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Samuel Hearne. Toronto. [c1930]

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The Ryerson Canadian History Readers

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SAMUEL HEARNE

By
LLOYD ROBERTS
Author of "The Book of Roberts," "Along the Ottawa," etc.

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The Ryerson Canadian History Readers

WITHDRAWN

"Pupils who depend upon the ordinary [illegible] alone for their information learn little or nothing about Champlain's life except that [illegible] in Canada. They know nothing about his fighting days with Henry of Navarre, that he travelled widely in Spanish America, that he wrote interesting books about his travels, that he was the first man to suggest the possibilities of a Panama Canal. All this and a very interesting account of all he did for his beloved colony, his toilsome journeys through the primeval forest, his zeal in spreading a knowledge of Christianity among the cruel and ignorant savages, will be found in this [illegible] little booklet on an early Canadian hero—Champlain."—*[illegible]*

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1. STORIES OF [illegible]

- *[illegible]
- *Jacques Cartier—*J. C. Sutherland*
- *Henry Hudson—*Lawrence J. Burpee*
- [illegible]—*Margaret Lawrence*
- *Daniel du Lhut—*[illegible]*
- *Père Marquette—*[illegible]*
- *Pierre Radisson—*Lawrence J. Burpee*
- *[illegible] and [illegible]—*Lawrence J. Burpee*
- [illegible]
- *[illegible]

2. STORIES OF PATHFINDERS

- *La Vérendrye—*[illegible]*
- *Anthony Henday and Matthew Cocking—*Lawrence J. Burpee*
- *Captain Cook—*Mabel Burkholder*
- *Samuel Hearne—*Lloyd Roberts*
- Captain George Vancouver—*[illegible]*
- *Sir Alexander Mackenzie—*Adrian MacDonald*
- *[illegible]
- *David Thompson—*[illegible]*
- *Sir John Franklin—*[illegible]*
- *[illegible]

4. STORIES OF SETTLEMENT

- *Samuel de Champlain—*Adrian Macdonald*
- *[illegible]
- *[illegible]—*Helen E. Williams*
- *Talon—*Helen E. Williams*
- *[illegible]
- *Colonel Thomas Talbot—*[illegible]*
- The [illegible]
- *Lord Selkirk—*[illegible]*
- The United Empire Loyalists—*[illegible]*
- The Canada Company—*[illegible]*
- *[illegible]

(This List continued on inside back cover.)

SAMUEL HEARNE

TO BE a successful explorer one needs to possess exceptional bodily stamina, dogged courage, a dream which is more than merely a duty. There must also exist a *terra incognita,* together with the needs and the means for its discovery. Because all these conditions were present at the lonely trading post of Prince of Wales Fort on the north-west coast of Hudson Bay in the year 1769, a young Englishman of twenty-four, by name Samuel Hearne, was lifted from the obscurity of his fellows to a fame that will endure as long as the annals of Canada's northern development.

For more than a century the Hudson's Bay Company, picturesquely chartered as "The Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson's Bay," had been holding a monopoly of the Indian fur trade of the northern half of the continent. From their stockaded posts at the mouth of the Churchill, the Nelson and other rivers of

the bay the factors had watched the tribes come in heavily laden with their winter's haul of pelts, depart more lightly laden with English blankets, guns, hatchets, beads and trinkets, while the noble adventurers in far-away London waxed as fat on the profits as the Spanish grandees on Inca gold. But this state of affairs was too good to last. Rivals, more cunning, more indomitable than their old enemies the French, were threatening to divert the eastward flow of trade toward more southern ports. It behooved the ancient company to look to its laurels and its profits. A more aggressive policy than that of merely sitting at home was demanded. Now it was recalled that the charter of 1670 had been granted by King Charles not solely for the purpose of trade, but also for opening up the country and mayhap discovering a north-west passage to the south seas. Obedience in this direction would mean the tapping of the fur trade at its many sources, and who could tell what other secrets of potential wealth. So reasoned Moses Norton, the half-breed governor of the Churchill

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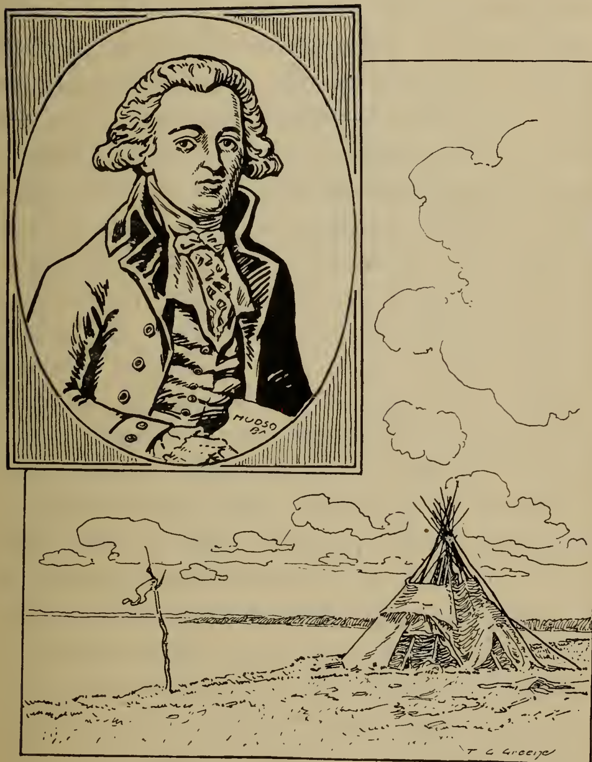
SAMUEL HEARNE



SAMUEL HEARNE, WHOSE FAME WILL ENDURE AS LONG AS THE ANNALS OF CANADA'S NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT.

fort, for one. Had not the Athapascan Indians boasted of a great river far to the north with a "mountain of copper" on its shore? Had they not produced evidence with uncouth weapons wrought of the metal? The matter had been a topic of animated discussion around the bay for some time. The Company agreed that it was worthy of investigation, and authorized Norton to send out an expedition. He very wisely picked on young Hearne to lead it.

Who was Hearne? History, having failed to anticipate his future greatness, has preserved scant record of his small beginnings. Thanks to an obituary notice in the *European Magazine and London Review* for June, 1797, we know that he was born in 1745, abhorred schooling, had a penchant for drawing "and although he never had the least instruction in the art copied with great delicacy and correctness even from nature," and craved adventure upon the sea. When but eleven years of age he gained his way, his mother taking him to Portsmouth and placing him in the care of a man-o'-war cap-

tain, who later became famous as Lord Hood. After several years as a midshipman, during which time he saw some hot and successful fighting, he left the navy and entered into the service of the Hudson's Bay Company as mate of one of their sloops. For some time he was engaged in the fur trade with the Eskimos, cruising up and down the coast of Hudson Bay north of Churchill River. We know he was at Prince of Wales Fort when he was twenty, because his name and the date, July 1, 1767, is chiselled on a rock at Sloops Cove, on the west side of Churchill harbour, as plain now as the day it was done. His experience and ability, plus his thirst for some brave and outstanding adventure, caught the attention of Governor Norton and induced him to send the young sailor upon the hazardous commission.

The commission, as described at length in the governor's "orders and instructions," was not only hazardous, but as broad as all outdoors. Accompanied by William Isbester, sailor, and Thomas Merriman, landsman, two of the Home-guard or Southern

Indians, Captain Chawchinahaw and his lieutenant Nabyah, and "six or eight of the best Northern Indians we can procure, with a small part of their families" he was to proceed to the borders of the Athapuscow country where Captain Matonabbee was to conduct him to "a river represented by the Indians to abound with copper ore, animals of the fur kind, etc., and which is said to be so far to the Northward, that in the middle of the Summer the Sun does not set, and is supposed by the Indians to empty itself into some ocean. This river, which is called Neetha-san-san-dazey, or the Far Off Metal River, you are, if possible, to trace to the mouth, and there determine the latitude and longitude as near as you can; but more particularly so if you find it navigable and that a settlement can be made there with any degree of safety, or benefit to the Company." He was to keep account of all topographical features, the nature of the soil, the course of the river and its depths, in fact everything that might prove of future value in opening up the territory to trade. He was to clear up

for all time the still mooted question of "a passage out of Hudson's Bay into the Western Ocean, as hath lately been represented by the American Traveller." In the event of his failing to reach the Coppermine river he is "recommended" to return to the northern coast of the bay and endeavour to trace the course of Wager Strait to the westward and, failing to find a passage, make a similar examination of Chesterfield Inlet. "There is certainly no harm in making out all Instructions in the fullest manner," dryly remarks Hearne, "yet it must be allowed that those two parts might have been omitted with great propriety." He realized perhaps better than any man living how colossal was the task set him, how impossible in some respects its accomplishment. Commenting further on his instructions to find a northwest passage, he says: "The Continent of America is much wider than many people imagine, particularly Robson, who thought that the Pacific Ocean was but a few days' journey from the west coast of Hudson's Bay. This, however, is so far from being the

case, that when I was at my greatest western distance, upward of five hundred miles from Prince of Wales Fort, the natives, my guides, well knew that many tribes of Indians lay to the west of us, and they knew no end to the land in that direction; nor have I ever met with any Indians, either Northern or Southern, that ever had seen the sea to the westward. . . . As to a passage through the continent of America by the way of Hudson's Bay, it has so long been exploded, notwithstanding what Mr. Ellis has urged in its favour, and the place it has found in the visionary map of the American Traveller, that any comment on it would be quite unnecessary."

His chief, almost his only act, in preparing for his journey was the drawing of a map on a large piece of parchment, depicting the west coast of the bay, but leaving the interior portion blank for filling in during his trip. He also prepared detached pieces on a larger scale for every degree of latitude and longitude contained in the large map, on which he was to prick off his daily courses and dis-

tances and other important data. "These and several other necessary preparations, for the easier, readier and more correctly keeping my Journal and Chart, were also adopted." As for himself, intending to travel light and live off the country, in addition to his instruments, ammunition, and a few objects for trade, he took "only the shirt and clothes I then had on, one spare coat, a pair of drawers, and as much cloth as would make me two or three pair of Indian stockings, which, together with a blanket for bedding composed the whole of my stock of clothing." Imagine starting on a trip into the sub-Arctic with only one blanket!

On November 6, under the salute of seven guns and hearty cheers from his comrades of the fort, the party plunged north-westward into the unknown wilderness of barrens and frozen muskegs. Difficulties began to beset them almost immediately. The Indians had declared that the main woods were only a few days' journey away, but they failed to appear. The cold became intense and food gave out. The few deer, partridges and

fish procured were insufficient to nourish such a large company. But, worst of all, the brave Captain Chawchinahaw proved treacherous and began to do everything in his power to break up the expedition, first by not contributing to the white men's support, and then by inducing several of the Northern Indians to abscond with a greater part of the outfit. Charged with this villainy Chawchinahaw grew openly rebellious and made off with the rest of his crew, "making the woods ring with their laughter" and leaving the whites and their remaining Southern Indians to extricate themselves the best they could. Reluctantly Hearne turned homeward, arriving "safe at Prince of Wales Fort on the eleventh of December, to my own great mortification, and to the no small surprise of the Governor, who had placed great confidence in the abilities and conduct of Chawchinahaw."

In no wise daunted by his failure, Hearne made ready for a second attempt. This time it should be a small party—no white men, no women, and only three Northern

and two Southern Indians. The cannon on the ramparts were buried in snow, so did not give him a boisterous send-off on February 23, although "the Governor, officers, and people insisted on giving me three cheers." We can imagine our youthful explorer feeling less cocksure, more grimly determined, than he did before.

For a month the chronicles are filled with interesting, but unexciting, details of camp life. The dusky allies proved lazy and gluttonous, refusing to hunt while there were fish to be caught through the ice, and every night before falling asleep clearing the tent of every scrap of food. In consequence the party had several narrow escapes from starving before the spring arrived with an abundance of feathered game. By June 10 the thaw compelled them to abandon their sledges and take to packing their supplies on their backs. Hearne found it laborious work packing a sixty-pound load, consisting of a quadrant and its stand, a trunk containing books and papers, a bag of wearing apparel, knives, hatchets, files and other presents for

the natives, especially when the weather became excessively hot. He was fortunately able to purchase a canoe from an Indian, which carried them over the many rivers and lakes encountered. Most of the Northern, or Cree, natives met with, however, were utterly indifferent to his wants, callously refusing to supply him with food even when he was starving, convincing him that, whatever his plight, there would be nothing to hope for from that quarter. And food, or rather the lack of it, haunted him incessantly and claimed the major portion of his diary. He observes that his life was all feasting or all famine, but seldom just enough. Many times he fasted two whole days and nights, twice upwards of three days, and once, while at She-than-nee, near seven days, "during which we tasted not a mouthful of anything, except a few cranberries, water, scraps of old leather, and burnt bones." On these occasions he would observe his Indians examining their clothes to see what portions would provide the most succulent morsels. One day they had the good fortune to kill three

musk-ox, but before they could get one skinned the rain came down and put out their moss fire, and they were under the necessity of eating it raw. Hearne had already been initiated into raw venison and raw fish, but he had some difficulty in stomaching meat strongly impregnated with musk.

On July 22 Hearne fell in with a party of Indians, and his guide, Saw-sop-o-kishac (for short called Sossop), manifested a desire to keep them company. On being questioned he declared that it was too late in the summer to try and make the Coppermine River, and that it would be better to remain with the Indians for the winter. Hearne agreed to this. Other Indians joined them, until there were upwards of six hundred persons and seventy tents, which made their encampment look like a small town, "alive with men, women, children and dogs." Moving slowly westward they crossed the Dubawnt River by canoes and had very successful hunting of deer. One day was marred, however, by an Indian making off with the precious quadrant and all the

powder, which were not recovered until the next day. The rest of the tribe showing the same propensity to steal, or to bully him out of his trading goods, the explorer's aversion to the Northern Indians did not abate.

But a real calamity occured on August 11 for which he had only himself to blame. While endeavouring to establish his location a gust of wind blew over and broke his quadrant, leaving him as helpless in a scientific sense as though he had lost his eyes. For the second time he must retrace his steps, defeated. Although he had been away nearly six months, the territory covered, as compared with his objective, was so small that a less intrepid explorer might well have been discouraged. Dubawnt Lake, where the accident occurred, is less than a quarter of the distance to the Coppermine.

Before starting back Hearne suffered the humility of being plundered of most of his belongings. "Nothing can exceed the cool deliberation of those villains" (Northern Indians), he writes, who, entering his "tent"—a blanket thrown across three walk-

ing sticks—opened his baggage and helped themselves to everything they fancied. With more subtlety, being cautious of starting a war, they talked his Southern Indians out of all they had. Thus lightly laden, on August 19, 1770, they travelled southward at a fast pace. As the fall advanced they began to feel the cold very severely for lack of clothing and skins, although fortunately game was plentiful. On September 20 they fell in with the famous Southern leader, Matonabbee, and his party *en route* to the fort, and most of their present troubles were over. Matonabbee, who spoke a few words of English, took pity on their plight, supplied them with skins, staged a grand feast and dance, said that he knew the Coppermine country and would be glad to guide Hearne there if Governor Norton would engage him. Hearne assured him that his offer would be accepted. "As I had already experienced every hardship that was likely to accompany any future trial, I was determined to complete the discovery, even at the risque of life itself." He arrived at the fort late in

November, "after having been absent eight months and twenty-two days, on a fruitless, or at least an unsuccessful journey."

Hearne had twice failed, but was not too pig-headed to realize that his failures had been due largely to his own mismanagement and inexperience, especially where the handling of Indians was concerned. He listened to Matonabbee's shrewd explanations of past misfortunes and welcomed his advice as regards future plans. He stubbornly refused to re-engage the two Southern Indians, whom their distinguished relative, the half-breed governor, would have forced upon him, and started out on December 7 in the company of his new guide and a few of his best men and their wives.

His course now was almost directly west toward Athapuscow Lake and, stopping only to hunt and to repair their sleds and snowshoes, they made splendid progress. By April 8 they reached a lake bearing the dignified name of Thelewey-aza-yeth (Little Fish Hill) and turned north. At Lake Clowey they paused to build canoes and were joined

by two hundred Northern Indians from various quarters. Now, however, being under the protection of a great chief, Hearne was unmolested, although he bemoans the fact that the universal custom of smoking pipes of friendship and bestowing small parcels of tobacco depleted his stock alarmingly. Toward the last of May Matonabbee had the misfortune of losing one of his eight wives, who, together with another squaw, ran off in the night to meet their former husbands. To the white man's surprise this incident "made more noise and bustle than I could have supposed," and his guide seemed quite inconsolable. Hearne pauses here to explain how the Indians obtained their wives by wrestling with their owners, so that a weakling had a poor chance of keeping a desirable mate. The contestants were never hurt in these bouts and usually the prize was led off unprotesting to act as beast of burden for her new master. "Notwithstanding," says Hearne, "the Northern Indians are so covetous, and pay so little regard to private property as to take every advantage of

bodily strength to rob their neighbours, not only of their goods, but of their wives, yet they are, in other respects, the mildest tribe or nation that is to be found on the borders of Hudson Bay; for let their affronts or losses be ever so great, they will never seek any other revenge than that of wrestling." Murder was all but unknown among them.

At Peshew Lake, Matonabbee left behind his many children and all his wives but two and the other Indians did the same, so that the party could travel with more despatch. A band of Northern Indians had decided to accompany them, for the sole purpose of murdering the Esquimaux who were wont to frequent the Coppermine River. Hearne's endeavours to persuade them from their cruel design only resulted in arousing hostility and open accusations of cowardice and he concluded to ignore what he could not prevent. By June 20 they arrived at Cogead Lake and fell in with some Copper Indians. These, hearing of the contemplated attack on the Esquimaux, became enthusiastic allies. They were also delighted when they

heard of Hearne's hopes for the establishing of a trading post in their neighbourhood, arguing away all obstacles to such a venture. Their extreme friendliness, however, did not prevent the Northern Indians from helping themselves to their allies' possessions with utter shamelessness. It is true Matonabbee endeavoured to dissuade them from taking from the Copper Indians their furs and bows, although he had no objection to their taking as many women as they pleased.

After some days spent in hunting and curing the meat the party moved on, minus all their squaws. The Stoney Mountain country and continuous cold rains made travelling most difficult. On July 7 they reached Buffalo, or Musk-ox Lake, where the Indians killed many of these uncouth animals, and a week later camped on the shores of the Coppermine River. Scouts sent in advance met them on the 16th with news of an Esquimaux encampment of five tents on the west side of the river, and the Indians, in great excitement, prepared themselves for battle,

daubing their shields and bodies with black and red paint and dividing their weapons among them "with the utmost uniformity of sentiment." The lone white man was filled with pity for the few Esquimaux, but dared not show his feelings.

The Indians lay in ambush near the tents, and while waiting for night made themselves "completely frightful" by stripping off their clothes, painting their faces either all red or all black and cutting off their hair. Near one o'clock in the morning they fell upon the sleeping natives and massacred every one of them in the most brutal manner. Hearne narrates that "the shrieks and groans of the poor expiring wretches were truly dreadful," and his horror was increased by seeing a young girl murdered at his very feet, so that "my situation and the terror of my mind at beholding this butchery cannot easily be conceived, much less described," and it was with difficulty that he refrained from tears. The site of the massacre has since been known as Bloody Falls.

This matter successfully disposed of, the

Indians declared themselves ready to assist Hearne in completing his. He caught a glimpse of the sea only eight miles away and made a survey of the locality, none too accurately, it was found afterwards. The Coppermine had proved a disappointingly meagre stream and its mouth, blocked with ice as far as he could see, was quite impracticable for navigation. However, he erected a pile of stones and took possession of the coast in the name of the Hudson's Bay Company, then turned wearily homeward. About thirty miles from the coast he paused to examine one of the so-called copper mines. He had expected to find hills entirely composed of this metal, but instead, after nearly four hours' search, the mines proved "nothing but a jumble of rock and gravel," and he was rewarded with only one piece of ore, which he carried away with him.

Hearne retraced his course as far as Cogead Lake, the squaws and children rejoining the party *en route*, then turned south-by-west toward Athapuscow lake, afterwards named Great Slave. Curiously enough, he

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received no inkling of that immense inland sea, Great Bear Lake, which lay only a comparatively short distance westward of the Coppermine. Half-way to Athapuscow he again had the misfortune to break his quadrant, and later his watch stopped, so that he was "deprived of every means of estimating the distances which we walked with any degree of accuracy." Otherwise life was more pleasant than at any time since embarking on his travels. Wandering tribes kept joining and leaving him, so that his party averaged two hundred strong, and he had excellent opportunity for studying their customs and habits. After crossing Great Slave, on January 9, he was favourably struck with the smooth parklike country, in striking contrast to the north side which is "a jumble of rocks and hills." Buffalo, moose and beaver were in abundance and many pages of his journal go to describing their traits and the native manner of hunting them. On May 30 they crossed Cathawhachaga River, the ice breaking up soon after they had got over. A fortnight later, at Egg River, Hearne

sent a letter ahead to the governor, and on June 30 he appeared at the fort after an absence of nearly nineteen months.

Hearne sums up the results of over two years and a half of the most strenuous and perilous labour in the following modest lines:

"Though my discoveries are not likely to prove of any material advantage to the Nation at large, or indeed to the Hudson's Bay Company, yet I have the pleasure to think that I have fully complied with the orders of my Masters, and that it has put a final end to all disputes concerning a North West Passage through Hudson's Bay. It will also wipe off, in some measure, the ill-grounded and unjust aspersions of Dobbs, Ellis, Robson, and the American Traveller, who have all taken much pains to condemn the conduct of the Hudson's Bay Company, as being averse from discoveries, and from enlarging their trade."

But Samuel Hearne does not pass out of history upon his return to civilization. He was to be given one more chance to add lustre to his name—and to fail rather

ignominously. In recognition of his services he was given a more lucrative post at the fort and a few years later was made governor, or commander-in-chief. Before that, however, he had increased his reputation with the company by founding the trading post of Cumberland House on the far-off Saskatchewan, where the Indians' trade with the French posts below could be intercepted. Then war broke out between England and France, and one August afternoon in 1782, when Hearne was busy trading with some Indians Matonabbee had brought in, a small fleet appear in the harbour. The governor had heard nothing of the war and took no precautions against attack. If he had, even with only thirty-five whites in the fort at the time, one would think he could have made it impregnable. For the walls were forty feet thick and nearly seventeen feet high, mounted with forty cannon, and a handful of resolute souls might have stood off an army. But Hearne lacked aggression as well as prudence. He went to bed that night as usual, to be

awakened at three in the morning with word that four hundred armed men were marching on the gates. The call to arms was sounded, and at the same time Hearne runs out of the fort with two men to find out what it is all about. He is informed that the great officer La Perouse, backed by a part of the French navy, demands the instant surrender of the fort, whereupon Hearne decides that resistance would be impossible. It was not the first time for him to choose discretion as the better part of valour. At six o'clock the British flag was replaced by a white tablecloth and the enemy took possession. Hearne and his officers were sent on board as prisoners, the valuable stores were plundered, the buildings burned and a futile attempt made to blow up the fortifications. The loyal Matonabbee, filled with horror and dismay at this disaster to his friends and too proud himself to accept defeat, promptly killed himself. The rest of the Indian colony were scattered to the winds. In October the company received word from the prison at Dinan Castle in France demanding ranson

for the prisoners, and by May they were in London and by June back at the fort on Hudson Bay. Although Hearne was taken completely by surprise, and an attempt at defence might have been foolhardy and even criminal, he was severely criticized for making no effort whatever to avert his fate. J. B. Tyrrell, the Canadian explorer, excuses him on the ground that his "training in the service of the company had taught him to preserve the peace at any price and it was impossible for him to set aside, at a moment's notice, what had become second nature to him." Whatever the extenuating circumstances, we prefer to remember our hero in the rôle of explorer rather than that of soldier.

In 1787 Hearne returned to England and having saved a few thousand pounds might have enjoyed an easy and prosperous life. We are told, however, by this same *European Magazine and London Review*, from which we quoted in the beginning, that "he had lived so long where money was of no use that he seemed insensible of its value here,

and lent it with little or no security to those he was scarcely acquainted with by name," and who apparently took full advantage of his "native simplicity and innate goodness." "If he had some failings," concludes the article, "he had many virtues to counterbalance them, of which charity was not the least." He died in 1792, when only forty-seven years of age.

Traversing an unknown wilderness on foot, at the mercy of primitive tribes and extremes of cold and heat, in imminent danger of starvation and accident, was no task for cowards or weaklings. Hearne accomplished what in those days was considered all but impossible. His maps and surveys have been consulted by travellers and explorers for a century and a half and, though now replaced by more accurate data, they will always be preserved and reverenced as representing the first and most courageous step in the opening up of this great northern territory.

(Continued from inside front cover)

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Samuel Hearne

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WITHDRAWN

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