

Letter from Alexander MacArthur to his mother giving news of his life in Canada, Montreal, 24 September 1863 (NLS reference: Acc. 10623/2)

The things I dislike here

‘The long winter and the heat of the stoves are the thing above all others that I dislike here. Already it is dark by the time I rise from dinner (I dine at six) and those long evenings last ... six months. You can be very little of that time out of the house and must always have a fire. And as you cannot have a fire to suit yourself you must take chance of what is suitable to others. Sometimes almost suffocated and again almost starving with cold.’

Letter from Alexander MacArthur to his brother Duncan concerning his move from the Toronto Bank to the Hudson’s Bay Company in Montreal, Toronto, 13 July 1864 (NLS reference: Acc. 10623/2)

The Hudson’s Bay Company

‘The Hudson Bay Coy. are to carry on a different system now ... merit and zeal, combined with perseverance and diligence will in future be well and quickly rewarded ... My knowledge of business and accounts will give me an immense advantage over the other officers, and I think I will not be slow in improving upon that advantage.’

Letter from Alexander MacArthur to his sister Bella concerning French customs in Montreal during Christmas and New Year, Montreal, 19 January 1865 (NLS reference: Acc. 10623/2)

New Year’s Day French customs in Montreal

‘New Year’s day is always devoted to calls on families and there were hundreds of sleighs driving in all directions. For some people who make fifty or sixty calls it must be quite a tedious business ... It is also a custom in France or least was a custom there some time ago until it was turned into the more formal channel of sending cards through the post.’

Letter from Alexander MacArthur to his sister Bella concerning his holiday trip to the New Hampshire and New York, Montreal, 9 August 1867 (NLS reference: Acc. 10623/2)

A description of New York's stock exchange

'There is a great deal of gambling in gold. I went into the gold room with a friend while business was being transacted. The members of the Board were round a ring and howling dozens of them at once and at the top of their voices, their eyes sparting out their sockets and their hands thrown out with alarming rapidity. It looked more like a lunatic asylum.'

Letter from Alexander MacArthur to his sister Bella concerning the progress of his wholesale fur business, Montreal, 28 August 1868

(NLS reference: Acc. 10623/2)

Alexander MacArthur's business venture

'Our business is getting on very well although this is a dull time of the year. We have obtained an order from Government chiefly through my influence for the soldiers' moccasins. It amounts to about £700 Stirling. We will not make much out of it but it will give us a name.'

Letter from Duncan MacArthur to his sister Bella concerning the outcome of Peter and Alexander MacArthur's involvement in the Red River Rebellion, Montreal, 25 March 1870

(NLS reference: Acc. 10623/2)

News from the Red River rebellion

'I hasten to relieve your anxiety regarding Alexander and Peter. We had two letters from Alexander this week. At the time they were written matters were almost settled in the settlement and he anticipated doing good business before he left for Montreal. All the prisoners held by Riel in Fort Garry were released on the 15th of February and Peter among the number.'