he was discouraged by the untimely

death of his close friend Kennicott, whose memory he held in reverence during the remainder of his life; perhaps the fields in which he now found himself seemed unworthy of exploitation after his experiences in the virgin Anderson wilderness. Whatever the cause, we know of no collection being formed by him for a period of nearly fifteen years. From 1866 to 1870 he was stationed mainly at Fort Simpson. In the spring and early summer of the latter year he obtained leave of absence to visit his old home in Scotland. On his return in July, 1870 (the territory so long held and governed by the Hudson's Bay Company having been in the interval transferred to the Dominion Government), he was appointed to take charge of the Athabaska District, and held this charge until 1885. During this period several small collections of birds and eggs were made by him and his associates about Great Slave Lake and Athabaska Lake, mainly in 1880 and 1885. The bulk of these specimens was sent to John J. Dagleish, of Scotland, with whom, doubtless, MacFarlane had become acquainted during his visit to his old home. A portion went to Dr. Robert Bell, then Director of the Canadian Geological Survey, who was forming the nucleus of the Government collection now housed in the Victoria Memorial Museum, at Ottawa.

During the latter part of his incumbency as head of the Athabaska District he was instrumental in introducing steam on the lower Athabaska and the Mackenzie, thereby displacing the old method of transportation by means of scows and York boats, propelled entirely by man power. About the same time the continuation of the Canadian Pacific Railway westward made it possible to utilize more fully the section of the Athabaska then little known above the mouth of the Clearwater. MacFarlane's exploration demonstrated its superiority, under the new conditions, over the time-honored route by way of the Methye Portage, which had been followed for practically a hundred years, and this new route has since been in use until the last year or two, when the construction of a new branch railroad from Edmonton to the head of steamboat navigation at the mouth of the Clearwater has caused the abandonment, probably forever, of this stretch of difficult water.

In 1886 MacFarlane was granted a year's leave of absence, and

made a second and longer visit, his last, to the old country. On his return he was transferred to New Caledonia District, in British Columbia, with headquarters at Fort St. James, Stuart Lake, where he remained until 1889. Here he made a small but varied collection which was forwarded to the U. S. National Museum. This collection, as far as we know, was the first made in central British Columbia, and naturally constituted a valuable addition to our knowledge of this remote section.

From 1889 to 1893, MacFarlane was in charge of Cumberland District, being stationed at Cumberland House on the lower Saskatchewan. Here he made a considerable collection of birds and eggs, as well as mammals, which was augmented by the labors of several of his associates stationed at outlying posts. This collection, which contained many rarities, was also forwarded to Washington.

MacFarlane published only a few articles, but his papers were all important. In 1890, in the 'Canadian Record of Science,' appeared an account of his first trip to the Anderson. During the same year he published 'Land and Sea Birds Nesting Within the Arctic Circle in the Mackenzie River District.' This was reprinted, with additions and corrections, the year following, in the 'Proceedings of the U. S. National Museum,' under the title: 'Notes on and List of Birds Collected in Arctic America, 1861-1866.' This paper treats about 131 species. A report of similar scope on mammals appeared in the 'Proceedings of the U. S. National Museum' in 1905. His last important paper on birds was published in 1908 as an appendix to a book by Charles Mair, 'Through the Mackenzie Basin,' and was entitled 'List of Birds and Eggs Observed and Collected in the Northwest Territories between 1880 and 1894.' This includes some account of his Stuart Lake and Cumberland House collections.

MacFarlane married in 1870 a daughter of Alexander Christie, Jr., an officer of the Hudson's Bay Company, by whom he had eight children, five girls and three boys. The youngest boy died when a child; the others attaining positions of honor and trust in law and finance. Several of his daughters were married to men of prominence. He was survived by most of the members of his large family.

MacFarlane retired from the service of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1894, and spent practically all the remainder of his life in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Fur traders have seldom engaged in any regular and definite occupation after retirement, and MacFarlane was no exception to the rule. He retained his interest in the affairs of the Dominion and the world generally, however, and read eagerly and widely. Always interested in the natural history work of others, especially in expeditions to the scenes of his early labors, he was ready to assist in any way to further such plans. He remained active until a short time before his death, retaining in his old age, to a remarkable degree, that keenness of mind and vigor of body which had enabled him to accomplish so much, both as a fur trader and traveler, and as a zoological collector.

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ADVENTURES IN BIRD-BANDING IN 1921.

BY S. PRENTISS BALDWIN

BIRD-BANDING seems, at last, to be coming into its own, since its recognition by the U. S. Biological Survey, and the widespread publicity given to this method of bird study during the last two years. During 1921, three hundred lovers of birds in all parts of the United States and Canada have taken out permits to begin this work; and within the month an additional three hundred or more, from Canada and New England alone, have gathered in Boston to organize the New England Bird-banding Association. The purpose of this organization is to cooperate with the Survey in establishing lines of trapping stations in New England, and by occasional meetings to compare notes and promote bird-banding.

It is because there are so many who are taking up the work anew that the writer will not attempt in this paper to compile scientific data bearing upon one or another phase of bird life, but will instead try to suggest, and illustrate by the data, different methods that may be employed in obtaining the facts.

The bird-bander will save much time, by first reading not only the *History and Purpose of Bird banding*, by Mr. Frederick C.