

**Alexander Herbert Eckford**  
**1867-1946**

**Pioneer Rancher in Western Canada**

**of the High River Horse Ranch  
Alberta**

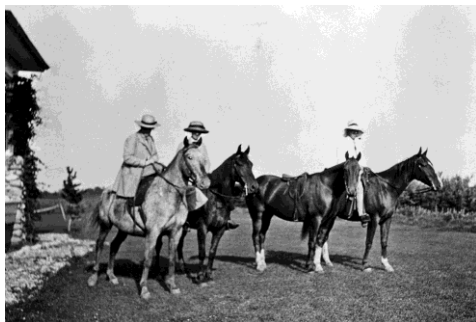
**and Templeknowe  
Roxburghshire**



*A.H. Eckford in c.1904*



*High River Horse Ranch House c.1913*



*Eckford Family Group  
at the High River Horse Ranch c.1913*



*Templeknowe c.1914*

*Researched by Glyn Kennedy*

## Introduction



*Postcard showing cattle on the Cochrane Ranch*

Part of the fundraising for a Provincial Historic Site at the original Cochrane Ranch included the sale of bricks to be included in one of the outside walls of the building. The owner of the +U brand in the 1990s bought five bricks – one for each of the previous owners of the brand which included **A.H.Eckford**.



*1887 was the year when Herbert Eckford, son of Major Eckford, arrived at High River with his wagon, rake and mower to begin ranching in Alberta*

**Templeknowe** is one of those houses of which even its name almost demands research. It was a brief study of Templeknowe's history and that of the nearby **Temple Farm** which led to an interest in the story of three founding families in nineteenth century Canada, one of whom had an association with former inhabitants of the house in the early twentieth century - **Alexander Herbert Eckford (1867-1946)**.



*Templeknowe in the Scottish Borders*

**Alexander Herbert Eckford** and his wife **Christina** of the “Hamilton Hendries” of horse-breeding fame in Canada lived in Templeknowe during the first half of the twentieth century. The Eckfords are part of the rich history of Alberta, Herbert having emigrated from Scotland to become owner of the **High River Horse Ranch** and a shareholder in the **Calgary Brewing and Malting Company** of A.E. Cross whose name is synonymous with the growth and development of the province and who helped establish the Calgary Stampede. The Eckfords were friendly with Alfred Cross and his wife who was the daughter of the Mounted Police Commissioner James F. Macleod. Herbert Eckford was an accomplished polo player and is mentioned briefly in the historical biography “Braehead” by Sherill Maclaren (published 1986).

**Templeknowe** is not only a fine architecturally attractive building and family home set in a superb location in the Scottish Borders but it is a house which has a direct link to the development of **western Canada and the prairie lands of Alberta**.

In the penultimate decade of the nineteenth century, in **1884**, as stated in the 1906 Census of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, **Alexander Herbert Eckford** left the shores of Britain for **Canada**. Seventy-seven Eckfords are recorded in the 1901 Census of Canada alone. The story of A.H. Eckford, however, begins in India in the eighteenth century rather than in Canada.

### **Lt. General James Eckford CB (Companion, Order of the Bath) (1786-1867)**

The grandfather of Alexander Herbert Eckford was **Lt. General James Eckford** of the **Bengal Army** who was born on the 5<sup>th</sup> July **1786** in Dunfermline and died at 33 Clarendon Road in St. Helier, Jersey, on 2<sup>nd</sup> July **1867** aged 80.

Scots had been able to exploit the position of the **East India Company**, the military situation and the civil service requirements in India in the late eighteenth century whereas progression for the lesser Scottish gentry in both Scotland and England was extremely difficult, if not impossible, at that time. A military career in India, however, was attractive and possible despite the distance from home and the unpleasant and unhealthy conditions in that country. Less patronage was required, too, than in the civil service and a commission in the Company’s army was free. Officers did not depend upon their salaries alone there but stood to gain also from the booty and profits from the personal trading so widespread in the East India Company.

Continuous hostilities in India during the later eighteenth century together with the new movement towards territorial annexation massively expanded the Company’s forces. By 1800 it had one of the largest standing armies in the world – most troops were native Indians (sepoys) officered by Europeans.

**Bengal** was the richest of the East India Company’s provinces and the military contribution of some Scottish families was truly remarkable. The intention, however, of those who served in India, whether in the army, in surgery or in civil administration was not to remain in the country but to become wealthy, as was easily possible from their personal trade, and to return home as quickly as possible.

**James Eckford** was described as a serving member of the East India Company's military service in 1817 when he married his first wife **Diana Wrighton**. By her he had only one son, **George Henry** (1818-1877), born a year after their marriage. George Henry Eckford was also to join the army in India. **Lt. General Eckford** married **Mary Haldane** on 2<sup>nd</sup> December **1824**. Mary Haldane was born on the 13<sup>th</sup> December 1801 in Edinburgh and died on the 7<sup>th</sup> November 1857 at Dehra Dun in India aged 55. They had eight children, two of whom died as young men along with their mother in India in 1857, the year of the **Indian Mutiny**.

## **Lt. General James Eckford and His Family**

### **George Henry son to Dians Wrighton**

*Ensign George Henry Eckford of the 12<sup>th</sup> regt. Madras N.I. (Native Infantry), married Catharine Haldane (born 27<sup>th</sup> September 1806 in Edinburgh; died 31<sup>st</sup> May 1897) in 1836 in Calcutta Cathedral. Catharine Haldane was a younger sister of **Mary Haldane**, the second wife of Lt. General Eckford.*

The children of **Lt. General James Eckford** and **Mary Haldane** were:

- **Mary Alexina** (b.1828; d. 30.5.1861 married Henry Stewart **Reid** 11.12.1847)
- **Anne Marian Jessie** (b. 4 Jan. 1830; d. 3 Sept. 1914 aged 84) who married **Arthur Herbert Cocks** CB, JP, (b. 18 April 1819; d. 29 August 1881 aged 62 at South Kensington) on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1847. Arthur Herbert Cocks was the third son of Philip James Cocks MP. At the outbreak of the **2<sup>nd</sup> Sikh War** in **1848** Arthur Herbert Cocks was attached to **Lord Gough's headquarters** as a **political officer**. He received the **Punjab War Medal** and became part of the Punjab Civil Service. In the Indian Mutiny he held the post of judge at Mainpuri before returning to England in 1863 and serving as JP for Worcestershire.
- **Lt. John James** (b. 1831 Meerut in India; d. 7 March 1872 aged 41) who was present in **Meerut** on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1857 when the Indian Mutiny began in that town. John James was married to Catherine Berry Black.
- **Robert** (died c.1857 in India)
- **2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. James Alexander Haldane** (died at Cawnpore, India, in **1857**)
- **Alexander Haldane** (b. 1837; d. 1914; the father of **A.H. Eckford**)
- **Emily** (b.1838; d. 18.2.1902) who married Sir Frederick Russell Hogg
- **Maria** (b. 19.6.1842; d. 6.1.1906) who married **Herbert Taylor MacPherson**



**Major General Sir Herbert Taylor MacPherson** (sometimes written as McPherson or Macpherson) VC, GCB, KCSI - above right – husband of Maria was born 22 January 1827 or 27<sup>th</sup> February 1827. His death was on 20 October 1886. He was a Scottish recipient of the **Victoria Cross**.

It is Major General MacPherson who provides the **first link** to the **High River Horse Ranch** in **southern Alberta**, wishing to establish his son **Duncan** with a ranch in Canada where he could be joined by **Herbert Eckford**, his cousin, the son of **Major Alexander Haldane Eckford**, MacPherson's brother-in-law. There is no evidence that Major General MacPherson ever visited Canada but Major Eckford is recorded sailing to America in **1885** and in Canada he administered the ranch with Duncan MacPherson who reached Alberta in the spring of **1887** prior to Herbert Eckford's arrival only months later.

In **1887 Major Eckford, Lord Strathcona and Lord Mount Stephen purchased the High River Ranch**. Duncan MacPherson returned home to England in **1893** and Eckford bought out MacPherson's interest. **Herbert Eckford** became **sole owner** of the ranch in 1896.

### **1857 and the Eckfords in India**

Besides the military service of their father in India, two sons of Lt. General James Eckford were to become closely involved in the **Indian Mutiny of 1857**.

**Lt. John James Eckford** (1831-1872) was involved in the infamous battle of **Chillianwala** in 1849 which has been described as "a battle which changed Indian perceptions about British military effectiveness and had a direct link with the 'Great Sepoy Rebellion' or 'The Indian War of Independence' of 1857". Eckford's brigade which took part in the assembly of Sir Hugh Gough's army and invasion of Punjab was two native infantry regiments.

Lt. John James Eckford described hearing of the start of the Indian Mutiny in letters to his brother in law, A.H. Cocks, who was a judge at Mainpuri during the Mutiny:

*"About six o'clock on Sunday afternoon, the 10<sup>th</sup> May last, I heard a great uproar in the direction of the Native Infantry and cavalry lines. It increased and I heard shots fired. On enquiring from my servants and Chuprassies, they said the Native troops had mutinied and were setting fire to their lines and Officers' houses. I sent a man to find out and he said the Sepoys were murdering their Officers."*

It was the events of **May 10<sup>th</sup> 1857** in Meerut that converted the small and mostly contained disturbances into a full blown mutiny. Most of the rebellious sowars and sepoy headed for Delhi which was only 40 miles distance away. In "Delhi, Past and Present" by H.C. Fanshawe (1998) there is mention of Lieutenant Eckford:

*"By sunset the engagement was over and the troops returned to camp drenched through with rain which for several hours had fallen at intervals with great violence. Our loss this day was 1 officer and 40 men killed, 8 officers and 163 men wounded and 11 missing .....*

*Lieutenant Eckford 69<sup>th</sup> Regiment Native Infantry attached to the Sirmoor Battalion slightly injured. The enemy must have lost near 500 men, most of whom were killed on the spot."*

**2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. James Alexander Haldane Eckford** of the Bengal Horse Artillery 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade was among those **murdered at Cawnpore** on the **27<sup>th</sup> June 1857**. W.H.G. Kingston in "Our Soldiers" described the defence of Cawnpore and mentioned the artillery position taken up by 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Eckford:

*“The following were the arrangements for the defence: On the north, Major Vibart, of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry, assisted by Captain Jenkins, held the redan, which was an earthwork defending the whole of the northern side. At the north-east battery, Lieutenant Ashe, of the Oude Irregular Artillery, commanded one 24-pounder howitzer and two 9-pounders, assisted by Lieutenant Sotheby. Captain Kempland, 56<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry was posted on the south side. Lieutenant Eckford, of the Artillery (the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bengal Horse Artillery Brigade), had charge of the south-eastern battery with three 9-pounders, assisted by Lieutenant Burney, also of the Artillery, and Lieutenant Delafosse, of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Native Infantry.”*

In “Heroes of the Indian Mutiny” by Edward Gilliat the unfortunate and tragic death of Lieutenant Eckford is graphically described:

*“By the end of the first week 59 artillerymen had been killed at their posts: sunstroke had killed Major Prout and Captain Kempland. Lieutenant Eckford was struck on the heart by a canon-ball while resting on the verandah.”*

The defence of Cawnpore has been described as the saddest episode in the bloodstained history of the sepoy mutiny.

**Robert Eckford** also died in India in **1857** along with his **mother Mary** who died on the **7<sup>th</sup> November 1857** at Dehra Dun in India aged 55. Lt. John James Eckford survived this calamitous year in India and lived until 1872 when he died aged 41.

### **Major A.H. Eckford (1837-1914)**

**Major Alexander Haldane Eckford**, the father of **Alexander Herbert Eckford**, was the youngest surviving son of Lt. General Eckford and was **born in India in 1837** and **died on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1914** aged 77 in London.

*Major Eckford, after his initial investment in the High River Ranch in 1887, re-visited Canada from 1888-96 becoming a shareholder in the Ranch and then owner of the Round T Ranch in what became the province of Alberta. In 1896 Herbert Eckford, his son, who had emigrated to Canada, undertook sole ownership of the High River Horse Ranch.*

Major Eckford married Elizabeth Kerr of Largs in **1861**. They had five children of whom Adriana Louisa Kerr died in March 1913 in Cairo and Elizabeth in 1919 in Calcutta. The **1881 Census** records Eckford, a City of Glasgow bank agent, living in Elmbank House Largs along with Elizabeth and Gertrude (aged 12 and 4 respectively) and a number of domestic servants including a housemaid, tablemaid, cook and nurse.

The **High River Ranch** at **Nanton** on the Highwood River was formerly known as **Little Bow Ranch** and was founded by Bill Sommers and Bill Henry in the late 1880s.

**General Herbert Taylor MacPherson (1827-1886)** and **Sir Charles Ross** of the Manchester branch of the Bank of England took over the High River site following occupation by Billy Cochrane of the CC Ranch (who had occupied the land until his own quarters were built at Willow Creek) and later Walter Skrine, Lazy Bar S, who also moved south. General MacPherson and Sir Charles Ross were setting up their sons **Duncan MacPherson** (b. 7 June 1864 India) and **George and Horatio Ross**. George was an outstanding polo player.

General MacPherson was married to **Maria Eckford** the daughter of **Lt. General James Eckford** and **Mary Haldane**. Maria was the sister of Alexander Haldane Eckford and General MacPherson's interest in the High River location may have been a major reason for Major Eckford and his son deciding also to invest in Canada.

**Duncan Haldane MacPherson**, the son of General MacPherson and Maria, had come from England in the spring of 1887 to act as manager of the High River Horse Ranch only a few months before his cousin **Herbert Eckford**.

Duncan MacPherson and **Major Alexander Haldane Eckford** administered the High River Ranch.

In **1885** at the age of 48 Major Eckford had sailed from Liverpool via Queenstown in Ireland for the United States of America on the SS "Adriatic", arriving in New York on 20 April.

In **1887** the **High River Ranch** was purchased by **Lord Strathcona, Lord Mount Stephen** and **Major Alexander Haldane Eckford**, the father of **Herbert Eckford**. Herbert arrived in the Highwood area in **1887** where the High River Ranch stocked some outstanding horses. He was another good polo player like George Ross.

**Lord Strathcona**, as **Donald Alexander Smith**, (1820-1914) had emigrated to Lower Canada in 1838 to work for the Hudson Bay's Company. In 1869 he was sent to the Red River Settlement to negotiate with Louis Riel and returned to Ottawa in early 1870. He was appointed President of the Hudson's Bay Company's Council of the Northern Department and accompanied Col. Wolseley's military mission to Red River later in the year. Following the end of the rebellion Smith became involved both in politics and investment opportunities. He was a leading figure in the creation of the Canadian Pacific Railway and was promoted to the Presidency of the Bank of Montreal. Smith became extremely wealthy through his investments which probably involved him in the purchase of the **High River Horse Ranch**.

**Major A.H. Eckford** sailed on the SS "Vancouver" in **1888** and **1895** from Liverpool to Quebec – with arrival dates 3 July and 5 October respectively. From shipping passenger lists it is possible to chart Major Eckford's movements to and from Canada. Unlike his son, Major Eckford never settled in southern Alberta.

**Duncan MacPherson** is listed in the 1891 census for Southern Alberta as a "horse breeder" and ran the High River Horse Ranch with **Herbert Eckford** until 1893 when he returned to England. He was aged 28 in 1891 and his faith is recorded as Church of England. The Census agrees that he was born in India. Duncan MacPherson married Frances Douglas Macandrew who died on 28 February 1925.

In **1896** Major Eckford sailed from Liverpool on the SS "Bothnia" for Boston, Massachusetts, arriving on **26 March**. He was one of four saloon passengers among a total of 258 passengers. Major Alexander Haldane Eckford's destination was Canada.

Major A.H. Eckford is recorded, aged 59, sailing from Boston on SS "Lake Huron" of the Beaver Line bound for Liverpool with an arrival date of **3 November 1896**.

Major Eckford is recorded sailing from the United States in **1898** on the SS “Umbria” from New York to Liverpool with an arrival date of 28 October. He was travelling Cabin Class alone.

Lawrence Fowler (1876-1961) has described working for Major Eckford who took ownership of the **Round T Ranch** near High River in Alberta:

*“I went south to work for Major Eckford who owned the Round T Ranch near High River. There I joined my brother Aiden who had moved there a short time ahead of me. We built a wire fence around six sections of land, which was the first wire fence in the district around such a large acreage. We also tore down the old Spitzee trading post and used the logs – which had been planted on end in the ground – for a round corral for breaking saddle horses. All this work took us about two months.”*

The word “**Spitzee**” is derived from the Blackfoot word “**Ispitsi**” meaning high. The Blackfoot called this section of the country **Ispital** due to the tall cottonwood or Balm of Gilead trees that grew along the river bottoms and the fact that near Spitzee (or High River), when the river overflowed its banks, some of the water ran down the Little Bow River.

**The Canadian Passenger Lists** 1865-1935 reveal that Major Eckford returned to Canada on 9 May **1900** sailing 1<sup>st</sup> Class on the SS “Dominion”. He departed from Liverpool and his destination was Montreal.

**Major Alexander Eckford** is also listed in the **UK Incoming Passenger Lists** 1878-1960 returning to England on 20 August **1900** from Montreal along with his daughter **Mary Eckford**. They sailed as Saloon Passengers on the SS “Vancouver” of the Dominion Line built by Charles Connell & Co., Glasgow, and their destination was Liverpool. Major Eckford had sailed on this ship at least twice previously.

In **1901** Major Eckford is recorded travelling alone in Saloon Class on the SS “Numidian” of the Allan Line from Liverpool to Montreal arriving 20 May and in **1904** returning from Quebec to Liverpool on SS “Lake Manitoba”, also of the Allan Line, arriving on 24 October.

The Canadian Passenger Lists for 1865-1935 reveal that Major Eckford aged 71 once more returned to Canada in **1908** arriving in Montreal from Liverpool on 22 May. He was travelling 1<sup>st</sup> Class on the “Empress of Ireland” with Miss Adrianna Kerr, his daughter, aged 42, who died in March 1913. His profession was described as “Army” and his destination was High River.

*The SS “Empress of Ireland” was in service for the Canadian Pacific from 1906-1914. She was built by the Fairfield Shipbuilding & Engineering Co. of Glasgow and had a tonnage of 14,191 with twin-screw and a speed of 19 knots. She could carry 310 first class passengers, 350 second and 800 third. Her maiden voyage was from Liverpool to Quebec on 23 June 1906. The “Empress of Ireland” was unfortunately sunk when in collision with the “Storstad” during thick fog that prevailed on the St. Lawrence River on 20 May 1914. She went down within 15 minutes with the loss of 1,024 lives. This event was rated as one of the worst disasters on the Atlantic route.*



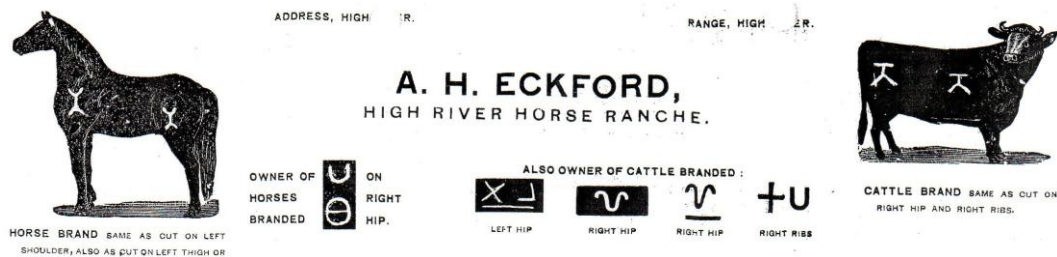
Major Alexander Eckford is listed in the UK Incoming Passenger Lists as returning to England on 24 November **1911** from New York on the SS “Baltic” of the White Star Line along with his daughter **Mary Eckford**. The “Baltic” was the largest liner ever built to 1903, being built by Harland & Wolff, Ltd., Belfast, and had a tonnage of 23,884. She was launched on November 21, 1903.

Although it has been recorded that Major Alexander Haldane Eckford died in March **1914** in London in his 77<sup>th</sup> year, “The Best of Times” for September 10 1914 stated:

*“Colonel Hall of Toronto and Major Eckford\* accompanied the Hon. A. Parker, representing the Remount Commission, to High River on Thursday where they purchased 60 saddle and artillery horses for the British War Office. They paid from \$125 to \$165 per head for a total of close to \$10 thousand dollars. The riding horses were to weigh from 1,000 to 1,300 pounds and artillery horses from 1,200 to 1,340 pounds. They must be from five to nine years old and be sound in every respect.”*

(\*Major Eckford died on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1914 – this reference is to Herbert Eckford, his son, who sometimes used his father’s military title, which he did, for example, on one of the shipping lists, the SS Megantic, on November 1920 )

### **Alexander Herbert Eckford (1867-1946)**



*Notepaper of A.H. Eckford at the High River Horse Ranch showing his horse and cattle brands*

**“Herbert” Eckford**, as he was known to his friends and family, was born in **August 1867** and there is some confusion in the census records, being born either in India (1901 Census) or Scotland (1906 Census) – his obituary, however, states the former as well as his autobiographical article in “The Southern Annual” of 1943.

Herbert Eckford wrote in the above article that he was a **Pioneer** in **Western Canada** in the **early 1880s**. He came to **Manitoba in 1884**, aged 17, to engage in farming just prior to the Louis Riel rebellion, a year later, when he joined the **Transport Service**:

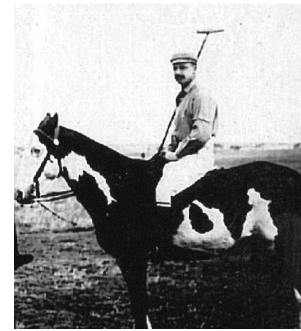
*“I made my entry to farming the Virgin Prairie with a pair of oxen and a wooden beamed plough, and after ploughing and back setting some 35 acres, which I sowed the following Spring, I did not harvest my seed owing to drought and grass hoppers.”*

**Eckford** arrived at **The Crossing** (the former name for the settlement at High River - due to the fact that the **Macleod Trail** crossed the High - or Highwood - River at this point) with a wagon, rake and mower in the **autumn of 1887** after serving as a scout and freighting supplies for the armed forces taking part in the North-West Rebellion.

During this time he travelled two hundred miles across hostile country, sleeping under wagons, and lived on salt bacon which was called “Chicago Chicken” and hard tack, “Ships Biscuits”.

**The North-West Rebellion (1885)** was a brief and unsuccessful rebellion by the Metis of Saskatchewan under Louis Riel against the Dominion of Canada, which they felt had failed to address their concerns for the survival of their people.

The **Dominion Lands Act of 1872** was intended to bring people to settle in Manitoba and the prairies. Herbert Eckford’s duties on arriving at the **High River Ranch** were those of an ordinary hand and accordingly his pay was \$30 a month in wages. He thus became acquainted with all the practical details of ranch management.



*“I worked for years as a Ranch hand and I made my painful introduction to bucking bronchos”*

*Herbert Eckford before a polo match in 1893*

*“Later I joined a Company formed to breed Remounts for the British Army and the Royal North Western Mounted Police”*

In “Canadian Cattlemen”, published Quarterly by the Western Stock Growers’ Association of Calgary, Herbert Eckford wrote in September 1944 about his involvement with **breeding these remounts**:

*“In the early ‘80s of the last century a band of optimists, mostly retired soldiers, of which my father was one, decided to start a Horse Ranch in the then ‘Far West’ of Canada.*

*In those days it was the real ‘Open Range’ and our boundaries were the Rocky Mountains to the West, the Bow and Belly Rivers to the East and South, no fences in those days, Fort Calgary in the North and Fort Macleod in the South.*

*The object of the Ranch was to breed remounts for the British Army and the North West Mounted Police. The enterprise was named ‘The High River Horse Ranche Co.’ and the writer was enrolled as a Ranch hand at the age of twenty.*

*The Company procured their foundation stock from the State of Washington on the West Coast of the U.S.A. and we trailed them in over the Rockies. The band consisted of about 500 head, some 250 mares, and the balance young stock, and very few, either young or old, had ever had a halter or piece of leather on them and they were as wild as hawks.*

*Many thoroughbred sires had been used for a considerable period to cross on these mares which were of native stock. Percheron sires had also been used.”*

In the above article of September 1944, written only two years before his death, entitled “*The Story of ‘Queenstown’ – a Ranch Horse*” Eckford wrote about a favourite horse of his which he rode for some twenty years as a rancher and to which he was particularly attached. Eckford wrote on Queenstown’s death:

*“Farewell, gallant old friend. May the turf on the banks of the Highwood lie lightly over you”*

In June 1946 in his eightieth year Herbert Eckford again reminisced from **Templeknowe** in **St. Boswells** about his younger days as a rancher on the prairie lands of Alberta in “Canadian Cattleman”:

*“In the days of the ‘Open Range’ when ‘Cattle Barons’ ruled, I was a very young cowboy serving my apprenticeship on a mixed Horse and Cattle Ranch in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.*

*We were much worried by Timber and Prairie Wolves (called Coyotes) which infested the range and caused serious losses among the cattle and horses, particularly foals and yearlings”.*

This article gives a flavour of ranch life in Alberta in the period 1887-1914 – a time when Herbert Eckford was a major personality in the province which was going through economic and social change and agriculture was beginning to cast cattle and horse ranching into the realms of the past. The headquarters of the High River Ranch were located about four miles west of the famous “**Medicine Tree**”, the favourite camping ground of the **Blackfoot Indians** where the **whisky forts** were built towards the end of the 1860s.

The land adjacent to the Medicine Tree was an historic river crossing and Indian camping ground. Early explorers including Samuel Herne in 1772, Peter Fidler in 1792 and David Thompson in 1800 all camped there. It also became **Dan Riley’s homestead** in the 1880s.

At least **three forts** were built on the site and **early traders** for **Hudson’s Bay Company** were all familiar with the area having grass, water, firewood and berries readily available in addition to plenty of game. T.C. Powers Co. built the first **Fort Spitzie** north west of the later High River ranch building. It was operated by Ace Samples. Dave Akers and Liver Eating Johnson built the second fort down stream. L.G. Baker’s was the third fort with **Howell Harris** in charge. Another log cabin was built on the site and this would become the first location of what became the **Bar U Ranch**.

*The site of the High River Ranch, was the spot which was chosen by **Daniel Edward Riley** (born: November 28, 1860 Baltic, Prince Edward Island - died: April 27, 1948) for his homestead when he arrived in this area on horseback in the spring of 1883. Riley was to become a politician, insurance agent, rancher and a real estate agent. He helped found the Western Stock Growers’ Association and served various positions in the organization from 1921 to 1937. Riley was appointed to the Canadian Senate on the advice of Mackenzie King on June 26, 1926 and served until his death on April 27, 1948. He was inducted into the Canadian Agricultural Hall of Fame posthumously in 1965.*

The chosen **Riley homestead** was also the site of the old **First Nation’s Camp Spitzie** and the ruins of the **first trading post on the Highwood River**, a relic of the **1870s**. The location, as observed by Riley, had the shelter of trees, fuel at hand, water, game and grazing – all the requirement of man in those days. It was already a **long-established rendezvous** for Blackfoot, Peigan and Blood **Indians**.



*The Highwood River*

The **Medicine Tree** was revered by the First Nations who used to travel hundreds of miles to invoke its blessing. They were convinced that if they slept under its branches they would rise refreshed and strong in the belief that they would excel in hunting, fighting or whatever their need might be. Gifts of tobacco were left under the tree for the spirits. The tree, believed to be the only one of its kind in that area of Alberta, was formed by two cottonwoods joined by a branch which became part of the trunk. The old Indian burial custom in those days was to tie the bodies of the dead in the branches of the trees and then they were left to nature. Many of the trees in the groves around Riley's homestead used to shelter bones in their branches, all that was left of some dear Indian brave. Sometimes, too, bullocks might be found in the cottonwoods, a silent evidence of skirmishing round old **Camp Spitzie** and **Fort Whiskey**.

Fort Whiskey was the **old trading post** where early traders dealt in buffalo hides and horses with the First Nations. One of these traders was **Howell Harris** who was known to Riley and came to this part of the country in **1876**. Harris was described by Riley as resourceful, fearless and implacable, qualities required for survival in those days. At 18 years of age he was an experienced plainsman, so well known on the western plains that the Baker freighting company, working north from Fort Benton, placed him in charge of an outfit to travel to Calgary. In this outfit were 3 teams of 20 yoke of oxen each, and each of these teams hauled 3 heavy wagons loaded with such goods as whisky, calico, flour, tea and sugar. Riley described, in an article (written by Helen McCorquodale in the Calgary Herald in May 1941) on his return to his former homestead, one incident which involved Harris when he was about a day's ride over the border. Harris's scouts brought the alarming news that Indians were approaching in full war paint. Quickly Harris made a corral of his nine wagons, herding the stock inside. He then went off to meet the Indian leader who demanded an exorbitant amount of goods from the wagons. Harris refused and the chief struck him but Harris replied with a blow that knocked the Indian to the ground. His slaughter was expected as retaliation for such an act but from over a hill in the distance a rider magnificently mounted on a great black horse rode towards the skirmish. The rider halted the commotion and enquired about the problem. When this was explained he turned upon the war party and ordered them to leave Harris and his outfit in peace. The peacemaker turned out to be **Gabrielle Dumont**, the war leader of the plains Crees and half-breeds.

The wanderings of Howell Harris brought him south to the **Highwood River**. Here he saw the fine location of **Camp Spitzie** and the possibilities of a thriving trade with the plains Indians. He built **Fort Whiskey**, a long, low building surrounded by a stockade eight feet high, two-hundred feet long and fifty feet wide. He imposed his will upon the so-called "Spitzie Police" who were terrorizing the Indians and the few other peoples in the vicinity. Soon the "police" vanished and Harris was left in control.

Generally the relations between Harris and the Indians was good but on one occasion there was trouble when an Indian discovered that his brother had been killed by a white man in the Cypress Hills.

The Indians believed in a life for a life and the brother elected to kill Harris. He planned to crawl on the roof of Fort Whiskey and shoot Harris in the back as he stepped out in the morning. A friendly Indian, however, passed the information to Harris who made his exit from a side window. He, thus, made a surprise attack on his intended slayer and shot the Indian - and then soothed irate feelings with a half-gallon of whiskey.

After operating the trading post for several years Harris's wanderlust lured him away to other parts of Southern Alberta where he made history in ranch life and as a trader, familiar with Indian ways.

### **The High River Horse Ranch**

**Herbert Eckford** wrote in his autobiographical piece in the Southern Annual in 1943:

*"I became a foreman, and after a few years, manager, and then owner, of a horse and cattle ranch. It was a hard struggle against drought, great range fires, floods and swimming rivers, no bridges in those days, and terrible winters, often 30 and 40 below zero."*



*The MacPherson Ranch in the 1890s*

After six years Duncan McPherson, the manager and a part-owner of the High River Ranch (formerly the **McPherson Ranch**), returned to England and Herbert Eckford was put in charge.

**Eckford bought out McPherson's interest in 1896.**

**Herbert Eckford devoted his attention to horse breeding and a large number of the finest horses in the west came from the Eckford ranch. In one year 2,300 head were handled.**

Eckford's brands included the Double Rowlock and Lazy Round Top T (which later became the upright Round T about 1914).



*The Polo Ground at the High River Ranch, Nanton, Alberta and the Highwood River*

## The Calgary Brewing and Malting Company

**A.E. Cross** of the **a7 Ranche near Nanton**, a business entrepreneur, floated a company in **Calgary** (with a population of three thousand in 1890) and found five other business friends, including **Herbert Eckford**, to invest in the **Calgary Brewing and Malting Company**, their **first official meeting** taking place on **March 7<sup>th</sup> 1892** and the first brew begun by **March 9<sup>th</sup> 1893**.



## Calgary Brewing and Malting Company Photographs c.1897-1907



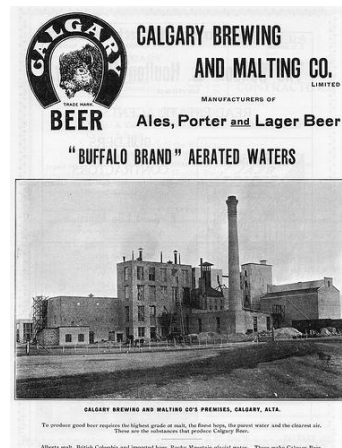
*A.E. Cross (left)*



*The Calgary Brewing and Malting Company buildings c.1897 (right)*

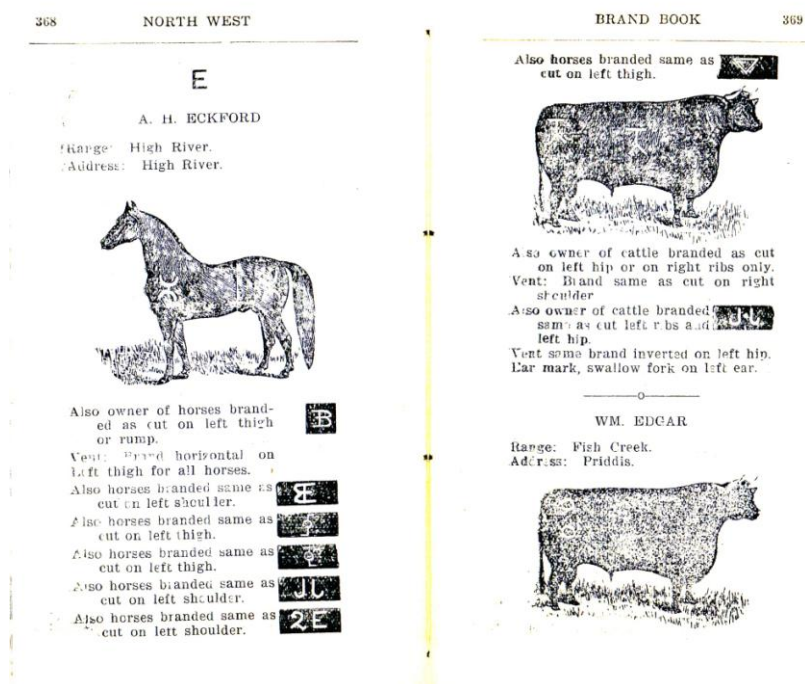


*The Calgary Brewing and Malting Company premises in 1903 (left) and 1906 (right)*



*Helen Cross, wife of Ernest Cross, laying the cornerstone for the new Calgar Malting Company Office Building in 1907 (left and right)*

## A.H.Eckford's Brand Marks



*The A.H. Eckford brand marks for his horses and cattle as listed in the revised "North West Brand Book" (Jan 1<sup>st</sup> 1900)*

## Development of High River and Difficulties on the Range

The **Canadian Pacific Railway** which came through **High River** in **1892** did not encourage settlement to any degree at that time due to the country being in the grip of a very dry cycle but development took place at a steady pace after that date. The Museum of the Highwood today is located in the 1911 sandstone station building.

Three letters from **A.H. Eckford** to **A.E. Cross** give some indication of **life and difficulties on the range** for cattlemen in 1896 with regard to

- **the shortage of hay for winter feed at the High River Ranch.**

Cattle ranching followed a seasonal pattern and mid-summer and early autumn were devoted to putting up hay for winter feed. This was required for three to five months and large quantities were needed to feed calves and weak cows. Plentiful supplies of hay were critical to success.

- **the problems caused by cattle straying on the open range.**

Open range refers to the days before fences were erected when there was an unrestricted grassland on which to run cattle. This involved semi-feral cattle left alone to multiply and which only came into contact with cowboys at the time of the yearly roundup. Stock fended for themselves and there was no attempt to move herds from one area to another, let alone to fatten them for market. Unfortunately it was clear that open range methods were risky and therefore uneconomic. There was then efforts made to rotate herds to reserves for use of the best grass for winter grazing. Many small and medium sized ranches adopted a very different course from the beginning.

They invested in purebred horses or cattle and close-herded them to avoid mixing with range herds. These men adopted some fencing almost immediately (as Major Haldane Eckford). They put up hay and cropped better land for oats. This more intensive adaptation yielded a viable living for a family in exchange for a lifetime of devotion.

- **the requirements of fattening cattle in the “beef bonanza” era**

In the 1880s promotion of the “beef bonanza” drew eastern and foreign investors to Alberta, predominantly Englishmen and Scots, whose diverse ethnic, cultural and economic backgrounds provided a cosmopolitan atmosphere to the ranching frontier. The compelling arithmetic of the “beef bonanza” was based upon the assumption of free grass. In the west lay boundless, gateless, fenceless prairies in the public domain, covered with grasses, which hundreds of observers had declared to be the most nutritious that livestock ever fed upon. With no operating expenses save that of a few cowboys, some corrals, and a branding iron, one might transform these leagues of free grass into steers of top prices. Consistent profits could be achieved as long as grass was unlimited and almost all capital was tied up in cattle and not in improvements or labour. In spite of harsh winters, fires, wolves and rustlers, cow herds grew by half each year.

- **the problems using dogies on the ranch**

The dogies were “pilgrim cattle” from Manitoba or Ontario. The newly-finished railway line was used for their transportation. These cattle were unfamiliar with the range on which they found themselves and were vulnerable during bitter winters and infrequent Chinook winds. Dogies were stock cattle and could be bought cheaply when available - but could also dilute the stock.

**High River** at the **end of the century** consisted of an hotel, livery barns, a blacksmith’s shop, the stone building of the High River Trading Company, two boarding houses, the railway station, a couple of warehouses, a school, the Presbyterian Church and a few dwellings. This “cow town”, however, second in antiquity in Alberta only to Fort Macleod, was the hub of all the open-range cow outfits and horse ranches in the Spitzee country. When it was roundup time and the roundup wagons were camped in the vicinity of High River, the cowboys rode into town on their top cow ponies and did square dances on their horses.



*High River Town*

Just east of the town was the **Highwood Ranch**, operated by the Trading Company, their brand being a Seven Bar Brand. Most famous of the better known brands was the **Bar U** which had forty thousand head of cattle in the summer of 1906. Ten years later when horse power was still important Bar U had between four and five hundred purebred **Percheron** mares, which was the largest herd in the world. They also raised fine saddle horses using thorough-bred stallions. For many years their two year old Percheron stallions were shipped all over the world. The ranch had its own stables in High River after the turn of the century.



Harry Baines and Billy Henry, who owned the High River Hotel and livery barn, had five corrals and when the Mounted Police or the British Government, who were buying horses for the Boer War, came to High River, the High River Horse Ranch, the Bar U and the Quorn Ranch each were given a corral. The fourth corral could be used by other people who brought in horses, and the fifth one was for buyers.

These outfits came in with their fine string of half-broke horses and their top riders such as Bert Pierson, Al Meakes, Rod Redfern, Goerge Baker, John Ware, and Herb Miller. Every horse had to be saddled and ridden down the Macleod Trail and back to the corral. The buyers picked out the horses they liked which were branded and turned into the buyers' corral. Everyone came in to see the show as there were some great riders and the bar did great business.

In 1900 Bradley's Harness Shop was established in High River and about the same time Billy Henry sold his hotel and corrals.

### **The Hendrie Family**

On July 31st **1900** Herbert Eckford married **Christina Hendrie** of the "Hamilton Hendries" of horse fame. She was born in Ontario in February 1872. **William Hendrie**, father of Christina, was a businessman and horse-breeder. An announcement was placed in "The Mail & Empire" of Toronto of that day.

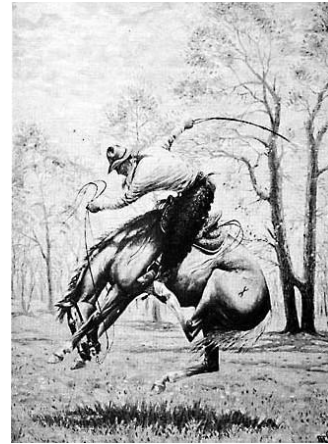
**William Hendrie** was born in 1831 in Glasgow and was married first to Margaret Walker who died in 1873. By her he had four sons and four daughters. In 1875 he married Mary Murray and they had a son and two daughters. After his schooling in Glasgow, William Hendrie took a clerkship in a law office. Instead of pursuing a legal career, however, in 1848 he found a position in the office of the Glasgow and South Western Railway. Three years later he moved to Newcastle upon Tyne to work for the North Eastern Railway in its freight department. His experience there led to an offer in 1855 from the **Great Western Railway in Upper Canada** to join its freight department. He accepted and emigrated.

In 1855 Hendrie and John Shedden formed a company to become the Great Western's exclusive **cartage agent**. Having first served Hamilton, London and other points on the Great Western Line, in 1856 the firm set up in Toronto, where it soon became cartage agent as well for the Grand Trunk there and in Montreal. Besides cartage, William Hendrie became engaged in a number of prominent enterprises in Canada with his brother George and the Hendries developed **American investments**, including two banks and Great Lakes navigation companies. Railways created Hendrie's business and cartage, contracting, manufacturing and rail production ultimately involved him in the production of structural iron and steel.

Hendrie's success rested in the first instance upon **horses** and at the height of his cartage business he owned 300 of them. At his **Valley Farm**, just outside **Hamilton**, he invested considerable money in breeding horses, in addition to raising sheep and cattle. Horse-breeding allowed Hendrie to indulge in racing and the bloodlines in his stable connected him to such international horsemen as **Lord Derby**.

The **1891 Census of Canada** records the household of William Hendrie at the age of 60 living in Hamilton, Ontario. Mary, his wife, was aged 35 and the following family members are listed – all single

- James W. aged 32
- Elizabeth S. aged 30
- William J. aged 28
- Annie aged 20
- **Christina Mary aged 18**
- Murray aged 15
- Maud aged 13
- Phyllis aged 6



*Bert Pierson (right) the High River Horse Ranch  
Broncbuster from the Bert Smith oil painting*

**Breeding and racing** demonstrated to the public that William Hendrie was a very rich man. He had six domestic servants living with him in 1891. William Hendrie died fifteen years later on 27 June 1906 in Hamilton.

Nine years after the 1891 Census **Herbert Eckford** married **Christina** and the Eckford family link with **horse breeding** was strengthened. The marriage took place in the Central Presbyterian Church, Hamilton. There were about 70 invited guests. From the **1901 Census of Canada** it can be learnt that Herbert Eckford was a member of the Church of England and described as a **rancher** with five household members besides Christina his wife

- Kenneth McLean aged 34, born in Ontario, the foreman
- George Fales and Elizabeth Fales, both aged 37, a farm hand and his wife from England
- George Meyers, aged 30, a lodger born in Ontario
- Douglas Morrison, aged 22, a pupil lodger

The extremely wet years of **1901** and **1902** changed the face of Alberta. The drought was broken and **homesteaders** started flocking into the country with cartloads of settlers' effects. Four new hotels and four large livery barns were constructed, along with implement sheds. Lineham's Mill was built in 1903 and there were three other lumber yards. The Saratoga restaurant opened its doors to the public. The Little Bow Trading Company, Bill Lower's harness shop, Ballantyne's Hardware Store and the Medical Hall were established on the east side of the railway track. Knowles' planing mill was built which turned out doors, windows, mouldings, etc. Included in the **booming economy** were bankers and bakers.

The livery stable had a bonanza taking prospective homesteaders out to find a location. Lumber in plenty came out of High River and tar-paper shacks and little **farm houses** dotted the prairie, where previously nothing but horses and cattle had roamed. Long black furrows appeared and large steam engines broke the prairie soil. School houses sprang up and cowpunchers courted the school ma'ams. In High River elevators appeared on the skyline and a large big frame school was built. New churches appeared supported by five denominations.

“The Pioneer Years” by Barry Broadfoot (Paperjacks 1990) tells the story of the opening up of the Canadian West by settlers during the historic years between the turn of the century and 1914. With regard to the economic, social cultural and philosophical life of the West the **1885-1914** period was the most important. “The Pioneer Years” tells how three million people rushed into the West from all parts of the globe to take up 160 acres for a 10 dollar filing fee in order to call themselves homesteaders.

The **Bar U Ranch** near High River was one of a small group of very large corporate ranches in western Canada. Established in 1882, the Bar U was one of the foremost ranching operations in Canada. Key personalities included Fred Stimson, George Lane and Patrick Burns. Fred Stimson set out the foundation and infrastructure for the Bar U Ranch, which under George Lane achieved international repute as a centre of breeding excellence for cattle and purebred Percheron horses. Patrick Burns and his company modernized the ranch by replacing horses with tractors.

Recognizing that the Bar U's long history provided an excellent opportunity to commemorate Canada's ranching industry, Parks Canada acquired 148.43 hectares (367 acres), including the ranch's headquarters area in 1991.

Bob Edwards published the “High River Eye Opener” for two or three years and related **the fair held in High River** in the autumn of **1902**:

*“It was more of a race-meet and stampede, there was nothing to exhibit. Western society was brilliantly presented, most of them wearing blankets of gaudy hue. Extra bartenders were shipped down from Calgary, cowboys brought in their racing ponies. Shorty McLaughlin, Jack Matheson, Christie, Eckford, Koch, Harry Robertson and others were all on hand with fast ponies of every description.”*

Herbert Eckford was a well-known polo player and raised many fine horses on the **High River Horse Ranch**. Extracts from “**The Calgary Herald**” in **1903** give some indication of the social, sporting and working life of Herbert Eckford during that year.

*“A.H. Eckford and Mrs Eckford of High River, Alberta, are the guests of Mr and Mrs Hendrie at ‘Holmstead’ Hamilton” (5.1.1903)*  
*“Charles Valle is on trial at Macleod on a charge on theft of a horse from A.H. Eckford of High River” (12.3.1903)*

**Cattle and horse rustling** were two of the major crimes in the Canadian West during the latter part of the nineteenth century. **Henry Longabaugh** – the “Sundance Kid” – after completing an eighteen-month sentence for horse stealing in the USA in 1889 fled north and worked on the H2 Ranch before joining his old friend Ebb Johnson at the Bar U Ranch. Fred Ings of the Rio Alto Ranch called him “*a thoroughly likeable fellow ..... A general favourite with everyone, a splendid rider and a top notch cowhand .....*” but Herb Miller, senior hand at the Bar U, remained suspicious of the American and claimed that he had seen a hacksaw blade hidden between Longabaugh's saddle and horse blanket. In range country such implements were connected with cattle rustling since they could be used to modify branding irons. Longabaugh returned to the United States early in 1892 and became involved with a gang which ran stolen horses from northern Montana into Saskatchewan.

Charles McLaughlin of the High River district was sentenced to seven years for stealing a horse from Eckford. The animal was taken to Calgary and sold. The brand had been cut and marred but the double rowlock of Eckford showed plainly through the cuts.

## **The RoundUp**

*“At a meeting of stockmen held in High River on May 16 it was decided to start the roundup on June 8 from the mouth of Mosquito Creek. Amongst the cattle men present were Messrs. Hull, Cross, Walter Ings, J.H. Brown, Eckford, Ted Hills, Koch, George Winder, H. Millar, Pete McElroy, Charlie Anderson, Lem Sexsmith, Peter Muirhead and several other.” (23.5.1903).*

W.R. Hull was a veteran Calgary-based cattleman and owner of the Bow Valley Ranch. For accounts of some of these cowboys i.e. Ted Hills see pp 67-68; Herb Miller 51-2; Lem Sexsmith p 49; Peter Muirhead pp 107-8 in “Cowboys, Ranchers and the Cattle Business”.

## **Polo**

*“Polo to the Fore ..... Fine Games Yesterday*

*Polo has not lost any ground in Calgary and some of the best games ever seen in the country were played at the polo grounds yesterday afternoon. A very large number turned out, including many ladies, and the spectators were well pleased.*

*Over seven quarters were played and among those taking part were Lord E. Seymour, A.G. Woolley Dod, A. Hone, A.H. Eckford, W. Toole, H.R. Middleton, F.A. Macnaghten, W.R. Newbolt, Cecil Douglas, A.E. Cross, Captain Inglis, F.R. Bevan, R.K. Bennett and G.R. Noton  
.....*

*Considering that this was the first practice good work was done and the ponies were in excellent shape. There were lots of them, too, and 40 were counted standing at the rail awaiting the play.*

*Though, owing to the wet spring of last year, polo received a little damper in the small number of games played last season, there is no doubt that the game is more popular than ever..... A number of ladies were on the grounds, among others Mrs Woolley Dod, Mrs A.H. Eckford ....” (2.6.1903)*

*“Mr and Mrs Eckford of High River Horse Ranche arrived in town Sunday to attend the polo matches” (6.6.1903)*

*“Mr and Mrs A. H. Eckford and Mrs Eckford’s little niece, daughter of Mrs Braithwaite, have been guests at the Alberta this week” (11.7.1903)*

*“A.H. Eckford was a passenger on the south train this morning. He was returning to his ranche at High River” (31.7.1903)*

*“Tuesday: July 7 at 10 o’clock sharp Eckford’s team v Toole’s team” (18.8.1903)*

These are only a few of a number of similar references in the Calgary Herald to the business, sporting and social arrangements of those in the public eye in Calgary at the start of the twentieth century - these individuals included Mr and Mrs Eckford.

Polo, which had been played at High River before the turn of the century, was a popular sport until the commencement of World War One among the ranchers and business men of Alberta. Most ranches, by necessity, raised some saddle horses sired by thoroughbred stallions. These ranch ponies, trained to work cattle, made good polo ponies with very little training. Tournaments were held throughout the summer.

*“The playing of polo in the Canadian West is a good example of how an ostensibly elitist sport bridged social cleavage and encouraged the cohesion of community interests. Polo was played by the wealthiest members of the social strata but the sport also had its appeal among smaller scale ranchers, farmers and townspeople.”*

(“Polo and British Settlement in Alberta 1880-1930” by John F. Varty in “Alberta History” 1995)

**Polo originated in India** where it was discovered by British cavalry officers during the **1870s**. Approximately in 1876 these officers imported the game to England where it became popular among the cavalry. Polo had been played in **Alberta** since the **middle of the 1880s**. In the 1890s the popularity of **the sport began to grow in small ranching communities** in the **south of Calgary** as well as in Calgary. The peak of polo’s popularity in Alberta occurred during the first half of the twentieth century when the sport became common in ranching communities throughout the southern part of the province. Polo could be played by Alberta ranchers with a minimum of expense. It was tied to the main industry in the foothills area of Alberta – ranching. **Horses and horsemanship were the common denominator** that caused people to participate in the sport when it was relatively new.

**Billy Cochrane** reflected on the early days of polo in the West and attributed its broad appeal to the fact that people who lived with, and worked on, horses would inevitably accept a sport that was played on a horse.

*“A feller didn’t do much walking in the olden days if he could help it; he opened gates, packed grub and even could do a fair amount of fence fixing on horse-back and it was only natural that in due course he would be looking for a game, beside running races, that could be played on horse-back. Most everyone had a good saddle-back horse as that was the only means of getting about the country, and Alberta was even then recognised as a natural breeding ground for distinctive saddle horses.”*

(“Early polo in Southern Alberta” by W.R. Cochrane in “Canadian Cattlemen” 1949)

Billy Cochrane owned the CC Ranch and ran a purebred Galloway herd as well as a regular range herd. He was a good friend of **A.E. Cross** who maintained a breeding herd at the **a7 Ranche** and a steer herd along the **Red Deer River**.

### High River Horse Ranch For Sale



*Advertisement in The Nanton News dated Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1905*

The big **stone ranch house** at the High River was built in **1904** and became a social centre for the locality. **Major Eckford** sent stonemasons from Britain to carry out the work. The foot-thick walls of the lower storey were constructed from river rock and stone from the original Fort Spitzie chimneys. Billy MacDougall could recall hauling many loads of rock. It is said, also, that logs from the early forts went into the construction of some of the ranch buildings. In 1908 the Eckfords also had a home on the banks of the Medicine River in Alberta.



*Eckford's home on the banks of Medicine River in 1908*

## **The Roundups Continued**

One of the most important events in the cattlemen's calendar was **the round up**. In some respects the methods and objectives of roundups remained much the same from their instigation on the Canadian range in the 1880s at least until the First World War. However, there were ongoing and far-reaching changes in organisation and scope.

The general roundups of the early years gave way to smaller district roundups before the turn of the century as the outfits multiplied and the ranges became more fully stocked. The districts with their own roundups included Fort Macleod, High River (as mentioned above), Mosquito Creek, Bow River, Pinder Creek, Medicine Hat, Red Deer River, Cypress Hills and the Whitemud River.

Walter and Fred Ings came from Prince Edward Island to establish the Rio Alto (OH) Ranch. Fred remembered the roundups with affection:

*"In looking back now I can see it! Live it! Again a roundup day!*

*From the first call to roll out in the dawn till we stamped out the last coal of our camp fire and turned in a little stiff and weary to sleep the dreamless sleep of youth.*

*Breakfast at day break was eaten in the mess tent, a hot and substantial meal of meat, potatoes, bread and jam with strong black coffee. Our dishes were tin and we ate sitting around on bed rolls or a box if one was handy, or on the ground.*

*Before we were through, the tinkle of a bell told us the night wrangler was near with the saddle horses ..... This bell and the approaching hoof beats was the signal to get our saddles ready and untie our ropes."*

## Horse & Cattle Sales and the Eckfords & Life in High River 1906-07

In May 1905 98 horses were shipped from the High River district along with 517 head of cattle.

*“J. Teasdale, of Guelph, arrived here on Wednesday with the remainder of a car of pure bred stock sent out by the Ontario Agricultural Department ..... Mr A.H. Eckford secured a magnificent stallion and mare” (High River Times 26 April 1906)*

In the **1906 Census of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta** only two household members are mentioned alongside Herbert and Christina Eckford

- Kenneth McLean, still single, now aged 40 and described as a hired man
- Frank Coyle, aged 38, born in Washington

A.H. Eckford was elected chairman of the High River Polo Club in April 1906 and in this year he was, along with George Lane, included in the Officers List of the Alberta Horse Breeders Association.

The terrible winter of **1906** and **1907** which wiped out seventy-five per cent of the range herds, however, joined with the arrival of the homesteaders and sod busters to break the back of the open range beef cattle industry.

*“The net effect of the winter of 1906-07 was to make stock farmers out of ranchers. Almost as suddenly as the disappearance of the buffalo, it changed the way of life of the region.”*  
(“Wolf Willow” by Wallace Stegner 1995)

**The last general roundup took place in 1907.** The cowboys met at Coaldale Lake and there were twelve roundup outfits and over eighteen hundred horses in the cavvies.

**So ended an epoch that started only a quarter of a century earlier:** yet such was the colour and romance of its brief duration that its ever lengthening shadow lives on in western garments, in fiction, on the screen, in rodeo, and on the ranches.

*“The winter of 1906-07 occurred at a time of rapid change in western Canada. The losses inflicted by the winter were assessed by a diverse multitude of decision makers. To some long-time ranchers it was a fatal blow, to others it was an opportunity. Many small stockmen had expected to continue to make their living from selling beef, but the winter’s losses forced them to take a new look at their futures”.* (“The Bar U” by Simon Evans 2004)

“The Best of Times” for June 29 1907 under the title “Ranchers Gave Their Evidence to Commission” reported, “The sitting of the beef commission opened yesterday. A. Eckford was the first witness called”. He stated that:

*“He fed cattle for the last two years and is satisfied that the feeding business is a profitable one in this district. Five years ago he shipped cattle to Liverpool and found that he was charged an exorbitant rate for space on the ship on account of the space having been bought up by commission men early in the season who retailed it to single shippers. He received a poor price for his stock because they had a hard trip and arrived in a very bad shape.*

*He believed that the law regarding the dipping of cattle for mange which lately (has come) into practice is an injustice to the small stock man who has no mange in his herd. These men have not the facilities for dipping and when it is not necessary the owner should be able to turn his cattle loose after securing a permit from the heath inspector."*

Life on the ranch and social and sporting activities, however, continued fairly normally for the Eckfords at the High River Horse Ranch despite the problems and changes:

Under the title "Land of Diversified Resources" in "The Best of Times" for December 3 1908 an interesting article gives a description of **the development of farming alongside ranching on the prairies** and the subsequent growing winter wheat production in Alberta. It states:

*"It has been said that the story of winter wheat in South Alberta sounds like a dream. Up till a few years ago wheat growing was an unknown quantity and the old time rancher went out of his way to discourage the advent of the farmer. But the farmer came out and the soil responded to his efforts with crops which for quantity and quality amazed him. Alberta Red wheat was experimented with in High River and it only required a few crops to establish the fact that High River could grow winter wheat successfully.*

*While we have a great reputation as a winter wheat country, yet it should be understood that this is not a one crop country. This is a land adapted to diversified farming. True, wheat is king, yet oats, spring wheat, barley, flax and vegetables grow in marvellous abundance and quality.*

*As proof of the foregoing we need only produce a statement completed by the manager of one of our banks which was sent to the head office and is reliable in every sense of the word.*

*Acreage under fall wheat – 10,000; Average yield per acre, bu – 33; Total yield – 330,000.  
Acreage under oats - 20,000; Average yield per acre, bu – 50; Total yield 1,000,000.  
Acreage under spring wheat – 1,6000; Average yield per acre, bu – 20; Total yield – 30,000.  
The acreage under barley was small and the average yield is estimated at 26 bushels per acre.....*

## **Change**

***The High River district has always enjoyed a reputation of being the finest range for cattle raising in America. Our cattle bring the best market prices and yet they are strangers to the stable, shed or grain. They are born on the prairies, live and grow fat on the prairies and from the prairies are driven to the nearest shipping point or to the slaughter. Our grasses are unequalled both in quantity and in this connection we defy the world. Of late some of our large cattle kings have given away to the farmer but we believe that better cattle will be raised under the new order of things than when the ranchman's large herds roam at will over this district. From now on the profit will be to the many farmers and not to a few cattle lords.***

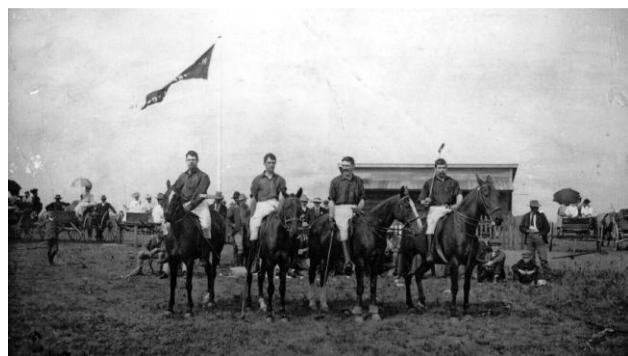
*The estimate given of the number of cattle shipped in the year 1908 is placed at 8,600. These were nearly all beef and a value of \$40 per head placed on them which is exceedingly moderate. The total value being over \$344,000."*



## High River Polo Photographs



*The High River Polo Team in 1904  
with A.H. Eckford second from right*



*The High River Polo team in 1908  
with Eckford again second from  
right*

When it was decided to hold a polo tournament each rancher in the neighbourhood would buy a wagon box load of oats, some extra food and a case of whisky. The teams from the other clubs that were to take part would arrive with their democrats and ponies and be the guests of the local ranchers.

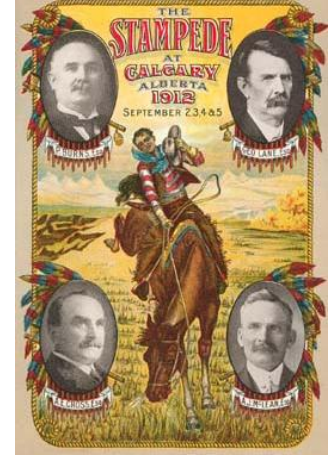


*Group photograph c. 1900 taken at the polo grounds Calgary with Mrs Eckford second from left. To the right: Lady MacNaghton, J.B. Cross, Mrs A.E. Cross and Frank Bedingfield. Polo mallets are visible in the foreground*

A.H. Eckford was a keen sportsman who enjoyed not only polo but was one of the Officers of the High River Tennis Club (1906-10), Hon. President of the High River Football Club (1907), Hon. Vice-President of the Hockey Club (1907-08), Hon. President of the High River Lacrosse Club and Patron of the Curling Club.



As stated, the Eckfords were friendly with their neighbours **Alfred Ernest Cross** and his wife **Helen Rothney Cross** as mentioned in the Calgary Daily Herald (November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1907) when Mr and Mrs A.E. Cross were guests of Mrs Eckford at the High River Ranch. **Cross** (born in Quebec in 1861) was one of the most prominent Calgarians of the early 20th century. He came to Alberta in 1884 and established both the Calgary Brewing and Malting Company and the a7 Ranche west of Nanton.



Alfred Ernest Cross was one of the “**Big 4**” who helped finance the **first Calgary Stampede**. He was married to Helen Rothney Macleod (born at Fort Mcleod in 1878; died at Calgary in 1959), daughter of Mounted Police **Commissioner James Farquharson Macleod**.

**In 1887 Macleod was appointed a judge of the newly organised Supreme Court of the North-West Territories.**



*Col. F. Macleod and his wife Mary (right)*

## **Horse Sales in 1909 & the Horse Fair**

Reference was made in the Calgary Daily Herald of the ranch selling horses on the 6<sup>th</sup> August 1909:

*“Stewart Derry recently purchased 85 head of horses from Mr Eckford whose ranch lies west of High River. Mr Derry will dispose of them to buyers in Cayley and surrounding country.”*

In August **1909 A.H. Eckford** was named president of the **High River Agricultural Society**. The Society was incorporated in 1909 under the provisions of the Alberta Agricultural Societies Ordinance. The first meeting was held on August 7<sup>th</sup> 1909. A **two-day fair** was held in October and the society held **annual fairs from 1909 to 1924** (see High River Agricultural Society Fonds from 1909 in Glenbow Museum Archives - M2404, M 2706, M 6660).

The High River Agricultural Society came into being in **1906**, according to the High River Times (August 16 1906) upon a motion by Messrs. Ballachey and McDougall at

a well represented meeting of town and country citizens on August 10th 1906. Officers were elected and A.H. Eckford was one of the directors.

The **Exhibition of 1909** at High River had a full programme of activities on October 19 and 20 including a Cadet Parade, the Calgary Brass Band, Indian Races, Stock Exhibits, Farm Produce Display and a Program of Racing. A.H Eckford is listed as President in the High River Times advertisement and detailed programme on October 14. The Exhibition was a total success.

*“To President A.H. Eckford is due credit for the success of the Fair” (High River Times October 28 1909)*

The annual meeting of the High River Agricultural Society discussed the matter of the Fair grounds in December 1909 and among the Officers and Directors was A.H. Eckford who was again listed as President.

**Christina Eckford** played her part in **developing the community of High River**. She was interested in establishing a Cottage Hospital for the town as set out in the following letter to Mayor Young which was discussed at the Town Council on Friday, October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1909:

*“In reference to my conversation with you on the 14<sup>th</sup> August regarding a Cottage Hospital for the town and district of High River. I now wish to ask, if you think it advisable, would you place the subject before your council and get their opinion and co-operation in this matter as soon as possible. Perhaps a public meeting would be called if you and the majority of the council are in favour of the object for your town. It would seem that a place of the importance and size of High River has now arrived at the stage when the care of the sick of the town and neighbourhood is an urgent necessity to have near their homes, and I feel sure if the movement for such a good charity is well started it could not help but have many willing helpers”.*

The members of the Town Council immediately took up the suggestion of a Community Hospital in the Town of High River and appointed Councillors Short, McDougall and Sheppard to enquire into the idea and secure information as to the **initial cost of equipping and the expense of maintaining such a building**.

At the next meeting of the Town Council the committee handed in their recommendations and the idea was accepted – with only one exception. The Council appointed a provisional board of directors, consisting of Messrs. A.H. Eckford, W.C. McDougall, C.C. Short, H.N. Sheppard, A.A. Ballachey and C. Clark. These directors were granted the power to purchase equipment, engage nurses, frame by-laws, solicit members and **direct all the work** in connection with the organisation of such an institution.”

Mr A.H. Eckford shipped five car loads of prime cattle at the beginning of November 1909

*“.....which were probably the best looking herd ever entrained at High River”(High River Times 11 November 1909)*

These cattle had ranged on Eckford's outer ranch for about twenty miles west of Pekisko for years and were very difficult to round up as they scarcely had seen a human or a building and were very excited when they were being driven into the cattle corrals. The stock was shipped direct to England.

### The Eckfords and their Ranch in c.1913



*The High River Horse Ranch (left) with Mr Eckford and his Chinese cook*

*An Eckford family group at the High River Horse Ranch (right)*



On the 14<sup>th</sup> May 1913 A.H. Eckford wrote to his friend Ernest Cross stating, "I have decided to offer my ranch and stock for sale, and I enclose herewith a description of same. If it is of interest to you I will be pleased to furnish any further particulars that you may desire". On May 12<sup>th</sup> Eckford had handwritten on Calgary Brewing & Malting Company notepaper a description of his ranch at High River. He also produced a slightly amended version later which stated:

**"The ranch consists of 7,000 acres of land, of which 5,000 acres are in one block, from 3-6 miles from High River, the other 2,000 acres are 16 miles west of High River. All of this land is fenced, cross fenced and divided into fields. Of the 5,000 acres, 800 are irrigable and ditch and laterals are completed with water rights secured for same. In connection with the 5,000 there are 4 miles of river frontage, with considerable bush, timber and springs, and of the same at least 4,500 acres are first class farming land, 100 acres under cultivation. Complete set of ranch buildings, together with house which cost \$15,000. The plot of 2,000 acres is fenced; of this one-half is good agricultural land and the balance first class grazing land and is well watered.**



*A.H. Eckford - High River  
7000 acres - 5000 in one block  
6 miles from High River. About  
2000 twelve miles from H.R.  
800 acres can be irrigated,  
ditch complete with water rights  
All fenced & divided into fields  
Four miles river frontage.  
Building all complete with chook  
ing house cost \$15,000  
About 100 acres under cultivation  
Stock - about 1000 cattle - divided  
up - 350 steers & pay 3 yrs + up  
400 ewe stock 3 yrs + up about 120  
two yrs about 120 yearlings*

The stock consists of about 1,000 head of cattle as follows:

- c. 350 steers and spays, 3 years up
- c. 400 cows, 3 years and up
- c. 120 two year olds
- c. 120 yearlings
- c. 6 regular short horn bulls

The horses consist of the following:

- 8 registered clyde and shire mares
- 1 imported shire stallion
- 6 registered yearlings
- 4 thoroughbred mares
- c. 30 head, grade mares and saddle and work horses

The price of this property is \$155,000 for land and stock.”

The **Eckfords** are recorded returning to England on **28 August 1913**, having sailed 1<sup>st</sup> Class on the “**Empress of Ireland**” from Quebec. They arrived in Liverpool before presumably travelling north to Scotland. Herbert is described as a “rancher” aged 47 and Christina, his wife, aged 40.

In the Canadian Passenger Lists 1865-1935 Herbert and Christina Eckford are listed sailing on the SS “Calgarian” from Liverpool to Quebec destined to arrive on 9 **July 1914**. They are stated as aged 48 and 32 (Christina was aged 42 – not 32) and they recorded that they had resided in Canada thirty years. Their destination was Calgary. Herbert is stated as being born in India and he is described as a “ranchman”.

In **1914**, a few days after the outbreak of war, **Herbert Eckford** sold his ranch to the **Highwood Land Company, Ltd.**, which was composed of **K.N. Ribbins, Hiram W. Sibley** and **R.A. Sibley** of Rochester, New York.

The “**great Eckford ranch**” comprising approximately 7,300 acres was described as “**one of the largest and best known ranches in Alberta**” (newspaper article: “Tribute to Alberta Land” 7 August 1914). It was also one of the biggest real estate deals that had been put through in Calgary. It was the intention of the new owners to operate the ranch on a large scale and to devote it to the business of horse breeding and raising.

Under the title “Eckford Ranch Sold” (“The Best of Times” August 13 1914) a short history of the ranch is described:

*“The High River Horse ranch, better known here as the Eckford Ranch, was sold last week to a syndicate of American capitalists for the sum of \$100,000 cash. It is one of the best known ranches in Alberta. Mr and Mrs Eckford intend to return to Scotland to reside permanently.*

*Breeding of horses, cattle and hogs are to be conducted on a larger scale on the 7,300 acres of property. Only a small portion of the acreage will be devoted to the growing of alfalfa, timothy, grain and vegetable.*

*A.H. Eckford, the retiring proprietor, came to Canada in 1884 and served as a scout during the northwest rebellion. He went on to the ranch in 1887, soon after it had been purchased*

*by the late Lord Strathcona, Lord Mount Stephen and Major Haldane Eckford, the vendor's father, all of whom are now dead.*

*It is of interest to note that Mr Eckford initially worked as a common hand on the ranch and received \$30 a month in wages. He thus became practically acquainted with all the details of ranch management from the ground up. Mr Eckford took possession of the ranch following the death of his father in 1896\*. He devoted his attention largely to horse raising, and a large number of the finest horses in the west came from the Eckford ranch. One year 2,300 head of horses were handled on the property.”*

*(\*The above report states that Major Eckford died in 1896 but a genealogical family tree of the Eckfords gives the date of Alexander Haldane's death as the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1914 and certainly Major Eckford was listed in the UK Incoming Passenger list of the SS Baltic returning to England in November 1911)*

The purchasers of the Eckford ranch were very wealthy men of Rochester. Messrs. Sibleys were rated as multi-millionaires in 1914 with Hiram Sibley owning the best known herd of Jerseys in the United States. The land was turned into several farms by the Highwood Land Company which had over a million dollars invested in Alberta. The property was managed by F.V. Bennis of New York.

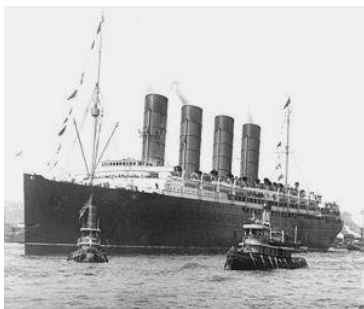
#### *The Round T Ranch*



In 1942 C.W. Roenisch, vice-president and general manager of Midland Pacific Grain Company, purchased the Round T Ranch from Harper Sibley which consisted of 4,100 acres of deeded land. Harper Sibley owned and operated the ranch – one of the oldest ranch properties in the district – after the death of his father, Hiram Sibley.

In 1986 the property was owned by Eason Chisholm and Western Feedlots. Some modernisation had been carried out by that date to the ranch house but the original charm of stonework, hardwood and spaciousness remained untouched. The old polo field was the putting green. Lillian Knupp stated in an article in the High River Times of July 9 1986 that, “Sufficient of the early buildings remain to retain an historical aura in its charming setting”.

On retirement **Alexander H. Eckford** joined the British Remount Service. Eckford with his wife **Christina** sailed to **Liverpool** from **New York** on the ill-fated **Cunard Line** vessel the “**Lusitania**” in **November 1914**, arriving in Liverpool on 10 November. He was listed as a “rancher” aged 47. **Christina** was aged 40 and described as a “housewife”.



*The “Lusitania” was built by John Brown of Clydebank and made her maiden voyage from Liverpool to New York on 7 September 1907. She had eleven elevators and carried 563 first class passengers, 464 second and 1,138 third. She recaptured the trans-Atlantic speed record for the British. The “Lusitania” and her sister ship the “Mauretania” retained the “Blue Riband” for a number of years. The “Lusitania” was torpedoed and sunk by a German submarine off Kinsale on 7 May 1915 with the loss of 1,198. “Lusitania” on her maiden voyage (left)*

During the First World War Eckford enlisted and is recorded as working in a munitions factory but in 1917 he returned to the High River to buy horses for the British Government. It is also recorded that in 1920 Alexander H. Eckford aged 54 crossed from Canada to the U.S. arriving at Buffalo in November.

From the Names and Descriptions of British Passengers sailing 1<sup>st</sup> Class to Liverpool from Montreal on the White Star vessel the SS “**Megantic**” arriving in **November 1920** can be located the names of

- Alexander H. Eckford (Retired Army Officer\*) aged 54  
(\* It was his father who was the retired army officer – not Herbert his son!)
- Christina M. Eckford (Housewife) aged 48

The **Eckfords retired** to Herbert’s home in **Ayrshire**, twenty-six years after he had emigrated to Canada, but by 1920 he had purchased Mavishaugh in St. Andrews. Mr & Mrs Eckford also had a residence at “**The Green**” in **St. Boswells, Roxburghshire**, on the Scottish Borders, and later bought the nearby **Templeknowe House** (close to the village of **Eckford** near Kelso).

The Valuation Rolls for the Parish of Roxburgh from 1920-33 list Alexander H. Eckford (retired of Mavishaugh, St. Andrews) being the proprietor of **Glenside House** and Stables at **St. Boswells** with **William Hyde** living at the stables as the groom from 1921-32. Eckford occupied the house until 1933 when it was tenanted by Mrs Grace Audley of Kincaig, Inverness-shire, with George Poyner living in the house at the stables as stud groom.

Herbert Eckford was still involved in the **Calgary Brewing and Malting Company** in **1926**. In a letter to A.E. Cross dated 12<sup>th</sup> May from **Mavishaugh** in **St. Andrews** Eckford writes about his disagreement over the purchase of the **Silver Spray Brewery**. The letter reveals the situation in Alberta with regard to the current brewery business and the growing tension between Eckford and Cross:

**Christina Mary Eckford**, aged 54, is recorded as returning alone from a visit to Canada in **1926**. She was sailing on the SS “**Athenia**” of the Anchor Line and arrived in Glasgow on the 18 July. Her address is stated as Mavishaugh in **St. Andrews**, Scotland. Christina’s visits to Canada would have been to visit her family members living in Hamilton.

**Herbert and Christina Eckford** are recorded travelling together to Canada in **1930** and their return is documented in the passenger list of the SS “**Albertic**”.

*From 1932 the Eckfords are linked with their new home, Templeknowe, St. Boswells, Roxburghshire. The story of Herbert Eckford continues in this brief history of Templeknowe House.*

**Templeknowe was built in the first decade of the twentieth century by James Craig, a papermaker of Carlekemp, North Berwick – it is a spacious country house standing three storeys high.**

The house was built in a Scots Baronial style which refers back to the lairds' houses of the seventeenth century. Characteristic traditional features include crow-stepped gables and angle-turrets. The buildings first erected were Templeknowe House and the stables. These were followed by offices and two other houses.

Templeknowe House first appears in the Valuation Rolls of St. Boswells in the year 1911-12 owned by James Craig, the eldest grandson of James Craig who had established the Newbattle Paper Mill in 1820.

A.H. Eckford and his wife Christina are first mentioned living at Templeknowe in the Valuation Roll of 1932-33 William Hyde is mentioned as their groom. William Cunningham replaced William Hyde as groom in the year 1934.



*William Hyde, groom, at Templeknowe*

Eckford wrote an autobiographical article in the "Southern Annual" of 1943 which appeared under the title "Empire Pioneer – Rancher in Western Canada". This revealed his strong belief in the British Empire

"I think I can fairly call myself a Son of the Empire, having been born in India where my forebears have served since 1800, and having been a Pioneer in Western Canada in the early 1880s of the last century, where I ranched and farmed for 30 years .....

When I made my start in the Far West it was truly "The Great Lone Land." The Canadian Pacific Railway had not been completed. The city of Winnipeg was then a primitive collection of buildings. I saw ox wagons stuck in the mud on the main street.

I always had faith in the future of the Western Country which later proved fully justified. The hard conditions took some courage and doggedness to stick it out; but the pioneers of these days – many of them hardy Scots – held on grimly, and most of them became independent and well off.

In the last 30 years or so Canada has become one of the greatest producing nations in the world of all farm products, gold, silver, and many other valuable metals, also huge forest tracts. It is true that Canada is today the granary of the Empire. I have travelled



all over Canada from East to West, and from the U.S. Boundary to the edge of settlements in the North many times, and I pay tribute to the courage and splendid loyalty of the settlers all over. When the Boer War broke out, that fine old Scotsman, Donald Smith, later Lord Strathcona, raised the Strathcona Horse and sent them all out to Africa to fight for the Empire. In 1914 the Great War broke out and I had the opportunity to see the loyalty and devotion of Canada's sons and daughters, as I purchased for the British War Office some 1,000 horses for the Government, and in doing so travelled some 1,000 miles – truly it was inspiring to meet on all sides such a display of affection for the Mother Land.”

Unfortunately **Alexander Herbert Eckford** was only to live another three years. He died at **Templeknowe** on **October 21<sup>st</sup> 1946** in his 80<sup>th</sup> year. **Christina**, his wife, continued to live at their home at Templeknowe after her husband's death. The house was inherited on May 25<sup>th</sup> 1950 by A.H. Eckford's cousin Philip Reid of Bath.

**Herbert Eckford had spent thirty years as a rancher in southern Alberta, been a prominent member of the agricultural, business, sporting and social scene in the High River area and gained a number of friends who enjoyed his company. On his return to Scotland he lived in both St. Andrews and St. Boswells where he contributed to the local area as a benefactor and contributor to local causes. He also enjoyed the field sports of hunting and fishing on the Scottish Borders and maintained a keen interest in agriculture.**

The “Southern Reporter”, published in the Scottish Borders, contained an article on **Thursday October 24<sup>th</sup> 1946** under the titles “Pioneer Passes - Great Lover of Empire - Border Benefactor” as **an obituary to Herbert Eckford:**

*“The Late Mr A. H. Eckford*

*By the death of Mr Alexander Herbert Eckford, Templeknowe, St. Boswells, aged 80 years, there has passed a pioneer of Western Canada, a lover of Empire and a most generous benefactor. He was well-known to our readers as a contributor of ‘Wild West’ experiences to the ‘Southern Annual’ and as a writer in the ‘Southern Reporter’ of articles and letters on the Empire to which he was passionately devoted and of which he was a leal (loyal) and powerful champion.*

*In the West*

*Mr Eckford, who was born in India, joined his cousin and others in a trek to the West where in a life of hard work and adventure he spent the major portion of his young days. He was one of the pioneers in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in Alberta where he owned the High River Horse and Pense Ranches. It was while he was at the former that he joined a company formed for the purpose of breeding mounts for the British Army and the Canadian Mounted Police.*

*These were the days of the open range, transport was primitive and the Canadian Pacific Railway not yet completed. Mr Eckford started his farming career on the virgin prairie with a team of oxen and wooden plough in a region then known as 'great lone land'.*

### *Half-Breed Rebellion*

*In 1885 the half-breed and Indian rebellion led by Louis Riel broke out and joining the transport service Mr Eckford conveyed supplies for the armed forces 200 miles across dangerous country, sleeping under canvas and living on hard tack. One of the officers taking part in the fight against the rebels was the late Lord Minto who later became Governor-General of Canada.*

*Mr Eckford retired to St. Andrews and frequently visited the Borders to hunt and fish, eventually taking up residence in St. Boswells in 1932. Maintaining his interest in agriculture he became associated with local societies and was identified with Border shows.*

*A generous benefactor, he gave liberally to local and national causes and he and his 'good lady', who survives him, recently provided a home for the St. Boswells nurse. His many gifts included three mobile canteens for the armed forces. His distinguished figure and kindly heart will be missed in the Borderland."*



*Postcard of Templeknowe*

**Christina, A.H. Eckford's wife, continued to reside at Templeknowe with a nurse companion until her death on February 13<sup>th</sup> 1950 at the age of 77.**

***Templeknowe located on the A699 close to St. Boswells in Roxburghshire has changed little from the exterior over a hundred years.***