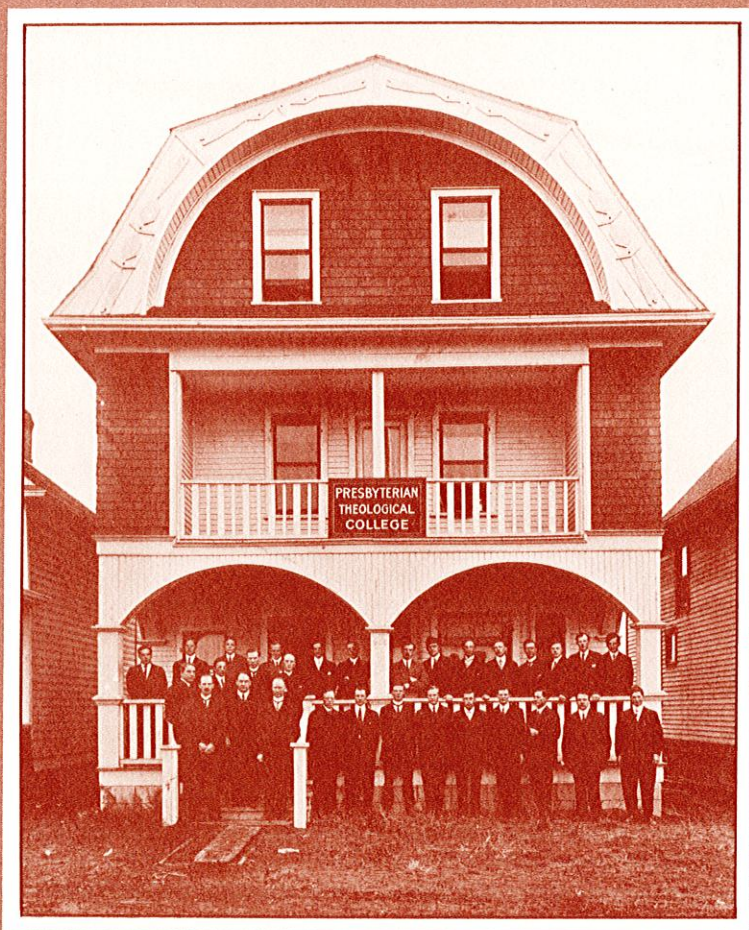


# Saskatchewan History

Volume XXXVII No. 3  
Autumn 1984  
\$2.00



**The Prairie Pastor — E. H. Oliver.**

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH: Presbyterian Theological College. First building used for classes at 209 Albert Avenue, Saskatoon, on the day classes began 1 October 1914. Credit: United Church of Canada, Saskatchewan Conference Records. Saskatchewan Archives Board.

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Saskatchewan Archives Board, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon  
Saskatchewan. S7N 0W0

Published three times a year by the Saskatchewan Archives Board:

Chairman, Dr. N. Ward, Vice Chairman, Elizabeth Crosthwaite.

Members: Hon. C. Maxwell, Mrs. M. Powell, Dr. B. Zagorin  
and Secretary and Provincial Archivist I. E. Wilson.

Subscription rates: \$6.00 a year or \$2.00 per copy.

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ISSN 0036-4908

# THE PRAIRIE PASTOR — E. H. OLIVER

*By Gordon Barnhart*

“**T**hat a country boy, without means and without influence, should in two-score years become the head of a great Church and a figure of national importance is convincing evidence of great ability and high character.”<sup>1</sup> These were the words of Dr. Walter Murray, the first President of the University of Saskatchewan, and one of Oliver’s closest friends and colleagues. One would also have to add that such accomplishment was convincing evidence that Oliver’s character, ideas and objectives were peculiarly congruent to the needs of his time, or at least of a large and significant constituency in Canada and the West between 1909 and 1935. The Murray-Oliver team had shared many common campaigns in education, prohibition and church union, all of which were based on the broad vision of creating a society of Christian righteousness on the last Canadian frontier. This partnership had begun in 1909 when Oliver came west to teach at Saskatchewan’s new university.

Edmund Henry Oliver was born in Eberts, Kent County, Ontario on February 8, 1882 and was raised in a strict Presbyterian home. He grew up with a strong belief that the West was the last frontier in which to create the new and ideal society patterned on Ontario. He proved that he was a youth of keen intellect as he quickly moved through the primary and secondary grades with ease. Upon completion of his secondary education at the Chatham Collegiate, Oliver was awarded the gold medal as top student at the collegiate and won the Edward Blake scholarship for being first in classics and mathematics in the Province of Ontario. He graduated from the University of Toronto in 1902 with an Honours degree; was awarded the McCaul Gold Medal in 1902 for his academic excellence at the University of Toronto; completed his M.A. in 1903; and his Ph.D. in ancient history at Columbia University in 1905; received his degree in theology from Knox College, Toronto in 1910 and did post graduate research in Chicago, U.S.A. and in Halle and Berlin, Germany.

From 1905 to 1909, he taught at McMaster University until joining Dr. Walter Murray at the fledgling University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. In 1913, he became the founder and first principal of the Presbyterian Theological College in Saskatoon and professor of Church History and New Testament. In the course of his career, he was awarded honorary degrees from the Universities of Queen’s, Toronto and Saskatchewan and from the theological colleges of Emmanuel in Toronto and Pine Hill Divinity Hall in Halifax. Although he was born in Ontario, he had adopted Saskatchewan as his new home and with the exception of the three years that he spent overseas during the First World War and the two years that he travelled throughout Canada as moderator of the United Church, he lived in Saskatchewan and devoted his talents and efforts to Saskatchewan and the Canadian West.

Although Oliver came west to teach history and economics, by 1910 he held a degree in theology. Since the rapidly developing West was desperately short of



*University of Saskatchewan Archives.*

E. H. Oliver as a young man.

well-trained ministers, Oliver was soon involved in founding a theological college, whose graduates could establish the churches in all of the new farming communities and stand as a guarantor of their moral and spiritual life. This transfer to the principalship of a theological college did not mean that Oliver had left the university. On the contrary, he viewed this move as a step closer to the centre of the university. For him, as for Murray, the university and the West had their basis in the church, and the creation of the college was a natural step toward the creation of Oliver's new West.

Oliver's role, however, was not to be confined to higher education and he soon reached into public life. His first major opportunity to influence economic and social policies of the Saskatchewan Government came through his appointment to the Agricultural Credit Commission established on January 13, 1913. The other two members of the Commission were John Heber Haslam, Chairman, and Charles Avery Dunning. Like many Ontarians who came west, Oliver early began to feel the economic and political tensions between Eastern and Western Canada and to recognize their primary causes. He threw his support behind western unrest and supported the farmers' efforts to unite, believing that through a cooperative effort and government support, they could produce a new agricultural and economic way

of life to balance the inequities that arose out of eastern industrial policies. That was the essential message of the new agricultural co-operative credit scheme with government backing which he urged upon the Saskatchewan Government. As were the other moral and social reforms which Oliver early espoused in a prominent way, his credit proposals were equally an expression of his Protestant sensibilities. Unfortunately, the agricultural cooperative scheme was not implemented by the Government of Saskatchewan either in 1913 when credit was tight or in 1917 when a government credit board was established. Oliver was well aware of the success of the Cooperative Elevator Company and the growing cooperative spirit amongst the Saskatchewan farmers. Oliver had become quite familiar with the German cooperative credit plan and had used the Commission's Saskatchewan public hearings to encourage this cooperative spirit. Oliver was in tune with the new trends in cooperative credit but was unable to persuade the Scott Government to implement such a programme in Saskatchewan.

Oliver's performance on the Agricultural Credit Commission must have been quite acceptable to Premier Walter Scott because in April 1915 he was appointed along with J. F. Bole to a Commission to Inquire into the System of Liquor Dispensaries in South Carolina and to advise the Scott Government on the ways and means of replacing the Saskatchewan bars with a system of government run dispensaries. As a member of the Committee of One Hundred and an active supporter of prohibition in Saskatchewan, this was not only an opportunity for Oliver to study the South Carolina experiment, but also to recommend the dispensaries as a stepping stone toward total prohibition. As it turned out, the Saskatchewan liquor dispensary system, as implemented in July 15, was shortlived and proved indeed to be the foot in the door for total prohibition.

The First World War seemed to interrupt Oliver's educational and social activities in Saskatchewan, but proved to be merely a transfer in location and not in goals. As Chaplain to the 196th Western Universities Battalion which he joined in 1916, Oliver not only followed the traditional role of preacher and counsellor, but as soon as he landed on the European shores, was once more waging war on demon rum and its related social ills of sexual immorality and venereal disease. Oliver's battle against alcohol and moral laxity could not stop. Not only must these Canadian boys be protected for their own spiritual and moral well-being overseas, but Oliver well knew that these same men would help create or destroy the West of his dreams upon their return home.

Likewise, Oliver's interest and concern in education soon led to the establishment, first of reading rooms, and eventually to a series of libraries and the University of Vimy Ridge. For Oliver, idle minds were worse than idle hands, and he strove to provide Canadian soldiers with the options of higher thinking, a better Canadian citizenship and more elevated Christian living which he considered to be their birthright, regardless of their present circumstances — or perhaps the more because of them. The war-time university became even more vital upon the cessation of the hostilities as a major part of the demobilization and reconstruction process. The re-introduction of war weary soldiers back into Canadian civilian life was not a small task but again offered Oliver the opportunity to preach the gospel of Canadian and Christian citizenship.

Upon Oliver's return to Saskatchewan after the War, the immigration question surfaced again as another threat to Oliver's vision for the West. The immigration situation was not just a question of nationality but also involved language, religion

and attitudes toward alcohol. Oliver linked Christianity, morality and temperance. The new immigrant, in Oliver's standards, often violated all of these social and religious goals.

Religion, nationality and language were in one package for Oliver. The Roman Catholic Church was a force in the West competing with Protestants for new religious converts. The French Canadian Catholics were doubly threatening to Oliver because of their insistence on separate religious schools and the use of the French language — both of which were threats to Oliver's view of a united Canada. Oliver devoted his life to the public school, the use of English as a natural unifying force, the freedom of each denomination to use the last half hour of each day in the schools for religious education and the development of a Canadian consciousness in all citizens, particularly the new Canadians. Unity within the Canadian nation was a high priority for Oliver, and he feared the division of the West into virtually separate nation states, each with its own language and culture. However, Oliver did not wish to eliminate all aspects of immigrant cultures: each new Canadian could and should keep his mother tongue and the culture of his homeland, and maintain at least some religious tradition. In short, Oliver encouraged the development of a Canadian cultural mosaic, and allowed a certain degree of cultural pluralism in Western Canada.

Not only was E. H. Oliver a historian, teacher, theologian, college principal, and chaplain, he found time to commit his ideas to paper. Within twenty years, quite apart from his commission reports, he wrote five major books, one novel, one survey history of Saskatchewan and Alberta, presented ten papers at the annual meetings of the Royal Society of Canada, edited a two-volume collection of Territorial Legislative records and wrote countless articles for newspapers and church magazines, particularly during the church union debate.

Enforced cooperation amongst the various denominations of the Church due to war-time conditions in Europe and the challenges to the Church in the Canadian western frontier convinced E. H. Oliver and many other church leaders that church union was mandatory. Oliver became one of the key pro-Unionists in the Presbyterian Church waging a campaign to convince fellow Presbyterians, particularly in the West, to join the proposed union. Dr. Oliver represented the unionist forces and was a key witness before committees of both the Saskatchewan Legislature and the Canadian House of Commons during passage of the Union Private Bills. Oliver offered three main arguments in favour of church union: that union existed in the West already; that the frontier required union; and that Church union was mandatory in order to create a national church. Oliver saw cooperation working in the West with the cooperative elevators and cooperative credit. Cooperation was surely mandatory for an effective church.

Oliver argued that even if Canadian confederation was accomplished in 1867, Canadian unity was not yet a fact. He pointed to many points of conflict between Eastern and Western Canada. He believed that a union within the Church could help bridge the gap between the East and West.

The union of 1875 in the Presbyterian Church and of 1884 in the Methodist Church created a warmth and a kindliness which I believe has contributed to the union of Canada, and I believe the consummation of union will contribute to an understanding and kindliness, and to the integrity of this Dominion in a way nothing else can. Transportation cannot keep it together. We are kept together by our affections, by our love, by our sympathies, and the Christian church more than anything else is a factor in that regard.<sup>2</sup>

Oliver did not argue for a state church but a united church within a united Canada. On June 10, 1925, church union of the Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists was accomplished. Oliver's contribution to church union was outstanding and elevated him in the ranks of United Church leadership to the point where he was elected as the first western moderator of the church in 1930.

When the delegates of the newly formed United Church of Canada left the Toronto arena on the tenth of June 1925, the outlook was bright. The union struggle had left many internal wounds and divided congregations but the new united organization would work to heal those wounds and would renew its efforts for social regeneration. Although the three denominations had not deserted their social programs during the union debate and in fact church union had been a triumph for the social gospel, the struggle for a united church and the division in the Presbyterian Church had absorbed much of the attention and energy of the church leaders. Concern, particularly in the Presbyterian Church, over their own internal organization and the final battle to preserve prohibition, weakened their social programs. By 1925, the prohibition battle had been lost on most fronts, the Sabbath was increasingly being ignored and the influence of the church within society was decreasing. It was time for the new United Church to move forward with a new outlook. The future held unlimited potential. Yet before the United Church could recover from the union battle and the prohibition losses, the stock market fell in 1929, signalling the beginning of an economic depression that affected the entire world. By a strange coincidence of nature and poor farming practices, a drought in Western Canada combined with the depression to create an emergency of great magnitude. It was at the beginning of these urgent and turbulent times that the United Church met in 1930 in London, Ontario, to formulate church policy and to select the fourth moderator. The first three moderators had been chosen from the former Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational denominations respectively. Each had had their term. Who then would be the fourth moderator? Five candidates were nominated.<sup>3</sup> Three of the candidates withdrew leaving Brown from Kingston and Oliver from Saskatoon. On September 17, 1930, the United Church decided that Dr. Edmund H. Oliver, at age forty-eight, would be its fourth moderator.

Why was Oliver chosen for this position? It can be argued that since he had been a Presbyterian, he was chosen because it was time again to have a former Presbyterian as moderator. The election, however, was more than a mere selection of a candidate due to a rotational denominational roster. The selection was, in part, a result of Dr. Oliver's leadership in the union battle, which generated widespread respect for him among his colleagues not only in Western Canada but across the nation. The Church was aware as well, of the crucial role of the West in the accomplishment of union and that the three moderators to date had come from Eastern Canada. The election was a fitting tribute not only to Oliver but to the West. Oliver, appropriately, did not take the credit for himself, but interpreted the election as a symbol of honor paid to the men of the frontier.<sup>4</sup> Upon his election, in his speech of thanks, he said: "When the radio broadcasts the news over the prairies, they will say, 'you have honoured us in honouring him.'"<sup>5</sup>

The paying of tribute to this western leader was momentary. The United Church had not only selected Oliver to pay tribute to him, but had chosen him to tackle a new job and to lead the church through what, it was increasingly being recognized, would be difficult times. Oliver was not long in starting his job in earnest. Within three weeks after the General Council, the moderator's schedule for

the next year was published in *The New Outlook*.<sup>6</sup> He planned to visit Central and Eastern Canada in the autumn of 1930, in the interests of the Missionary and Maintenance (M. & M.) fund; to tour Western Canada in the winter and to devote the spring to attend meetings of boards and conferences across Canada while the following summer was to be devoted to Home Missions. Within the first six months, he planned to visit the main regions of Canada and no doubt bookings of special appointments for services by the moderator began to flood the head offices.

Dr. Oliver, in helping to create a national church, had stressed the importance of tying the East to the West and mobilizing the entire church. His speaking tour was an attempt to do just that. His whirlwind tour often led to headlines in *The New Outlook* such as "Keeping up with the Moderator."<sup>7</sup> By the beginning of November 1930, it was reported that he had attended eighteen banquets in three weeks.<sup>8</sup> In the period from October 13, 1930, to December 16, 1930, during his eastern tour, he delivered 125 addresses in seventy towns and cities and attended fifty-four banquets.<sup>9</sup> On his tour of Western Canada, he spent nearly three weeks in British Columbia delivering thirty-one addresses which included five addresses within one twenty-four hour period.<sup>10</sup> During his moderatorship, his tours were not spent entirely in attending formal banquets and addressing the crowds from the platform. He felt it was of utmost importance to meet as many people as was possible. While visiting the Peace River country in July 1932, he reported:

I spent a good deal of the day hunting up the Protestants, feeling that the Moderator could spend his time in no better way than in a house-to-house pastoral visitation of United Church folk.<sup>11</sup>

He made it a point to visit the backwoods as well as the large urban centres. His message throughout was one of courage and optimism. He stressed the importance of the church working together as a unit and becoming involved in the issues that faced it. Better church attendance, more faith, increased social service and increased contributions to the M. & M. fund were common themes. He stressed that the frontier was still issuing its challenge to the church. He had visited new communities in Northern Ontario, Saskatchewan and Northern British Columbia. No place was too small, nor distance too great for the moderator to bring the challenge or the comfort of the new church. The Prairies had trained him well to have an eye for local needs, which in turn became part of the challenge and message he broadcast to the rest of the church.

One of the biggest challenges to the new church was the "dirty thirties," which was a national catastrophe that surpassed any other in the history of Canada. Canadians had experienced depressions, recessions and drought before but not at the same time nor of the same magnitude as was experienced from 1929 until the Second World War. The worsening conditions in Canada and particularly in Western Canada, required attention by the churches. As Dr. Oliver commenced his tour of the West in December 1930, he announced that he had called a conference of the United Church leaders to meet in Regina on January 5 and 6, 1931 to discuss the situation.<sup>12</sup> In his announcement, he said:

A church that scarcely exists in the rural settlements of Western Canada might easily avoid the strain. The United Church of Canada, however, cannot choose to abdicate its responsibilities. It will do its full duty and it will challenge its membership to larger sacrifice and self-denial in this hour of trial for many of its ministers and members who are facing privations and suffering.<sup>13</sup>

Forty men were present at that meeting which had been called by the moderator. The reports in *The New Outlook* praised Dr. Oliver for his leadership





Dr. E. H. Oliver

*University of Saskatchewan Archives.*

and foresight in having called the meeting to discuss the drought situation in Western Canada. Many leaders in their speeches expressed their thankfulness that Dr. Oliver had been called to be moderator during such troubled times.<sup>14</sup>

Oliver reported to the meeting that the demands on the M. & M. fund were increasing at the same time as the contributions to the fund were dwindling. He stressed that through the United Church, the East was bound to the West and that they would work together in finding solutions to the problems. The church leaders were briefed on the situation in Southern Saskatchewan. During the Christmas week of 1930, Oliver had prepared himself for the meeting in Regina by touring part of the province himself. Rev. George Dorey, Superintendent of Missions in Southern Saskatchewan, drove Dr. Oliver through 480 miles of the Assiniboia Presbytery with stops at many of the charges.<sup>15</sup>

The outcome of the emergency meeting in Regina in January and the increasing concern amongst the leaders regarding the situation in the West, led to the establishment of the National Emergency Relief Committee by August 1931. The original intent of the committee was to try to provide clothing for the destitute in western areas but this goal was quickly expanded to provide food as well as clothing. Rev. R. B. Cochrane, secretary of the Home Missions Board, became the chairman of the committee with Rev. D. N. McLachlan as secretary and Rev. John Coburn as organizer.<sup>16</sup> Other committee members were Mrs. Anson Spotton, Mrs. G. A. Saunders, Mrs. E. D. Banfield, Mr. Thomas Bradshaw, Gershom W. Mason, Rev. Peter Bryce and Rev. Kenneth J. Beaton. Dr. Oliver and Dr. T. Albert Moore, secretary of the General Council, also joined the committee. Dr. Cochrane, in an open letter to all congregations, issued the plea for everyone to contribute clothing. Rev. John Nicol and Rev. George Dorey, Home Mission Superintendents for Northern and Southern Saskatchewan respectively, were appointed to receive the food and clothing and to arrange for its distribution to the needy. There had been small and scattered relief attempts in 1930 but the National Emergency Relief Committee was the first large scale relief movement. The use of the word "national" in the title of the church committee is worth noting. The church leaders realized that the calamity Western Canada faced was one of concern for the entire nation.

Although the United Church was the first to establish a relief program, it was soon joined by the provincial and federal governments. In September 1931, the federal government also joined the relief efforts by agreeing to pay the freight on the first twenty rail cars of relief going to Western Canada. Eventually the two major railways agreed to transport all relief supplies free of charge.

During July 1931, Dr. Oliver was driven 1600 miles through Saskatchewan viewing the effects of the drought. In his notes of this trip, he described the Prairies as:

Nothing but sand, wide-reaching sand, powdered and shifting relentlessly, wind-whipped, sun-scorched, cutting as with a razor any tender roots that dared to try to grow. . . . Here and there as spectres of a ruined town rose the gaunt mockery of grain elevators to remind men of unfulfilled hopes and labors lost.<sup>17</sup>

It was only seventeen years before that Oliver was filled with optimism and believed that the potential of the West was unlimited. The drought and depression dashed the optimistic dreams for Oliver and for the West and reminded many of Palliser's assessment of the Prairies as being an arid zone unfit for agriculture.

Dr. Cochrane, Dr. C. Endicott, and T. A. Wilson accompanied Oliver on his tour of the drought-stricken areas and wrote a joint report of their tour: "The

impression made upon us is that of Desolation. If there was added to the scene a battered house here and there and an occasional trench it would be like the Desolation of the Western Front in time of War."<sup>18</sup> Dr. Oliver's western homeland and the world's bread basket had been turned into a deserted and desolate dust bowl. In his notes, Oliver could not help but constantly return to the utter desolation.

What a lonesome countryside. No men in the fields. No crops. No traffic. No animals. Not many gophers but a plenitude of grasshoppers.<sup>19</sup>

Oliver's tour through Southern Saskatchewan also enabled him to stop at many of the small towns and villages. He met with the local United Church minister and his family in order to offer them encouragement. He stressed that the people of these rural communities needed spiritual and psychological help as well as food and clothing. The church could not desert them now in their darkest time of need. Dr. Oliver did not offer any quick solutions to the problems nor could he promise that the church would pay the salaries owing to the ministers. He only asked them to hang on and to be the centre of strength and endurance in the community. In a speech, as reported by *The United Church Record and Missionary Review*, Oliver publicly re-emphasized this encouragement to the clergy:

Stay on the job. The United Church of Canada will stand behind you. We won't give you luxuries. We won't even give you the minimum. We will see you don't starve. We will see you are here to break the bread of life to all the people on the Prairies.<sup>20</sup>

He spoke to the local communities asking them to give what money they could to the Missionary and Maintenance fund. Then, after having viewed the western catastrophe firsthand, he travelled to other parts of Canada calling on United Churchmen everywhere to respond to this need. He encouraged Canadians to donate food and clothing to the relief committee and to contribute as much money as they could to the M. & M. fund. He issued the "Challenge Extraordinary" to all Canadians. For himself, he offered all of his time and talents to lead the campaign. It was up to the people to respond.

The campaign throughout Canada stressed two points: the need of the people in the West and the glorious opportunity for service. As was the case during the struggle for church union, the frontier was mentioned again during the relief campaign. One of the reasons why the United Church had been formed was to respond to the challenge of the frontier. The church could not let its outposts close and wither in time of need. The United Church could not fail to respond to the area that it had originally set out to serve. They had created a national church and this national crisis fulfilled the church's desire to respond to a national need.

Rev. John Coburn, organizer for the relief committee, in an article in *The New Outlook*, entitled "Saying it with Cauliflowers," raised a further argument as to why Canadians should contribute:

It is difficult to decide who will get the most good out of this move — the needy folk in the West who receive, or the generous folks in the East who give.<sup>21</sup>

That, of course, was to paraphrase the New Testament teachings that it was more blessed to give than to receive. The depression, however, was more in Oliver's mind than a potential unifying influence in the church. Oliver believed that in a profound way, God was using the depression as a test for the church and its people. It did provide opportunity for faith and service, but he went on:

God can transform the desert of Southern Saskatchewan and the depression and the difficulties of Canada into the Church's chance, into the building up of His

Kingdom. God is teaching us in this hour that we are brothers with all people that dwell on the face of the earth. He is teaching us through suffering, yes, but he is teaching us also within Canada that we are brothers with all people who dwell east or west. God is making in His own way, a better order of society. He is making a more Christ-like Church. He is making better men and women. God has a purpose in it. It is not chaos: it is purpose, a better order of society.<sup>22</sup>

The depression and drought in Western Canada also aroused, in the minds of the church leaders, including Oliver, racial and national fears which were not always in harmony with such convictions. In a letter, dated July 7, 1931, from Dr. Oliver, Dr. Endicott and Dr. Cochrane, to various church leaders, this threat to the nation surfaced:

I am afraid that we shall lose some of our best people through this discouragement and their places will be taken by German and Mennonites and Doukhobors who will stick to it until they come through triumphantly.<sup>23</sup>

It was believed that the church, through its spiritual and physical aid to the destitute, could help maintain social and political stability in the country, both in message and means.

Hence, Dr. Oliver stressed the cooperative features in the efforts to meet the needs of the people. Through his addresses and articles in *The New Outlook*, he repeated his message that the National Emergency Relief Committee was a centralized, cooperative and efficient means of offering assistance with the assurance that the contributions would reach those who were most in need.<sup>24</sup>

The depression must have struck deeply at the hopes Oliver had long held for a region of prosperous family farms. Yet the depression offered Oliver and the church an opportunity to revive its message of social service which could cause a regeneration within the church itself.

We have long prayed for a revival of religion, but did not expect it to come in such a way as this; but 'God moves in a mysterious way,' and if out of this hour of agony and need the membership of our Church in sharing with and sacrificing for others find their own souls, and in a new and wonderful way find God, we shall have cause for rejoicing.<sup>25</sup>

In short, Dr. Oliver, along with other church leaders, interpreted the depression as all being part of God's will. It was a test of the faith of the people in the church. Precisely because the depression was God's will and a test to all Christians, it was also a threat to the nation as a whole and to the national church. The church leaders, including E. H. Oliver, were quick to emphasize the appeal to the national conscience. "To save Canada, we must save the Church and its work. At any cost we must stand behind our workers in sympathy and with support".<sup>26</sup>

The National Emergency Relief Committee was one product of the situation and the arguments used in its favour were varied. Economic, national, and spiritual — even racial — arguments were raised in order to encourage Canadians, from coast to coast, to respond to the desperate need on the Prairies, and respond they did. By late 1931, it was reported that through the efforts of the relief committee, the West had received 165½ tons of clothing and a total of 159 cars of relief to Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta.<sup>27</sup> Saskatchewan received most of the relief with a small portion going to the other two prairie provinces. Each car of relief served approximately 250 to 300 families. A spirit of community developed whereby an eastern town adopted a western town. As an example, the two carloads of fruit and vegetables gathered in the Oxford county were sent to Limerick, Saskatchewan.<sup>28</sup> Although the details of the collection and distribution were coordinated by the relief committee, the communities involved established a bond of friendship. The western

clergy reported great appreciation and relief in their communities. A feeling of gratitude to Eastern Canada grew up as the westerners realized that the East had helped them in their time of need. Yet there must have been at times, a spirit of bitterness at having to receive "welfare" from the East.

Dr. Oliver, as leader of the United Church, had a three-cornered problem when dealing with aid for the West: he knew that the United Church had to respond to the physical and psychological suffering in Western Canada; the church needed the state's assistance in order to provide comprehensive relief; yet the church had to be careful in asking for state assistance so as to avoid direct political involvement. The church could not afford to be too forceful and critical of the state or it would lose all form of state assistance. If the church was not forceful enough in its pleas for assistance, the government possibly would not respond at all.

It was along this tightrope that Oliver had to lead his church knowing that if the church did not respond, its credibility as a force for social reform would be destroyed. He was working not only to save Canada but also the very church that he was leading and he believed there were limits beyond which he could not go in his remarks on the need for a new economic system with a new distribution of wealth.

Although Dr. Oliver's contributions to the relief committee were strenuous and time consuming, his moderatorship was devoted to other issues as well. He devoted what seemed to be endless energy in travelling across Canada representing the United Church in many far-flung outposts that had not had contact with the church before. During his visit to the Peace River country in the summer of 1932, in twelve days he performed five baptisms, opened five new churches, and preached twenty-four times. He was also able to personally visit many of the families in the communities.<sup>29</sup> His concern for the frontier was not lost when he became moderator. Even with his high post and his many pressures, he never lost his sense of humour or his pioneering sense. In describing a baptismal service in the Peace River country, he wrote:

I baptized two babies, then with the simplicity of the Frontier, the missionary (Oliver) emptied the water in the baptismal bowl out of the window to use the bowl to take an offering from these pioneers for the Missionary and Maintenance Fund.<sup>30</sup>

Throughout his extensive travels and his hard work with the relief committee, Oliver continued as principal of St. Andrew's Theological College and even had time to attend the College's convocation in Saskatoon in March 1932.

The status of women within the United Church was another issue that Oliver, as moderator, became involved in. E. H. Oliver was, as early as 1916, expressing progressive views on the role of women within society. In commenting in a letter to his wife on Premier Scott's resignation and the resulting government shuffle, Oliver wrote that the Liberals would possibly be running "some of you women folks" in forthcoming elections.<sup>31</sup>

The question of women members of Session surfaced at the 1930 General Council as Mrs. A. D. Miller moved, seconded by Mrs. G. H. Bennee, that the basis of Union be amended to allow women to become members of Session.<sup>32</sup> According to Mrs. Bennee, E. H. Oliver, the new moderator, had supported and encouraged her in her drive to increase the status of women in the church.<sup>33</sup> By 1932, the United Church passed Mrs. A. M. Scott's motion, which was seconded by Dr. E. H. Oliver, to accept women as members of Session.<sup>34</sup> By 1934, E. H. Oliver moved, seconded by Dr. T. Albert Moore, that the question of ordination of women be remitted to the

Presbyteries for their consideration and judgement.<sup>35</sup> It was not until 1936, one year after Oliver's death, however, that ordination of women was finally accepted by the United Church. Oliver's influence can be seen even then as the first woman to be ordained, Lydia Gruchy, was a graduate of his own St. Andrew's College, the head of her class. She first asked to be ordained in 1926 and repeated her request, likely with Oliver's encouragement, at every General Council thereafter until she was finally ordained in 1936. Oliver very clearly had had an influence as moderator and as past moderator in leading the church to reform its own constitution in order to accept women as equal members within the church.

An obvious underlying theme of Oliver's moderatorship was Canadian unity. The spirit of national consciousness in Oliver, which motivated his drive for church union, continued throughout his term as moderator. He issued the challenge that:

We need to be only one country, but we need to be a Christlike and a missionary church. The foe of the United Church is sectionalism; the foe of a Christlike church is sectarianism; and we must wage unremitting warfare of the spirit against those divisive forces, whether it be in church or state.<sup>36</sup>

His efforts with the National Emergency Relief Committee is a prime example of his efforts to have the East work with the West and in so doing, create a united church within a united Canada. But further church union was another aspect of that theme that Dr. Oliver spoke out on, although it could not then be actively pursued. In a sermon delivered at the 1932 General Council, the retiring moderator said that "the United Church of Canada stood ready to confer with any other ecclesiastical body relative to any matter in which a better understanding or truer cooperation might be reached."<sup>37</sup> The challenge from the drought and depression served to strengthen Oliver's belief in cooperation and unity amongst the various denominations so that the challenges facing the church could be met. Oliver's early lessons from the West regarding the cooperative elevator and cooperative credit system were still present in Oliver's basic philosophy as he retired as moderator of the United Church.

As the two year term of moderator came to a close for Oliver, he could look back with some satisfaction. Although the drought and depression had not ended by 1932, his church had responded by sending aid to the western families and in so doing, had created new bonds between East and West. The national church which Oliver had helped to create, had reacted to the national crisis.

Oliver's efforts as moderator had not gone unnoticed by his colleagues and friends as they publicly and privately expressed their praise and gratitude to him for his contribution to the church and to Canada. Rev. George Dorey, a close friend of Oliver's, jokingly wrote to Oliver that:

I have let all my friends know that when the next General Council meets they should be sure to elect a moderator who is decrepit, worn out and one who comes from a land of plenty; and, as a final thing to be desired, one who will never say to us 'ten per cent off' [referring to the salary cuts for ministers] — but we do rejoice in being able to share with you, even in a slight way, in the great work which you are doing for the Church.<sup>38</sup>

The editor of *The New Outlook* wrote:

What to do with a man who has gathered the head of steam that he has in these two years will be a task indeed. That he will be content to settle down to do the work of one or two men who have been doing the work of ten seems hard to believe.<sup>39</sup>

Dr. Oliver had been doing the work of ten men with seemingly unending energy. He would board trains at 3:00 a.m. bound for the next stop on his all-Canada tour. His grueling schedule, however, was not without its harmful effects. Nearly three years

after his retirement as moderator and just less than a month before he died, Dr. Oliver wrote to his brother George about his health.

The Moderatorship enlarged my heart — like an athlete's heart. Then the fat prevented it from functioning properly and I had a smothered feeling. I suppose my heart is permanently impaired, but I have put myself in shape to do a regular man's work.<sup>40</sup>

Although he was aware of his failing health, he neither slowed his pace nor indicated to his colleagues or friends that the pace was slowly killing him.

Even with the need for extra rest, his holidays still consisted of a trip with a purpose such as leading a youth camp or a series of addresses and banquets. Not only his time as moderator but all of his life had been devoted to his work. His second son, John, remembers his father most, if he was home, as working in his study each evening. There was always a lecture or a book manuscript or a speech or a sermon that needed some attention. Family holidays for the sake of pure leisure and relaxation were nonexistent.

Dr. Oliver had devoted his life to the college, to the church, and to the nation. His efforts and his hard work led him to the moderatorship which, in turn, required more time and devotion. Fortunately for the church and for Canada, a strong leader was chosen at a time of crisis. As Canada experienced the depression and drought, Dr. Oliver issued the "Challenge Extraordinary" to his people. He burnt up much of the rest of his life in the task of being the pastor to the nation in one of its darkest hours.

Even though the moderatorship had left Dr. Oliver tired and physically ailing, he refused to slacken his pace in the church, in the college or in his beloved West. There was so much more to be done. Even though he had received throughout his career offers to take powerful and prestigious positions in Eastern Canada, Oliver decided to devote his life to the Prairies. Regarding the offer to become President of Queen's University, he said:

Men of ability and training and sympathy will gladly go to Queen's. But the workers in the West are very few and frequently not well trained. . . . And being in the West I cannot desert it. . . . I must return to the prairies.<sup>41</sup>

He took pride in being an earthy westerner. He understood the people and the country.

Bald and monotonous the prairies can never be to him who has a heart to know their people, the sky, birds, flowers and waving wheat.<sup>42</sup>

"These are my neighbors, these prairie folk," he wrote, admiring the Prairie people for their courage and pioneering spirit. He described them as "gentlemen adventurers of the soil" and was proud to work with them.<sup>43</sup>

The War, the church union battle and the depression may have appeared to be obstacles for Oliver in his attempt to achieve his vision for the West. However, each obstacle proved to be a new challenge which spurred Oliver onward toward the creation of a morally sound society. It is debatable whether Oliver ever expected to achieve the ideal goals that he had set for himself and Western Canada. Yet he devoted his life toward those goals with the energy and determination of ten men. Even though the ideal had not been reached when he died, Oliver knew that he had done his best and if there had been even a small measure of change toward that new society, then he was satisfied.

In July 1935, E. H. Oliver and his youngest son, attended a church camp at Camp MacKay in the Qu'Appelle Valley. His years of stress and the long hours of work for the church and for his West had taken their toll. After leading the camp in

worship and bible study, Edmund Oliver said he was not feeling well and went to his cabin to rest. Shortly thereafter, he died of a heart attack. Within days before he died, he recited a poem to some young campers which aptly described his philosophy of life and death:

<p>If this bit of prairies be          Worthier because of me,          Stronger for the strength I bring,          Sweeter for the songs I sing,          Purer for the path I tread,</p>	<p>Lighter for the light I shed,          Richer for the gifts I give,          Happier because I live,          Nobler for the death I die,          Not in vain have I been I.</p>
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E. H. Oliver 1882-1935

### FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> C. MacKinnon, *The Life of Principal Oliver*, (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1936), p. VIII.
- <sup>2</sup> Address given by E. H. Oliver at complimentary banquet given by Sir James Woods, January 9, 1923, p. 14.
- <sup>3</sup> Dr. Wylie Clark nominated Dr. T. Albert Moore; Dr. G. C. Pidgeon nominated Dr. W. T. G. Brown; Dr. L. McTavish nominated Dr. E. H. Oliver; R. W. Armstrong nominated Dr. J. W. Woodside; Rev. P. A. Walker nominated Dr. Robert Laird.
- <sup>4</sup> *The New Outlook*, November 5, 1930.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, October 15, 1930.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, October 8, 1930.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, August 3, 1932.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, November 5, 1930.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, January 7, 1931.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, March 4, 1931.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, August 11, 1932.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, January 7, 1931.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, January 21, 1931.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, September 9, 1931.
- <sup>17</sup> *The United Church Record and Missionary Review*, November 1931.
- <sup>18</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board, United Church of Canada, Saskatchewan Conference, Oliver Papers (hereafter cited as U.C.C., S.C., Oliver Papers). Report by Oliver, Cochrane, Endicott and Wilson after touring Southern Saskatchewan in July 1931.
- <sup>19</sup> U.C.C., S.C., Oliver Papers, E. H. Oliver's personal notes on his trip through Saskatchewan in July 1931.
- <sup>20</sup> *The United Church Record and Missionary Review*, November 1931.
- <sup>21</sup> *The New Outlook*, October 21, 1931.
- <sup>22</sup> *The United Church Record and Missionary Review*, November 1931.
- <sup>23</sup> U.C.C., S.C., Oliver Papers, E. H. Oliver, C. Endicott and R. B. Cochrane to various church leaders such as Peter Bryce and T. Albert Moore, July 7, 1931.
- <sup>24</sup> *The New Outlook*, September 23, 1931.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, October 21, 1931.
- <sup>26</sup> U.C.C., S.C., Oliver Papers. Report by Oliver, Cochrane, Endicott and Wilson after tour of Southern Saskatchewan in July 1931.
- <sup>27</sup> U.C.C., S.C., Oliver Papers.
- <sup>28</sup> *The United Church Record and Missionary Review*, November 1931.
- <sup>29</sup> *The New Outlook*, August 17, 1932.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>31</sup> University of Saskatchewan Archives, Oliver Papers (hereafter cited as U.S.A., Oliver Papers). E. H. Oliver to his wife, October 17, 1916.
- <sup>32</sup> United Church of Canada Central Archives (hereafter cited as U.C.A.), *United Church of Canada, Record of Proceedings*, 1930, p. 58.
- <sup>33</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board, interview with Mrs. G. H. Bennee conducted by A. M. Nicholson.
- <sup>34</sup> U.C.A., *United Church of Canada, Record of Proceedings*, 1932, p. 75.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 1934, p. 26.
- <sup>36</sup> *The United Church Record and Missionary Review*, September 1935.
- <sup>37</sup> *The New Outlook*, October 5, 1932.
- <sup>38</sup> U.C.C., S.C., Oliver Papers, Rev. George Dorey to E. H. Oliver, August 28, 1931.
- <sup>39</sup> *The New Outlook*, September 28, 1932.
- <sup>40</sup> U.C.C., S.C., Oliver Papers, E. H. Oliver to George Oliver, June 22, 1935.
- <sup>41</sup> U.S.A., Oliver Papers, Oliver to J. K. MacDonald, August 16, 1916.
- <sup>42</sup> *The New Outlook*, August 10, 1932.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*



# BRANDY AND BEAVER PELTS: ASSINIBOINE-EUROPEAN TRADING PATTERNS, 1695-1805

By Thomas F. Schilz

When French explorers penetrated the forests west of Lake Superior in the seventeenth century, they encountered a Siouan-speaking tribe called the Assiniboines near the Lake of the Woods in present-day Minnesota and Ontario. Although related to the Yanktonai Sioux, the Assiniboines were enemies of their Sioux kinsmen and allied with the Crees, an Algonkian tribe living north of them in Ontario. The Assiniboines sustained themselves by hunting moose and other animals in the forests, snaring waterfowl in the marshes, and catching sturgeon and other fish in the numerous lakes of the area.

The Assiniboines and their Cree allies quickly became attached to the French traders' goods. French *coureur des bois* and Ottawa trading captains bartered guns, tobacco, and brandy for the Assiniboines' beaver pelts and other furs. The Assiniboines also sold furs to Cree middlemen who, in turn, exchanged these pelts for French goods at Sault Ste. Marie.<sup>1</sup>

Some Assiniboine traders visited the English post at York Factory on the Churchill River, offering beaver, ermine, and fox pelts for guns, blankets, "high wine," and other goods. French traders, hoping to lure the Assiniboines to their posts, began building forts in the Assiniboines' country.<sup>2</sup> Although the proximity of French posts pleased the Assiniboines, the wealth of beaver allowed them to deal freely with both of the European traders. By 1695 as many as three hundred canoes carrying the Assiniboines and their furs made the yearly trip to and from York Factory.<sup>3</sup> French posts attracted a like number of Assiniboine traders.

Since they controlled the major portages of western Ontario, the Assiniboines soon acquired an important position as middlemen in the fur trade. Tribes living farther south and west of the French and English posts in Ontario faced serious obstacles if they attempted to carry their furs directly to the European forts. Many of the western tribes lacked the skills at handling canoes necessary to travel along the rivers to the distant trading posts. The short open-water season in northern Ontario also prohibited the western Indians from making long canoe voyages, since such trips normally required three or four months to complete. Indians from the Great Plains were threatened with freezing weather and its twin spectre of starvation on such journeys. Their culturally-based refusal to eat fish, a major part of the human diet in northern Ontario, added to their unwillingness to travel there.<sup>4</sup>

Just as fear of ice, dislike of fish, and the lack of navigational skills caused the plains Indians to employ the Assiniboines as middlemen in their dealings with Europeans, the French and English found it convenient to employ the Assiniboines in the same way. Europeans feared the warlike reputations of western tribes such as

the Gros Ventres of the Prairie and the Blackfeet. They preferred using Assiniboines as go-betweens in their commerce with these aggressive Indians rather than risk the dangers of traveling among them. One English trader noted approvingly that his company had supplied the "Sinnypoyets" with trade goods, making them "the only brokers between all Strange Indians and ourselves."<sup>5</sup>

By the beginning of the eighteenth century a trading pattern had been established on the Canadian plains. Every spring, Assiniboine and Cree trading parties collected furs from the western tribes in exchange for French and English goods which they had purchased from the white men the year before. The Assiniboines then sold those furs to the Europeans for more trade goods to barter to their Indian neighbors. Assiniboine traders carried their goods as far west as the Mandans, Hidatsas, the Arikaras on the upper Missouri. These tribes provided not only furs but also other goods including corn and baskets.

The Assiniboine middlemen charged higher prices for manufactured goods than their Indian customers would have paid had they traveled to the trading posts themselves. These inflated prices came as a consequence of the dangers involved in the long voyage from the trading posts and the western tribes' demands for gifts as a prerequisite for trade. The Assiniboines raised prices on the trade goods they had left to sell after having distributed presents to their customers, and on their return demanded increasing numbers of gifts from their European suppliers for themselves and the western Indians. English and French traders, who could not comprehend that gift exchange was a critical part of Indian trading practices, believed that the Assiniboines' demands for gifts and easy credit were forms of extortion. At the same time, however, the western tribes, perhaps more aware of the dangers involved in the trade, accepted the Assiniboines' high prices. Andrew Graham, a trader at York Factory, recorded the astonishment of one Gros Ventre who bought a musket for fourteen beaver pelts, since Assiniboine middlemen regularly demanded fifty for the same item. Despite such lower prices at the trading post, the Gros Ventre refused to return to York Factory, regarding the long canoe voyage through unfamiliar country as too great an obstacle.<sup>6</sup>

The Assiniboines' position as middlemen in the fur trade began to undergo subtle changes after 1720. As the animal population in their homeland declined owing to overtrapping, the Assiniboines pushed westward onto the Manitoba prairies in search of more beaver. Their migration displaced the Gros Ventres and Arapahoes whose warriors, armed with bows and arrows, were no match for Assiniboines armed with guns.

Another European gift — the horse — also helped alter the Assiniboines' culture. Acquiring horses through Gros Ventre and Mandan traders, the Assiniboines ceased to be woodland hunters and gatherers who relied on canoes or snowshoes for transportation. Instead they became equestrian buffalo hunters typical of the Great Plains.

Buffalo hunting rapidly became more important to the Assiniboines' tribal economy than trapping beaver or fishing for sturgeon. Since the buffalo provided the raw materials for tools, clothing, and shelter, they were uninterested in many items that were popular at woodland posts, such as European cloth and blankets.<sup>7</sup> The western tribes valued guns, ammunition, knives, tobacco, and brandy, but cared little for anything else the white men had to offer.<sup>8</sup>

While the Assiniboines continued to collect and trade beaver pelts, their increased dependence on buffalo hunting made them less inclined to gather pelts for

the Europeans. As one chief informed English trader Charles MacKenzie, they would gladly supply the white men with beaver pelts if the animals could be hunted on horseback like the buffalo.<sup>9</sup> MacKenzie reported that the Indians regarded the white men as fools who "leave their homes in small parties, risk their lives on the great waters, among strange nations, who will take them for enemies," all for the sake of a small animal whose pelt made poor clothing and was too small to be used for tipi covers or other practical purposes.<sup>10</sup>

Conversely, traders regarded the Assiniboinés and other plains tribes as a "set of useless lazy fellows" who would collect only enough furs to satisfy their immediate needs.<sup>11</sup> European traders failed to appreciate the Indians' motivation for trading. As Calvin Martin points out, the Indians sought "enhanced convenience" — more pleasing ornaments, a surer and swifter means of killing game, and the intensification of spiritual experience — through the fur trade.<sup>12</sup> To the Assiniboinés, the trade items that provided these rewards — beads and dentalium shells, guns, and brandy — were much more valuable than beaver pelts. Unable themselves to transport anything more than the necessities of life, the Indians regarded the white men's greed for unlimited pelts as foolhardy. They questioned the sanity of white traders who squandered their wonderful technology in exchange for beaver skins.

The first European to visit the Assiniboinés in their new environment was Pierre Gaultier de Varennes de la Verendrye, a French explorer and trader sent to find the "Western Sea" and to open trade with the Mandans. Verendrye found the western Assiniboinés firmly tied to the English through Cree middlemen.<sup>13</sup> Assiniboine traders, frequently in league with the Crees, carried English goods to the western tribes and attempted to keep the Frenchmen from traveling west by assuring them that the plains tribes were fools who did not know how to kill or dress beaver.<sup>14</sup> The middlemen warned Verendrye that the western tribes had never seen white men and would run away from them rather than trade.<sup>15</sup>

Despite these warnings (which were intended to keep French traders from interfering in the Cree-Assiniboine trade network), Verendrye continued on westward as far as the Mandan villages on the upper Missouri. The Mandans were courteous but preferred to trade with their Assiniboine neighbors, perceiving that it was easier to cheat them than it would be to dupe the French.<sup>16</sup>

Although Verendrye failed to find the Western Sea, or open direct trade with the Mandans, he erected French posts on the Canadian prairies to serve the Assiniboinés. Reacting to these developments, the Hudson's Bay Company dispatched Anthony Hendry to the western prairies in 1754. A trader with experience in handling the tribesmen of the Hudson Bay region, Hendry was expected to persuade the Assiniboinés and other western tribes to trade at York Factory rather than at the French posts in Manitoba. Believing that the Gros Ventres were the major source of furs brought to the English fort by Cree and Assiniboine middlemen, Hendry traveled by canoe and horseback to the plains of central Saskatchewan in search of these Indians. On the way he encountered several bands of Assiniboinés armed with French guns and possessing large herds of horses.<sup>17</sup> Hendry berated the Assiniboinés for their lack of loyalty to his employers and offered them great rewards if they would return with him to York Factory. The Assiniboinés refused, explaining that they received everything they needed from the French posts.<sup>18</sup>

The Hudson's Bay Company was unable to capture the French trade, but the

collapse of the French empire in North America in 1763 put an end to European penetration of the Canadian west for almost a decade. Assiniboine and Cree middlemen, unable to trade elsewhere, carried their pelts to the English forts. After 1770, however, new competitors appeared to challenge the Company's monopoly in the west.

The first of these was a group of Canadian and Scottish investors in Montreal who established a number of fur companies to compete with the Hudson's Bay Company. Montreal traders enjoyed a measure of popularity with the western tribes because they offered the Indians easy credit and were liberal with gifts. Montreal traders also regularly dispensed brandy to lure the Indians away from their rivals. Samuel Hearne, a Hudson's Bay trader at Cumberland House on the lower Saskatchewan, complained that the plains tribes refused to trade with him because he would not give them large quantities of brandy. He reported that the Montreal traders always had plenty of firewater for the Indians.<sup>19</sup>

In 1770 William Pink had found the Assiniboines attached to independent traders who later allied themselves to the Montreal companies and passed along a large amount of the Assiniboines' furs to the Canadian firms.<sup>20</sup> Alarmed by Pink's report, the Hudson's Bay Company sent Matthew Cocking to the Saskatchewan valley to seek an alliance with the plains tribes. As Cocking traveled westward along the Saskatchewan he met several Assiniboine bands. These Indians, who preferred the Montreal traders' easy credit and free brandy to the arduous journey to York Factory, were indifferent to Cocking's promises of gifts if they would trade with Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the Assiniboines were at war with their Sioux and Eagle kinsmen, and unwilling to leave their women and children unprotected during the long trip to York Factory.<sup>22</sup> They argued that it was better to trade at nearby Canadian posts.

Cocking was equally unsuccessful in dealing with the Assiniboines' western neighbors, the Gros Ventres and Blackfeet. White Eagle, the Gros Ventres head chief and the most important leader of the plains tribes in Canada, refused to travel to York Factory, stating that the distance was too great and the journey was too dangerous.<sup>23</sup> White Eagle's people preferred to deal with Assiniboine and Canadian traders. On his return to York Factory, Cocking reported that the western country was rich in fur-bearing animals, but none of the western tribes were willing to travel great distances to trade.<sup>24</sup>

Cocking's report, coupled with fear of Canadian competition, caused the Hudson's Bay Company to build trading posts on the Saskatchewan. Prices for trade goods were lowered in an effort to undercut Canadian competition, and the Hudson's Bay traders offered liberal gifts of brandy to attract western tribesmen to their posts.

At the same time that the Hudson's Bay Company and its Montreal competitors were pushing onto the Canadian prairies, the Spanish regime in Louisiana began to extend its commercial tentacles up the Missouri. Spain had received Louisiana from France in 1763, at the conclusion of the Seven Years' War. The Spanish government, fearful that English traders on the upper Missouri were really spies who would organize Indian rebellions and lead an English army into New Mexico and California, sought to exclude foreigners from trading on the Missouri by capturing the Indian trade for themselves. A charter was granted to a Franco-Spanish syndicate in St. Louis giving its members exclusive trading rights on the Missouri. The St. Louis syndicate, called the "Company of Explorers of the

Upper Missouri" (afterwards referred to as the Missouri Company), lacked sufficient capital to challenge effectively the Anglo-Canadian hold on the fur trade on the northern plains. It remained, nevertheless, a potential threat throughout the Spanish era in Louisiana.

The expansion of the trading posts onto the Great Plains threatened the commercial position of the Assiniboines. Until the 1780s they had enjoyed a monopoly of the Great Plains trade west of Lake Winnipegosis. This market was now invaded by the Europeans, who were prepared to deal directly with the plains tribes and thereby deprive the Assiniboines of their annual supply of presents collected in their capacity as middlemen. Furthermore, the white men's presence upset the military balance of power on the Great Plains. Until the 1780s the Assiniboines were better armed than the Gros Ventres and Blackfeet, with whom they were frequently at war. Since they had controlled trade between these tribes and the white men, the Assiniboines had been able to limit the number of guns their enemies received. The arrival of the Europeans eliminated that advantage. Within a few years the Assiniboines' enemies were as well-armed as they were, and since the Gros Ventres and Blackfeet possessed more horses than the Assiniboines, they were more mobile. The balance of power on the Great Plains was so precarious that the possession of a few firearms or horses was often enough to endanger a tribe's existence; loss of the monopoly on the gun trade threatened the Assiniboines' control of their hunting grounds in Manitoba and the Qu'Appelle River valley.

The Assiniboines employed economic threats and physical violence in their attempt to overcome the loss of their middlemen status and regain their advantage in the balance of power on the plains. The Spanish threat was the easiest to deal with since the Spaniards were the weakest of the European contenders in the struggle for commercial domination. The Assiniboines, who carried most of the trade between Canada and the Mandans, regarded Spanish efforts to open trade with the upper Missouri tribes as an intrusion into their commercial sphere.<sup>25</sup> Assiniboine war parties often attacked Spanish *pirogues* on the Missouri and plundered their cargoes. The Assiniboines traded the articles they obtained in these raids to the Mandans and Blackfeet for horses.<sup>26</sup>

English traders also suffered attacks when they attempted to trade on the upper Missouri. In 1797 Assiniboine parties had intercepted David Thompson, a Canadian trader, and warned him that Sioux threatened anyone who tried to reach the Mandans.<sup>27</sup> Their warnings failed to dissuade Thompson, and so the Assiniboines turned to more direct means of persuasion. Seven years later they kidnapped a Hudson's Bay Company trading party that attempted the same journey. After holding the white men for several days and threatening to torture and scalp them, the Indians confiscated their goods and let them go.<sup>28</sup>

The Assiniboines' relations with traders at posts in western Canada had initially been as violent as these confrontations on the Missouri. In 1780, for instance, the Assiniboines, outraged by high prices and the death of an Indian who had been given a dose of laudanum in a cup of brandy, destroyed Eagle Hills Fort on the Battle River and killed two white men.<sup>29</sup> In 1781 another Assiniboine war party attacked Poplar Fort, plundered it, and killed three traders because they believed the white men were using dishonest weights to measure the powder that was sold to them.<sup>30</sup> Competition between white traders also spawned violence. In 1781, an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company named Charles Isham, hoping to eliminate his Montreal rivals permanently, paid Proud Blood, an Assiniboine

warrior, to kill them.<sup>31</sup> Most of Isham's fellow traders were unwilling to go that far, but were willing to lie to the Indians, telling them that other white men carried smallpox or poisoned their brandy.

Attitudes toward the traders changed after the smallpox epidemic that swept the northern Great Plains in 1781-1782. Reduced in numbers, the Assiniboines were even more dependent on European guns and other goods for protection against their Gros Ventre and Blackfeet enemies. Escalation of warfare against the Sioux also created new strains. The annihilation of an entire Assiniboine band by the Sioux in present-day North Dakota heightened the Assiniboines' anxiety.<sup>32</sup>

As a result of these dangers, the Assiniboines cultivated the white men's friendship in an effort to maintain the flow of firearms needed to defend themselves against their enemies. They continued to act as middlemen in Anglo-Canadian dealings with the Missouri River tribes, carrying trade goods to the Mandans, Arikaras, and Hidatsas in exchange for pelts for the white men and corn, buffalo hides, and horses for themselves. The Assiniboines learned after 1782 to employ economic boycotts as a means of coercing the white men into treating them fairly. Traders at western posts were particularly susceptible to this economic coercion, because they were obliged to rely on the Indians for supplies of buffalo meat, pemmican, and other foods. The Assiniboines often burned off the grass around a trading post to drive away game and force the white men to trade for foodstuffs. They demanded gifts of paint, gunpowder, and tobacco before they agreed to trade, and then insisted on highly inflated prices for their provisions.<sup>33</sup>

Assiniboine guides and hunters often refused to work for their white employers if they were not given a bonus in the form of brandy or grog.<sup>34</sup> Traders reluctantly accepted these conditions for fear that the Indians would take their furs or much-needed provisions to a competitor's post.<sup>35</sup> For the traders, failure to collect enough furs could mean dismissal, while the inability to acquire supplies often meant starvation. For these reasons they cultivated good relations with the Assiniboines, who were more willing to supply the trading posts with provisions than were the Gros Ventres or Blackfeet.<sup>36</sup>

White traders continued to regard the Assiniboines as friends despite difficulties with them as customers and suppliers. They frequently gave oatmeal to hungry Indians in the winter, and accepted inferior pelts to maintain good relations. Robert Longmoor, a Hudson's Bay Company trader, often traveled overland to Assiniboine camps to induce the Indians to return to his post to trade.<sup>37</sup> Old Snake, chief of the Eagle Hills Assiniboines, camped near Longmoor's post at Hudson House many times but refused to trade there because the Montreal merchants had better brandy. Longmoor acquired Old Snake's supply of furs only by traveling to the Assiniboine camp and smoking with the chief while plying him with gifts of tobacco, grog, and sweetmeats.<sup>38</sup>

David Thompson, one of Longmoor's rivals, described the Assiniboines as "a fine looking race of men and women" who were expert horse thieves and loved firewater.<sup>39</sup> Thompson related that the Assiniboines regarded the traders' horse herds as a good source of ponies for their own herds. On one occasion in 1802, for example, the Assiniboines, having lost numerous horses to the Blackfeet, determined to replace their losses by stealing from the horse herd at Rocky Mountain House, a North West Company post on the Saskatchewan. The Assiniboines disguised themselves in antelope skins and moved among the hobbled horses, imitating grazing antelopes while untying the horses. Before the men guarding the herd

became suspicious of these "antelopes," the Assiniboines made off with fifty horses.<sup>40</sup>

Thompson's partner, Alexander Henry, also regarded the Assiniboines as horse thieves who spent their time drinking and dancing rather than collecting pelts as Henry thought they should.<sup>41</sup> On one occasion, Henry accused Smoke, chief of the Gens de Pied Assiniboines, of having stolen horses from his trading post. Smoke denied Henry's allegation, blaming another band for the theft. Smoke was sympathetic, and assured the trader that he would help recover the stolen animals. Mollified, Henry provided Smoke with a keg of brandy. The Assiniboine reciprocated by stealing two of Henry's horses when his band left the fort.<sup>42</sup>

In spite of troubles over brandy and horses, the Assiniboines remained important to the English traders. Fearful of being overwhelmed by their powerful Sioux and Blackfeet enemies, the Assiniboines cultivated the white men's friendship, perceiving the traders as allies who offered guns and other goods, whose herds supplied the Indians with horses, and who provided economic opportunities for Assiniboine middlemen. The English and Canadian traders, eager to acquire beaver pelts and provisions for their western posts, refused to abandon the Assiniboines' friendship for that of the hostile Sioux or inconstant Blackfeet, who were "always inclined toward mischief and murder."<sup>43</sup> English traders preferred to overlook the Assiniboines' faults rather than risk reliance on other allies.

Acting as middlemen and hunters for the white men, the Assiniboines carved out a place for themselves in the fur trade. The expansion of American fur trading activities into the northern plains after 1805 provided another outlet for the Assiniboines' economic activities, and many of them drifted southward to the American forts. Assiniboine middlemen were able to play off Canadian and American traders by threatening both with boycotts if they refused to accept Assiniboine demands. The Assiniboines maintained their important role in the fur trade until the silk "topper" replaced the beaver hat as a symbol of European fashion, and the fur traders' frontier passed into history.

#### FOOTNOTES

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- <sup>5</sup> Edwin E. Rich, ed., *Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1679-1684*, 2 vols. (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1945) 1:254-255.
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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.  
<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>25</sup> Pierre Antoine Tabeau, *Tabeau's Narrative of Loisel's Expedition to the Upper Missouri*, ed., by A. H. Abel, trans. by Rose Abel Wright (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939) p. 161.  
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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 267-268.  
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# EARLY MINING EXPLORATION IN NORTHERN SASKATCHEWAN THE H. V. DARDIER EXPEDITIONS OF 1914-1917\*

*By David Neufeld*

Saskatchewan has a rich heritage of technology. Much of the province's economy rests upon the successful use of machinery to harness the resource wealth of the land. And the people of the province are conscious of this fact. The major museums are well stocked with artifacts reflecting this dependence on technology, and almost every town fair includes demonstrations of old equipment that has been lovingly restored. However, almost all of this activity focuses on the agricultural past. Very little attention has yet been paid to the history of other industries in the province.

Recently, this has changed and the mining industry has begun to explore its history. The first major effort in this search was the recovery and researching of artifacts from the H. V. Dardier prospecting expeditions between 1914 and 1917 into northern Saskatchewan. In many respects this was the first true industrial archeology project undertaken in the province, in that it attempted to combine the archeological findings, the historical research and technical information available into a picture of Saskatchewan mining in the early part of this century.

A pair of large steampowered prospecting drills had long been known to geologists working in the Lake Athabasca region. Occasionally, a note describing the site would be submitted to one of the mining journals, usually with some questions about the equipment.<sup>1</sup> Located on an island in Lake Athabasca in northern Saskatchewan, almost 300 kilometers beyond the end of the nearest all-weather road and 100 kilometers from the closest city, the drill was not in an easily accessible location. This isolated location and the short rusting season in the north partly explains why so much of the drill and related equipment survived almost seventy years.

In the summer of 1981, the Saskatchewan Mining Development Corporation had a prospecting party in the eastern end of Lake Athabasca. The old mining camp was well known in the area and the crew visited the site and examined the remains. The company's public relations officer felt that the old camp represented an important aspect of Saskatchewan's mining history and offered an opportunity to make Saskatchewan people more aware of their mining heritage.

Negotiations began with the Saskatchewan Western Development Museums to contract the necessary staff and undertake the arduous task of recovering the drill and in August, 1981, a joint expedition was sent out to survey the site and remove the drills to Saskatoon. In a week of hectic work an archeologist, assisted by a work

crew, conducted a survey of the entire site, recorded the location of the drill and related equipment and labelled, packed and prepared for shipment some 185 artifacts. The findings of this work preserved the artifacts and raised many questions about their story. A careful archeological survey of the site, the recovery of the drill and a thorough examination of the historical evidence provided the background to this early mining venture.

The focus of the recovery work was on the drill. Following traditional archeological methods, a three metre square string grid was superimposed over the artifacts to be moved. This allowed for an organized method of cataloging and preserved the "as found" provenience of the artifacts. Two drills and two vertical boilers with related gear were recovered. The duplication of equipment appears to have been in response to the very real difficulties of supplying parts to the isolated exploration site. One finding offered conclusive proof of the original expedition, a painted stencil with the initials "HVD, Edmonton" on one of the boilers.

The camp site was not surveyed in as detailed a fashion, but revealed a great deal about the expedition. Fragments of a cast iron cook stove and rusty cutlery marked the location of the dining shack but there were no building remains. It was probably built of planks and thus readily reused. The garbage dump near by also revealed a great deal. Empty tins of Nova Scotia butter and Tetley tea, english liquor crocks and even fragments of fine english china showed that no ordinary miners had been at work on the site. Some distance from this area were the outlines of two smaller log buildings. From the debris within them it was obvious that one had been a drill core storage shed and the other a small, but complete laboratory.<sup>2</sup>

The tale behind the drills tells much about the early development of northern Saskatchewan. The transportation problems to be overcome, the difficulties faced by white expeditions when dealing with local organizations and customs and the ramifications of international mining investment are all highlighted by the story.

Northern Saskatchewan had long been travelled by white men in search of nature's bounty. In the eighteenth century, traders established posts to gain access to the rich fur grounds of the area. However, it was not until the late nineteenth century that the mineral possibilities of this part of the Canadian Shield began to be explored. In 1892 and 1893, J. B. Tyrell, of the Geological Survey of Canada, conducted a study of the geology of the north shore of Lake Athabasca.

The eastern end of the lake, or the Fond du Lac region, was first prospected and staked in 1912 by an expedition sponsored by Lieutenant Governor G. H. V. Bulyea of Alberta. The claims were for iron, copper and precious metals. This small start elicited no great excitement and many of the claims were either never registered or allowed to lapse in the following year.<sup>3</sup>

In the summer of 1914, a trio of prospectors, Harold Victor Dardier, John Gibbs Devlin and George Fowler travelled up the Athabasca River and into the Fond du Lac area to prospect the mineral possibilities there.<sup>4</sup> Dardier, the leader of the group, had spent considerable time in the area earlier that year and had already staked and registered two claims, the "Paris Group", about nineteen kilometres east of Fond du Lac. On this trip however, he and his companions prospected an area in the Pine Channel area of the Lake, some thirteen kilometres further east. Here the group studied the shoreline of the lake carefully and along Sucker Creek and Norite Bay they staked about twenty more claims following two outcroppings inland for some distance and out onto the islands in the lake to ensure complete coverage of the showing. Curiously, they did not claim to either side of the outcroppings, thus

risking the loss of the ore body if it dipped off to one side or the other. These areas were claimed early the following year by other prospectors.<sup>5</sup> The trio gathered several hundred pounds of samples from their claims and as winter had overtaken them in their work, they travelled by dog team across the lake and up the river to the town of Athabasca where they registered in one of the town's finer hotels. Dardier and his men said little about their findings. In a confidential interview to a newspaper correspondent, Dardier indicated that he would return in the fall with a large crew and some equipment to further investigate their findings. After a short rest in Athabasca Dardier took the samples and returned to England to discuss the financing of further work.<sup>6</sup>

John Devlin, a Scottish prospector who had previously worked in British Columbia for "old country" interests, however stayed in Athabasca. Devlin, with a reputation for wild behaviour<sup>7</sup>, used his recent northern trip to start his own mining boom. In the first week of March, well after Dardier's departure for England, Devlin released the results of an assay on a few small samples of ore that he claimed to have picked up in the Fond du Lac area. The *Athabasca Northern News* immediately proclaimed in bold headlines that "AN EL DORADO OF SILVER" had been found at Fond du Lac. Devlin's ore assayed at \$11,000 per ton or almost 1400 pounds of silver per ton. He stated that he would lead a large expedition back to the claim when the navigation season opened in spring.<sup>8</sup>

After the first announcement of the silver find, information about it appeared from a wide variety of sources. Colin Fraser, an old trader in the area expanded on the find. He told the *Edmonton Journal* that there was a silver ledge three feet deep and three miles long.<sup>9</sup> This story and other rumours fertilized a rapid growth in the extent of the find. By the end of March, barely two weeks after Devlin's announcement, the *Athabasca Northern News* declared, "Athabasca leads to Fond du Lac Silver Mines — Is Another Cobalt". After a further week of hothouse growth the find blossomed to its fullest extent; "FOND DU LAC RICHER THAN FAMOUS COBALT".<sup>10</sup>

The rush, possibly the spark needed to boost a frontier town to metropolitan status, provoked a spirited competition between Athabasca and the town of Peace River for control of the traffic that would stream north to the silver mines. Since the 1880's, Athabasca had been used as a major shipping point for the northern posts of the Hudson's Bay Company and the various religious missions. It experienced the Klondike gold rush when the river was used as part of the overland route to the Dawson goldfields. In 1912, the railway reached Athabasca making it easier to trans-ship goods north. In early 1915, the railway to Peace River was completed to within thirty miles of the town. While the Peace River route was a longer trip to Fond du Lac, it did not have the treacherous rapids that made the upper Athabasca River so difficult to use. Several items were published supporting the Peace River route<sup>11</sup> but the *Athabasca Northern News* contemptuously dismissed them as "a joke . . . originally intended as a Guide to the Moon".<sup>12</sup> In 1919, the railway line reached Waterways, north of the rapids on the Athabasca River and both Athabasca and Peace River lost their claims as "Gateways to the North" and became farm service towns.<sup>13</sup>

Mining men from across North America were attracted to the district by the prospect of finding silver and they eagerly awaited the opening of navigation in Athabasca.<sup>14</sup> The journalists had a field day but it appears that very few Athabasca locals were swept up by the "silver rush" that developed in the spring. The

storekeepers of Athabasca were quick to point out that they could outfit any prospector going north for a fair price. The Board of Trade refused to make a statement on the silver find but published a pamphlet outlining the advantages of outfitting and travel through their town. Even the Hudson's Bay Company in Edmonton got involved by printing a pamphlet describing the various routes into the Fond du Lac region and, no doubt, pointing out the location of Hudson's Bay Company posts along the way.<sup>15</sup>

More enterprising citizens offered a variety of other services. One river pilot spoke highly of the rich silver find but allowed as he wasn't much for mining, he would be happy to guide people across the Athabasca rapids and sell them transport scows. Two others went north to establish a restaurant in the area and one intrepid local, perhaps reflecting the general view of the town "invented a simple, flying machine . . . [with] a silk car in the rear for carrying silver . . . to ply between here [Athabasca] and Fond du Lac". A few went north but it appears the local population, inured by previous mineral speculations, was careful about the silver find.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the excitement drew people from all over the continent and in the spring of 1915 it was estimated that as many as 150 prospectors were studying the area for silver.<sup>17</sup>

Charles Camsell of the Geological Survey of Canada was also ordered to study the area and report on the silver claims. Camsell had some difficulty locating the area as Dardier was still in England and Devlin had dropped from sight shortly before he was to lead his large expedition into the area. Camsell spent several weeks investigating the silver story and studied many of the claims in the district. He felt that Devlin's story was based upon ore that came from somewhere else, possibly Cobalt. One of the American geologists reporting on the rush noted that Devlin was a "prospector who does not command much respect." Despite Devlin's disappearance, Camsell concluded that the area had possibilities for nickel, copper, silver and gold. Over the course of the summer the excitement died down and by July, only about twenty-five prospectors were still in the area.<sup>18</sup>

It was about this time that Dardier returned from England to lead his expedition into the Fond du Lac area. Harold Victor Dardier was the son of Stephen V. Dardier, one of the directors of foreign marketing for the giant British armament firm of Vickers.<sup>19</sup>

Vickers was one of the largest steel fabricators in Europe in the early twentieth century. The company built military and naval equipment for many countries around the world. Vickers used large amounts of steel and incorporated the latest scientific and technical advances in order to keep its products in demand.

The armaments industry felt the shocks of the industrial revolution in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Up to the mid-nineteenth century only minor changes in military technology had resulted from the industrial advances in production and science. During the American Civil War the major warships were built of wood, powered by sail and fired round shot as their weapon. By the end of the century, rifled cannon, firing armour piercing shells were mounted on steam powered steel warships. Advances in steam technology, ship design, armour and gun manufacture had provided the catalyst for this revolution in naval armaments and these sparked a massive arms race. Many of these advances were dependent upon metallurgical breakthroughs, one of the most important of these being the alloying of nickel-steel.<sup>20</sup> The great strength, toughness and resistance to fatigue made nickel-steel an essential element of modern war. These qualities led to a rocketing

demand for nickel by steel and armament manufacturers in the 1890's, which continued unabated until the end of the First World War.

Two companies, Le Nickel in New Caledonia and the Canadian Copper Company in Sudbury, Ontario, controlled the lion's share of nickel production at this time and after a lengthy price war in the early 1890's they settled into a comfortable co-existence with agreed markets and prices.<sup>21</sup> Both nickel companies increased production in the early twentieth century in an attempt to keep up to the increasing demand for nickel but were unable to keep pace. As production lagged, the major buyers became disgruntled with the limited nickel supply and its consequent high price.<sup>22</sup> During the First World War this supply problem was exacerbated by the reduction of nickel output from New Caledonia. As a result of this supply shortfall and the high profits apparent in the nickel industry, many of the steel and armament manufacturers formed syndicates to establish independent and secure supplies of nickel.<sup>23</sup>

Vickers was involved in several of these syndicates. As early as 1900 the company had attempted to establish an independent nickel producing company. By 1910 they also pursued an active nickel exploration campaign in Canada. Dardier's explorations in the Lake Athabasca region were an attempt by the company to locate its own source of nickel. This work also had the effect of encouraging existing producers to give Vickers attractive long term, low cost nickel supply contracts.<sup>24</sup>

The north shore of Lake Athabasca did have nickel. Tyrell's 1893 report noted large amounts of norite, a mineral associated with the massive nickel deposits of Sudbury, at Pine Channel. In 1914, F. Alcock, also of the Geological Survey of Canada, reported finding traces of nickel in the same area.<sup>25</sup> Dardier, already in the area at the time of Alcock's study, had probably read Tyrell's work and was investigating further for Vickers.

In the late summer of 1915, Dardier returned to Athabasca with a party of twenty-five assayers, engineers and mineralogists and a large body of Metis labourers. He also brought about seventy tons of freight, spending \$50,000 on drilling equipment, including the two steam powered drills, derricks and other mining requirements and some \$10,000 on other supplies in Edmonton. In addition to these supplies, Dardier took 5,000 crisp, new one dollar bills to pay Indians for portage and other work. All together it was estimated that the expedition had cost about \$100,000. The *Edmonton Bulletin* declared that it was, "the best outfit sent north in the past seven years". Dardier and some of his party however, had no intention of disappearing into the north without their wives. At least two white women, one Dardier's wife, accompanied the party and doubtless demanded certain conditions and supplies atypical of mining expeditions.<sup>26</sup>

In August, Dardier ordered his Athabasca agent to have eighteen scows built to transport the expedition and its supplies to Fond du Lac.<sup>27</sup> Scows for the Athabasca River trade were sturdy, flat bottomed boats, designed to run the many rapids of northern rivers. A typical scow was described by a mining engineer in 1915 as about fifty feet long, ten feet wide, three feet deep and constructed of one inch spruce lumber. Further:

... the scow is fitted with six oars or "sweeps", made from small trees and each about 25 ft. long. The steering oar is a larger tree, about 35 to 45 ft. long, with a hole bored through it at a place not far from its point of balance, giving leverage of about 15 ft. for the steersman. An iron post securely fastened to the stern of the scow passes through this hole, and this gives the steersman ample chance to wield the apparently clumsy oar. The Indians are remarkably adept at this work,

and the best steersman can guide the scow, aided at intervals by the oars, with wonderful precision and skill through rapids seemingly impassable.<sup>28</sup> Scows had long been used to haul goods to northern posts and were often dismantled at their destination for lumber as the supply traffic was usually only one way.<sup>29</sup>

A local river pilot was hired to guide the scows over the rapids of the Athabasca River and Dardier left for Fond du Lac in the first part of September.<sup>30</sup>

Once on the river the most difficult part of the trip, the eleven sets of rapids between Athabasca and Fort McMurray, had to be faced. Most of the rapids could be run by skilled pilots without portaging but Grand Rapids, "with a drop of over 50 ft. in less than 2,000 ft., forming a continuous cascade"<sup>31</sup> required a portage. On an island in the middle of these rapids the Hudson's Bay Company had built a small tramway to transport goods over the difficult area while the lightened scows could be run over the rapids. In 1914 the tramway was described as:

a narrow gauge railway, which pays no attention to grades or curves, consisting merely of rough wooden rails, upon which is tacked a strip of old iron. . . . It was built over twenty years ago — looks its age — and seems to be in a perennial state of collapse . . . You load the truck, haul across and unload yourself. The portage is less than 500 yards long, and as the duties of engineer, stoker, traffic and passenger agents, general manager and section gang are all performed by one man, perhaps this with the tariff schedule (\$2.50 per ton and \$2.00 per canoe), explains why this railway is called the best paying in the world.<sup>32</sup>

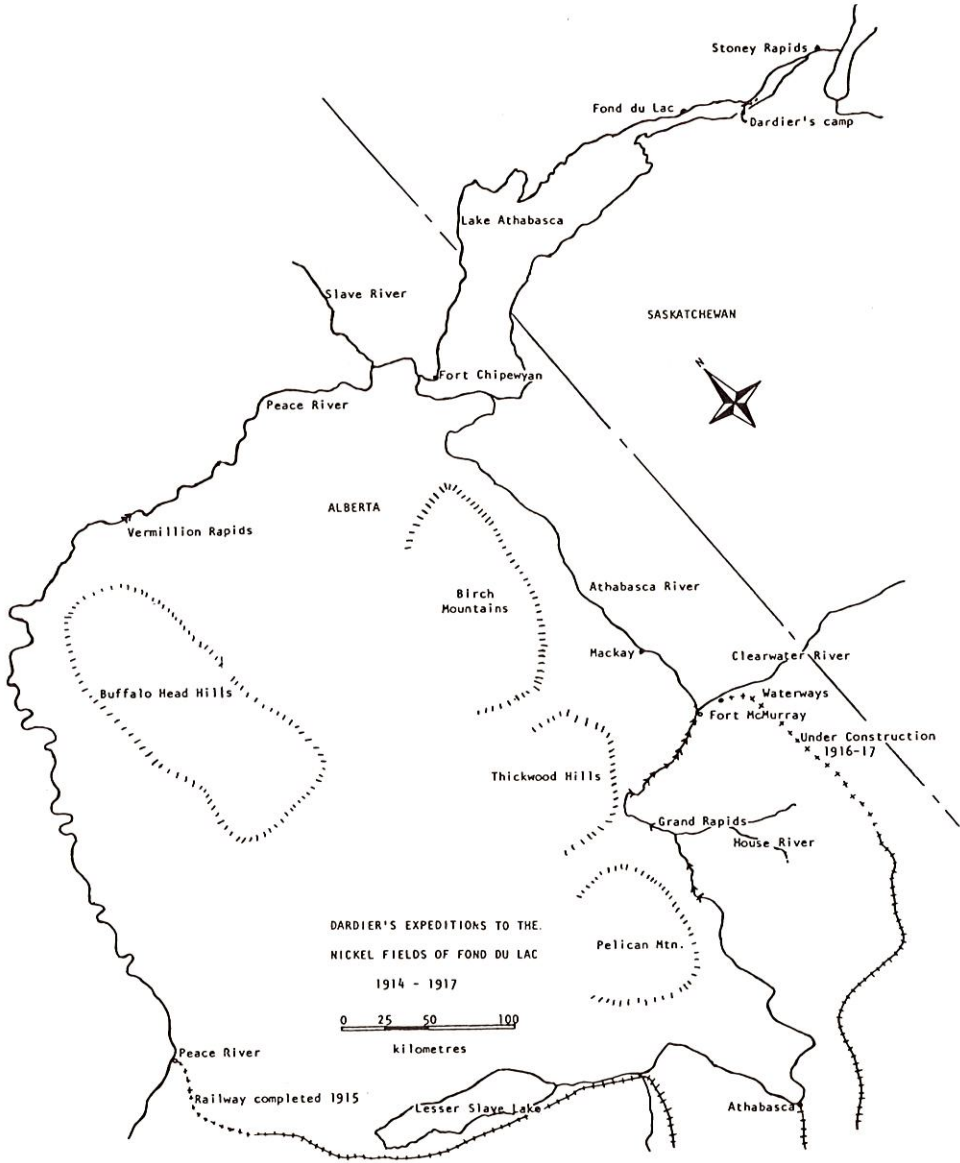
Because of the wild nature of the river, Dardier took the precaution of tying buoys to the larger pieces of equipment so that they might be retrieved if a scow were upset.<sup>33</sup>

Once past Fort McMurray the river was much quieter and the pilot was usually let off.<sup>34</sup> From here to Fort Chippewyan, on the western end of Lake Athabasca, the scows were allowed to drift with the current. The 720 kilometre trip from Athabasca to Fort Chippewyan could be done in fifteen days. However, with a large flotilla of scows, such as Dardier's, the time was probably twice that.<sup>35</sup>

Once in Fort Chippewyan, it was possible to make arrangements to have a steamboat tow the scows to Fond du Lac. During the springtime silver rush, a Hudson's Bay Company steamer had transported scows and prospectors to the eastern end of the lake. No doubt the steamer was still in the area in the fall for Dardier's use.<sup>36</sup>

Dardier must have reached Fond du Lac just as ice was forming in the lake. Navigation usually closed in Fort Chippewyan in mid-October and as the lake near Fond du Lac is much narrower it closes a week or two earlier.<sup>37</sup> Hard and fast work would have been necessary to get the drilling equipment and other supplies to the island drill site before the lake froze. Despite this hazard, it appears that all the material reached the island safely and that a camp had been set up by Christmas.<sup>38</sup>

The isolated nature of the camp meant that all the needs of the work crew had to be met on site. Some seventy-five Metis and twenty-five whites, including two women, had to be accommodated. Building materials were plentiful. The island was thick with trees suitable for log construction and most of the eighteen scows that carried goods to the site were probably taken apart for the lumber. It seems very likely that Dardier's supplies also included some basic building materials such as window glass, tar paper and wood heating and cook stoves. Thus, in all likelihood, the main buildings were of frame construction, sheathed with one inch boards and



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weatherproofed with heavy tar paper. The less important buildings, such as storage and work areas, were probably built of log.<sup>39</sup> A Royal North West Mounted Police corporal, visiting the camp on Boxing Day, 1915, reported that the camp was “very comfortable.”<sup>40</sup>

All the workers appear to have worked on a round-the-clock, seven days a week schedule<sup>41</sup> In addition to this work schedule, many of the Metis were probably absent from the camp for days at a time, hauling wood, shooting game or fishing. Some of the Metis labourers were probably sent out once the camp was established. Therefore it is likely that sleeping room for only thirty Metis, or less than half of the

original labour force was required. The white crew of just over twenty men, who operated the drill, assayed the cores and managed the boilers also required accommodation. There appears to have been at least two married couples, Dardier and his wife and Mr. Miller, the camp foreman, and his wife<sup>42</sup>, in the camp and they, no doubt, had some form of separate living space. This was probably limited to private rooms in the bunk house.

A dining hall with a large kitchen was an essential building for the camp. It was probably large enough to seat thirty to thirty-five people, thus requiring at least two shifts of diners, not an uncommon occurrence in present camps. The menu likely included caribou, which was reported as plentiful in the area in the 1915 - 1916 season, fish from the lake and tinned vegetables and dairy goods, freighted in with the camp supplies.<sup>43</sup>

Some form of storage for equipment and supplies was required. This was probably close to the unloading point on the island and the remains of a log building found near the west beach may have served such a purpose. Its present swampy location would not have been obvious when constructed in the winter.<sup>44</sup> The building may also have served as a shelter for the dog teams that were used in the winter. The dogs were likely obtained from local Indians at considerable expense.<sup>45</sup>

Another building on the site was an assay laboratory, about ten meters by six meters, built of logs and divided into two or three rooms. From the debris, broken assay crucibles and chunks of a ceramic furnace in one of the rooms and the bottles of chemicals in the dump it is obvious that a well-equipped assay laboratory existed on the island. The other rooms in the shack were probably an office and a storeroom for assay supplies.<sup>46</sup>

A drill core storage shed was built close to the assay laboratory. It was a small log building, probably more casually constructed than the others, as drill core storage typically does not require any weatherizing. Modern mining exploration camps generally leave the drill cores outside stacked in trays without protection.<sup>47</sup>

A small stone building, discovered about 150 meters to the east of the drill site, was probably a part of the camp Dardier had on the island in the winter of 1914-15 when he did some trenching and blasting on the Norah claim just north of the drill site.<sup>48</sup> It was probably not used again in the 1916 season as it was some distance from the main camp.

A drilling shanty was likely also constructed. This would have been a frame building constructed over the pumps, boilers and drill to protect the equipment from the harsh winter climate. A typical shanty of the time in northern Michigan was "14 x 16 ft., with a 9-ft. front wall and a 7-ft. back wall, and a shed roof. . . . The floors and roof are usually made of loose planks with tar paper on the roof". More elaborate buildings are also possible. Similar drilling outfits in Nova Scotia and Alberta show far more extensive buildings erected for winter protection.<sup>49</sup>

A successful mine is based upon the ability of a prospector to discover ore bodies and accurately describe their extent and value. A mine is a big investment and it is important to gain as much information about an ore body as possible to determine the economics of mine operation. In the nineteenth century, the increasing pace of industrialization demanded ever larger amounts of raw materials and led to a rapid development of geological science and prospecting techniques and technology.

The science of geology undertook major strides as scientists developed theories



on the formation of the earth and the forces that shaped the planet. This new knowledge allowed much more informed guesses at the nature and shape of subterranean rock formations. Advances in technology also allowed the prospector to probe the earth's crust and confirm the scientific guess and gain details about an ore body. Test pits and shafts had been dug in the past but this was a slow and expensive method of tracing an ore body. It was practically limited to relatively shallow caches of minerals. To tap deeper ore bodies and cut the costs of evaluation the technology of drilling developed. By punching a series of small holes into a prospect and collecting and analyzing the resulting cuttings it became possible to make fairly accurate estimates of the extent and value of an ore body.

The rotary drill, successfully developed in the nineteenth century, gave prospectors this ability to probe an ore body and gain an accurate record of the material surveyed. The chief advantage of the rotary drill is its ability to make a core; that is, an unbroken sample of the subsurface rocks drilled through. The cutting edge of a rotary drill is placed on the perimeter of the shaft. As the drill shaft sinks it creates a column of rock inside the shaft. This is held in place by a variety of different techniques and when the drill is withdrawn the core is extracted.

Two types of rotary drill were used in the early twentieth century, the diamond drill, introduced in the 1860's and the shot drill, developed at the turn of the twentieth century. The diamond drill was an effective tool but it was expensive to operate because of the high cost of the diamonds and the need for highly skilled operators to select and set the diamonds.<sup>50</sup> Dardier was probably familiar with the problems of cost and skill required by the diamond drill and he selected the simpler, though much bulkier and heavier, steam-powered Davis-Calyx shot drill for his work.

On the surface, a steam power plant with two vertical boilers powered the Davis-Calyx drill and its water pump. While a gasoline engine would have been much lighter and more portable, the reliability of gas engines at the time left much to be desired and probably would not have been able to support a sustained long term drilling effort. Another difficulty to overcome was that related to power transmission. To vary the speed of a steam engine more or less steam is allowed to run through the engine. A gas engine however, has a very limited throttling range and requires gearing and a sophisticated transmission system to gain a full range of speeds. The technology of power transmission was still in its infancy at the time and the equipment was subject to frequent breakdown and repair. Steam engine technology was well developed and provided a reliable source of power. Also the availability of wood as a fuel precluded the need for the transport of volatile and bulky supplies of petroleum fuels. Therefore, in spite of a substantial handicap in portability, the steam engine was a preferable source of power.<sup>51</sup>

The drill also required a derrick to support the drill shaft and allow for the addition of extra lengths of shaft as the hole progressed. From the finds on site, it appears that Dardier had carried in a large prefabricated steel tube derrick that was erected over the drill. The drill outfits probably weighed some twenty-five to thirty tons and made up fully one-third to one-half of Dardier's freight shipment.<sup>52</sup>

Dardier had brought a large work crew to the island to set up and support the camp. Corporal Johnson of the Royal North West Mounted Police visited the camp in December, 1915 and reported that the "employees seem to be an exceptionally good gang and had no complaints to make." The drilling did not begin immediately. By Christmas one of the drills had been set up but it was not in operation because of



*Provincial Archives of Alberta. A5498*

"Having Lunch". The scows used to transport freight north on the Athabaska River were sturdy and versatile craft.

a scarcity of wood.<sup>53</sup> Deep snow may have made it difficult to transport cut wood to the boilers. However, once drilling began it went on twenty four hours a day.

In March, the Royal North West Mounted Police again visited the drill site after prodding by the priest in Fond du Lac. This time they received complaints from several white employees and some of the Metis labourers that they had to work on Sundays. The officer cited Dardier for violating the Sabbath. Dardier, by then the local Justice of the Peace, refused to comply unless specifically ordered to do so by the officials responsible for his commission, well aware that this would take months even if they did order Dardier to comply. Moreover, he threatened to fire any employee not working Sundays.

... I beg to confirm here the fact that the work here is proceeded with regularly day and night without any stop for Sundays. This is for the reason that I find it absolutely necessary for the successful operation of the plant here and for bringing the work to a satisfactory termination.<sup>54</sup>

Dardier was busy at other work as well. As soon as the camp had been established, Dardier travelled out, probably to Edmonton, where he applied to become the Justice of the Peace for the Fond du Lac district. After receiving his appointment through the Saskatchewan Government, he returned to the island in late February.<sup>55</sup> His most important action as the local Justice of the Peace was the arrest and expulsion from the area of three German 'enemy aliens'. This action resulted in some pointed questions about Dardier's motives.<sup>56</sup> Dardier's only other action as a Justice of the Peace occurred in February 1916 when he dealt with a case of two women brought to justice for fighting.<sup>57</sup>

Before he left England, Dardier had received a letter of introduction from Mr. Charles Sale, a director of the Hudson's Bay Company and a personal friend of his father. Dardier apparently used this letter in attempts to gain discounts and special

privileges at the Hudson's Bay posts in the Lake Athabasca region. These abuses proved an embarrassment to Sale when post managers' complaints reached back to Hudson's Bay House in London in the summer of 1916.<sup>58</sup>

When river navigation opened in the spring of 1916, Dardier and his wife left for Edmonton. He was apparently going to meet with people from Vickers to report on his exploration work and he told his crew that he would return in late June with additional supplies.

He did not return as promised, but his crew continued work until late August when their supplies eventually ran out. The camp was abandoned on 25 August, when the remaining members of the drill crew took a scow to Fond du Lac, thirty-two kilometres to the west. Here they met the *S. S. Keewatin* and, on the following day, were towed towards Fort Chippewyan and the outside. The crew had drilled only about 130 meters on the island site and found no worthwhile deposits.<sup>59</sup>

Dardier did return to the area later that fall with some gas engine diamond drills and a small crew. In spite of some difficulties with the temperamental gas engines, he spent about two months in the area doing some additional drilling about nineteen kilometres east and nineteen kilometres west of the original camp. No worthwhile ore bodies were found in either of these areas.<sup>60</sup> In the late summer of 1917 Dardier left the area and in September, *The Engineering and Mining Journal* reported his claim that, "Nickel deposits of considerable extent . . . have been found".<sup>61</sup> In spite of these claims, however, Dardier did not return to the area and Vickers did no further development work.

The camp buildings and equipment were left on site and local people gradually helped themselves to the tools, fuel and other gear left there. The frame buildings would have been especially attractive and in time they would have been completely dismantled and moved to other locations. In 1924, Constable Marcel Chappuis, the Saskatchewan Provincial Police officer based in Fond du Lac, described the camp in his annual report.

The Pine Channel Silver and Nickel Mine, known as "The Dardier Silver Mine" is still closed down and considerable machinery is exposed to all weathers, and the buildings are now "Tumble Down Shacks". I have been informed lately that there will be a sale of all properties on that location during the coming summer, but I could not say if the information I received is authentic.<sup>62</sup>

This is the last contemporary mention of Dardier's expeditions into northern Saskatchewan.

A review of the facts of the expedition provides some insights into the nature of the venture. Vickers was anxious to obtain more reliable and less expensive supplies of nickel, either by developing new sources or by gaining more favourable contracts with existing suppliers. By sending out high profile exploration parties, Vickers could work on both possibilities.

Dardier's noisy three year search for nickel in northern Saskatchewan certainly filled the requirements for Vickers. As the son of Vickers' director of foreign affairs he was not likely to work unnoticed and his behaviour while in Canada was hardly subtle. While there is no direct connection between Dardier and the Fond du Lac Silver Rush of 1915, the event further ensured the attention of the mining world. The use of heavy steam powered mining equipment, while in some ways justified, meant that a discreet expedition was out of the question. In spite of Dardier's claims to the contrary, nickel in workable quantities was not found.

Nevertheless the costs of the work were no doubt recovered by achieving another of the favourable supply contracts that Vickers apparently always enjoyed.

After many years of scavenging and exposure to the elements the camp has now been documented through the efforts of the Saskatchewan Mining Development Corporation and the Saskatchewan Western Development Museums. This site is one of the earliest examples of hard rock mining in the province of Saskatchewan and is thus significant because of the attention it drew to the mineral wealth of the northern half of our province.

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\*Thanks are due to the Saskatchewan Western Development Museums for the opportunity to work on the project and the Saskatchewan Mining Development Corporation for their financial support of the work.

### FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> "A Bit of History Unearthed by Kintla Explorations in Saskatchewan", *CIM Reporter*, 6 May 1981, pp. 15-17.
- <sup>2</sup> T. Jones, "Calyx Project Archaeological Report", unpublished report prepared for the Saskatchewan Western Development Museums, 4 January 1982, pp. 21-22; 28-31 (hereafter Jones, "Report").
- <sup>3</sup> C. Camsell, *Reported Occurrence of Silver in the Neighbourhood of Fond du Lac, L. Athabasca, Sask.* Ottawa: Geological Survey of Canada, 1961 (hereafter Camsell, *Silver*). Saskatchewan Archives Board, Saskatchewan Department of Natural Resources, NR8 A. 65394 (hereafter DNR).
- <sup>4</sup> *Athabasca Northern News*, 22 January 1915 (hereafter ANN).
- <sup>5</sup> DNR
- <sup>6</sup> Public Archives of Canada, R.G. 18, Vol. 1818, file 130, part 2 (hereafter RNWMP) and ANN, 22 January 1915.
- <sup>7</sup> Correspondence with R. Welwood, David Thompson University Centre Library, Nelson, British Columbia, 5 February 1982. Notes from E. C. Wragge Memoirs and D. St. Dennis papers.
- <sup>8</sup> ANN, 12 March 1915 and *The Engineering and Mining Journal*, New York, 1 May 1915, p. 787 (hereafter EMJ).
- <sup>9</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 8 March 1915.
- <sup>10</sup> ANN, 26 March 1915 and 2 April 1915.
- <sup>11</sup> *Peace River Record*, 1 April 1915 and 29 April 1915 (hereafter PRR) and the Hudson's Bay Company published a pamphlet on the various routes to the silver field.
- <sup>12</sup> ANN, 16 April 1915. The railway to Athabasca and the shorter distance apparently won the favour of most of the prospectors going north as ANN, 27 August 1915 noted that 144 prospectors went to Fond du Lac via Athabasca while only four travelled through Peace River.
- <sup>13</sup> C. Andreae, "An Historical Atlas of Railways in Canada", (manuscript copy). The change in the two towns can be seen in the transformation of the towns' newspapers from vibrant Board of Trade boosters looking towards future urban growth to farm papers giving coverage to only local events and people.
- <sup>14</sup> EMJ, 3 April 1915, p. 264.
- <sup>15</sup> ANN, 19 March 1915 and 9 April 1915; PRR, 1 April 1915. Aside from the mention in the PRR no trace of the Hudson's Bay Company pamphlet was found in either the Company's archives in Winnipeg or the western Headquarters in Edmonton.
- <sup>16</sup> ANN, 23 April 1915; 9 April 1915 and 30 April 1915.
- <sup>17</sup> Camsell, *Silver*, p. 21. It appears that only 136 claims were staked by August, 1915, DNR.
- <sup>18</sup> Camsell, *Silver*, pp. 121-122 and EMJ, 1 May 1915, p. 787.
- <sup>19</sup> EMJ, 1 May 1915, p. 787 and C. Trebilcock, *The Vickers Brothers: Armaments and Enterprise 1854-1914* (London, 1971), pp. 51, 128.
- <sup>20</sup> F. B. Howard-White, *Nickel — An Historical Review* (Princeton, 1963) provides a good description of the early uses of nickel.
- <sup>21</sup> O. W. Main, *The Canadian Nickel Industry — A Study in Market Control and Public Policy* (Toronto, 1955), pp. 34-36 and 38 (hereafter Main, *Nickel*); Anon., "The Nickel Industry" *Canadian Mining Journal*, 1 February 1910, p. 82 (hereafter CMJ).
- <sup>22</sup> CMJ, 1 February 1910, pp. 81-82; Canada, House of Commons, Proceedings of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Mines and Minerals, Appendix No. 5. (Ottawa, 1910) (hereafter Canada, Proceedings).
- <sup>23</sup> Main, *Nickel*, p. 70.
- <sup>24</sup> Canada, Proceedings, p. 1 and 45 and Main, *Nickel*, p. 70.
- <sup>25</sup> J. B. Tyrell, "Report on the Country between Athabasca Lake and Churchill River" (Ottawa, Geological Survey of Canada, 1896), p. 65 and F. Alcock "Geology of the North Shore of Lake Athabasca, Alberta and Saskatchewan", Summary Report . . . for 1914 (Ottawa, Geological Survey of Canada, 1914) p. 61.
- <sup>26</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, 4 October 1915, p. 4 (hereafter EB).
- <sup>27</sup> ANN, 27 August 1915.

- <sup>28</sup> C. G. Gibbins, "A Trip to Great Slave Lake", CMJ, 15 March 1915, p. 168 (hereafter Gibbins, "Trip").
- <sup>29</sup> ANN, 23 April 1915.
- <sup>30</sup> ANN, 27 August 1915 and 3 September 1915.
- <sup>31</sup> Gibbins, "Trip", p. 169.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>33</sup> EB, 4 October 1915, p. 4.
- <sup>34</sup> ANN, "Joe Birds Quick Scheme", 23 April 1915, p. 4.
- <sup>35</sup> Gibbins, "Trip", p. 168-170. cf. G. M. Douglas, *Lands Forlorn* (New York, 1914), p. 11-34 gives a description of a 25 scow brigade travelling from Athabasca to Fort Chippewyan. The book also describes the gruelling trip back to Athabasca.
- <sup>36</sup> ANN, 23 April 1915.
- <sup>37</sup> B. W. Currie, "Prairie Provinces and North West Territories: Ice — Soil Temperatures" (U of S Physics Dept., n.d.); Saskatchewan Archives Board, Department of the Attorney General, Saskatchewan Provincial Police, Annual Divisional Reports for 1924 (hereafter SPP, 1924).
- <sup>38</sup> RNWMP, Vol. 1867, file 130, part 7.
- <sup>39</sup> Jones, "Report", pp. 30-31.
- <sup>40</sup> RNWMP, Vol. 1867, file 130, part 7.
- <sup>41</sup> RNWMP Report filed in Saskatchewan Archives Board (S.A.B.), Department of the Attorney General, Justices of the Peace, Section B, 1913-1918, file 1608, Harold V. Dardier.
- <sup>42</sup> RNWMP, Vol. 1867, file 130, part 69.
- <sup>43</sup> RNWMP, Vol. 1867, file 130, part 7; L. Rourke, *The Land of the Frozen Tide* (London, 1928) p. 210-211 (hereafter Rourke, *Frozen*) and Jones "Report", p. 30.
- <sup>44</sup> Jones, "Report", p. 28.
- <sup>45</sup> Rourke, *Frozen*, p. 261. The price of good sled dogs in winter at Fort Chippewyan started at \$100 and often went much higher.
- <sup>46</sup> Jones, "Report", p. 31. Broken bottles of Ammonium Oxilate ( $(\text{NH}_4)_2\text{C}_2\text{O}_4$ ) were discovered in the camp dump. Ammonium Oxilate is used in the assay process to break ore down into its constituent elements. Conversations with the University of Saskatchewan Chemistry Dept. assay lab.
- <sup>47</sup> Jones, "Report", p. 30-31.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27 and Public Archives of Canada, Geological Survey of Canada, R.G. 45, Vol. 189, C. Camsell Field Notebooks, 533 (1915).
- <sup>49</sup> G. S. Rollin, "Sectional Buildings for Drilling Camps", EMJ, 4 July 1914, p. 6-9. Photographs from the Nova Scotia Museum and the University of Alberta Archives show some of the variations of drill site construction possible.
- <sup>50</sup> Anon., "Zinc-Ore mining in Wisconsin," EMJ, 30 June 1906, p. 1233; K. Thomas, "Test Drilling on the Mesabi Iron Range", EMJ, 13 June 1903, p. 896.
- <sup>51</sup> Interviews with Dennis Fingas, Artifact care Co-ordinator, Western Development Museum, Saskatoon, March 1982.
- <sup>52</sup> Study of artifacts at the Western Development Museum, Saskatoon, March 1982. Ingersoll Rand Calyx drill catalogue 1939 (?) in Jones, "Report".
- <sup>53</sup> RNWMP, Vol. 1867, file 130, part 7.
- <sup>54</sup> S.A.B., Department of the Attorney General, Justices of the Peace, Section B, 1913-1918, 1608, cited in Corporal Johnson to Officer Commanding, RNWMP, Athabasca Crime Report, 29 April 1916.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>56</sup> RNWMP, Vol. 1867, file 130, part 45. The RNWMP headquarters asked for but never received additional details on these arrests. While the arrested enemy aliens were never identified it is known that an American mining syndicate had sent a geologist with a german name into the area during the war.
- <sup>57</sup> RNWMP, Vol. 1867, File 130, part 28.
- <sup>58</sup> Correspondence with Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Winnipeg, Manitoba relating to Nanton Correspondence, File No. 1, Bacon to Sale, 25 August 1916.
- <sup>59</sup> RNWMP, Vol. 1868, file 130, part 138 and F. J. Alcock, "Geology of the Lake Athabasca Region, Saskatchewan", Memoir 196 (Ottawa, Geological Survey of Canada, 1936) p. 34 (hereafter Alcock, "Athabasca").
- <sup>60</sup> RNWMP, Vol. 1901, file 130, part 8 and Vol. 1920, file 130, part 36. Alcock, "Athabasca" p. 34.
- <sup>61</sup> EMJ, 8 September 1917, p. 452.
- <sup>62</sup> SPP, 1924.

## BOOK REVIEWS

SEEKING A BALANCE: THE UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN, 1907-1982. By Michael Hayden. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984. Pp. xix, 379. Illustrations. \$24.95.

At the outset I should declare my "conflict of interest." I am responsible for three books on various aspects of the history of the University of Saskatchewan; the Notes to *Seeking a Balance* indicate that these books have been used extensively and accurately. In addition, the body of the work includes eleven references to me, all of them friendly. Further, Professor Hayden says that in the last chapter of his book ("Study and Service") and in the appendix on research he has done "a minor updating of King's work"; this would be of *The First Fifty* (1959) and *Extending the Boundaries* (1966) which are mainly about teaching, scholarship and research, and public service at the University of Saskatchewan.

Thus having cleared the way, Hayden proceeds to do what has never been done before: to write what is essentially an institutional or political history of the University. With scrupulous fairness and objectivity he traces the development of its governance from the beginning in 1907 to the significantly revised University Act of 1974, concentrating on the people and events mainly responsible for the changes which have occurred over the years. He notes half a dozen features which made for the distinctiveness of the University of Saskatchewan in its first twenty years, and then shows what has come of these in the subsequent half-century. These distinctive features were (1) minority representation of the Saskatchewan government on the University's board of management — the University was to be a state-supported but not a state-controlled academic establishment; (2) insistence that there should be only one degree-granting university in the Province; (3) the domination of the University's development by one man: its first president, Dr. W. C. Murray; (4) a strong commitment to serving the needs of Saskatchewan people; (5) emphasis on the natural sciences rather than on the humanities and social subjects; (6) emphasis on the professional colleges.

The last two — emphasis on science and on the professional colleges — have remained constants in University history. So too, in the main, has the tradition of public service, although Hayden notes with regret the reduction of Extension services as more and more of the University's resources have been devoted to research projects. Still, he says towards the end of his book, "the faculty of the University of Saskatchewan has continued to provide service to the community." (p. 295)

Certainly he is right in emphasizing that the early University was made in Dr. Murray's image; but was it a good thing that the University in its first thirty years should have been completely under the thumb of a benevolent autocrat? The first President was so neurotically sensitive not only to criticism but even to any question of his decisions that for so-called disloyalty he fired (in 1919) professors whose only proven error was to abstain from voting on a motion of confidence in the President. He kept both the academic and the private lives of the faculty under constant surveillance, and he had the University Council of Academics so cowed that, as Hayden writes, "in the Murray days only a few dared speak out against the president." (p. 219) His acts of personal kindness were numerous, but when he retired in 1937 the faculty payroll was such a shambles of caprice, favoritism, and

idiosyncrasy that it took fifteen years to correct all the anomalies; the University did not have a rational salary scale until the mid-fifties.

A single university for Saskatchewan was simply good sense in Dr. Murray's time during which student enrolment never exceeded 2,000. Twenty five years later, however, as the Province's population climbed towards a million and as University student enrolment passed the 5,000 mark and seemed likely to reach 10,000 (as it did eventually) there was a strong case for a second university — unless, of course, you think that big is beautiful. Even Dr. Murray, lifelong champion of the one-university concept, conceded that a second university would come — when we could afford it, he said. Well, we could afford it by 1960, and somewhere about that time plans should have been made for an independent degree-granting liberal arts college in Regina, including appropriate satellites like schools of education and social work and excluding the duplication of very expensive schools like engineering and medicine. This would have saved years of bitterness and backbiting later on and the vain expenditure of much time, energy, and money before the University of Regina was established by legislative fiat in 1974. The government "intervened with a political solution to the problems that the academics did not seem able to solve for themselves." (p. 272)

I agree with Professor Hayden that ideally the state ought not to have a preponderant voice in the governance of the University, but there is little hard evidence, so far, that the composition of the Board of Governors and the mode of its selection have had much to do with the good and welfare of the University of Saskatchewan. What has been significant in its ups and downs is something that cannot be legislated: the ability of successive presidents to win the confidence of the government of their day. President Murray frequently bypassed or ignored his Board of Governors, but he never made the mistake of alienating the politicians. He worked with them harmoniously, whether they were Liberals or Conservatives, for thirty years which included what Hayden calls "The Golden Age of the University: The 1920's." If there was a second golden period in the life of the University, it was during W. P. Thompson's presidency from 1949-1959, when T. C. Douglas's government funded the University generously, both as to operating grants and capital expenditures, and when not a single professor complained that his academic freedom had been abridged or even threatened. The government trusted W. P. Thompson. For his part, Thompson once said publicly that it was easy to be a university president if you had the luck to deal with a Minister of Education like W. S. Lloyd and a Premier like T. C. Douglas. Lloyd and Douglas would have liked to be on similarly good terms with W.P.'s predecessor, the Reverend J. S. Thomson, but it is very difficult to cooperate with a person who combines administrative incompetence with ecclesiastical arrogance. In 1967 Premier Ross Thatcher made rude noises which frightened many academics into thinking that he was about to gobble up the University; but President Spinks handled Thatcher with quiet and patient diplomacy, and prevented any serious damage to either financial support or academic freedom. Again on the other side, Professor Hayden's well documented account of the events leading to sweeping amendments to the University Act (in 1974) leaves no doubt that President Spinks had lost the confidence of Premier Blakeney's government. In summary, if universities continue to expect large dollops of money from the public treasury, their presidents will have to show that they are responsible managers and prudent spenders.

The attractiveness of this very readable and engrossing history of the

University of Saskatchewan is enhanced by many well-selected illustrations, a useful bibliography, and a good index.

Carlyle King

FROM PRAIRIE ROOTS: THE REMARKABLE STORY OF THE SASKATCHEWAN WHEAT POOL. By Garry Lawrence Fairbairn. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1984. Pp. xiv, 318. \$19.95.

In the Preface to this book, the author makes two disclaimers: this is not, he says, a "comprehensive, academically definitive history" of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, nor is it an "official history" either. The disclaimers are valid: in place of a consistently argued thesis about intra-organizational democracy for example, there are instead only recurring references to the Pool's life-long concern to promote delegate democracy, while throughout the book it is clear that this is very much one man's interpretation of a single organization's development. But *From Prairie Roots* is nonetheless a more substantial contribution to the study of prairie, and Canadian, history than Mr. Fairbairn modestly allows.

The Pool's origins, its initial success, the later trials and tribulations, and its modern renaissance are part of Saskatchewan folklore. But as in folklore it is the episodes, the unfolding of the story, and not the unity of the tale itself, which attract attention. The titles of this book's first five chapters ("Prelude," "Overture," "Triumph," "Collapse," and "Depression"), which bring the Pool's history down to 1939, suggest, erroneously, a similar approach. However, *From Prairie Roots* is not another account of the Pool's struggle against and victory over adversity. That story, of course, is there but so is much more. The author's major achievement is to describe with economical prose an array of characters and a multitude of local, national and international events without sacrificing either subtle differences among personalities or the complexity of the situations they faced.

The highlights of the Pool's history have tended to cast shadows on all but a few prominent individuals, and even some of the best known seem by now more mythic than real. Fairbairn's account restores old reputations while at the same time acknowledging new ones. There are a dozen or so profiles, some more extensive than others, on Sapiro, McPhail, Brouillette, McNaughton, Wesson, Gibbings, Turner, Robertson, Sproule, Wilson, Milliken, Mumford, McFarland and Waldron. In light of the achievements of these men, and one woman, it is remarkable how little has been written about them. But if balance is restored to the leaders, there is equal treatment for the workers as well. Pool fieldmen, who the author designates as "agents of change," are lauded as a group (and in some instances as individuals) for their labours in making the Pool a success: "In the 1937-38 fiscal year, for example, the sixteen fieldmen were at: 372 Pool district or subdistrict conventions; 1788 general public meetings; 1138 Pool film shows; and 747 Pool Committee meetings. On average, that meant the small field staff was holding 11 meetings every day of the week. All told, they were at meetings attended by 223,919 people — and in addition made visits to 16,275 farmers, 6,028 businessmen and 4,909 elevators." No wonder that with the mobility which access to a car gave them, the fieldmen possessed latent and, at times, not-so-latent political influence. Fairbairn notes but does not investigate the disposition of Pool delegates in the 1940s to support the CCF.

In fact, there is minimal discussion of partisan politics as opposed to



government policies and the effect of the former on the Pool's development. R. B. Bennett, J. G. Gardiner, John Diefenbaker and Otto Lang are among the most prominent politicians to appear in these pages and this book must be among the first to evaluate Otto Lang's significant influence for over a decade on the grain industry. As well, it is surely the first to treat his reforms sympathetically, in terms of their goal and the procedures followed. An academically oriented study might have examined more closely the relationship between the grain industry and the federal government. For as told here, the story of the Pool's relationship to government is one of success and of failure. The important question to ask is what accounts for the different results? How, in other words, is this staple industry to get what it wants from government? Starting from the proposition that ministers responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board have been neither knaves nor fools and that all of them have wanted the farmers' votes, how does one explain the vast range of policies the Pool has had to confront over its long history? *From Prairie Roots* is probably not the book to provide the answers, and its emphasis on personalities, all of whom possessed a strong regional perspective in the sense that Canada's prairie wheat country constitutes its own region, ensures that it does not have the breadth of analysis to find them.

But it is the strength of this study that these are the kinds of questions the reader is led to consider. For the clarity of the narrative as well as the precision with which it describes the choices open to Pool leaders and to their constituency of grain farmers make it so. *From Prairie Roots* gives credit to Canadian agriculture where credit is due. The Pool's persistence after the second world war in developing rapeseed into a profitable industry testifies to the commitment of an unusual organization in a capitalist economy, but is also a reminder that prairie farmers must continue to look to their own devices if they are to prosper. The rapeseed story, the author reports, is "high tech R & D but because it's related to agriculture, it's not glamorous."

The achievements of Canadian agriculture in war and peace have never received the recognition they deserve. As an industry (and for many farmers as a way of life) agriculture has required articulate defenders. Often these have been in the form of strong federal ministers, sometimes in the form of protest political parties but, as is made clear in this book, the most constant advocate of all has been the Pool.

David E. Smith

RIEL AND THE REBELLION OF 1885 RECONSIDERED. By Thomas Flanagan. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1983. Pp. ix, 177. \$19.95 (Cloth), \$12.95 (Paper).

We never tire of Louis Riel. Every generation of Canadians seems to find it necessary to review and pass judgment on his deeds. One of the most prominent Riel scholars today is Thomas Flanagan, a political scientist at the University of Calgary, who has published two edited volumes of Riel's diaries and poetry, a monograph on his mental state, a forthcoming collection of Riel's writings in 1884-5 (one of five volumes in the University of Alberta's Riel project), numerous articles on Riel's career, and now this argument — rather like a debator's case — concerning Riel's place in the history of the 1885 uprising. This volume has provoked stormy scenes at several academic meetings, chiefly because it attempts to denigrate Riel's contribution to the metis community but also because it contains some ill-chosen

words — “an uncoordinated spasm of murder and pillage” for example — on Indian participation in the uprising. The book is less substantial than the fuss might suggest.

Flanagan follows the path set out by Donald Creighton a generation ago. Like Creighton, he believes that the government's land policy was reasonable, if a little slow in implementation, and that the metis were uncooperative, even stubborn, in adjusting to the new order. Like Creighton, he argues that Riel himself was motivated by self-interest in provoking the crisis and, therefore, that his role did not arise “solely, or even chiefly, from disinterested idealism.” Flanagan then breaks new ground by demonstrating that Riel was promulgating an elaborate theory of metis aboriginal land rights. In this striking new perception Flanagan demonstrates convincingly that Riel believed in aboriginal ownership of western lands; in Riel's scheme, Canada was obliged to extinguish Indian and metis title to the North-West Territories. Riel proposed that the Manitoba Act provided an appropriate formula for the metis claim because, in its 1.4 million acre grant, it returned one-seventh of provincial lands to the metis. Riel used the metis as “pawns in his own game,” according to Flanagan, and thereby misled their protest movement. Like Creighton, Flanagan believes that the legal proceedings in Riel's treason trial were fair and Macdonald's decision not to commute the death sentence appropriate. Given that Riel truly committed treason and was convicted fairly, Flanagan concludes, a posthumous pardon would be an empty gesture. In each of the three main sections — administration of lands policy, the underlying motivation of Riel, and the judicial process — Flanagan supplements the information formerly available in the Riel literature. In the analysis of Riel's theory of aboriginal rights, he has picked out a significant new thread in native-white relations in the nineteenth century. But the book is unsatisfying, in the end; like Creighton's revisionist interpretation in the 1950's, it apologizes for bureaucratic inflexibility and inertia, adopts an unsympathetic approach to Riel, and takes a narrowly legalistic view of Macdonald's refusal to commute the death sentence.

The new material on Riel's political thought and the administration of public lands is insufficient to sustain another volume on 1885. One misses the political dimensions of the era: Riel, the millenarian leader, required followers; what were Gabriel Dumont and the hundred-odd metis thinking when they permitted Riel to dupe them? Violence was not the rule in the North-West Territories in 1885; was the path of armed rebellion chosen lightly? Flanagan dismisses the issue of madness as a “fruitless non-question;” but was Riel in any shape to exert continuous effective leadership over the community in the spring of 1885 or did he abandon that responsibility as he succumbed to visions of another world? Was intransigence an appropriate stance for the nation's leader or was Prime Minister Macdonald driven by a vindictiveness greater than Riel's? This volume is too brief to rewrite the story of 1885 and, indeed, too brief to make its smaller case. It is clearly written and nicely argued but, in the end, it remains three interesting scholarly articles — on public lands, aboriginal rights and the judicial process — rather than the definitive new treatment of the North-West uprising.

Gerald Friesen

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