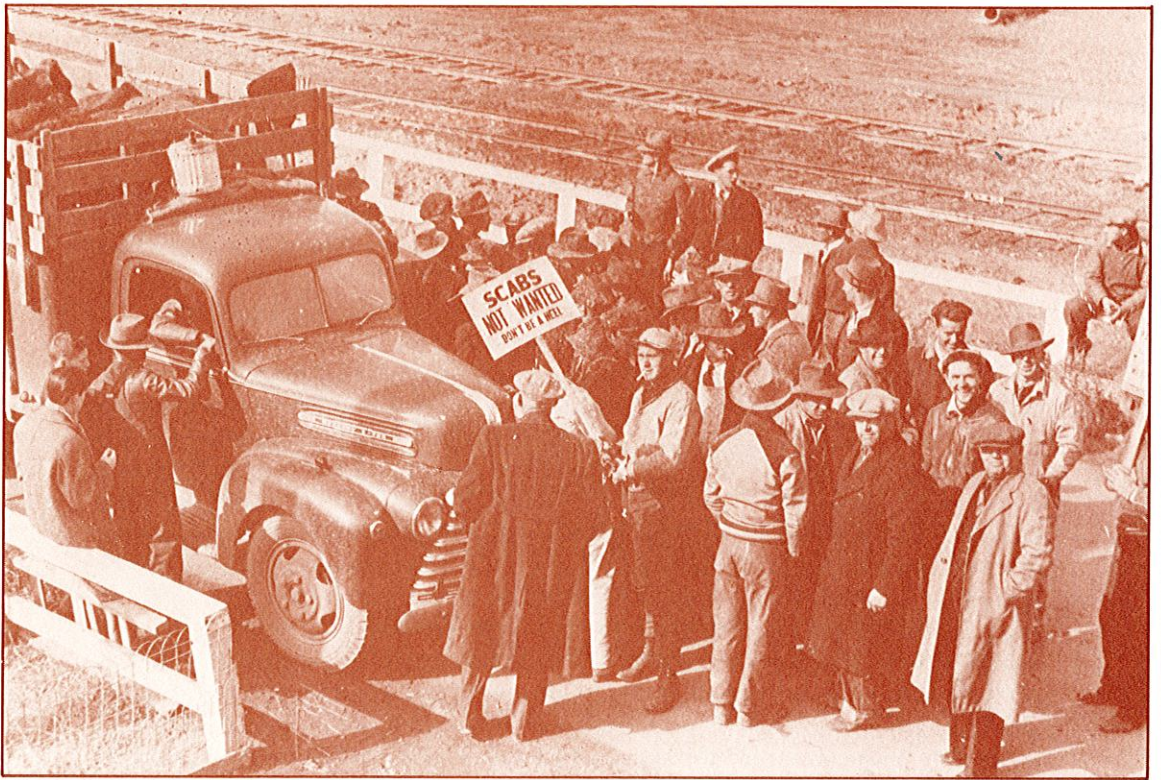


# Saskatchewan History

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**Parity Prices and the Farmers' Strike.**

**Jack Douglas and Saskatchewan's Highways.**

**Battleford During the Rebellion.**



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COVER PHOTOGRAPH: Farm strike pickets blocking the road leading to the stockyards in Saskatoon 27 September 1946. Saskatchewan Archives Board, Photograph No. S-B829.

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# PARITY PRICES AND THE FARMERS' STRIKE

*By D'Arcy Hande*

**I**n the 1930's the prairie farmers were the victims of massive drought and economic depression. Out of this hardship grew the protest movements and parties of which so much has been written. A less commonly known response to the agricultural collapse of the Thirties is the willingness of farmers to adopt economic reforms not seriously considered before in Canada. One of these proposals was parity prices. The parity price issue mushroomed in the mid-1930's, captivated the farm population for the next decade, was debated hotly among farmers and non-farmers alike, precipitated a farmers' strike in 1946, and then declined as rapidly as it had arisen.

The idea of parity prices for farm products basically revolves around the need for the farmer to have a stable income from the produce he sells, which will allow him to meet his operating costs and sustain a comfortable standard of living, regardless of the fluctuations in market prices. The concept has been discussed in the United States since the mid-19th Century and is still debated today. In 1922 George Peek and Hugh Johnson published a brief entitled "Equality for Agriculture," elaborating on their definition of parity, which was widely distributed among American farm organizations and government officials. The brief called for the United States government to set a "fair exchange value" on all farm products "which bears the same ratio to [the] current general price index as a ten-year pre-war average crop bore to [the] average general price index for the same period."<sup>1</sup> The proposals were seized upon by legislators soon after their publication, and Senator C.L. McNary and Representative G.N. Haugen tried unsuccessfully to have bills approved based on parity principles as outlined by Peek and Johnson. With the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932, parity prices were given new hope. The Agricultural Adjustment Act was passed in 1933, incorporating the parity idea, and American farmers gave it widespread support.<sup>2</sup>

The Depression conditions in Canada were such that farmers here soon took notice of the Agricultural Adjustment Act (or Triple-A, as it came to be known). Already in 1934 the University of Saskatchewan College of Agriculture was looking at the Act and the significance of parity prices for prairie agriculture.<sup>3</sup> In 1936 officials of the United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) (UFC) met with representatives of the University and, in confidential discussions, were convinced of the necessity for and feasibility of parity prices. The University researchers had decided that the parity price for wheat was actually \$1.06, compared with the 87½¢ per bushel of No. 1 Northern wheat offered by the newly re-established Canadian Wheat Board.<sup>4</sup>



Also in 1936, Canadian farmers learned of government action in New Zealand which looked promising with regard to stabilizing farm income. The Labour Government, elected to power there in 1935, passed the Primary Products Marketing Act, insuring the farmer "an income in accordance with the time, skill, energy and experience used by him in producing his products."<sup>5</sup>

In September 1936, the United Farmers asked for the Canadian government to replace the optional Wheat Board by a Board "with full power to take delivery of grain at all times irrespective of the market price on a basis of a fair minimum price." But this was to be only a temporary measure. As a permanent solution to the low prices, they recommended that Aaron Sapiro, the legendary proponent of the wheat pool, be invited to return to Canada to establish a compulsory grain marketing organization with growers' control. If the government did not heed these proposals, the UFC would ask its members to take immediate action through a non-delivery strike.<sup>6</sup> No response came from the Dominion government and very little progress was made towards a strike. It is significant, though, that almost immediately after the adoption by the farmers' union of the parity price idea, the use of the strike weapon was threatened. For the next several years the two seemed to be almost inseparable in the minds of the United Farmers. Late in 1936 the UFC annual convention discarded the cooperative marketing scheme and passed a resolution favouring the establishment of parity prices directly through government legislation.<sup>7</sup>

Considering the overall agricultural situation in Canada at the time, it is not surprising that Saskatchewan farmers should have accepted the innovative parity price ideas and proposed the more radical strike action to make those ideas a reality. Farm income was reduced everywhere, but nowhere so drastically as in Saskatchewan. The drought had decimated the wheat yields which provided such an overwhelming portion of farm income. Even when prices for farm produce improved, the farmers here had no produce to sell. This was most vividly shown in 1937 when two-thirds of farm families in Saskatchewan were considered destitute and there were fears of famine. Relief costs amounted to 63% over and above the income of the provincial and municipal governments.<sup>8</sup>

Most prairie farms had been operational for a comparatively short time. Debts from the period of expansion in the 1920's were left unpaid and were added to by the loans of the Thirties. In some years net income was a minus quantity. Farm machinery and buildings deteriorated with no hope for improvement until some profit was made.<sup>9</sup> Agricultural indebtedness peaked in the disaster of 1937 when it reached \$806 million.<sup>10</sup>

After 1937 the wheat growers' luck seemed to improve. Yields on the 1938 and 1939 crops increased markedly, and at last it seemed that some much needed cash would be coming in. But there were no export markets. Many European countries had actually placed embargoes on wheat and were paying their domestic farmers as much as two and one-half times the Liverpool price.<sup>11</sup> The Canadian Wheat Board, faced with unsold surpluses, reduced the price offered for wheat to 80¢ for No. 1 Northern at Fort William in 1938-39, and to 70¢ the crop year after that.

The western farmers were up in arms! In the fall of 1938 the annual convention of the UFC passed resolutions demanding that the federal government establish parity prices for all farm produce before the following April 1, 1939. If the demands were not met, the UFC would ask all members to hold farmer produce off



the market and request the provincial government to declare a moratorium on the seeding of wheat in 1939.<sup>12</sup> The parity price for wheat was estimated at \$1.05.<sup>13</sup> The Board of Directors issued the following press statement:

This convention has formulated a definite policy. The delegates demand a parity price for farm products, and an enquiry into the practicability of an independent Western Dominion within the British empire. The Executive will carry out the mandate of the convention.

A parity prices campaign slogan was adopted by the Directors:

Use            Brain  
Parity Price . . .    Your            . . . Secession?<sup>14</sup>  
                          Hold            Grain

Response to this militant talk by the UFC was disappointing. Nevertheless, certain sections of the farm population were in favour of the proposed strike action, even outside the confines of the UFC membership. One reply came from H.R. Boutillier, vice-president of the Willingdon Farmers' Union in northern Alberta. He explained that a group of twenty local farmers' unions had been organized in response to the call of the UFC for a non-delivery strike. They were disaffected with the conservatism and political machinations of the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA), and were anxious to co-operate with Saskatchewan farmers in a strike in 1939.

Drastic conditions call for drastic action, and no one need be called a "Red" who advocates taking drastic action.

I sincerely hope that if your organization decides that it is necessary to adopt in the future methods not used before, that we farmers here in Alberta will have an organization with the backbone to co-operate with yours to the limit.<sup>15</sup>

Even though the UFC was reluctant to antagonize the prestigious UFA by endorsing the more radical farmers around Willingdon, these enthusiasts would not be held back. Soon the United Farmers of Canada (Alberta Section) was organized.<sup>16</sup> The manifesto of the new farmers' union declared that its aim was to work in harmony with farmers in Manitoba and Saskatchewan in their "fight for decent prices and general economic justice for farmers in this Dominion."

We aim to foster and promote farmers co-operative enterprises . . . We realize that we have made mistakes in the past in our co-operative enterprises, chiefly due to inexperience and tremendous opposition but we realize that only by working together, buying and selling together, the same way as the farmers in Denmark and Sweden are doing, can we do anything to achieve our economic salvation.<sup>17</sup>

Clearly, although the UFC (Alberta Section) was prepared to take militant action in concert with their counterpart in Saskatchewan, no definite objective was distinguishable. Whereas the UFC (Saskatchewan Section) would strike to obtain parity prices on the United States or New Zealand model, the UFC in Alberta was talking of economic reform based on greater support of the farmers' co-operatives as in the Scandinavian countries.

By the autumn of 1939 both UFC sections had mounted intensive campaigns to promote parity prices and the use of a farmers' strike. In late August the secretary of the Alberta Section sent a telegram to the Saskatchewan Section urging that they both call a strike. "Seventy cents peg price for wheat for this fall with no drastic protest means fifty cents per bushel on wheat for 1940 crop," he argued.<sup>18</sup> But Frank Eliason, the secretary in Saskatchewan, had to reply that "the rank and



file throughout the province has not been very enthusiastic about it," and advised that consideration of a strike should be postponed.<sup>19</sup>

Within a few days of this exchange, Canada declared war. Strategy on the part of the farmers had to change drastically. While the United Farmers in Saskatchewan readily acknowledged that strike action was "altogether out of the question," they called upon the government to restrict profiteering by industrialists and allow the price of wheat to rise to a parity level.<sup>20</sup> In this they were in agreement with the three provincial wheat pools.<sup>21</sup>

Unlike World War I, there was not to be an immediate increase in demand for Canadian wheat in this War. In fact, the few European markets were now cut off and the British at first were purchasing cheaper wheat in Argentina.<sup>22</sup> Bumper crops in 1939, 1940, and again in 1942 were to aggravate the surplus situation from previous years and keep open-market prices low.<sup>23</sup> Other types of farm products managed to hold their own, but surpluses were a problem in marketing them as well.<sup>24</sup>

In March 1941 the federal government announced policies aimed at reducing wheat acreage. A quota system was imposed for the next crop year based on 65% of the acreage of the previous year. In addition, subsidies were offered to those who converted their wheat acreage to summerfallow or to coarse grains and hay.<sup>25</sup> This effected a significant shift in production trends on the Prairies to livestock and served to enhance the traditional agricultural practices of Ontario and Quebec. The great demand for pork products in Britain and livestock of all kinds in the United States readily absorbed the increased production and actually pushed prices upward in 1941. Nevertheless, the advances of prices for farm produce were not equal to the upward spiral for other commodities, and the danger of inflation loomed. On 18 October 1941 Prime Minister King announced that, effective December 1st, the Wartime Prices and Trade Board would impose price ceilings on most products.<sup>26</sup> The price of No. 1 Northern wheat was later set at 82¾¢ per bushel.<sup>27</sup> Thereafter the government maintained a policy of subsidizing necessary agricultural production while keeping consumer prices under control. This generally worked to the advantage of dairy and livestock producers, but inhibited former wheat growers who were forced, temporarily at least, to accept lower prices for their product, or to diversify their traditional farming practices.

Although farmers in Alberta and Saskatchewan had shelved the strike weapon for the time being, their demand for parity prices persisted. In fact, the debate on this issue widened considerably in the War years, and parity ideas enjoyed an unprecedented vogue in Canada. At the annual meeting of the Canadian Chamber of Agriculture (CCA) in 1940 the principle of parity was endorsed unanimously, and a slate of desired parity prices was endorsed.<sup>28</sup> The CCA's successor, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA), reaffirmed its support in a modified form in 1941.<sup>29</sup> The North-West Line Elevators Association, representing private elevator companies, made a presentation to the government in which they deplored the extremely low price set on wheat under the Wartime Prices and Trade Board and said a mere equitable parity price would be \$1.02 for No. 1 Northern.<sup>30</sup> J.H. Wesson, president of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, went on radio in March 1940 and declared.



The Wheat Pools will continue to fight for the wheat farmer and for agriculture generally. We apologize to no one when we say that parity prices should be paid . . . . I would sound a note of warning and say that if arrangements are not made so that price levels can be secured in Western Canada then its primary producers and its business men . . . are doomed.<sup>31</sup>

The federal government had studied the idea of parity and was doubtful that it was a practical solution to Canada's agricultural problems. J.B. Rutherford of the Agricultural Branch, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, was openly sceptical that parity could be attained in an economy so dependent on agricultural exports. He also flinched at the great bureaucracy that would be necessary to implement parity, and felt that its adoption might tend to fossilize advances in farming technology and marketing.<sup>32</sup> With the pressures of War and the scepticism of civil servants, it appeared unlikely that parity prices would be implemented, at least for the time being.

In March 1941 a proposal was made by the Wheat Pool committee at Abernethy, Saskatchewan, that a delegation of farmers undertake an On-to-Ottawa March.<sup>33</sup> Nothing materialized of this suggestion at the time, but at the end of January 1942, in response to the price controls instituted by the federal government, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool organized a delegation of four hundred farmers and business men and women which left in two special trains for Ottawa carrying a petition signed by 185,000 people. The first two items of the petition demanded,

1. That the government recognize and accept the principle of parity prices for all agricultural products.
2. That no price ceiling should be established on agricultural commodities below parity levels which may be established by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics.<sup>34</sup>

The petitioners objected to the low price ceilings and, using the Triple-A formula in the United States and 1926 as a base period, they claimed the proper price of wheat should actually be \$1.00 per bushel.<sup>35</sup>

The same day the delegation met the cabinet, February 2nd, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture made its annual presentation to the government and they supported the delegation's requests.<sup>36</sup>

The demonstration of support for parity prices by the farmers at Ottawa gave the issue much publicity in the House of Commons. Most of the criticism of the government's agricultural policy in this regard came from the western Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) members of parliament. P.E. Wright, the CCF member for Melfort, grilled the government for its lack of a "balanced, equitable programme for agriculture," and contrasted this with the well-ordered programme in the United States.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, Hon. James G. Gardiner, Minister of Agriculture, claimed that the equivalent of parity prices was already being paid for hogs and dairy products, although he did not mention beef and field crops.<sup>38</sup> Speaking to the farmers' delegation, he declared parity to be the long-term objective of the government.<sup>39</sup>

Apparently influenced by the delegation, the government announced on March 9th that, although it could not encourage an increase in wheat production, the initial export price of No. 1 Northern for the 1942-43 crop year would be increased from 70 to 90 cents per bushel. It was also announced



that a floor price would be established on coarse grains to be used for live-stock feed.<sup>40</sup> The CCF tried to have the price of wheat marketed through the Wheat Board raised to the parity level of \$1.00, but this was defeated by the Liberal majority.<sup>41</sup>

By 1943 the wheat surplus in Canada had been reduced to the point that increased demand in this country and the United States was actually forcing up the price. In September the open market price reached \$1.23¼ for No. 1 Northern. Deliveries to the Wheat Board, which was offering only 90¢ per bushel, had stopped. The government was in danger of not being able to fulfil its export commitments. On September 27th the Winnipeg Grain Exchange was closed, and the Canadian Wheat Board was declared the sole purchasing agency for wheat. The initial payment for No. 1 Northern was pegged at \$1.25 a bushel.<sup>42</sup>

The farm population seems to have been somewhat placated by the new Wheat Board arrangements, as they now focussed little concerted pressure on the government. But by now parity prices was a political issue. The CCF party in the House of Commons went stalwartly to bat for parity prices. Unfortunately, their definition of parity remained confused, and this uncertainty allowed the Minister of Agriculture to sidestep the question.<sup>43</sup>

Late in the 1944 session, the government introduced the Agricultural Prices Support Bill, legislation designed to facilitate the transition of agriculture from the war to a peacetime economy. The Bill provided for an Agricultural Prices Support Board, the objectives of which were outlined as follows:

In prescribing prices . . . the Board shall endeavour to ensure adequate and stable returns for agriculture by promoting orderly adjustment from war to peace conditions and shall endeavour to secure a fair relationship between the returns from agriculture and those from other occupations.<sup>44</sup>

This seemed to be a "vague but highly flexible approach to the parity concept," although it prescribed no formula as existed in the United States Agricultural Adjustment Act.<sup>45</sup> Thus, while the Bill raised the hopes of Canadian parity price advocates and suspicions that it was just a ploy of the Liberals in the face of an upcoming election, its passage effectively defused the parity issue in Parliament.

By 1945 the Canadian Federation of Agriculture had also shifted its emphasis in agricultural prices policy. In their annual meeting with the federal cabinet in February 1945, the CFA asked that floor prices be instituted permanently under the Agricultural Prices Support Board, when the Board became operational after the War. The Federation also advocated that a price support program based on subsidies be adopted by the government.<sup>46</sup> But even a year later, the secretary of the CFA insisted that the parity program, as it was in effect in the States, despite its shortcomings, could prove to be a valuable basis for Canadian policies.<sup>47</sup>

When the War did end, the Alberta and Saskatchewan farmers' unions were still staunchly behind the parity issue as the solution to their income problems. The United Farmers of Canada (Alberta Section) had in 1942 incorporated under a different name, the Alberta Farmers' Union (AFU), and parity was explicitly included in their Constitution as an objective of the Union.<sup>48</sup> Shortly after the end of the War, the AFU and the UFC (Saskat-



chewan Section) issued their *Farmers' Action Program*. The *Program* pointed to the Triple-A legislation in the U.S.A. and the higher prices paid for farm products in Canada during wartime as proof that parity prices were possible. The farmers also felt that with the removal of price controls and support mechanisms during the post-war period, they were in danger of again slipping into a depression like that of the 1930's which, they said, was "caused almost entirely by a lack of Parity Prices"<sup>49</sup> In September 1945 the UFC Board of Directors called for \$1.55 per bushel of No. 1 Northern wheat as the parity price that should be offered by the Wheat Board; this was 30¢ above the current level.<sup>50</sup>

1946 was a year of stress and anxiety for farmers in Canada. Along with the removal of price ceilings on the goods they had to buy, they were also faced with the withdrawal of many of the subsidies that had been paid on their products during the War. The CFA made representations to the federal government expressing the concern of farmers in this regard.<sup>51</sup>

The wheat farmers were even more anxious about the removal of controls, and no less so because of federal government actions regarding wheat export policies. The government had, even before the conclusion of the war, attempted to reach an international agreement with the wheat-producing countries on the pricing and marketing of exports, but this had met with no success. As a result, Canada had entered into negotiations with the United Kingdom for a long-term bilateral agreement on wheat exports to Britain. The last stage of these negotiations was at Ottawa in June 1946.<sup>52</sup> In the course of the talks, the UFC sent a telegram to J.G. Gardiner to "urge that in all negotiations for disposal of farm commodities parity prices be adhered to. Available information indicates that parity price for wheat is now \$1.86 per bushel basis No. 1 Northern F.O.B. Fort William."<sup>53</sup>

In the coming weeks wheat farmers became increasingly agitated over their uncertain prospects. Reports of strike talk were now being printed in the newspapers, and both farmers' unions in Alberta and Saskatchewan were gearing up for a showdown. By the beginning of July the Alberta Farmers' Union issued a pamphlet to their locals entitled, "Instructions and Guidance on Organizing Strike Action for Parity Prices." While the pamphlet gave no definition of parity prices as such, its implication was that unless they were adopted the agricultural economy would slip back into depression and modern farming techniques and living standards would be an unattainable dream.<sup>54</sup>

The UFC Board was not yet convinced that strike action was necessary, but sympathized with the frustration of farmers generally. Thus they decided to begin a campaign of protest, and President F.T. Appleby began a series of speeches to UFC district conventions. An editorial in the United Farmers' newsletter urged members to make their dissatisfaction known:

Come out in open support of a parity price policy of your farm union. Parity price is simply asking for common justice. Parity Price will prevent a return to the hungry thirties. Parity Prices will keep labor employed. Parity Prices are reasonable prices — Parity Prices mean prosperity for the agriculturist and prosperity for the agriculturist means prosperity for All.<sup>55</sup>



**FARMERS'**  
**NON-DELIVERY**  
**STRIKE**  
**IS NOW ON**

**WE DEMAND**  
**PARITY PRICES**  
**NOW!**

**REMEMBER the 30's!**  
*If we fail* **It Will Happen Again**

**LET THE FARMERS SPEAK**  
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Or, as one UFC organizer put it,

"We farmers have been milking the hind teat for too long!" — every one agreed with him — "Then it's high time we organized and stood our ground for PARITY." All the farmers we called joined up.<sup>56</sup>

The final blow to the government's credibility in the eyes of the wheat growers was delivered on July 25 when the terms of the new wheat agreement with the United Kingdom were announced to the House of Commons. The contract was for the next four years, beginning on 1 August 1946. It fixed the price of wheat to be sold to Britain for the first two years at \$1.55. The government also continued the compulsory Canadian Wheat Board with the minimum price at \$1.35, and set the domestic price of wheat at only \$1.25 per bushel, "in the interests of general price control." Considering that the going open-market price was around \$2.00, one can understand the outrage of prairie farmers. The Hon. J.A. MacKinnon, Minister of Trade and Commerce, explained the low price on the British contract as a preferable disadvantage in light of the guarantee of a long-term market.<sup>57</sup>

In August it was decided that a joint delegation of five AFU and UFC representatives should travel to Ottawa to present the farmers' case directly to the government. A list of proposals was drawn up which was subsequently presented in Ottawa, the most important of which were the following:

1. The immediate establishment of a permanent fact-finding board to determine parity prices, personnel of such board to be appointed equally by farmers' direct membership organization, labor, business and government.
2. Prices for all farm products to be set on a basis of parity as soon as such basis can be established by the fact-finding board . . . .
3. Farm prices until parity is established:
  - (a) Floor price for wheat \$1.55 per bushel, basis No. 1, Fort William, for all wheat produced;
  - (b) Other farm products to be maintained at present levels;
  - (c) Prices for all goods which affect farm production costs to be reinstated as of September 10, 1945;
  - (d) Abolition of the present domestic price system on wheat whereby the Canadian public is subsidized at the expense of the wheat producer.<sup>58</sup>

All these points hinged on the first proposal, the formation of a fact-finding board on parity prices.

When the delegation arrived in Ottawa, Agriculture Minister Gardiner was away in Europe. They had discussions with J.A. MacKinnon and briefly with J.G. Taggart, chairman of the Agricultural Prices Support Board. The former was generally in favour of the creation of the fact-finding board, and the latter believed that his already-existing Board could well undertake the task. But neither was ready to commit the government in this regard, and they explained that no decision could be made until Mr. Gardiner returned nearly three weeks later. Frustrated at the lack of results, the delegates telephoned reports of the situation to their headquarters, and the strike was on.<sup>59</sup>

The Alberta Farmers' Union had already announced that its 20,000 members would begin a 30-day non-delivery strike effective September 6th, and the last-minute negotiations in Ottawa changed nothing.<sup>60</sup> The next day, the UFC office asked its members to follow in the strike, in sympathy with the AFU cause, but it was not until September 16th that the Directors



gathered and formally called the strike in Saskatchewan.<sup>61</sup> By the end of the month the UFC claimed that 750 districts in Saskatchewan were on strike, about one-fifth of which had no UFC local lodge.<sup>62</sup> The strength of the United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) was quoted as being between 33,000 and 80,000 members, the former counting only voluntary memberships, and the latter reflecting the UFC's claim over farmers enrolled through the membership of their rural municipal councils.<sup>63</sup>

Public reaction to the farmers' strike was varied, but generally negative. The Canadian Federation of Agriculture gave one of the earliest and most forceful responses from their annual meeting in Charlottetown, PEI. A statement from the meeting wished to make it "emphatically clear that it had no official connection with, nor had it endorsed in any way" the strike called by the AFU.<sup>64</sup> Following this line, the provincial federations of agriculture in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario, representing co-operative and other farm organizations, all denounced the strike. The United Farmers of Alberta executive, representing a larger and more conservative membership than the AFU, passed a resolution stating that strike action was "contrary to any principles on which the UFA has acted in the past" and therefore could "give no encouragement or support to the strike."<sup>65</sup> The Manitoba Pool Elevators president called the farmers' union demand for a fact-finding board on parity prices "absurd" and stated that the Triple-A program in the United States was pricing some commodities "completely out of the market."<sup>66</sup>

Perhaps the most negative response came in circles not closely connected with the farming scene. Fearful of any revolutionary discord in the cold-war world, P.M. Richards wrote in *Saturday Night*;

There is no question of the good citizenship of Alberta farmers, yet their marketing strike at this time will harm their country by increasing the general feeling of unrest, particularly, of course, in the areas which may find themselves short of food if the strike is prolonged . . .

Though the striking farmers comprise only about one-fifth of all the farmers of the province, they or their sympathizers are reported to have used violence to keep non-strikers' produce from the market. It would be interesting to know if the strikers acted on their own initiative or if inspiration came from elsewhere. Though they are certainly doing so unwittingly, the striking food-producers are now giving "aid and comfort to the enemy."<sup>67</sup>

The farmers on strike received official support from the Alberta Wheat Pool, the Canadian Congress of Labour, the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, the Labor Party of Manitoba, and the Saskatchewan government.<sup>68</sup>

The grassroots response to the farmers' strike was very encouraging for the UFC and AFU. The strike was most effective in the parkland belt of northern Alberta and Saskatchewan, where the membership of the farmers' union was largely based, but support came from other regions as well. The impact of the strike in many parts of the two provinces often surprised the farmers themselves. An agent of the Alberta Wheat Pool wrote,

Although I forecasted strong sympathy for the movement, by the Peace River farmers, . . . I did not anticipate quite the solidarity that has developed to date. Probably I modified my ideas a little to conform with the more general opinion that the farmers couldn't pull a strike. However, from Edmonton to Dawson Creek, everything is at



a complete standstill. Lack of deliveries is due to the strike and has nothing to do with the weather, which has been ideal for threshing and hauling all week. The whole country seems to be solidly behind the strike. The business people are supporting it and the line elevators are trying hard to gain prestige over it.

\* \* \*

... This is no longer an A.F.U. stunt, it has developed into a popular mass, farm movement and I believe it will be to our lasting advantage to express our official sympathy.<sup>69</sup>

Similar, but less concerted efforts were reported in Saskatchewan. Picket committees were set up, often on an *ad hoc* basis, with little or no direction from the head office of the UFC. An example of this was in the Preeceville area where, on September 19th, a mass meeting of 400 to 500 farmers and business men and women gathered to discuss the strike situation. A resolution was passed endorsing the demands of the AFU and UFC, and a telegram was sent to J.G. Gardiner advising him of this action. A week later another meeting was held. It was announced that Mr. Gardiner had not replied to their telegram (he had just barely returned from Europe by then), a press statement by the Agriculture Minister was called "an insult to the intelligence of the farmers of Canada", and a non-delivery strike was launched. It is significant to note that a local of the United Farmers was not organized here until several months after the strike.<sup>70</sup>

The impact on the agricultural processing industry was quite noticeable in those areas where the non-delivery strike was strong. Intercontinental Packers in Saskatoon was forced to lay off 120 workers by mid-September.<sup>71</sup> Many Pool elevators were forced to close in Saskatchewan, and the Dairy Pool was having difficulties in some areas collecting cream and milk. A cream truck at Dafoe, Saskatchewan, was blockaded by picketers, who encircled it and the driver with farm machinery in one farmer's yard. Only after RCMP intervention was the truck released.<sup>72</sup> Twelve hundred packing plant employees were laid off in Edmonton and virtually all creameries in the north half of the province were closed. The AFU tried to arrange harvest work for these unemployed people.<sup>73</sup> The production of creamery butter and cheese fell by over one-half during the strike in Alberta, while in Saskatchewan the reduction was only one-seventh.<sup>74</sup> Usual dairy production in the two provinces was roughly the same, so it would appear that strike action in Alberta was much more effective.

However, by the beginning of October, support for the farm strike was faltering. Several groups had requested the UFC head office to discontinue the strike at the end of the 30-day period, and the UFC was appealing for solidarity until the strike was to end on October 6th.<sup>75</sup> Some farmers had suffered more than others by withholding their products from market for the one month. Those with perishable products like milk, cream and eggs lost money from spoilage, while grain growers and, to a lesser extent, livestock producers could afford to stop marketing for this short period without serious loss. Many marginal farm operations were little able to cope with any loss of income. Worst of all, by refusing to deliver to their own co-operative marketing organizations, the farmers indirectly suffered from these losses as well.<sup>76</sup> And so fissures were bound to appear in the ranks. Although no violence





*Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Collection, Saskatchewan Archives Board, R. B7430 (86).*

Hon. J.G. Gardiner, Minister of Agriculture speaking to the On to Ottawa Delegation, 1942. Harry Marsh, chairman of the delegation is seated on the extreme left.



erupted in Saskatchewan, several arrests were made in Alberta on this account.

However, discussions had now resumed with government officials upon the return of the Minister of Agriculture on September 23rd. On the 25th Mr. Gardiner addressed a public letter to the Alberta Farmers' Union in which he referred to the existence of the Agricultural Prices Support Board, and suggested that it would be inappropriate for the government to appoint another body to look at parity prices. He assured the AFU that the present Board had "authority to do everything and more than what your request asks for." Therefore, he suggested that the Farmers' Union make its representations to the Board, either directly or, as he personally preferred, through the Canadian Federation of Agriculture.<sup>77</sup> Two days later, Mr. Gardiner invited representatives of the AFU and UFC to Ottawa to discuss the parity price issue and their proposals with J.G. Taggart, chairman of the Agricultural Prices Support Board, and on October 1st the delegation left for Ottawa.<sup>78</sup>

The meeting with Mr. Taggart took place on October 3rd. The farmers' delegates pressed for a change of the "Agricultural Prices Support Act" to the "Agricultural Parity Prices Act", under which parity prices would be maintained for all farm products, including wheat. While Mr. Taggart seems to have encouraged enthusiasm among the delegation, any illusions of change were dispelled when, later in the day, they met with the Hon. Mr. Gardiner. He flatly stated that the name of the Act and its basic transitional nature would not be changed, and that wheat would not be placed in a different parity structure as proposed by the farmers. He seems to have confronted them with the fact of divisions among the farm organizations and suggested that the most representative of these, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, should be consulted in future studies on parity by the Agricultural Prices Support Board. On this last point only did the farmers' union gain any concession; Mr. Gardiner agreed that a representative from each of the two bodies would sit on the committee to study parity prices.<sup>79</sup>

With little if anything gained from their meetings in Ottawa, the UFC and AFU delegates wired home that the strike should end as planned on October 6th, since they felt "that negotiations with the Cabinet will be helped considerably if the strike is terminated and further strike action be postponed until we have a complete report and discussion at our Annual Convention  
..."<sup>80</sup>

In retrospect, the strike in Alberta and Saskatchewan was a flop. Although, farmers organized *en masse* to stop deliveries of farm products, often quite effectively, their leadership failed to obtain results for them. The first three weeks of the strike could produce no results while Gardiner was out of the country. Divisions among the farm organizations which were created during that period only served the government's interests in avoiding the parity issue. Gardiner's promise of an Advisory Committee to study the farmers' union proposals effectively defused an explosive situation until it had dissipated of its own accord. There is no evidence that the Advisory Committee on parity prices ever met.<sup>81</sup>

Considerable debate over the wisdom and usefulness of the strike continued for several months afterward. At the annual meeting of the UFC in



December 1946, resolutions were passed supporting the strike action taken, but asking that further action be postponed.<sup>82</sup> The Alberta Farmers' Union came under more criticism, direct and indirect, during the annual meeting of the Alberta Federation of Agriculture (AFA) that same month. H.H. Hannam, secretary of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, spoke to the delegates on parity prices and strike action in general. He asserted that in the United States parity had largely failed and that the CFA was now advocating "parity income," as opposed to parity prices.<sup>83</sup> (Little elaboration was made of this novel concept.) The AFA voted to recognize the right of farmers to strike, but such action should not be taken "until every reasonable effort had been made by democratic forms of representation to achieve the desired ends," and only "after full consultation with our associates in the Canadian Federation of Agriculture."<sup>84</sup> Mr. Hannam had convinced the representatives of these farm organizations that farmers should be represented only by the CFA when dealing with the federal government; regional interests were to be subordinate to national solidarity. Thereafter, the interests of wheat growers would not take precedence over those of all other varieties of agriculturists.

The criticism directed at the farmers' unions by farm and public press alike was something of an embarrassment. Soon the United Farmers of Canada newsletter, for instance, was making only rare references to parity issues. A year after the non-delivery strike, the editor of *U.F.C. Information* wrote,

We believe it unwise . . . for farmers or any other group for that matter to allow a strike complex to develop to the degree that they cry for strike action for anything and everything and for that reason we can appreciate the wisdom of the daily newspaper for letting the matter of the farmers' 1946 strike drop shortly after the thirty day period expired. We believe that editors, particularly those of farmer publications, instead of using a lot of space and time in giving belated postaction criticism and advice should cast their sights ahead and endeavour to expound sound advice or warnings of things to come . . .<sup>85</sup>

Obviously, the militancy of the farmers and their interest in the discredited parity issue were on the way out, and the farmers' unions, especially the UFC, were anxious to make them non-issues. In 1949 the AFU amalgamated with the United Farmers of Alberta and any hopes of radical action were shelved.<sup>86</sup> The same year the United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) reorganized and took the name, Saskatchewan Farmers' Union, thus admitting what was widely known, that the provincial organization could have no hopes for the time being of forming the nucleus of a national farmers' union. But probably the most convincing reason why "parity" and "strike" were dropped from the farmers' vocabulary in Canada, was the post-war boom which saw the agricultural economy advance much more rapidly in terms of income than the other sectors of the Canadian economy. In the good times of the late 1940's and 1950's fearful memories of the worst of times during the Great Depression gradually disappeared.

The parity price issue arose in Canada at a time when the Prairie wheat economy was still struggling in the depths of drought and depression. Since eastern agriculture was on the way to recovery, parity had little real value for farmers there; it remained the banner primarily of the wheat grower. Although the Agricultural Adjustment Act in the United States pro-



vided the main basis for parity debates in Canada, the parity principle was never clearly defined here. "Parity" remained a protest slogan, closely identified with the ultimate weapon of desperation, the non-delivery strike. Had the war not intervened, it is quite possible a major farmers' strike could have been staged earlier, and the parity issue and farmer radicalism would have died an unspectacular death as they did in 1946.

The War offered a time of economic truce when parity was seized upon as an issue for debate among many Canadians, farmers or not. But its proponents did not use these few years to realistically assess and study the precise practical use of parity principles in Canada. The CCF and the farmers' organizations were not sure of the exact nature of parity, and the issue became beclouded and confused. By the end of the War, parity had already fallen into disrepute. The farmers' strike of 1946, by associating parity most clearly with misguided, or poorly guided, radicalism, wielded the fatal blow to an idea that never really was given a chance, regardless of its merits. The American experience would indicate that parity prices were worthy of much more serious consideration than they were given in the Canadian context.

#### FOOTNOTES

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- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.
- <sup>3</sup> "Parity Price," *U.F.C. Information*, November 1939, p. 8.
- <sup>4</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) [UFC (SS)] Papers, File VIII. 106, F. Eliason, Secretary, UFC (SS), to H.R. Boutillier, Vice-President, UFC (Alberta Section), 11 November 1939.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* File VIII. 21, Hon. Walter Nash, New Zealand's Minister of Finance, quoted in a circular letter from H.B. Cowan, Secretary, Canadian Chamber of Agriculture, to Directors of the CCA, 15 May 1936.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, File X. 66, G.R. Bickerton, President, and F. Eliason, Secretary, UFC (SS), to Local-Lodge secretaries, 3 September 1936.
- <sup>7</sup> "Parity Prices — Our Problem," *U.F.C. Information*, November 1939, p. 8.
- <sup>8</sup> G.E. Britnell and V.C. Fowke, *Canadian Agriculture in War and Peace, 1935-50* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1962), p. 73.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 395.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- <sup>12</sup> "Seeking a Parity Price," *U.F.C. Information*, November 1938, p. 11.
- <sup>13</sup> "Hold Your Wheat . . . Why?" *U.F.C. Information*, October 1938, p. 5.
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- <sup>16</sup> William F. Priestley and Edward B. Swindlehurst, *Furrows, Faith and Fellowship* (Edmonton: Alberta Agricultural Centennial Committee, 1967), pp. 168-169.
- <sup>17</sup> *Preamble, Manifesto and Proposed Provincial Constitution of the United Farmers of Canada, Alberta Section*, 1939.
- <sup>18</sup> SAB, UFC (SS) Papers, File VIII. 106, W.L. Shapka to F. Eliason, 21 August 1939.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, F. Eliason to W.L. Shapka, 23 August 1939.
- <sup>20</sup> "War Prices and Profits," *U.F.C. Information*, October 1939, p. 2.
- <sup>21</sup> C.F. Wilson, *A Century of Canadian Grain* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978), pp. 663-664.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 634.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 649; Britnell and Fowke, *op. cit.*, pp. 90, 387, and 446-447.
- <sup>24</sup> Britnell and Fowke, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-94.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95-96.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 127-129 and 219-220.
- <sup>27</sup> Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 723.
- <sup>28</sup> "Special from Ottawa," *U.F.C. Information*, February 1940, p. 9.
- <sup>29</sup> Canadian Federation of Agriculture, *Manifesto of the Canadian Farmer*, 27 January 1941, p. 4.



- <sup>30</sup> Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 724-725.
- <sup>31</sup> SAB, UFC (SS) Papers, File X. 44, J.H. Wesson, script of CJRM radio broadcast, 18 March 1940.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, File IX. 208, J.B. Rutherford, "Parity Prices for Farm Products," 25 January 1940.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, Telegram to F. Eliason, 28 March 1941.
- <sup>34</sup> "The Farmers' 'Petition of Rights'," *The On-to-Ottawa Delegate*, 30 January 1942.
- <sup>35</sup> "Analysis of Petition Shows Need for Agricultural Adjustments," *The On-to-Ottawa Delegate*, 30 January 1942.
- <sup>36</sup> Britnell and Fowke, *op. cit.*, p. 100; Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 731.
- <sup>37</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, 3 February 1942, p. 271.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 March 1942, pp. 1205-1206.
- <sup>39</sup> Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 733.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 736-739; Britnell and Fowke, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-101.
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- <sup>42</sup> Britnell and Fowke, *op. cit.*, pp. 213-214.
- <sup>43</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, February 1943, pp. 99-100, 272.
- <sup>44</sup> Agricultural Prices Support Act, quoted in *Report of the Minister of Agriculture . . . for the Year Ended March 31, 1946* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1946), p. 210.
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- <sup>46</sup> Canadian Federation of Agriculture, *Farmers Meet the Cabinet*, February 1945, pp. 7-8.
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- <sup>50</sup> "\$1.55 Wheat Price Wanted," *U.F.C. Information*, November 1945, p. 2.
- <sup>51</sup> Glenbow-Alberta Institute (GAI), Alberta Wheat Pool (AWP) Papers, File 131, W.J. Parker, President of Manitoba Pool Elevators, circular to local presidents and secretaries, 21 September 1946; and SAB, UFC (SS) Papers, File X. 43, F. Eliason, "Report on Non Delivery Strike," December 1946.
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- <sup>53</sup> SAB, UFC (SS) Papers, File VIII. 25, F.T. Appleby, President, to J.G. Gardiner, 17 June 1946.
- <sup>54</sup> *Instructions and Guidance on Organizing Strike Action for Parity Prices* (1946).
- <sup>55</sup> "Editorial," *U.F.C. Information*, July 1946, p. 1.
- <sup>56</sup> "Rural Ramblings," *U.F.C. Information*, August 1946, pp. 2-3.
- <sup>57</sup> Britnell and Fowke, *op. cit.*, pp. 220-221.
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- <sup>61</sup> "Strike News," *U.F.C. Information*, October 1946, p. 12.
- <sup>62</sup> "Farm Strike Leaders Confer," *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, 30 September 1946.
- <sup>63</sup> "The A.F.U. Tries a Minority Strike," *Western Business and Industry*, October 1946, p. 64.
- <sup>64</sup> GAI, AWP Papers, File 131, CFA press release, 9 September 1946.
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- <sup>66</sup> GAI, AWP Papers, File 131, W.J. Parker to presidents and secretaries of local Manitoba Pool elevators, 21 September 1946.
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- <sup>69</sup> GAI, AWP Papers, File 131, Allan M. Gibson, Grande Prairie, to N.P. Davisson, Alberta Wheat Pool, 13 September 1946.
- <sup>70</sup> SAB, UFC (SS) Papers, File XIII. B. 114.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, File X. 43, "Strike Bulletin #2," 17 September 1946.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, undated memorandum, and File X. 66, UFC Radio Broadcast script, 5 October 1946.
- <sup>73</sup> Charlotte Whitton, "Farms and Factories Show Strike Pattern," *Saturday Night*, 28 September 1946, pp. 6-7.
- <sup>74</sup> "Farm Strike Reduced Butter, Cheese Output," *The Farm and Ranch Review*, November 1946, p. 11.
- <sup>75</sup> SAB, UFC (SS) Papers, File X. 66, UFC Radio Broadcast script, 2 October 1946.
- <sup>76</sup> Charlotte Whitton, *op. cit.*, p. 6; and "The A.F.U. Tries a Minority Strike," *Western Business and Industry*, October 1946, p. 69.
- <sup>77</sup> GAI, AWP Papers, File 131, J.G. Gardiner to C.J. Stimpfle, President, AFU, 25 September 1946.
- <sup>78</sup> SAB, UFC (SS) Papers, File X. 43, F. Eliason, "Report on Non Delivery Strike," December 1946.
- <sup>79</sup> "The Ottawa Conference," *U.F.C. Information*, November 1946, pp. 2-4.
- <sup>80</sup> SAB, UFC (SS) Papers, File X. 66, UFC Radio Broadcast script, 7 October 1946.
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- <sup>82</sup> "Convention Resolutions," *U.F.C. Information*, January 1947, p. 5.
- <sup>83</sup> "The C.F.A. and Parity Prices," *Notes and News From the Office of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture*, No. 39, 21 December 1946.
- <sup>84</sup> *Minutes of 1946 Annual Meeting, Alberta Federation of Agriculture*, pp. 15-16.
- <sup>85</sup> "Editorial," *U.F.C. Information*, August 1947, p. 2.
- <sup>86</sup> "Alberta Farm Groups Unite," *Country Guide*, February 1949.



# JACK DOUGLAS AND SASKATCHEWAN'S HIGHWAYS

*by Jean Larmour*

The worst roads between here and Minsk and Pinsk was the description of Saskatchewan highways when the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) party took over the government in 1944 and a new minister, J.T. Douglas of Laura, accepted responsibility for Saskatchewan's Department of Highways and Transportation. Here was a problem to challenge any man and an opportunity to build anew.

The 'twenties had seen the acceleration of mechanization on the farm as power machinery replaced horse power. The motor car had made its appearance and ownership soon became the goal of many people. Cross Canada travel had come into vogue but the complaints about the roads were voluminous. Many a tourist had been mired in a sea of mud or had broken an axle in one of the many pot holes on the highways. Bad roads had become almost synonymous with the West where sparse population and vast distances made road building a slow process.

The decade of drought and depression, with financial problems for all levels of government, had seen little road construction and only minimal maintenance. The return of prosperity with the war added little to the road building program, for equipment and then manpower were difficult to obtain. Thus, there was a huge backlog of road construction, little modern road building equipment and few trained personnel. Add to this the change in technology of road design and a whole new approach to highways was needed.

"Road building has become a highly specialized job, requiring trained men and modern equipment," Jack Douglas soon realized. "The day of haphazard road building has gone." People demand that

every measure of safety which engineering skill can devise be built into our highway system. Longer sight lines, easier curves, fewer level crossings, wider right of ways and removal of dust menace are all improvements that will add to the safety of the travelling public and help make our highways, safe ways.<sup>1</sup>

People were also demanding that roads remain open all year round.

The task of building the roads that were required was a large one for Saskatchewan as it had only seven percent of the population of Canada, but thirty-eight percent of the road mileage.<sup>2</sup> The distances between Saskatchewan farms increased as the farm unit grew larger in order to become more economically viable for dry land farming. Since the population remained predominantly rural until 1971, proportionately more roads were needed to serve a small population. The



rural resident experienced many transportation problems. In the winter, many of the local roads were blocked with snow and horse drawn cutters brought the supplies from town or took the children to school, as transportation reverted to the style of the turn of the century. When spring arrived in all its glory, many a farmer was stranded for days. Neither car nor cutter could traverse the sea of mud. Even a good rain could mire the unwary or inexperienced driver until the old fashioned team or heavy tractor of a neighboring farmer came to the rescue.

Saskatchewan residents following the War could no longer tolerate the suspension of highway travel for the winter. Keeping the road system functional during winter was initially hampered by the lack of snow removal equipment, but it soon became evident that even with the newest equipment, the cost of snow removal was prohibitive. The real answer was in better road design with higher grades for self clearance; what was needed was the rebuilding of the entire highway system, Mr. Douglas said. Until this could be accomplished, snow fencing, hedge planting and improved weed control along the edge of the road would help prevent snow drifts. In 1952, he was able to report that "during the present winter we have been able to service our entire system."<sup>3</sup> Four years later, with a very heavy snowfall and a late spring forecasting massive problems, Douglas gave his staff open authority for snow removal. He wrote to his deputy, "This will be your authority to instruct the District Engineers to proceed with securing extra equipment to assist in our snow removal program."<sup>4</sup> This was essentially a "blank cheque to the amount that can usefully be spent and reasonably supervised."

Providing a road system functional all year round included taking Saskatchewan travellers out of the mud or, in other words, gravelling the roads. However, it soon became apparent that gravel was scarce in some areas of the province. The search for new gravel deposits became an on going function of the department. As technology improved, the on-the-spot search for gravel was supplemented by examinations of drilling core samples collected by the Department of Natural Resources in their search for minerals, and later by the interpretation of air photos.

The scarcity of gravel accentuated the move towards hard surface roads. However, there were more problems than just cost involved in hard surfacing those roads. The asphalt used for this purpose had not proven satisfactory.

As early as the fall of 1944, Jack Douglas was corresponding with the University of Saskatchewan over the possibility of research into types of crude oil and methods of production which would produce a more satisfactory asphalt product for Saskatchewan roads. By 1945 he had made arrangements for W.G. May, a graduate student in chemical engineering, to undertake a research project to distinguish between asphalts of low stability which show early failure on roads, and those of high stability which produced good surface characteristics.<sup>5</sup> The department's own research man, W.E. Winnitoy, conducted tests on the different oils from Turner Valley, Cut Bank, Vermilion and Lloydminster and later Unity, to determine their suitability for road construction.<sup>6</sup> The government itself was very interested in developing uses for Saskatchewan oil from Lloydminster and Jack Douglas and George Cadbury, head of the Economic Advisory and Planning Board, were appointed to study the feasibility of using this oil. Many of the oil companies themselves became interested in the quality of oils, due to these tests.

There were many problems with Lloydminster oil for asphalt, including rate of production,<sup>7</sup> cost of production,<sup>8</sup> and salt and sulphur content.<sup>9</sup> An alternative



use might be found by mixing the crude oil with the gravel to extend the life of gravel roads. A number of tests were made using such methods to prolong the life of the road and to give dust-free service. Mr. Douglas himself went to Wyoming and Nebraska to observe "bituminous surfaced roads that run through heavy gumbo clays and also . . . road-mix methods of construction."<sup>10</sup> The problem was not a simple one and experimentation continued throughout the time he was Minister of Highways. It was not until 1948 that a more satisfactory product was obtained when the Flintkote Company built a plant at Lloydminster to produce an emulsion which could be applied cold to the road. They claimed that the asphalt produced from the Lloydminster area was second to none produced anywhere in Canada.<sup>11</sup>

With Jack Douglas' encouragement, research on road construction problems expanded in the department until in 1953 a separate branch was set up. By 1960 there were forty-three field testing laboratories to maintain control on materials used in highway construction, a pavement coring crew to test bituminous surfacing projects and three load-deflection test crews which operated during spring break-up to monitor the need for road bans. This was in addition to continuous research on soils, stability problems, and types of road materials and construction methods.<sup>12</sup> Road construction had become a highly technical process during the sixteen years in which Jack Douglas was responsible for Saskatchewan roads and his department had been in the forefront in adopting new techniques and higher standards.

The Saskatchewan Department of Highways carried the stigma of being the centre of machine politics in Saskatchewan. One political observer had written, "It was the duty of the district organizers who were the highway inspectors, and their assistants the road inspectors, to keep the constituency organizer informed of the state of the mind of his dozen 'key' men and of his hundred polling sub-division workers."<sup>13</sup> The writer added that it had been customary for most party organizations in Canada, including the Saskatchewan Liberal one, to use "public works appropriations, particularly the road money, for pork barrel purposes." The Department of Highways was second only to Education in the sums of money which were expended at the decision of the minister.<sup>14</sup> It would take a strong firm hand and a reputation for integrity to change the image of the department.

Shortly after he was appointed to Cabinet, Mr. Douglas announced his attitude to the department. He was determined to take politics out of the Highway Department and he gave fair warning that "road men who have been given favors from political bosses must rely on their own merit now, in order to keep their jobs."<sup>15</sup> A few months later he said,

Immediately upon taking office I made the appointment and dismissal of maintenance patrolmen the direct responsibility of the District Engineers . . . By taking these appointments outside the field of political patronage and placing them on a merit basis, I hope to build up . . . a spirit of pride in the condition of our highways that shall definitely raise the standard of efficiency. Already a great improvement has been effected.<sup>16</sup>

By the time of this statement, Douglas had released all of the district road inspectors except one; these he intended to replace by trained engineers.<sup>17</sup>

There still remained the stigma of possible pork barrel politics in the awarding of contracts: that is, the awarding of contracts on the basis of political patronage rather than by public tender. Jack Douglas, therefore, discontinued the practice of letting construction and gravelling contracts on a day labour basis. In fact,



much later he severely reprimanded one of his senior engineers who, in an emergency situation, gave a contract on a cost of work plus a percentage profit basis.<sup>18</sup> Contracts were to be let by public tender or the work was to be done by the department's own crews when these had been equipped.

Mr. Douglas put across very forcefully his message to the road contractors of no political patronage. When a contractor sent him a cheque for the CCF party funds, he returned it restating his position very emphatically.

I am very sorry that you sent this to me as I want to assure you that I meant what I said when you were in this office, that I was having no part in the collection of funds for the political organization . . . I also want to assure you again, as I did when you were in this office, that whether or not you gave a contribution to the organization would make no difference in my dealings with you. I also want to assure you that there is no back door to this department. Contracts will be let without fear or favour, and once they are let we will insist that they be lived up to. Personally I am going to make no difference between those people who support the organization and those who do not.<sup>19</sup>

These were strong words and the policy soon became known within the contractor's community as well as within the department.

Another problem had been the lack of technical personnel. In the spring of 1945 and for many years thereafter, members of the University of Saskatchewan graduating class in engineering were interviewed by representatives of the department with a view to obtaining competent trained staff. By 1955 there were sixty professional engineers on permanent staff compared to the ten in 1944.

Years later Jack Douglas defended his staff in the Legislature from "scurrilous statements" about their competence when the problem had been "the results of excessive precipitation which has plagued us for a number of years." At that time he said,

One of the services which I rendered this province and of which I am extremely proud, was the gathering together of the staff of men whom I now have in the department. It was not an easy task, as most of our engineers came directly from University with little or no field experience. True, we made some mistakes — and we will be the first to admit them, but there has been no serious one and it is to the credit of these young men who serve in their capacity as engineers that we have been able to build more miles of road in this province with the limited money at our disposal than has been done in any province or any state on this continent.

He went on to commend his staff. "I appreciate the contributions made by the small group of senior engineers who in the building of our staff, gave guidance and training to the graduates who joined our staff . . . Credit is also due the staff that . . . is removing the stigma attached to Saskatchewan highways."<sup>20</sup>

Lack of funds needed for the construction of Saskatchewan roads was a chronic problem. There was no question of the need, the question was the allocation of scarce resources. Federal funds appeared to be available as the senior government considered plans to stimulate post war reconstruction. Early in 1945 Mr. Douglas reported, "We have already filed with the Federal Government a most complete and thorough plan of what highway and bridge work should be done in this province with federal aid."<sup>21</sup> He had plans for six different projects, first and foremost of which was "1,330 miles of hard surfaced roads of national and international importance." This first project included two trans-continental roads, one in the north and one in the south of the province, as well as an international road



from North Portal on the North Dakota border to Prince Albert National Park to encourage the tourist industry. Mr. Douglas foresaw a period of booming road construction with the expected federal assistance.

By the next year, he was still optimistic but a little more cautious in his outlook. In 1947 he took his plea to the Canada Good Roads Association meeting in St. Andrews-by-the-sea, New Brunswick where he stated that,

Not only are we losing much of the American tourist trade because of our inadequate highway system but our own people in going from one part of Canada to another, find it profitable and certainly more comfortable to travel as far as possible over the bituminous surfaced roads of our southern neighbour . . . . I believe that people of Canada expect our Federal Government to assume some responsibility with respect to roads of National or international importance . . . . I know of no other single factor that will help to unify the people of Canada but the building of a Trans-Canada Highway.<sup>22</sup>

There was still no federal money forthcoming for highway construction. Not until April 24, 1950 was an agreement signed between federal and provincial governments for the construction of a trans-Canada highway. A telegram from J.W.W. Graham, secretary to Cabinet, sent to Jack Douglas that day read "O.C. 703/50 is reserved stop good luck and best wishes."<sup>23</sup> This was the Order-in-Council number which would be held to ratify the agreement.

It was not what had been hoped. Even the agreed payment by the federal government of 50 percent of the construction cost did not include such items as the purchase of right-of-way. Nevertheless it did provide federal funds for a high standard trans-Canada highway and Saskatchewan undertook to build it within the allotted five years. Although this goal was not attained, Saskatchewan, with more miles of highway per population, was the first to complete its section.

August 21, 1957 was the day chosen for the celebration. American neighbors in North Dakota and Montana were invited, as were federal, provincial and city officials. That Wednesday morning dawned cloudy and threatening. Not to be frightened by a threat of rain, the parade lined up at the armouries on Elphinstone Street. The legion of Frontiersmen, carrying both the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes, headed the parade, whose theme was the old and the new. Primitive early road building equipment was followed by huge modern day giants. A dump wagon and two horse team was followed by a 500 horsepower diesel scoop, an ancient highway plow by a modern grader which towered over it. Even the old time cars which bumped over the early trails were there. One float depicted these early two rut trails compared with the newly completed smooth hard surfaced Trans-Canada Highway. Bands, flower decked floats and cars with officials added to the length of the procession. In fact, the parade was the longest in the city's history, stretching for three miles along the city streets.<sup>24</sup>

Thus did the province celebrate its achievement — first in Canada to complete its section of the road that would tie the country closer together. That black ribbon of road with smooth easy curves, controlled rises and safe sight distances was heralded as a high standard of modern highway construction.





*Saskatchewan Archives Board, R.B711 (8).*  
Opening the Trans Canada Highway, Regina, August 21, 1957. Premier T.C. Douglas speaking and on his left is the Hon. J.T. Douglas.



In his pleas for more money for highway construction, Jack Douglas could become eloquent. "It has been said," he told the 1945 session of the Legislature, that

where you have a backward country you have no roads or poor roads. All the post-war services which we contemplate for the security and happiness of our people, including medical care and hospitals . . . would be unavailable for the majority of our residents without good roads, roads that are passable for the entire year. In the same way the benefits of our schools and community centres would be lost to many if we do not provide serviceable roads throughout this province.<sup>25</sup>

His eloquence and his arguments were effective for the Highways Department expenditure rose from 6.2 percent of the total government spending in 1944-1945 to 18.8 percent ten years later, the all-time high proportion being reached in 1953 when 22.1 percent of the total government spending went into roads and bridges.<sup>26</sup> As government spending increased almost every year, this amount was tremendous. The largest budget for highways, during Mr. Douglas' sixteen year responsibility, was in 1958 when nearly \$24,500,000 was spent.

Jack Douglas' vision was equal to the amount. "The constantly expanding economy of Canada is becoming increasingly dependent on our road and highway system," he said,

No single factor has made greater contributions to the advancement of our social and economic life. Roads have rolled back our frontiers in the expansion of our lumbering and mining industries . . . . The tempo of our industrial life has been quickened and much of the isolation associated with our rural life has been removed.<sup>27</sup>

He believed that "highways have proven to be not only nation builders, but instruments of international goodwill." Canada and the United States had built adjoining highways encouraging the acquaintance, intermingling and understanding of peoples from the two nations.

Operations of the Department of Highways were politically sensitive and could turn public opinion for or against the government in power. Jack Douglas had to be conscious of the political as well as of the technical impact of his decisions. He had to keep an ear to the public to hear and to react to public opinion. One means of monitoring the grass roots reaction was at the annual CCF conventions.

Here the Cabinet members had to account for their departments to the party members. Jack Douglas stood up to explain and defend the actions of the department and to hear suggestions and complaints of those using the roads. Here he had to justify the shorter route or the smoother curve which had separated a farmer's house from his other buildings or had isolated a corner of his field. Here he had to face the fact that the technical argument did not always meet with approval. This was where the reality of practical politics came to grips with the ideal plan; at times he had to bow to public opinion.

Resolutions from local CCF conventions, concerning highways, were sent to J.T. Douglas for reply or for action. He also received personal letters reporting grievances. There were complaints by travellers about poor road maintenance, complaints by farmers about slow payments for fences removed





*Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-A5142.*

Constructing Highway 3 between Big River and Green Lake.

during construction and about highway crews damaging the crops. All of these were also brought to the attention of the staff. Good public relations assisted the efficiency of operations as well as being good politics. In fact, a public relations officer was appointed during the 1956-1957 year "to improve the department's public relations by improving the training and general performance of the staff."<sup>28</sup> It was hoped that this would improve the staff awareness of public relations in their approach to the public.

Despite his care for public relations, despite his genial nature, there was one aspect of his work which remained a thorn in his side even after it had been taken out of his hands. This was market roads. Grants for road improvement in rural municipalities and for the construction and repair of market roads in southern local improvement districts came from both the Department of Highways and the Department of Municipal Affairs, although Highways carried out the program. This assistance never seemed to be enough.

The ink was scarcely dry on Douglas' appointment as Highways Minister before he began to receive invitations to attend local conventions of rural municipal organizations. It had been the practice for the executive of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM) to meet the



Cabinet to submit resolutions passed at their annual meeting. These resolutions asked the Highway Department to "arrange for several road construction outfits suitable for hire to smaller municipalities,"<sup>29</sup> at a small fee. They also pointed out that most rural municipalities had difficulty in maintaining roads because of their low tax revenue and, therefore, requested "adequate annual grants." Similar resolutions were passed every year protesting the municipalities' lack of resources and requesting more government assistance.

In 1947 the answer to these problems seemed at hand. The federal government decided to remove the three cent tax on gasoline which the province then proposed to collect to use for road construction.<sup>30</sup> When this proposal had a cool reception, Jack Douglas suggested the possibility of returning to the municipality the entire amount of money collected on farm fuels or of reducing the tax to a two cent levy; but the municipalities would have none of it. Shortly after the tax was removed "the oil companies . . . raised the price of farm fuels much higher than any other type of fuel used. I feel certain that had two cents . . . been left on farm fuels, the oil companies would have hesitated to raise their price to the extent they have done,"<sup>31</sup> he said. However, the deed was done and the revenue lost.

A new scheme of grants to municipalities, based on a formula evaluating need, was devised by the Assessment Commission and implemented in 1948.<sup>32</sup> In 1952 bridge grants were to be added on an equitable formula<sup>33</sup> and in 1953 the government agreed to discontinue the two mill public revenue tax which municipalities had been required to collect for the government.<sup>34</sup> This would add to the local financial resources.

Attempting to assist the technical and financial difficulties of the municipalities, Douglas suggested in 1952 the possibility of an engineer in each of eight highway districts, who could devote his full time to municipal problems.<sup>35</sup> In 1953 he proposed a system of main market roads to be developed by his staff with the Municipal Advisory Commission. "The next step is the re-organization of your municipal boundaries on geographical lines."<sup>36</sup>

That was the recommendation of the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life. The Commission had heard community after community report on the inability of the rural municipalities to build adequate roads. However, the recommendation and Jack Douglas' championing of it was resented. This and the chronic financial problems over roads perhaps built into an antagonism to Jack Douglas and the Department of Highways. In 1956 the responsibility for municipal roads was transferred to the Department of Municipal Affairs as the Municipal Road Assistance Authority. This was one regret which Jack Douglas had when he retired from government in 1960. He recommended that both the Municipal Road Assistance Authority and the road construction carried on by Natural Resources should be assigned to the Department of Highways.<sup>37</sup> That recommendation was not carried out.

When J.T. Douglas first took charge of the Department of Highways and Transportation in 1944, it was composed of seven branches but only two, the construction branch and the maintenance branch, were of any size. Many of the others were merely functional divisions headed by a person at the clerk level, although the bridge branch and the surveys branch had profes-



sional people heading them.

In 1960 there were nine branches, most of which were fairly large. Planning, design and research had each achieved status becoming branches. The market roads branch had expanded but had been transferred to another Department, while the need for a ferries branch disappeared as bridges replaced ferries on most roads. Stress was now placed on public relations which function had become a division although not a branch. There was a world of difference between the Department in 1944 and in 1960. In 1944, 900 maintenance patrols of teams of horses were used and only sixty-eight motorized units. In 1959, 245 modern motor graders maintained the roads.<sup>38</sup> The slow pace of the pre-war era had ended; the age of speed had taken its place. J.T. Douglas had presided over that change.

Not long after he became responsible for the highways in Saskatchewan a long range plan of the needs of Saskatchewan, had been prepared. This plan was partially in response to the suggestions that the federal government was prepared to spend money for development. As he saw it, Saskatchewan needed two hard surfaced all weather east-west highways, one in the south and one in the north, as well as a hard surfaced north-south highway from North Portal to Prince Albert National Park. The latter road would encourage the tourist trade as well as link northern and southern areas of Saskatchewan. In addition, he proposed three development roads; one to Flin Flon, one to Lac La Ronge; and one to Ile-a-la-crosse, and a traffic bridge over the South Saskatchewan River north of Swift Current. As well, there were 1,500 worn out secondary bridges which needed replacement and other major new bridges which might be built.<sup>39</sup> Nine railway-highway grade separation projects were also needed and the balance of the 8,000 miles of provincial highways would require replacement.

Even omitting the last two items, such an ambitious project would cost nearly 53.5 million dollars over and above the regular highway expenditures. Such a sum was greater than the entire government budget for the 1944-1945 fiscal year and was much beyond the financial ability of the province. It had been hoped that the federal government would pay for the three main arteries, contribute 75 percent of the northern development roads, and share the cost on all the other projects on a fifty-fifty basis.<sup>40</sup> Jack Douglas worked hard to obtain federal funds for these projects, but the final results were well below expectations.

When he retired in 1960, the three main arteries had been built, although about half of the northern east-west route and a small part of the north-south highway remained to be hard surfaced. The bridge over the South Saskatchewan had also been completed. Of the three development roads, only the Lac La Ronge one was constructed by 1960 but the other two were finished by 1964.<sup>41</sup> The Department of Highways was a technically oriented organization employing skilled professional staff. Douglas had accomplished most of the work which he had seen as necessary when he first took up the problem of Saskatchewan roads, but it had taken years longer than he had anticipated. Had he realized the time involved in his projects, the effort and the discouragement in obtaining what federal assistance he did gain, he might never have forged ahead so optimistically; he might not have dared to dream. But he did have that dream and the courage to forge ahead and the stamina to



## JACK DOUGLAS AND SASKATCHEWAN'S HIGHWAYS

persevere so that Saskatchewan roads were second to none. That was no mean accomplishment.

### FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> "Report to the People", *The Commonwealth*, 22 November, 1944.
- <sup>2</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board (hereafter cited as SAB), J.T. Douglas Papers, Box 3 (hereafter cited as Douglas followed by the box number), "A Survey of the Work of the Department of Highways and the Department of Public Works Since July 1944," 1946.
- <sup>3</sup> Douglas 6, J.T. Douglas, speech prepared for Budget Debate, 3 March, 1952.
- <sup>4</sup> Douglas 3, J.T. Douglas to L.T. Holmes, 7 March, 1956.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Dr. T. Thorvaldson, Department of Chemistry, University of Saskatchewan, to J.T. Douglas, 29 March, 1945.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, W. Winnitoy to H.R. Mackenzie, 21 March, 1945, and C.A.L. Hogg to G. Cadbury, 22 February, 1946.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, C.A.L. Hogg to G. Cadbury, 22 February, 1946.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, H.R. Mackenzie to G. Cadbury, 2 March, 1946.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, O.B. Moles, Consumer Co-op Refinery to H.R. Mackenzie, 15 December, 1945.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, J.T. Douglas to R. Bromely, Highways Commissioner, Wyoming, and to the State Highway Commissioner, Nebraska, 3 October, 1946.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, T.J. Powder, Flintkote Co. of Canada, to H.R. Mackenzie, 22 April, 1948.
- <sup>12</sup> Saskatchewan, *Annual Report of the Department of Highways and Transportation*, 1959-1960, pp. 73-76.
- <sup>13</sup> Escott Reid, "The Saskatchewan Liberal Machine Before 1929", *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. II, 1936, p. 31.
- <sup>14</sup> Saskatchewan, *Public Accounts*, 1944, pp. 280-284. Expenditures under the Treasury were mainly to service the public debt while those under Old Age Pensions were for such pensions and thus not subject to discretion.
- <sup>15</sup> "No More Political Bosses on Roads", *The Commonwealth*, 26 July, 1944.
- <sup>16</sup> Douglas 6, J.T. Douglas, Radio Address, 13 November, 1944.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> Douglas 3, J.T. Douglas to L.T. Holmes, 22 December, 1954.
- <sup>19</sup> SAB, CCF Papers, File B7 II. 96, J.T. Douglas to J. Evans, 25 April, 1947.
- <sup>20</sup> Douglas 6, J.T. Douglas, speech prepared for Budget Debate, 14 March, 1956.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, J.T. Douglas, Radio Broadcast, May 1945.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, J.T. Douglas, Address — Canada Good Roads Convention, 8-10 September, 1947.
- <sup>23</sup> Douglas 2, J.W.W. Graham to J.T. Douglas, 24 April, 1950.
- <sup>24</sup> "City's longest parade heralds road ceremony" *Leader Post*, 21 August, 1957.
- <sup>25</sup> Douglas 6, J.T. Douglas, Budget Debate, 1945.
- <sup>26</sup> Saskatchewan, *Public Accounts*, 1944-1945, pp. 226, 431, and 1954-1955 pp. 145, 159, and 527.
- <sup>27</sup> Douglas 6, J.T. Douglas, Address — Canada Good Roads Association Convention 1 November, 1951.
- <sup>28</sup> Saskatchewan, *Annual Report of the Department of Highways and Transportation*, 1956-1957, p.7.
- <sup>29</sup> Douglas 4, "Resolutions passed at 1944 Convention of the SARM to be presented to the Provincial Government".
- <sup>30</sup> Douglas 1, J.T. Douglas to R.C. Bens, 17 February, 1947.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, J.T. Douglas to R.C. Perkins, 14 April, 1947.
- <sup>32</sup> Douglas 6, J.T. Douglas, Address to SARM, 12 March, 1953.
- <sup>33</sup> Douglas 3, J.T. Douglas to SARM, 27 February, 1952.
- <sup>34</sup> Douglas 6, J.T. Douglas, Budget Debate, 9 March, 1953.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, J.T. Douglas, Address to South-Eastern Rural Municipalities, 10 July, 1952.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, J.T. Douglas, Address to SARM, 12 March, 1953.
- <sup>37</sup> Douglas 3, J.T. Douglas to T.C. Douglas, 21 June, 1960.
- <sup>38</sup> Saskatchewan, *Annual Report of the Department of Highways and Transportation*, 1943-1944, p. 25, 1958-1959, p. 32.
- <sup>39</sup> Douglas 1, "A Survey of Work of the Department of Highways and Department of Public Works since July, 1944", c. 1946.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>41</sup> Saskatchewan Department of Highways and Transportation Official Highway Maps, 1960 and 1964.



## BATTLEFORD DURING THE REBELLION OF 1885

Situated close to the reserves of a number of disaffected Indian tribes, Battleford was in serious danger of attack during the North West Rebellion. A former Territorial capital, Battleford was the site of the largest police detachment in the area and the base for detachments at Fort Pitt, Fort Carlton and Prince Albert. The palisaded police barracks stood on a hill overlooking the "old town" of Battleford which was situated on river flats to the south across the Battle River. Because of frequent flooding of the river flats, a "new town" was gradually developing on the higher land around the police post. The post had a major disadvantage in case of attack in that it did not have its own water supply and was dependent upon water hauled from the river. The post itself was not large as the inside square measured only one hundred by ninety feet. As danger of attack became imminent, the civilian population from the town and surrounding district sought refuge within the police post which for a time became the very crowded home for up to five hundred people.

The following document consists of part of a Daily Journal which was kept in the Sergeant Major's office at the police detachment in Battleford during 1885. The Journal was found among the papers of the late Effie Laurie Storer, a Battleford pioneer. Her papers are now in the Saskatoon office of the Saskatchewan Archives Board. Entries have been selected from the Journal from March 10 to May 24, 1885 to document what happened at Battleford during this eventful period. The entries are primarily about military and police events and, unfortunately, make little reference to the civilian refugees within the barracks and the problems that must have been encountered in providing for them. The entries do give a detailed, firsthand account of police and military activities around Battleford and how the events of the rebellion were perceived from the perspective of the police post which, at times, was virtually isolated and frequently beset by rumours that could not be resolved. As such it provides a useful and interesting insight into a little known aspect of the rebellion.

The story of the events of the rebellion are well known and no attempt has been made to detail them here. In preparation of these entries for publication, some editorial changes have been made. Some routine items of no significance have been deleted. The author of the entries, throughout, used abbreviations for military and police and for some organizations. For purposes of clarity, these have been spelled out in the text. The author was inconsistent in the use of punctuation and capitalization and again where necessary punctuation has been added and capitalization rationalized. An attempt has been made to provide identification for persons mentioned in the text. In providing this information we used lists of police and homeguards prepared after the rebellion. We are also indebted for some of the information to a recent publication by W.L. Clink, called *Battleford Beleaguered, 1885. The Story of the Riel Uprising from the Columns of the Saskatchewan Herald* (Toronto: W.L. Clink, 1985).



Tuesday, March 10

Superintendent Crozier, Constable Cole A., Redmond & Interpreter Laronde<sup>1</sup> left for Carlton at 8:30 a.m. Fatigues in forenoon. Arms drill in afternoon.

Wednesday, March 11

Arms drill at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Sent Staff Sergeant MacKay<sup>2</sup> and Guide McKay<sup>3</sup> to Red Pheasants Reserve . . . Inspector Howe,<sup>4</sup> 2 Sergeants, 3 Corporals, 20 Constables, 1 Guide and 21 Horses left for Carlton at 10:30 pm for special duty taking with them 1-7 pounder Gun.

\* \* \* \*

Saturday, March 14

Nothing particular.

Sunday, March 15

Everything in readiness to start for Carlton at a moments notice.

Monday, March 16

Surgeon Millar<sup>5</sup> & Guide Laronde arrived from Carlton at 4 am. At 10:30 am an eclipse of the sun occurred. Surgeon Millar, Corporal Davidson<sup>6</sup>, 19 Constables & Guide Laronde with 2 horses and 8 Civilian teams with 150 set of Militia rifles & accoutrements left for Carlton at 10 pm

\* \* \* \*

Friday, March 20

Alarming telegrams from Clarkes Crossing<sup>7</sup>. Constables McDonald & Dousley<sup>8</sup> left at 4 am with these telegrams for Major Crozier at Carlton. At 10 am Constables Kerr & Ross<sup>9</sup> left for Swift Current carrying despatches received from Major Crozier. About 50 Civilians enrolled themselves to act as home guard in conjunction with the Police in case of necessity. Wires down in every direction. Extra Picquet<sup>10</sup> mounted.

Saturday, March 21

Mail for the East left at 11 am. Gun drill at 4 pm. Constable McAllister<sup>11</sup> sent after mail & brought it back at 8 pm. Guide Joseph Potrias<sup>12</sup> left for Carlton with despatches at 8 pm. Telegraph communication opened with Winnipeg.

Sunday, March 22

Wyld, Skelton and other freighters arrived from Carlton 6 Militia rifles & ammunition issued by Inspector Morris<sup>13</sup> to Civilians.

Monday, March 23

12 Militia rifles arms & ammunition etc. issued by Inspector Morris to Civilians. Deserters Hawkins, Wright & Davies<sup>14</sup> liberated from imprisonment by the Order of the Commissioner and returned to duty from this date. Meeting in McDonalds store organizing Militia Corps. Officers selected. Authority from Government by telegraph to form the Corps.

Tuesday, March 24

No word from Carlton. Halfbreed named Lambert reported to have gone to Fort Pitt to seduce Indians from their allegiance. I despatched special messenger "Baptiste Fontaine" to inform Inspector Dickens<sup>15</sup> Members of Milita Corps sworn in and drilled for some time in No 4 Barrack Room. Horse Elk handed over by Clinkskills freighters having played out with Constable Kerr on his way down to Swift Current.

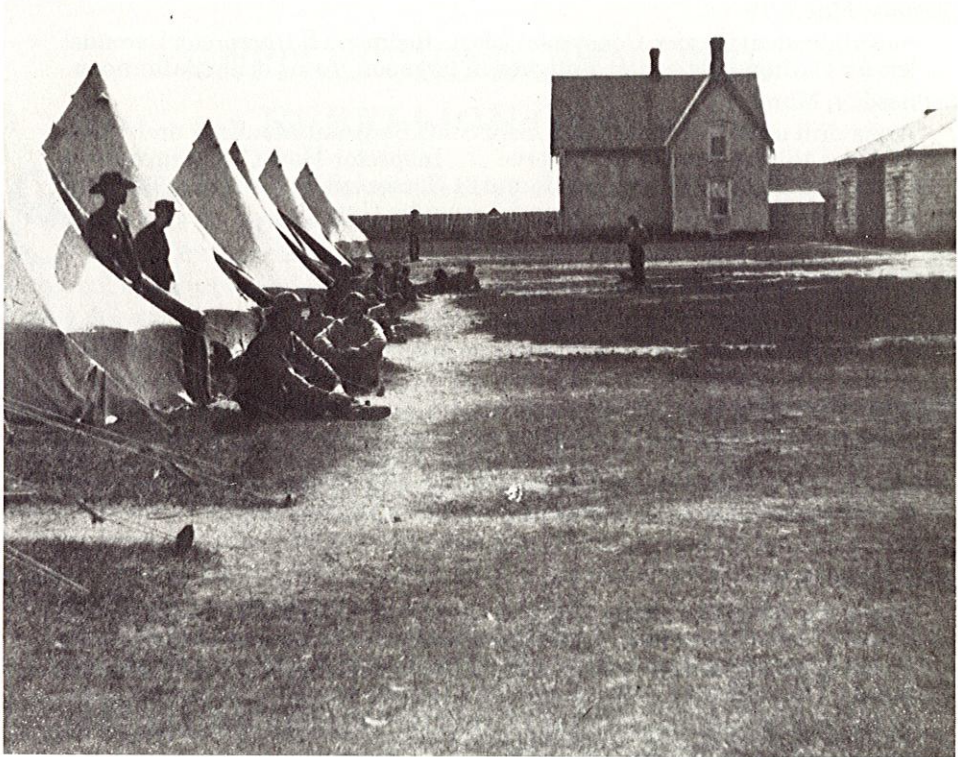
Wednesday, March 25

Telegram from Comptroller & 1 from Governor Dewdney<sup>16</sup>. Constable McAllister left with the latter at noon. L.C. Baker<sup>17</sup> left with former at 10 pm. Considerable anxiety felt at hearing no word from Carlton. Raining heavily during the day freezing during night.

Thursday, March 26

Nothing yet from Carlton.





*Saskatchewan Archives Board, R A5048.*

Tents pitched on the parade square inside Fort Battleford during the seige.

#### Friday, March 27

A messenger arrived from Carlton at 9 am with despatches from the Commissioner & Major Crozier reporting an engagement between 100 men under command of Major Crozier and the half breed rebels on Thursday yesterday. Constables Arnold & Gibson<sup>18</sup> killed and 7 of the Mounted Police wounded 7 of the Prince Albert volunteers killed and 4 wounded. An order was also received from the Commander for 25 men and 25 volunteers. By some bodys order at the Volunteers did not go. Sergeant Bagley<sup>19</sup> with 24 men left at 4:30 pm for Carlton . . .

#### Saturday, March 28

Entire force in Barracks engaged making Bastions for defence of Barracks  
...

#### Sunday, March 29

. . . Report that Poundmakers Indians are to attack Battleford tomorrow all hands strengthening defences. Telegraph office moved to orderly room all women & children brought into Barracks assembly at 9:30 & told off for stations in case of attack.

#### Monday, March 30

Stockade strengthened. About 120 Indians mostly mounted — were observed to come to Indian office in the forenoon. McRae the Indian Agent made an attempt to cross the river with Mr. McKay<sup>20</sup> from the Hudson's Bay Company but being fired upon by some people from other side returned to Barracks. Some of the Storekeepers sent over their keys & gave some



presents to the Indians they were observed to take up their quarters in the Industrial School. About 10 o'clock some shots were heard in the vicinity of the Barracks the assembly was sounded and all hands turned out.

Tuesday, March 31

It was found that the Indians had entered the Stores of the Hudson's Bay Company & Mahaffey & Clinkskill and all private houses on south side of river & carried off what stores they could lay hands on & either destroyed or carried away the clothing & other articles in private houses. B. Freeman, I. Payne<sup>21</sup> reported to have been murdered by the Stoneys during the night. Not known what has become Josh Applegarth & his wife & sister<sup>22</sup> Joseph Price & Geo Gopsil<sup>23</sup> who were coming into town were met by a large party of Indians. Prices horses were taken & he barely escaped with his life on the intercession of his wife. People from a distance getting into Barracks. Goodwin Marchand<sup>24</sup> arrested being suspected of supplying Indians with arms & ammunition.

Wednesday, April 1

Brought the gun to Ottons place & fired some shots at parties who were robbing store on other side. Teams hauling stores from Hudson's Bay warehouse & Mahaffey & Clinkskills. J. Bird & P. Ballentine<sup>25</sup> left at Midnight with despatches for Superintendent Herchmer<sup>26</sup>.

Thursday, April 2

Bird & Ballentine returned at 9 o'clock. Ballentine being afraid to proceed Constable Storer<sup>27</sup> volunteered to accompany Bird & they left on Swift Current trail at 10 am. Teams hauling stores from south side of river. Estimated number of people in Barracks — about 500 including women & children. Still fortifying stockade. A horse belonging to F.A. Smart<sup>28</sup> taken over by the Police to be used for Government purposes.

Friday, April 3

At 11 Sergeant Major Kirk<sup>29</sup> arrested Joseph Nolin and Vandal halfbreeds at Hudsons Bay store. At 1 pm Sergeant Major Kirk with a party of 20 men went to half breed camp about 3 miles on the south side of Battle River where it was reported hostile Breeds and some Indians had assembled and arrested Basil Lafonde, Duncan Nolin<sup>30</sup> & 7 others on suspicion. A party of Indians came down North side of Saskatchewan at about 6 pm & entered Wylde house brought out gun & fired some shots of schrapnell at them but it was difficult to find range & shots had no effect. A man named Bremner<sup>31</sup> galloped up to Barracks about 11:30 without cap or saddle he reported that he had been sent by the Breslayor people for an escort to bring them in but he contradicted himself so often Sergeant Major Kirk arrested him & put him into cells.

Saturday, April 4

About 75 Bushels of oats brought in from Turners and about 300 from Clinks a party of about 30 Mounted Indians were observed to come to south side of river at about 7 pm shortly after about 50 Carts arrived. Mahaffey & Clinkskills Store burned at 8 pm. Sentries reported that Rockets & Star Shell were seen on Swift Current trail. Report considered doubtful.

Sunday, April 5

At 6 am Josie Alexander<sup>32</sup> arrived from Pitt he brought in an Indian from Moosomins. 11 people reported massacred at Frog Lake<sup>33</sup>. Assistance wanted by Inspector Dickens. Stables at Industrial School burned at about 8 am. Josie Alexander & the Indian left for Pitt at 7 pm. Robt McDonald<sup>34</sup> and two half breed scouts left at same time on south side of river for Pitt.

Monday, April 6

Jno Longmore<sup>35</sup> arrived from Pitt at 3 am with despatches from Inspector Dickens he requests assistance. Massacre at Frog Lake confirmed. Snow storm.



Tuesday, April 7

Potrais returned from Prince Albert with despatches from the Commissioner. Robt Hourie & Philip Atkinson<sup>36</sup> discharged from custody. Adjourned inquest on the body of B. Freeman.

Wednesday, April 8

Josie Alexander returned and reported that he had met with a body of Stoney Indians near Turtle River who robbed him of his despatches and provisions and arms and saddle. A body of Indians plundering houses on south side of River fired 9 shots from the 7 pounder at them small skirmish between some our men & them with rifles 1 Indian killed. Philip Atkinson left with despatches for Prince Albert at 6:30 am.

Thursday, April 9

Telegraph line again in working order despatches from General Middleton, Josie Alexander & J. Atkinson<sup>37</sup> were to have left for Swift Current but line coming in working order were not sent. McCrae one of the Civilian Sentries happening to accidentally discharge his rifle. An alarm was sounded at 11:45 and all men turned out. Despatch from General Middleton important that it should be sent to Prince Albert. Great anxiety about Pitt Party — Storer left Swift Current.

Friday, April 10

Word from Swift Current that Applegarth & wife had arrived there safely. Potrais & J. Atkinson left for Prince Albert with despatches at 11 am important they should get through. Antoine an Indian arrived from Prince Albert 7 pm no despatches reports half breeds on North trail — driving off cattle etc is doubtful if our scouts get through all right. Messrs. Caswell & Brown<sup>38</sup> arrived from Clarkes Crossing with despatches from General Middleton.

Saturday, April 11

Caswell & Brown left for Clarkes Crossing at 9 am taking with them the buckboard taken from Nolin a prisoner. Josie Alexander was sent to find out Poundmaker's whereabouts at 10:30 . . .

Sunday, April 12

Josie Alexander returned from Breslayor saw no Indians they are supposed to be in camp at Poundmakers. Scanlan<sup>39</sup> left for Prince Albert at 3 pm taking with him Bremners horse. Turner & Arcand<sup>40</sup> come in from Pitt saw nothing particular. Everything apparently quiet.

Monday, April 13

Harpur<sup>41</sup> & Josie left for Clarke's Crossing with Gisborne's horses. Constable Storer, Bird, Smart, Ross<sup>42</sup> & an Indian came in from Swift Current they report all quiet on the trail. Saw no Indians they brought in Pompey, Erney & two horses purchased by Superintendent Herchmer — Fatigue party preparing cable to launch scow. Water low. Millar & Spence<sup>43</sup> went to Breslayor to bring in the Arcands. Sent Antoine<sup>44</sup> to find out the whereabouts of the Indians.

Tuesday, April 14

Sent 7 teams with escort of 20 men to Princes brought in 5 loads of hay and 2 of oats. Prince to receive \$12.00 per ton for his hay. The two Arcands, Miller & Spence returned from Breslayor they report that while there 9 Stoney Indians arrived who state that Poundmaker with the Indians of six reserves are crossing Battle River and intend to attack the Barracks tomorrow. Fatigue parties digging trenches round stockade. It would be advisable to put the oats again in Quarter Masters Store. The Officer Commanding decided to pile oats & flour on centre of square. Indians seen on south side of river in Hudson's Bay Store.



Wednesday, April 15

Two Indians seen near Roman Catholic Church. Sergeant Major Kirk and 14 men scoured the bush from there to the Boat Landing & Pines but did not succeed in finding anything. Trenches dug around Stockade. No word as yet from Pitt. Think it likely that Indians will not attack Barracks. I wish we could either send a scout or relief party to Pitt.

Thursday, April 16

Snow storm very cold. No word of messenger sent to Indian Reserves. Brought in a band of cattle found in sand hills. Telegram from Harpur from Clarkes Crossing. Sent reply.

Friday, April 17

At 1 pm Sergeant Bagley, Constables Storer, Hynes, Potter<sup>45</sup> with horses. Turpin, Pompey, Bumboozle & Ned left on special duty in the direction of Poundmakers. Jas Bird & Pembrun<sup>46</sup> left for Fort Pitt at 6 pm taking one of Rises horses and 1 of Skeltons gave them 1 Snider Carbine & 2 Adams Revolvers. Harpur telegraphs that he will leave for Battleford on tomorrow morning.

Saturday, April 18

Barracks scrubbed out & cleaned up generally. Stormy with showers of sleet. Everything quiet no news of any kind.

Sunday, April 19

Sergeant Bagleys party returned they report that they travelled about 50 miles up to Battle River Saw no Indians had a view of Poundmakers Camp. Saw nothing but cattle. If the Indians have not left they must be on Little Pine Reserve. Harpur & Josie returned from Clarkes Crossing. Nothing particular. Indians seen during night on south side of river.

Monday, April 20

Put Scow in Battle River. Casmere Delorme discharged by Commanding officer. Teams engaged hauling goods from Hudson's Bay Store & Industrial School. Bird and Pembrun returned from Fort Pitt at noon and reported that Fort Pitt had been abandoned by the Police that 2 of the Police were killed in an encounter with the Indians and that the remainder of the Force had left then for Battleford four days ago by the river. Constables Hynes, Allen & Guide Josie left at 2 pm to go north along the Saskatchewan with a view to find out if there was any truth in this report. Pambrun<sup>47</sup> accidentally shot in the arm by Speers in the Guard Room.

Tuesday, April 21

Constable Hynes Allen<sup>48</sup> & Guide returned at 7 pm and reported that they had found the Fort Pitt party with Inspector Dickens on a scow about 45 miles up the Saskatchewan the party having abandoned Fort Pitt. Constable Cowan being killed there on the 15th inst they were bringing in Constable Loasby<sup>49</sup> who was badly wounded. Four teams bringing over goods from Hudson's Bay Company Store & Industrial School. Brought in two loads of hay from Turners.

Wednesday, April 22

Inspector Dickens with Sergeant Martin, Staff Sergeant Rolph, Corporal Sleigh<sup>50</sup> and 22 Constables arrived from Pitt by scow bringing with them Constable Loasby who was wounded they brought in about 1500 Rounds Winchester ammunition. A small quantity of Snider ammunition "injured" by the water and a small quantity of revolver ammunition. About 8 o'clock pm Constable White<sup>51</sup> who had been on picquet with Mr. F.A. Smart came in and reported that they had been fired on by Indians and that Smart got hit & had fallen from his horse. Sergeant Major Kirk with 35 men started out



(at) once and found Smarts body about 3 miles from the Barracks he having been shot dead his horse was also shot but he was brought in & died in the stable during the night. The Hudson's Bay stores burned by Indians during the night. A general alarm the men remained around the Stockade till 4 in the morning. Smarts death is deplored by all as his services since his arrival from Winnipeg on the 13th inst were invaluable.

Thursday, April 23

Mr. Smart buried with military honours at 4 pm. Constable Ross arrived at the river at 5 pm with a message that troops under Colonel Otter<sup>52</sup> would arrive at Battle River this evening. Judge Rouleaus<sup>53</sup> house burned by Indians at about 7 pm. About 40 Indians on south side of Battle River. Some Shooting heard going on about 9 pm. Sergeant Mackay & 9 men who had been sent to guard the scow came in at 9:30 and reported that Indians were crossing on the scow — Story not believed. Nothing particular during the night. It was found that the scow had not been interfered with.

Friday, April 24

Colonel Otter with Superintendent Herchmer, Inspector Neale<sup>54</sup> 40 men of the North West Mounted Police and 500 troops arrived. Inspector Dickens took over the Command of the Post. Took the scow brought from Fort Pitt from the boat landing to Battle River. Sent 3 waggons & hay racks from the Barracks to Camp by Superintendent Herchmers order the waggons belonged to Guthrie Shelton and 1 Police wagon. Telegrams from General Middleton that he was engaged attacking the HalfBreeds 25 miles from Clarkes Crossing<sup>55</sup>. Two Indians found killed near Indians office. Paynes<sup>56</sup> body found in a stable at the Reserve . . .

Sunday, April 26

Bake house took fire at 9 am. Extinguished with but little damage by the Babcocks. Visited Camp in forenoon. Everything quiet.

Monday, April 27

Sergeant Fraser, Corporals McConnell<sup>57</sup> & Sleigh and 28 Constables left for the Camp across the Battle River for duty with Superintendent Herchmer

. . .

Tuesday, April 28

. . . About 1:30 pm a prisoner Bremner made an attempt to escape and succeeded in passing the sentries he was fired at several times but not hit Sergeant Bagley came up with near telegraph office and brought him back

. . .

Wednesday, April 29

. . . Civilians living in new town moving into their houses. Indian Agent Rea, Rev. Thos Clarke, Mrs. Clarke & Miss Taylor left for Swift Current. Moses Sayers arrested by Sergeant Major Kirk. Charged with stealing a pair of mitts from Miss Jessie Laurie.

Thursday, April 30

Constable J.A. Macdonald sent to replace Constable Dawson<sup>58</sup> with Superintendent Herchmer. Princes & Matheson teams engaged removing people to their houses by order of Colonel Millar . . .

Friday, May 1

Colonels Otter & Herchmer with about 330 men left for Poundmakers at 3:30 pm. Nothing particular everything apparently quiet.

Saturday, May 2

From signals given from Fort Otter Lieutenant Colonel Miller had the assembly sounded at 8:30. The column who had been at Poundmakers returned about 9 pm they had an engagement with the Indians Corporal Sleigh of the North West Mounted Police was killed & Corporal Lowry,





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Troops on their way to relieve Battleford

Constable Burke & Sergeant Ward<sup>59</sup> wounded the two former mortally. Inspector Dickens with his command remained under arms till midnight.

Sunday, May 3

Corporal Lowry & Constable Burke died from their wounds in the morning. Constable Rowley<sup>60</sup> handed me a diary and two pipes belonging to the late Corporal Sleigh.

Monday, May 4

Corporals Lowry, Sleigh, Constables Burke, Dodds<sup>61</sup> Battleford Rifles and 2 men of the volunteers and 1 teamster buried with military honors great funeral . . .

Wednesday, May 6

The camp of the North West Mounted Police moved over from south side of Battle River.

Thursday, May 7

A party of scouts under Constable Ross attacked by Indians near Breslayor and one of them "Baptiste Fontaine" taken prisoner. Board of discharge on Corporals Sleigh, Lowry, Constables Cowan & Burke. Kits & effects sold.

\*\*\*\*

Thursday, May 14

Joseph Nolin & Basil Lafonde liberated on parole. Goodwin Marchand remanded by Colonel Otter. Moses Sayers committed for trial by F I Dickens Jr. A scouting party of the North West Mounted Police attacked by a party of Indians near Duanes. Constable Elliot<sup>62</sup> killed and Constable Spencer wounded. Telegrams from Batoche that rebels are totally defeated 51 killed 173 wounded & 127 prisoners taken. Steamer Northcote to leave for Battleford this day from Batoche . . .

Saturday May 16

Telegram announcing the capture of Reil [sic] about 3 miles from Batoche. Elliotts body brought in . . .

Sunday May 17

Brigade church parade. Funeral of the late Constable Elliott.

Monday, May 18

Nothing unusual.



Tuesday, May 19

Same.

Wednesday, May 20

About 8 pm some half breeds carrying a white flag came into Camp accompanied by teamsters who had been taken prisoners by the Indians the breeds I believe are Chas Bremner, Sayers, Caplette, Rev. Cachon<sup>63</sup> also came in with the party & two women. Baptiste Fontaine who had been taken by the half Breeds also came in with the party.

Thursday, May 21

9 head of Cattle brought in by Scouts. Some excitement white flags the order of the day . . .

Friday, May 22

Barrack Square cleaned up.

Sunday, May 24

Major General Middleton & troops from Prince Albert arrived on Steamer North West.

### FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Superintendent Lief Newry Fitzroy Crozier in charge at Carlton, Constables A. Cole and T. Redmond, and Louis Laronde, interpreter.
- <sup>2</sup> Staff Sergeant A. B. MacKay
- <sup>3</sup> Probably Joseph McKay interpreter and guide who is reputed to have fired first shot at Duck Lake.
- <sup>4</sup> Inspector Joseph Howe.
- <sup>5</sup> Dr. Robert Miller, Assistant Surgeon.
- <sup>6</sup> Corporal H.J.A. Davidson.
- <sup>7</sup> Clarkes Crossing telegraph station on the river about eighteen miles from Saskatoon.
- <sup>8</sup> Constable A. McDonald and probably Constable R. Dowsley.
- <sup>9</sup> Constables Warren Kerr and Charles Ross.
- <sup>10</sup> Picquet also picket. A military term used for a small detached body of troops posted out from a force to warn against the enemy's approach.
- <sup>11</sup> Constable T. McAllister.
- <sup>12</sup> Probably Joseph B. Poitras.
- <sup>13</sup> Inspector W.O. Morris
- <sup>14</sup> Probably Constables P.H. Hawkins, J. Wright and possibly a D. or E.F. Davis.
- <sup>15</sup> Baptiste Fontaine was a police scout. He was sent to advise Inspector Francis Jeffrey Dickens in charge of the police detachment at Fort Pitt.
- <sup>16</sup> Edgar Dewdney, Lieutenant Governor of the North West Territories.
- <sup>17</sup> L.C. Baker was a freighter and rancher.
- <sup>18</sup> Constable G.P. Arnold was wounded at Duck Lake and died the next day. Constable T.J. Gibson was on the gun detachment.
- <sup>19</sup> Sergeant Frederick A. Bagley.
- <sup>20</sup> J.A. McRae, agency clerk and William McKay.
- <sup>21</sup> James Payne was a farm instructor at Eagle Hills. B. Freeman has not been identified. A. Bernard Tremont was killed about the same time as Payne. His body was recovered and an inquest held under Coroner P.G. Laurie. See entry for April 7 where B. Freeman is again referred to probably in error for Tremont.
- <sup>22</sup> George C. Applegarth, farm instructor at Eagle Hills. Mr. Applegarth, his wife and her sister escaped to Swift Current (see entry for April 10).
- <sup>23</sup> Joseph Price was a local farmer. George D. Gopsill was a farmer and farm instructor. Both men served in the Battleford Home Guards.
- <sup>24</sup> Charges do not appear to have been proceeded with against Goodwin Marchand, a local freighter and farmer. Yellow Plume was later charged with stealing Marchand's horse but the charges were dismissed.
- <sup>25</sup> Probably P. Ballendine.
- <sup>26</sup> Superintendent W.M. Herchmer who was at Swift Current.
- <sup>27</sup> Constable J.H. Storer.
- <sup>28</sup> Frank A. Smart, a freighter, later killed while on duty with the Battleford Rifles. See entry for April 22.
- <sup>29</sup> Sergeant Major John Kirk.
- <sup>30</sup> Basil Lafond and Duncan Nolin were freighters. They were both later released.
- <sup>31</sup> Identified as Alex Bremner see *Saskatchewan Herald* 23 April 1885. Cited in W.L. Clink: *Battleford Beleaguered, 1885*. (Toronto: W.L. Clink, 1985). p. 19. He later tried to escape (see April 28 entry) and was released on May 13.
- <sup>32</sup> Joseph "Josie" Alexander, a police courier.
- <sup>33</sup> Nine were killed.

## BATTLEFORD DURING THE REBELLION OF 1885

- <sup>34</sup> Robert McDonald, a freighter and member of the Battleford Home Guard.
- <sup>35</sup> John Longmore Senior, a freighter. John and his son John Junior served in the Battleford Home Guard.
- <sup>36</sup> Robert Hourie and Philip Atkinson. They had been arrested on suspicion on April 3. Atkinson on discharge served as a despatch rider (see entry for April 4).
- <sup>37</sup> James Atkinson, a police courier.
- <sup>38</sup> Joseph Caswell and Archibald Brown residents of the Temperance Colony at Saskatoon. Archibald Brown tells of the difficult journey that they made to carry the despatches. The journey was necessary because the telegraph line was out of commission. For the account see *Narratives of Saskatoon, 1882-1912*, University of Saskatchewan, 1927. p. 33.
- <sup>39</sup> John Scalon, despatch bearer.
- <sup>40</sup> William Turner and D. Arcand who had been working in the area of Fort Pitt.
- <sup>41</sup> Sergeant George H. Harpur.
- <sup>42</sup> Constables J.H. Storer, James Bird, Bresaylor, F.A. Smart, freighter and D. Ross.
- <sup>43</sup> The identity of these persons is not clear. They could be Constables W.J. Spencer and A. Miller.
- <sup>44</sup> Antoine a Hudson's Bay Company employee.
- <sup>45</sup> Constable John Hynes, Constable W.H. Potter.
- <sup>46</sup> James Bird, freighter and police courier. Pambrun should be Pambrun but which Pambrun is not clear as there were several but it was probably P.C. Pambrun who was later accidentally wounded (see entry for April 20).
- <sup>47</sup> Pierre Chrysalogue Pambrun was not seriously injured in the incident. See W.L. Clink *op. cit.*, p. 26.
- <sup>48</sup> Constable C. Allen possibly later promoted to Corporal.
- <sup>49</sup> Constable David Latimer Cowan and Constable C. Loasby.
- <sup>50</sup> Sergeant J.A. Martin, Staff Sergeant Dr. J.W. Rolph, Corporal R.B. Sleigh later killed at Cut Knife.
- <sup>51</sup> Constable T. White.
- <sup>52</sup> Lieutenant Colonel William Dillon Otter Commander of the Battleford Column of the North West Field Force.
- <sup>53</sup> Should be Rouleau. Judge Charles B. Rouleau, Magistrate.
- <sup>54</sup> Inspector P.R. Neale.
- <sup>55</sup> At Fish Creek.
- <sup>56</sup> See entry for March 31.
- <sup>57</sup> Sergeant G. Fraser, Corporal W.P. McConnell.
- <sup>58</sup> Constable James Dawson.
- <sup>59</sup> Corporal W.H.T. Lowry, Trumpeter Patrick Burke, Sergeant J.H. Ward, N.W.M.P.
- <sup>60</sup> Constable G.W. Rowley.
- <sup>61</sup> Should be Dobbs. Arthur Dobbs of the Battleford Rifles.
- <sup>62</sup> Constable F.O. Elliot. Should be Dewan's ranch not Duane.
- <sup>63</sup> Rev. Father Louis Cochin not Cachon.



## BOOK REVIEWS

'NO FAULT OF THEIR OWN': UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE CANADIAN WELFARE STATE, 1914-1941 by James Struthers. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983. Pp. 268. \$30.00 (cloth), \$12.50 (paper).

The propaganda dictated that to be unemployed was un-Canadian. Advertising issued from the Immigration Branch, the provincial governments, and the railway companies had the same message — no matter whether the picture on the cover portrayed a man on a horse in a bountiful wheat field, or a threshing machine surrounded by happy workers — that Canada was the land of opportunity where anyone with faith, patience, initiative, and hard work could find ready employment at good wages and eventually become a person of property and status. For many newcomers, as for many Canadians, rapid progress up the "agricultural ladder" was as much an article of faith as were the wages promised by eager promoters concerned with collecting bonuses and bounties for those they enticed to leave home. The unhappy consequence was that seasonal unemployment became a common fate for thousands unable to earn enough in summer to last all winter. To let them starve was out of the question, however, but to provide systematic assistance was equally unacceptable until almost mid-century. It is the long, arduous road to unemployment insurance viewed from a public policy perspective which forms the basis for James Struthers' excellent book, *No Fault of Their Own*. Throughout he skillfully weaves the differing attitudes, opinions and personalities which all had a bearing on the final determination of the question.

Underlying most policy decisions affecting the unemployed were two traditional attitudes which hampered effective action. One was the English Poor Law Principle of "less eligibility" — that aid to the down-and-out should always be less than that earned by the lowest paid local worker. Idleness was thus curtailed since there was no incentive not to work. The second belief was that Canada was essentially rural and agricultural, and as long as farmers needed workers there was no need to combat unemployment, an urban problem which could be solved simply by forcing the jobless to return to the land where they belonged. If for some reason assistance was necessary, however, it should be of short-term duration and should be provided by municipal and provincial governments in cooperation with philanthropic agencies.

With these factors in mind Struthers begins his discussion with the 1913-14 depression which saw the first real destitution due to urban unemployment. The war exacerbated the situation until the nation got its bearings and full employment returned. Most important, however, the struggle created a temporary change in attitude on the part of the federal government. Since men had served the national cause it was the nation's responsibility to provide jobs and assistance. The Employment Service of Canada was one indication. The second was the draft legislation for an unemployment insurance scheme prepared by dedicated administrators like Bryce Stewart. However, money and politics killed both. Not only were these schemes expensive but the dependence of the King government after 1921 on rural support meant that unemployment insurance on the British model was out of the question while farmers clamoured for workers. Thus, as Struthers states: "Canada entered the greatest economic crisis in its history unprepared not



## BOOK REVIEWS

through what was unknown but through what had been forgotten and abandoned.”

Bennett's response demonstrated the gravity of the problem. To fend off the effects of rising unemployment he raised the tariff and he offered \$20,000,000 under the Relief Act to the municipalities because they had the only available machinery to handle it. Not only did this mean inconsistent application but it left out the most vulnerable group of unemployed, the thousands of transients who could not meet residence requirements. On the positive side, however, it meant that meaningful work was still performed for the money granted to those who qualified.

Britain's abandonment of the gold standard in 1932 and its threat to Canada's credit resulted in the implementation of the wasteful and humiliating direct relief system administered by the municipalities, and to the infamous relief camps designed to keep transients out of the cities and out of trouble. Their failure, and the outbreak of another war which required greater direction from the centre, forced Ottawa to recognize Canada's urban complexion, abandon the constitutional argument which claimed that only the provinces and the municipalities had jurisdiction over unemployment, and do something positive. The result was the Unemployment Insurance Act of 1941.

*No Fault of Their Own* claims to be a simple administrative study but in fact it is one of the most important books to appear recently not only for its quality but because of the social implications of what Struthers describes. For this reason this writer would have liked to have seen more illustrative material like the tragic story of the Bates family from Glidden, Saskatchewan. The only other reservation concerns the title which releases the chronically unemployed from all blame for their plight. While this may be compassionate one can argue that many of them were no more at fault for being "conned" by promises of wealth in Canada than are those who purchase seaside condos in Arizona.

W.J.C. Cherwinski

MIDWAYS, JUDGES, AND SMOOTH-TONGUED FAKIRS. By David C. Jones. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1983. Pp. X, 157. \$16.95.

During the late 1960s and the 1970s educational history (usually thought of as the history of schooling), attracted a considerable following in Canada. One reason for the popularity of this genre was that, in keeping with the tradition fostered by Bernard Bailyn in the United States, it provided windows into the social history of a place or a period. In many ways, *Midways, Judges and Smooth-Tongued Fakirs*, written by an author trained in educational history, extends that tradition to the country fairs of the Prairie West. In doing so he provides some important insights into Prairie rural society.

The book essentially explores several main themes related to the fairs: the attempt by "country life zealots" to use the fairs to promote their rural life mythology; the difficulties involved in merging professional expertise as represented by the judges with the practical wisdom of the farmers; the constant and largely unsuccessful struggle to censor lewdness, immorality and indignities from the midway; the modestly successful attempts to introduce domestic science to mothers through exhibits on child-rearing and hygiene; and the difficulties involved in finding enough volunteer leaders to keep the fairs vibrant.



The insights developed directly and indirectly by discussion of these themes are important for anyone interested in Prairie rural social history. The gulf between the agrarian and social leadership of the Prairie on the one hand and the bulk of farm people, for example, is immense. The gap is clear in almost every theme discussed in the book. The book also provides a useful discussion of how country fairs helped spread agricultural knowledge throughout the Canadian West . . . a common concern among agricultural historians in other countries but until now little considered in Canada. Finally, Jones provides an "earthy" view of the fairs, one that echoes more the bemused, worldly view of a James Gray rather than the delusions of the vocal moral reformers of the early twentieth century.

In sum, this is an enjoyable book that improves our understanding of Prairie rural life. Indeed, given its purposes, it is a study with only a few flaws. It might usefully have added a chart indicating statistically the rise and decline of the fairs to complement the profuse and generally interesting photographs scattered throughout the volume. Jones could also have dwelt somewhat longer on the ambiguous relationship between the country fairs and the major exhibitions, and a little more should have been added on the midway companies that made the fairs both popular and damned. Finally, while Jones has commendably written a well researched book for a popular audience, in doing so he has sometimes stretched his prose to very light tinges of purple, a mild irritant that will doubtlessly disappear in his future writings.

Ian MacPherson

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