

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

1994

Review of Pioneer Policing in Southern Alberta: Dean of the Mounties, 1888,1914

Larry D. Ball

Arkansas State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Ball, Larry D., "Review of Pioneer Policing in Southern Alberta: Dean of the Mounties, 1888,1914" (1994). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 837.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/837>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Pioneer Policing in Southern Alberta: Dean of the Mounties, 1888-1914. Edited by William M. Baker. Calgary: Historical Society of Alberta, 1993. Introduction, maps, abbreviations, photographs, index. xv + 269 pp. \$22.95 paper.

Among law enforcement institutions, the Canadian North-West Mounted Police occupies an exalted place in the public mind. In this present volume, historian William M. Baker provides a helpful corrective to the sometimes exaggerated picture of this famous constabulary by presenting reports and other documents from the papers of Richard Burton Deane, a veteran of more than three decades (1883-1914) as a Mounted Policeman in Alberta.

Richard Burton Deane was born in India in 1848, where his father served as an Anglican chaplain. Three years later the elder Deane moved his family to England. After receiving a good education, young Richard joined the Royal Marines in 1866; however, since his family lacked the social standing necessary for promotion to high military rank, he decided to retire early. Upon relocating to Canada in 1882, Deane joined the Mounted Police and held commands at Lethbridge, Macleod, and elsewhere in Alberta.

This literate and perceptive Mountie reports on a host of frontier law enforcement problems, from livestock rustlers, striking miners, and rowdy railroad construction workers to unhappy Indians, disgruntled immigrants, and the demi-monde of the redlight districts. But Deane and his men did much more than arrest criminals. They investigated train wrecks, served as sanitation officers, set up quarantine lines during epidemics, held inquests over the unidentified dead, and provided humane care for the indigent and insane. Deane was even responsible for arranging the reception for a Japanese prince. In the early twentieth century, this veteran policeman encountered such modern problems as enforcing the Prohibition laws and other moral legislation, assignments the pragmatic Deane regarded as largely unrealistic.

Pioneer Policing in Southern Alberta provides an informative cross-section of law enforcement activities on the Canadian frontier. While the outbreaks of lawlessness that Richard Burton Deane encountered were seldom as sanguinary as those his contemporaries confronted in the American West, the tasks of the Mounted Policeman were sometimes life threatening. Some Mounties died in the line of duty. The volume also provides a helpful look inside the Mounted Police. Superintendent Deane had to deal with many disciplinary problems—mutinous behavior and desertions, among others—in an organization he considered an undisciplined rabble when he joined the force in the 1880s. Suicides among the Mounties particularly embarrassed this conscientious officer.

While the editor provides useful introductory material, the reader is still left with questions about the precise geographical setting of some events, especially along the border with the United States. The larger context of such events as the labor unrest of 1894, which included the United States, is also lacking. First names are sometimes omitted. These flaws aside, this volume provides an informative account of pioneer law enforcement on the Canadian Great Plains.

LARRY D. BALL
Department of History
Arkansas State University