

# The Jamieson Connection with the Charles Dickens Family

By Betty Hagberg

Late in the year of 1885, Alexander Jamieson was in Ottawa, Canada and met Francis Jeffery Dickens, son of the famous English author Charles Dickens. Captain Dickens was just completing his service with the Northwest Mounted Police. Alexander invited Francis to visit his family in Moline and consider undertaking a speaking tour of the United States.



Charles Dickens and his wife Catherine had a family of 10 children. Francis Jeffrey Dickens was the fifth child and third son. He was known as Frank in the family and given the nickname “chickenstalker” by his father, supposedly because he like to play hunting games as a child. None of the



Dickens children really lived up to the expectations of their illustrious father, and Francis was no exception.

As was the family custom he was sent to boarding school in France at the age of 7. Reportedly his father directed he be given a shot of port everyday to help build his strength. By 14 he was in Germany studying languages with the hope of going into medicine. He eventually gave up the idea of becoming a physician because of his stammer, but he did gain proficiency in both French and German.

As a young man he worked in the family publication business “All the Year Round” the weekly literary magazine owned by his father.

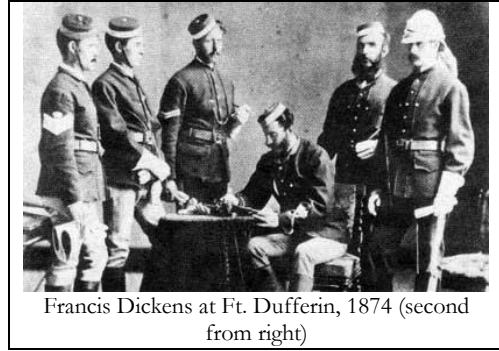
This publication published some of Charles Dickens novels in serial form.

At age 20 Francis left Britain for India, where he thought he would join his older brother Walter, only to find on arrival that Walter had died of an aneurism. Francis served with the Bengal Police for the next 6 years and rose to the rank of superintendent. He returned to England following the death of his father in 1870.

After spending several years in England, Francis, through various family connections, obtained a commission to the newly founded Northwest Mounted Police in Canada, known today as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The Mounties, as they were called, were formed to bring law and order and to assert Canadian sovereignty over the newly established Northwest Territories. Their first task was to stem a growing whiskey trade centered around Fort Whoop-Up.

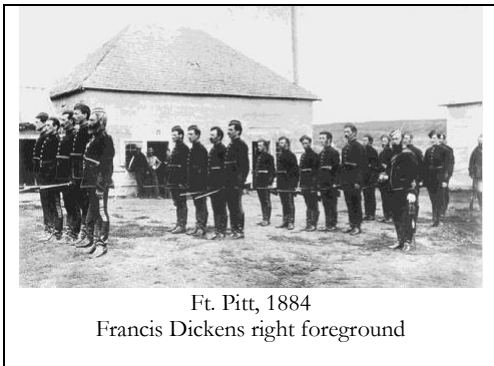
Francis was supposed to report immediately to Ft. Dufferin, Manitoba where

preparations were underway for a “Great March West” to Alberta and beyond. Unfortunately he arrived late because of delays with his luggage, and so he missed participating in this historic event. The picture at the right might have been taken when Francis received his commission as Sub Inspector.



Francis Dickens at Ft. Dufferin, 1874 (second from right)

From Ft. Dufferin he traveled west to serve at various forts throughout Western Canada. This was a time of Native American unrest and rebellions, similar to the Wild West in the U.S. In 1878 he was at Fort Walsh near where Chief Sitting Bull and his followers sought refuge after the massacre of George Custer at Little Big Horn.

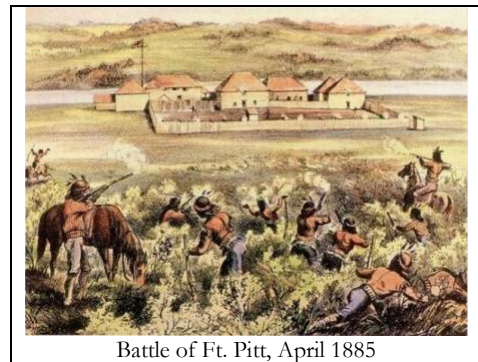


Ft. Pitt, 1884  
Francis Dickens right foreground

Francis was promoted to the rank of Inspector and became the Officer in Charge of Fort Pitt on the North Saskatchewan River. The primary responsibility of the outpost was to keep the peace between the Native Americans and settlers in the area.

During a major rebellion in 1885, 200 Cree warriors descended on Ft. Pitt. They intercepted a scouting party, killing one constable and wounding another. Surrounded and outnumbered (200 to 25), Francis

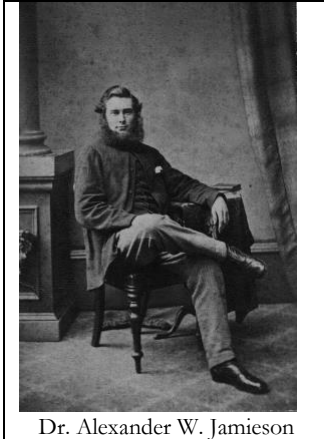
Dickens as garrison commander capitulated and agreed to negotiate with the attackers. Big Bear, the Cree chief, released the remaining police officers but kept the townspeople as hostages and destroyed the fort. Six days later, Inspector Dickens and his men reached safety after a harrowing journey down the Saskatchewan River. Although Dickens was criticized by some, recent studies of the events credit Dickens with saving multiple lives by abandoning the indefensible fort.



Battle of Ft. Pitt, April 1885

He was awarded a campaign medal after his death and it is on display at the NWMP Museum in Regina, Canada. Several months after the loss of Ft. Pitt, Francis decided to resign his commission having served 12 years with the Mounted Police. His personnel file lists the reason as deafness and poor health. He made his way to Ottawa and applied for severance pay.

In Ottawa, while waiting for his severance pay and deciding on a future course of action, he stayed at the Russell House Hotel and it was during this time that he met Dr. Alexander Wallace Jamieson of Moline.



Dr. Alexander W. Jamieson

Alexander Jamieson was born in England and came to Illinois with his parents as a young boy in 1842. The family built a log cabin and cleared land for farming on the Rock River bluff just east of where Black Hawk College is today. Alexander returned to Great Britain for schooling and received a medical degree from Edinburgh University. When he returned, he practiced medicine in downtown Moline and eventually moved his practice to the farm where he had grown up. It is not known why Alexander was in Canada in late 1885, but it was most likely at the Russell Hotel in Ottawa that that he met Francis Dickens. Alexander had throughout his life been interested in literature, and was known for writing poetry, some of which was published.

The first Jamieson family information is a letter that Francis Dickens wrote to two of Alexander's sons, dated December 30, 1885.

It says in part:

*December 30, 1885*

*[Ottawa, Canada]*

*To Masters Guy and Norman Jamieson.*

*My dear Boys,*

*As I have become acquainted with your father (Dr. Jamieson) during my sojourn in this city, and as he tells me that you are possessors, and also readers of the works of my dear Father (the late Charles Dickens) I thought it might give you some little pleasure to receive a short letter from one of his sons.*

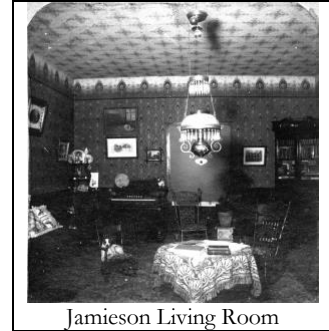
*I have spent some pleasant hours with your papa and shall be sure to call and see you if ever it is my fortune to visit Illinois. I am also glad to think that in all my Father's writings there is not one word of bad advice to old or young.*

*I have just had the pleasure of dining with your papa who has promised to dine with me tomorrow (New Years Eve). With kindest regard to your dear Mama and all your little brothers and sisters. Believe me your sincere though still unknown friend.*

FRANCIS JEFFREY DICKENS

Francis was trying to find work and Alexander encouraged him to consider coming to the U.S. to undertake a speaking tour where he could talk both of his adventures in the Canadian Northwest and of his illustrious father.

It was in May of 1886 that Francis Dickens and Alexander Jamieson arrived in Moline. He and Francis spent the next two weeks with the Jamieson family on their farm outside of Moline. The family has always called this home the 'log cabin' because it contained the original log cabin built by Alexander's father in the early 1840's. It was built onto over the years to accommodate Alexander's family and several of the younger children were born here.



The living room, seen here, was the original log cabin. We don't have any pictures from the time of Dickens visit – this picture was taken about 25



years later, but it was certainly in this room that Francis read to the Jamieson children from the set of Charles Dickens' books owned by the Jamieson family. Louise, the little girl in front, was 8 when Francis visited and later wrote an account of his reading to the children, describing him as a quiet, unassuming man.

Alexander and Francis spent their time traveling into town by horse and buggy and visiting the surrounding area.

When in town they would stop at the post office – Francis was still waiting for the majority of his severance pay.

On June 11, 1886, Francis Dickens was invited to speak to the Friday Evening Literary Club and to have dinner prior to the meeting at the home of Samuel Kennedy, editor of the Republican newspaper. The day was hot, and by the time Francis and Dr. Jamieson arrived downtown Moline at the Kennedy home they were quite overheated. As they sat down to dinner around 6 p.m., Francis drank a glass of ice water and almost immediately indicated he was under stress. Only a few minutes later, Francis died. An additional Doctor was called to the home, and both physicians diagnosed the cause of death as "paralysis of the heart." Perhaps the stress of the upcoming speech, especially considering his stuttering problem, was a factor.

A telegram was dispatched to Fred White, Commander of the Northwest Mounted Police in Canada and this letter was written that same day, asking White to contact the Dickens family for instructions..

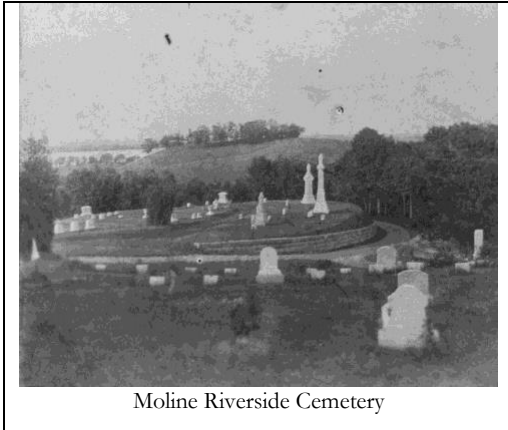
The letter says in part:

*"He was in such good spirits all day and pleased to be invited to attend the meeting tonight. I am so overcome that I can not at present realize it."*

In a later letter Alexander recounted that the severance pay Francis was expecting arrived the very day of his death. They had not had time to stop at the post office prior to the dinner at the Kennedy home and so Francis never knew it arrived.

The following Sunday the citizens of Moline gathered at the First Congregational Church in Moline and provided a rather elaborate funeral for Francis. The pall bearers included the mayor, the President of the Friday Club and representatives from the city's fraternal

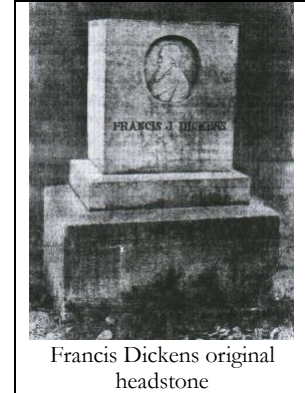
organizations including the Odd Fellows, Masons, and the Grand Army of the Republic. The Church was corner of Fifth Ave and 17<sup>th</sup> Street.



After the service, a line of carriages led by Dr. Jamieson and Charles Deere (John Deere had died just a month earlier) followed the body to Riverside Cemetery where it was interred in a vault until the wishes of the family were known. It was thought that the body would be sent back to England, but when instructions arrived, the family requested that the body stay in Moline. The grave site is down a slope just east of the John Deere burial site.

During the next several years there was correspondence between Dr. Jamieson and the Dickens family. In April 1888, Charles Dickens, Jr., older brother of Francis visited Davenport on a speaking tour. He traveled by horse and buggy over the double-decker Arsenal Bridge to Moline to have lunch at the home of Sam Kennedy where Francis had died. After lunch the group, including Dr. Jamieson, showed Charles the grave site and he was pleased with the location and beautiful view of the Mississippi Valley. Charles' wife and daughter visited the Jamieson farm where Guy took the daughter horseback riding.

Plans were made for a marker, and Charles' wife Bessie suggested the inscription from Mark 13, "Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is". Dr. Jamieson's wife Norah Helen, an artist, drew a likeness of Francis and it was carved in the stone.



A year later, in 1889 Dr. Jamieson was still corresponding with Charles concerning payment for the stone. Alexander Jamieson died a few months after the last letter I have and it is not known if payment was ever received.

In 1986, the 100th anniversary of Francis Dickens death, the grave marker was in disrepair. Area residents came forward to pay for repairs including the Moline Dispatch, Moline Preservation Society, and the Jamieson family. The Moline Monument company donated the labor to repair the stone. It was determined that instead of trying to re-carve the original stone, it would be best to add a brass plate containing the information.

About 15 years ago, a Canadian historian and politician by the name of David Carter, became interested in the story of Francis Dickens and spent years researching his life with the with support of the RCMP and the Dickens family. Previous accounts of Francis' career with the mounted police had been somewhat negative. David Carter had complete access to the mounted police archives, including Francis' personnel file and the picture he paints in his book "Inspector F.J. Dickens of the North-West Mounted Police" describes a shy, quiet educated man, who did his job well under difficult circumstances.

Through Dr. Carter's contacts with the Mounted Police, especially Inspector Daun Miller, It was determined that Francis was eligible for a regimental headstone. Together and with the support of "The March West Committee" they undertook a fundraising effort that led in 2002 to a Canadian contingent travelling to Moline to dedicate an official regimental headstone for Inspector Francis Jeffery Dickens. The September day was glorious with the Mounties in their traditional red uniforms, marching along the bluff in Riverside Cemetery to the sound of bagpipes.



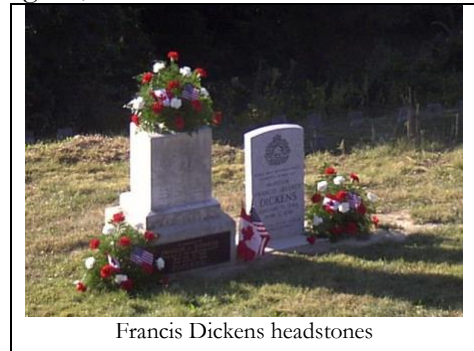
RCMP Honor Guard



RCMP with Moline contacts

At right is the Canadian contingent standing in back, along with several from Moline who coordinated the visit – in front, Todd Slater, Moline Cemetery Sexton; Kathleen Suesy, from the RI Historical Society and Betty Hagberg, representing the Jamieson family. Darrel and Betty Hagberg spent time with two of the Mounties while they were here, and still correspond with them. They were delightful – but wary of drinking the ice water! WQPT produced an 8 minute segment for their "Life and Times" show hosted by Susan McPeters, detailing the story of Francis Dickens.

So today, the Regimental headstone stands next to the original, and the Mounted Police while they were here asked the Moline Police department to honor Francis on appropriate occasions as they would one of their own.



Francis Dickens headstones