

# Saskatchewan History

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**Louis Schmidt Patriarch of St. Louis.  
"Building the Kingdom of God on the Prairies"  
E. H. Oliver and Saskatchewan Education, 1913-1930.  
The 1899 Manitoba and Northwestern Railway Dispute  
With the Doukhobors.**



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COVER PHOTOGRAPH: Central Avenue, Prince Albert, July 1910. The parade was held on the occasion of the visit of Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier to Prince Albert on July 26-27, 1910. Laurier, who was campaigning for re-election, is seated in the back seat of the first car on the left hand side. Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-B1685.		

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Guest Editor: D. H. Bocking

Correspondence should be addressed to: *Saskatchewan History*,  
Saskatchewan Archives Board, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon,  
Saskatchewan. S7N 0W0

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# LOUIS SCHMIDT

## PATRIARCH OF ST. LOUIS

*By Raymond J. A. Huel*

**D**uring his long life Louis Schmidt participated in two of the most significant events in the history of western Canada. In the Red River Insurrection he had been associated with Louis Riel, a colleague and classmate. Later on, Schmidt became involved in the early agitation to secure redress for the grievances of the North-West Territories but was only a close observer of the Rebellion of 1885. In addition, Schmidt witnessed the end of the fur trade and the buffalo hunt and the emergence of the agricultural frontier. Within this context he was one of the minority of Métis who successfully adapted to the new order in the West.

Schmidt is also unique because he was a well educated, articulate Métis who kept a diary. It is not known why he kept a journal but it was in keeping with the traditions of the fur trade era, his education in a classical college and a personal historical consciousness. Be that as it may, the diary is a valuable and fascinating account of life during the formative years of western Canadian history. It contains entries made between 1885 and 1934 but there is evidence to suggest that there were earlier sections which are no longer extant. In his memoirs published in 1911-1912 in *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, Schmidt referred to a series of notes completed in 1867-1868 and which were subsequently lost. Furthermore, the contents of his memoirs suggest that they could not have been written by relying only on his memory of events. Between August 1884 and April 1885 Schmidt wrote a detailed fifty nine page account of the agitation of the Métis in St. Laurent. Its form and style are similar to that found in the 1885-1934 entries and may have formed part of the earlier sections that have since disappeared. In the 1884-1885 notes, the memoirs and the 1885-1934 diary, Schmidt's style is characteristically short and only seldom does he provide a personal commentary.

Louis Schmidt was born on 4 December 1844, at Old Fort Chippeweyan. His father was Alfred Smith, a fisherman in the employ of the Hudson's Bay Company while his mother, Marguerite Lespérance, was the daughter of a Red River guide. In tracing his genealogy Schmidt alleged that his paternal grandfather was Nicholas Andrews a clerk in the Hudson's Bay post at Athabasca married to Marie-Anne Généreux a Métisse from Great Slave Lake. Andrews apparently abandoned his wife and youngest son after leaving the Bay's service.<sup>1</sup> Marie-Anne subsequently married Pierre Laferté and Schmidt's father, Andrew's youngest son, took the name Laferté.<sup>2</sup> According to Schmidt, he himself bore the name Laferté until 1858 when Bishop A.-A. Taché, O.M.I., of St.





The feast of Corpus Christi held at the Sacred Heart Cathedral, Prince Albert, 1917. The Corpus Christi festival is held to honor the Eucharist on the Thursday following Trinity Sunday.



Boniface altered it to Schmidt in the belief that it was his true name.<sup>3</sup>

Be that as it may, Schmidt's baptismal record signed by Rev. J.-B. Thiabault on 22 July 1845, refers to Louis Smith "*enfant légitime de Alfred Smith et de Marguerite Lespérance.*"<sup>4</sup> The ambiguity associated with Smith's birth does not appear to concern legitimacy but ancestry and Taché's transformation of Smith to Schmidt has compounded the matter.<sup>5</sup> The source of the confusion may have resulted from the fact that Schmidt's parents were estranged. While Schmidt's mother lived with him the father did not and only visited the son's home once.

In 1854, Schmidt arrived in Red River where his mother had gone the previous year to seek medical attention. In St. Boniface he was educated by the Brothers of Christian Schools and was one of four Métis children selected by Bishop Taché to pursue advanced studies in Quebec colleges. Schmidt attended the *Collège de St-Hyacinthe* and while he did well in his studies, he claimed that the cold damp winters played havoc with his health and in 1861 it was decided that he should return home.<sup>6</sup>

On 17 August 1861, the day after his return to St. Boniface Schmidt addressed a letter to Taché and the penitential tone of the letter clearly suggests that factors other than ill health had made him leave the college. He spoke of his "misfortune" and how the comments of a local clergyman had given him hope. Schmidt also asked Taché to pray "*pour le malheureux qui vous a fait tant de peine pardonnez-lui sa faute et donnez-lui aussi votre bénédiction.*"<sup>7</sup> In extending his New Year's wishes to Taché Schmidt stated that despite having received much from the bishop, he had not profited from these advantages. He claimed to owe Taché a debt far greater than that which he could ever hope to repay and implored the prelate to forgive all the grief caused by an "unworthy protégé."<sup>8</sup>

In the meantime, Schmidt lived with his mother and grandfather, Alexis Lespérance, a Red River guide. Under the direction of Father J. Lestanc, O.M.I., Schmidt prepared copies of the Cree grammar and dictionary compiled by Father A. Lacombe, O.M.I. Schmidt later went to live with Rev. N.-J. Ritchot in St. Norbert but some problems arose and in the fall of 1863 he went to Pembina where he lived and worked for two months with Joseph Lemay, the collector of customs. Lemay liked Schmidt but his wife did not and after tormenting Schmidt she convinced her husband to send him away. Consequently, Schmidt arrived in St. Joseph without knowing where to go.

Father Alexis André, O.M.I., who was in charge of the mission felt sorry for Schmidt and offered him the hospitality of the Oblates. André was struck by the fact that despite the excesses in his past, Schmidt earnestly sought the company of the clergy and seemed happy in their presence. André noted that in St. Joseph Schmidt would not be exposed to the same dangers as in St. Norbert. He made his own meals and would never have to come into contact with women while living with the Oblates.<sup>9</sup> Since the mission had no school and one was needed, André suggested to Bishop Taché that Schmidt should assume the function of teacher. André was quick to point out that Schmidt would be responsible only for educating boys because the schooling of girls might compromise him. Schmidt could also chop wood for the mission and direct the choir.<sup>10</sup>

It seems that these proposals never materialized and in December 1863, Schmidt accompanied André who had been asked by the American government to act as its emissary in peace negotiations with the Sioux.<sup>11</sup> When that mission



was completed Schmidt returned to St. Boniface in the summer of 1864 and was placed in charge of the carts and sent to St. Paul by Bishop Taché to bring back goods required by the diocese. It was on the second of these journeys that Schmidt brought back the famous cathedral bells which had been sent to England for recasting after having been damaged by fire in 1860. Schmidt was also a *factotem* at the bishop's palace, running errands and making *résumés* from the eastern press to missionaries in the north.<sup>12</sup> He also assisted Father V. Végréville, O.M.I., in teaching at the *Collège de St. Boniface*. Schmidt felt ill at ease in this function and was happy in the spring of 1866 to accompany Father Ritchot who was to establish the mission of Qu'Appelle. On the way, however, Schmidt learned that his uncle, Louis Lespérance, had been taken seriously ill at Fort Ellice and agreed to assist him in returning to Red River. Later that year, Schmidt was placed in charge of his grandfather's carts and accompanied the fall buffalo hunt in the vicinity of the Grand Coteau. In his memoirs Schmidt indicated that he was too inexperienced to take part in the actual hunt and had to satisfy himself with following the hunters and extracting marrow from large buffalo bones.<sup>13</sup>

The following year Schmidt, along with others from Red River, went to work for a company that had a contract to carry mail from Abercombie (North Dakota) to Helena (Montana) via Devil's Lake. While returning to Devil's Lake in the winter of 1868 Schmidt's horse froze to death and he himself suffered frostbitten feet and the subsequent amputation of some toes. When spring came Schmidt was unable to locate the place where he had been forced to leave his personal belongings after the death of his horse. He was anxious to retrieve a series of notes describing his travels.<sup>14</sup> Schmidt returned to St. Boniface in May 1868, "poor as Job" to use his own words. A short while later he finally was compensated by the American government for services rendered during Father André's mission among the Sioux four years earlier. Schmidt used this money to outfit himself as a freighter and joined the caravans transporting flour from Sauk Rapids, Minnesota to Red River.<sup>15</sup>

It was during this time that another flaw became evident in Schmidt's character and it may have been responsible for some of his earlier problems. In May 1869, a contrite and penitent Schmidt solemnly promised Bishop Taché that he would abstain forever from alcoholic beverages "*hors le cas de maladie.*" Schmidt also asked Taché to forgive "*les nombreux déboires que vous a causés jusqu' à aujourd'hui ma conduite déréglée.*" With the help of Taché's fervent prayers, Schmidt hoped to be able to abandon this "*affreuse passion.*"<sup>16</sup>

In the meantime, Louis Riel, Schmidt's boyhood friend and classmate, also returned to Red River and Schmidt went to live with him. They discussed the changes that were taking place in their homeland and, being uncertain of the plans of the Canadian government, they resolved to become involved in public affairs at the opportune time.<sup>17</sup> For his part Schmidt, late in the summer of 1869, left with a caravan bound for St. Cloud, Minnesota, and on the return journey his group camped with that of William McDougall, the Lieutenant-Governor designate of Rupert's Land but within a half day's ride northward Schmidt met Ambroise Lépine and the Métis who were on their way to prevent McDougall from entering.<sup>18</sup> Three days later Schmidt arrived in Fort Garry which was occupied by the Métis and he shared Riel's quarters.

It is not clear what role Schmidt played in this early period of the Red



River Insurrection. In his memoirs he speaks of assisting in correcting the proofs of the famous *Déclaration des habitants de la terre de Rupert et du Nord-Ouest* issued on 8 December and making his first speech on the occasion of the hoisting of the flag of the Provisional Government of Red River two days later.<sup>19</sup> The flag was white and contained a green shamrock and a buffalo. According to Schmidt, white represented the Kings of France, the shamrock acknowledged the Irish element and the buffalo symbolized the Métis.<sup>20</sup> Schmidt recalled later that an old Frenchman living in St. Boniface expressed his dislike of the white flag indicating that it was a symbol of the tyranny he had escaped by immigrating to Canada. Schmidt advised him that the monarchy did not have a monopoly on white, black was an unsuitable colour and red was too closely associated with the English. Furthermore, Schmidt informed the Frenchman that there were no royalist pretenders in Red River.<sup>21</sup>

Schmidt was a delegate from St. Boniface in the Convention of Forty that met in January-February 1870 and when the Provisional Government of Red River was created, he was appointed Assistant Secretary of State. In that capacity he issued numerous proclamations and orders on behalf of the Provisional Government and communicated with the delegates sent to Ottawa. In addition, he was to have been sent to Qu'Appelle, Batoche and other Métis settlements to inform them of events in Red River. Circumstances prevented Schmidt from going and he composed a letter to the inhabitants of the North-West explaining the peaceful intentions of the Provisional Government and asking them to support its work.<sup>22</sup>

In later years Schmidt would remember his association with the Provisional Government as his moment of glory but an examination of his contemporary correspondence suggests otherwise. On 31 May 1870, Schmidt complained to Riel that he was being mistreated and shown little respect by servants employed by the Provisional Government. Schmidt claimed that objections to his drinking habits were invalid explanations of the attitude displayed toward him and he complained furthermore that his room was rarely cleaned while others were receiving preferential treatment. He stated that he had to steal an old broken bowl in order to be able to wash himself. In a *post-scriptum* he added that even his most insignificant requests were received contemptuously by servants. Schmidt felt that Riel must be motivated by the same sentiment because he never intervened on his behalf.<sup>23</sup> The following day Schmidt again wrote Riel to complain about the privilege and favoritism accorded to others and withheld from him. While his title of Assistant Secretary of State was nominal, Schmidt argued that he had the right to more respect especially from domestic servants. He claimed that Riel's policies were creating social distinctions in a young society which should have none.<sup>24</sup>

In the meantime, the three delegates sent to Ottawa to negotiate the colony's entry into Confederation succeeded in reaching an accord with the federal authorities. Rev. N.-J. Ritchot, one of the delegates, returned to the colony with the terms of the agreement and, on 24 June, the Legislative Assembly of Rupert's Land heard his report. At Riel's invitation Louis Schmidt rose and moved that the Assembly accept the Manitoba Act. The motion was carried enthusiastically.<sup>25</sup> When the Red River Expeditionary Force arrived on 24 August 1870, Schmidt who had gone to his St. Boniface home the previous evening, did not have time to return to Fort Garry to gather his personal



belongings. Upon seeing the soldiers enter the fort, he prudently turned around and retreated. Unlike other Métis associated with the Provisional Government Schmidt suffered no reprisals at the hands of the military.

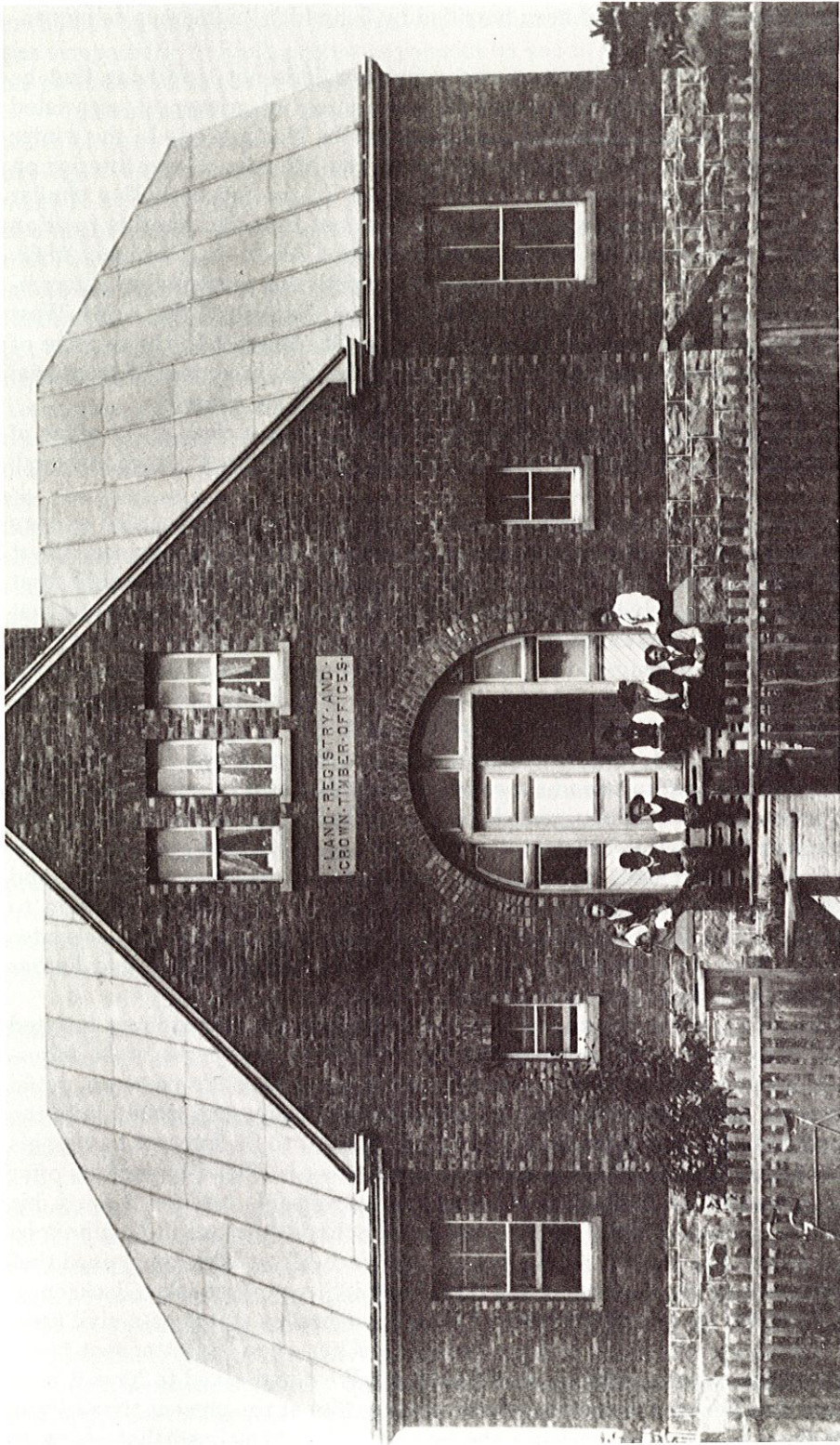
For his part, Riel went into hiding and while Schmidt kept in touch he could not visit him in St. Joseph because he lacked money and a horse. Schmidt complained of living in isolation and of knowing nothing of the politics of the new Lieutenant-Governor A. G. Archibald. The current state of affairs was not to Schmidt's liking and he hoped that it would soon change.<sup>26</sup> Elected to represent St. Boniface West in the first provincial election, Schmidt only returned to Fort Garry on 6 January 1871, when the newly elected representatives of the French parishes met with Archibald and Donald Smith, M.L.A. for Winnipeg-St. John. Schmidt reported to Riel that the Lieutenant-Governor was pleased to see a member of the former Provisional Government in the legislature. Smith, the former federal emissary, recognized Schmidt but seemed to have put aside the divisive sentiments engendered during the insurrection.<sup>27</sup> Schmidt continued to keep Riel informed of developments in Manitoba and acted as an intermediary between Riel and French Canadian M.L.A.'s such as Joseph Dubuc and Joseph Royal. Schmidt regarded Riel as the true spokesman of the Métis and argued that ministers could not act independently of him.<sup>28</sup>

When the legislature was dissolved in 1874, Schmidt's constituency was annexed to St. Charles and he was defeated in the subsequent election. In 1878 he stood for election and won in St. Francois-Xavier but did not contest the election the following year. Schmidt was also very active at the parish level as secretary of the *St. Jean-Baptiste* society and *l'Union St. Alexandre*, the Métis association. He farmed and was also secretary treasurer of the St. Boniface South School District.

Although Schmidt had married Justine Laviolette in 1872 it appears that he had not succeeded in overcoming his drinking problems and consequently he decided to leave St. Boniface and begin a new life in the North-West. His departure was delayed because he could find no one to look after his mother. Since neither his grandfather or uncle were willing to take her in, Schmidt approached a religious community but the sisters were unable to provide assistance.<sup>29</sup> In spite of these reverses Schmidt had purchased oxen and carts and had to pay for them. He asked Bishop Taché to advance \$100 to cover these purchases and other costs associated with the voyage. Taché had offered some money but Schmidt indicated that the amount was not sufficient.<sup>30</sup>

On 19 June 1880, Schmidt left St. Boniface and arrived in Duck Lake on 3 August. There he met Father André who suggested that he establish himself on the south branch of the Saskatchewan River where St. Louis now stands.<sup>31</sup> A short while later Schmidt wrote Taché to state that his previous conduct had made it impossible for him to personally render his respects. In his new home, however, Schmidt was beginning to rehabilitate himself. His health and courage were equal to the task and he asked Taché's benediction and prayers.<sup>32</sup> Throughout his life, Schmidt held the clergy in high esteem especially Bishop Taché whom he regarded as a special benefactor. From time to time he presented his homage and respect to the prelate and considered this a pleasant duty. In presenting his New Year's greetings to the bishop in 1885, for example, Schmidt stated that Taché had never ceased to protect him despite the contrary





Land Registry and Crown Timber Offices, Prince Albert, ca. 1902.



advice of the clergy who had been horrified by Schmidt's "numerous delinquencies."<sup>33</sup>

Given Schmidt's background and education, it is not surprising that he was involved in the early movement to seek redress of grievances associated with land surveys and homestead regulations in the North-West. In the winter of 1881, for example, he drafted a petition to the Minister of the Interior on behalf of the residents of the St. Louis district. In the fall of 1882 a similar petition was sent to the minister by the residents of Batoche. Another petition was sent to the Dominion Lands agent in Prince Albert in December 1883. Schmidt also collaborated in the preparation of petitions presented by intermediaries such as Lawrence Clarke, member of the Council of the North-West Territories and Vital Grandin, O.M.I., Bishop of St. Albert.<sup>34</sup> In the summer of 1883, the first of the large public meetings to voice the discontent of territorial residents was held in St. Laurent and Schmidt acted as secretary.<sup>35</sup>

In the meantime, Schmidt obtained employment as a clerk in the office of a Prince Albert barrister, M. V. Maclise, but the salary was not exorbitant and, given the difficult times, his position was not secure. Worse yet, Schmidt felt that he was not being well treated by his employer whom he regarded as very impertinent. The position of French-speaking assistant in the Prince Albert Lands Office would soon be vacant and Schmidt asked Taché to solicit that employment on his behalf. According to Schmidt, the Métis had petitioned that he be employed in that capacity the previous year but the request had not been successful. Schmidt claimed that his present misery was a just penance for his past sins but he was not convinced that the course of his life was permanently set and he remained optimistic about the future.<sup>36</sup>

In January 1884, while moving his family to Prince Albert Schmidt met a Métis who was about to attend a meeting of English mixed bloods. In discussing Métis grievances Schmidt suggested that Louis Riel be invited to champion the Métis cause because his influence would unify the Métis and strengthen their cause.<sup>37</sup> On 6 May 1884, Schmidt was secretary of a meeting of settlers and mixed bloods held at Lindsay School which resolved to send a delegation to Montana to seek Riel's assistance.<sup>38</sup> Schmidt was to accompany the delegates but on 12 May, he received his appointment in the Lands Office and Father André persuaded him to remain behind.<sup>39</sup>

Forced by circumstances to remain behind Schmidt nevertheless assisted the Métis by making their grievances known through the pages of *Le Manitoba*.<sup>40</sup> Upon hearing of Riel's arrival Schmidt wrote that his presence would enhance the Métis cause and that he was the only person who would unite the different elements in the North-West.<sup>41</sup> Schmidt went to St. Laurent to visit his former classmate and associate and offered his services. Riel declined this offer on the grounds that Schmidt could render more valuable services through his position in the Lands Office.<sup>42</sup> Riel appreciated Schmidt's letters in *Le Manitoba* and in communicating with T. E. Jackson of Prince Albert Riel complained that the only news of the movement was from Schmidt's pen. Riel asked Jackson to credit Schmidt for his efforts without compromising his status as a civil servant.<sup>43</sup> Schmidt continued to collaborate with Riel but when the latter sent him a memorandum outlining the needs of the North-West and asked to have it published in *Le Manitoba* Schmidt declined alleging that at the present time he was not inclined to comment on it for the journal. Schmidt claimed that everyone



knew that he was the paper's correspondent from Prince Albert. While Schmidt was sympathetic to Riel's protest movement he had to be circumspect because of his position and, hence, wished to remain silent.<sup>44</sup>

Schmidt's reluctance to cooperate perhaps might be more properly attributed to his growing suspicion of Riel's motives and heretical ideas. Consequently, in August 1884, Schmidt began keeping a detailed set of notes on Riel's movement. If Schmidt began with a premonition that the initial constitutional agitation might become more drastic, this feeling soon was replaced by the conviction that Riel was a dangerous heretic manipulating the gullible Métis.<sup>45</sup> A few days before the outbreak of the rebellion Schmidt wrote Bishop Taché stating that Riel was no longer interested in redressing the legitimate grievances of the Métis but in having the authorities recognize him as the leader of the Métis and negotiating with him as a sovereign power to establish a new government in the Territories. According to Schmidt, not only did the Métis blindly accept Riel's doctrines but these "absurd theories" also flattered their pride.<sup>46</sup> In sending his detailed notes to Taché, Schmidt suggested that the Bishop might want to use them to prepare a newspaper article on the true nature of territorial grievances. Schmidt feared that an attempt would be made to attribute the current unrest to the causes other than the real ones and perhaps implicate the clergy.<sup>47</sup> A short time after the fall of Batoche Schmidt again wrote Taché to inform him of the misfortune that had fallen upon the Métis. The revolt against constituted authority did not concern Schmidt as much as the apostasy of the Métis who had followed Riel in his heresy.<sup>48</sup>

Schmidt had remained in Prince Albert during the rebellion and his association with the clergy as well as his support of the status quo made him suspect in the eyes of many Métis. An uncle, Alexis Lespérance, reiterated the feelings of the Métis when he informed him that the government and its employees were to blame for the hostilities. Furthermore, Lespérance stated that the clergy had to bear a lot of the responsibility for the rebellion because if they had worked to promote the interest of the Métis, Riel's plans would have fallen on deaf ears. Instead the missionaries attempted to prevent the Métis from obtaining and exercising their rights and, hence, Lespérance urged his nephew not to take their pronouncements at face value.<sup>49</sup>

In addition, Métis suspicions were reinforced by the strong language Schmidt had used to condemn the recourse to arms in 1885 and his equally severe criticism of Riel's leadership. Schmidt's views were given a much wider audience in 1886 when he replied to comments made by Philippe Garnot, former secretary of Riel's council, shortly after his release from prison. In a letter published in *La Patrie*, a Liberal organ in Montreal, Garnot claimed that Riel had died for the French Canadian cause and that he, Garnot, would have been proud to have died alongside the Métis leader.<sup>50</sup> Schmidt took it upon himself to refute Garnot's allegations in *La Minerve*, a Conservative journal in Montreal, by accusing the Liberal party of having exaggerated Métis grievances in the North-West to further their partisan ends. While he deplored Riel's execution, Schmidt said that the rebellion could not be justified nor could the authorities be "reasonably blamed" for Riel's death.<sup>51</sup>

As a result of Schmidt's unequivocal condemnation of Riel and the rebellion many Métis became convinced that he had not only abandoned but also betrayed the Métis cause. This suspicion was so intense that nearly a quarter of



a century later in 1909 Schmidt felt compelled to rectify the historical record for the satisfaction of his family. In a written statement which he regarded as solemn as a death bed declaration, Schmidt reiterated his initial sympathy for Riel's movement and recalled his offer to serve under him. When armed conflict broke out in March 1885, the English in Prince Albert suspected Schmidt of being a Métis spy and to dispel these suspicions he joined the local militia. When the militia was mustered during the night of 26 March, Schmidt, instead of going directly to his unit, went to see Father André and was subsequently arrested by a patrol. According to Schmidt his detention was proof that the English did not regard him as a Métis traitor. He concluded his declaration by affirming that he had always condemned the rebellion because it was not justified and he felt that his strong denunciations of Riel were responsible for the resentment of the Métis.<sup>52</sup> For his part, Riel does not appear to have begrudged Schmidt's actions and a few days before his execution Riel prayed to God to grant his former associate a "happy old age."<sup>53</sup>

In view of the negative attitude of the Métis *vis-à-vis* Schmidt, it is ironic to note that in the parliamentary debate over the North-West Rebellion he was identified as being actively engaged in that "horrible contest" and a close associate of Louis Riel.<sup>54</sup> More than a half century later Raymond Denis, a former president of *l'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne de la Saskatchewan* referred to Schmidt's participation in that organization's founding convention in 1912. In discussing the constitutional history of the North-West Territories Schmidt had advised the delegates to agitate to regain their rights. In his memoirs Denis attributed the following words to Schmidt:

*Avec Louis Riel, nous nous sommes battus contre les Anglais pour des questions qui n'étaient pas aussi importantes, et je regrette de ne pas avoir 20 ans de moins et de ne pas me trouver dans le même group dont je faisais partie en 1885. S'il le fallait, nous n'hésiterions pas à reprendre nos fusils pour maintenir dans nos écoles l'enseignement de notre langue.*<sup>55</sup>

After the rebellion, Schmidt continued to work in the Lands Office. Given his education, experience in the Lands Office and familiarity with Métis problems, Schmidt was a strong supporter of a proposal whereby the Métis would give up their right to scrip in exchange for a reserve. This proposal had been put forth by D. H. Macdowall, M.P. for Saskatchewan. At a meeting in St. Laurent in 1891, the Métis had voted for a colony and they had applauded a supporting letter written by Schmidt.<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, a larger regional meeting held in Duck Lake a short while later voted overwhelmingly in favour of maintaining scrip and an astounded Schmidt found it difficult to explain this sudden change of attitude.<sup>57</sup> Schmidt also used his position and connections to assist the Métis in obtaining scrip and to eliminate bureaucratic impediments.<sup>58</sup>

In 1890, Schmidt was asked to accompany Father Morin, a missionary colonizer, on a voyage to eastern Canada. D. H. Macdowall was approached to secure a leave of absence for Schmidt who was subsequently selected as the Métis representative to accompany the clergyman.<sup>59</sup> In Montreal Schmidt presented lectures on the advantages of the North-West. In St. Raymond a large crowd asked him to speak and he responded willingly to this invitation. He discovered that the soil was exhausted in the area and that numerous individuals were prepared to immigrate to the North-West if only one decisive person set the example for others to follow.<sup>60</sup> This voyage also made it possible for Schmidt



to renew acquaintances from his school days as well as meet prominent statesmen such as Senator Thomas Chapain. In the company of Senator Joseph Tassé, Schmidt visited Alphonse Chapleau, the Secretary of State. Although Chapleau was preoccupied with the forthcoming federal election he provided Schmidt with a letter of introduction to Sir John A. Macdonald.<sup>61</sup> Schmidt was unable to meet the Prime Minister despite an ardent desire to do so and he deeply regretted this turn of events.<sup>62</sup> At St. Hyacinthe, on the other hand, Schmidt was able to visit his college and former teachers as well as local dignitaries including the editor of *Le Courrier*.<sup>63</sup> Upon his return to Prince Albert, Schmidt assisted French Canadian immigrants in selecting land.<sup>64</sup>

The diary kept by Schmidt during this period is a fascinating source. While there are the usual entries dealing with extremes of temperature, family matters, visits etc. many others are informative and insightful. The entry of 14 November 1886, for example, has an ecumenical tone. It refers to the death of the Anglican bishop of Prince Albert. Schmidt and his family had gone to view the body and he was obviously impressed as evidenced by his comment: "*Il était bien conservé pas la moindre odeur.*" He also recorded that the funeral was grandiose and that an immense crowd had attended.<sup>65</sup> The entry of 22 November 1890, refers to the festivities which marked the completion of the railroad between Regina and Prince Albert. The last spike was driven in by Joseph Royal, Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Territories, who amused everyone by pretending to be awkward. On 7 January 1891, Schmidt recorded the "fashionable marriage" Fanny Mair, youngest daughter of Charles Mair. In describing Mair's celebrity Schmidt made the following revealing comment:

*Il était célèbre aussi par la part qu'il a prise aux troubles de la Rivière Rouge en 1870 où il était le bras droit du fameux Schultz. Il n'était pas alors l'ami des Métis, mais, comme Schultz, il a bien changé depuis et il est aujourd'hui l'un des hommes les mieux disposés à notre égard.*<sup>66</sup>

Two days later, Schmidt and his family attended a "surprise party" at Joe McKay's home. Schmidt noted that this occasion presented his new neighbor with the first opportunity to indulge in her passion for dancing. While she danced until 4:00 A.M., he observed that she was not the favorite belle and was not asked to dance as often as she would have desired.<sup>67</sup>

Schmidt also recorded the arrival of prominent dignitaries in Prince Albert. In September 1890, for example, Schmidt went to greet Sir Hector Langevin, the Minister of Public Works, and spent some time speaking with his son-in-law, Senator Thomas Chapais.<sup>68</sup> A few days later Schmidt noted the arrival of Lady Macdonald, the Prime Minister's wife.<sup>69</sup> Four years later Wilfrid Laurier visited Prince Albert and Schmidt remarked that despite the inclement weather, a large crowd turned out to greet the Liberal leader.<sup>70</sup> The following year witnessed the arrival of Prime Minister Bowell accompanied by the Minister of the Interior, T. M. Daly, who visited the Lands Office for a couple of hours.<sup>71</sup>

There were other memorable events recorded by Schmidt. Electric lights, for example, first illuminated Prince Albert on 15 October 1891. More impressive, however, were the celebrations held in 1897 to mark the sixtieth anniversary of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne. During the offertory at High Mass the *Domine Salvam fac Reginam* was sung and a *Te Deum* at the end of the service. The stores were magnificently decorated and Schmidt himself



placed three small flags on his home.<sup>72</sup> The following day was even more impressive and Schmidt was forced to admit: "*jamais même affluence ne s'est vue à P.-A.*" Four hundred school children, each waving a small flag, took part in a procession led by a band. There were addresses following the singing of "God Save the Queen" and Schmidt was one of the speakers.<sup>73</sup> Four years later in 1901, Schmidt presented the principal address at the unveiling of a monument to the memory of those who had died in the Saskatchewan Rebellion.<sup>74</sup>

While Schmidt undoubtedly enjoyed being present and participating in such events, his first love was the Catholic Church and its services. This is evident in his description of Prince Albert's great day, 22 May 1892, the occasion of the blessing of the cornerstone of the cathedral. Schmidt assisted at numerous masses celebrated by visiting clergy and spoke at length with Mgr. L.-F. Laflèche, the ultramontane bishop of Three Rivers. Schmidt was particularly moved by the choir's rendition of the Royal Mass. After the dedication of the cornerstone Schmidt presented one of the addresses to Archbishop Taché who presided over the ceremonies.<sup>75</sup> The pontifical mass and ceremonies held on Easter day 1894, impressed Schmidt who remarked that he did not know of another parish where so many individuals fulfilled their religious obligations.<sup>76</sup> A few days prior to Christmas, 1894, Schmidt assisted at the benediction of the three cathedral bells and served as godfather for one. On 24 December, the bells were first rung together but Schmidt noted that the carillon had a poor sound and that the largest bell was too high pitched. Numerous Métis were present at midnight mass and received communion but Schmidt remarked that he did not know where they came from and that they were only seen in church at Christmas. While Schmidt did not object to a sixty five minute sermon by Father G. Michel, O.M.I., during midnight mass, he regarded the celebration of only a low mass on Christmas day as another of that clergyman's "innovations."<sup>77</sup> Four years later, the two smaller bells were replaced and when they were rung their sounds were in perfect accord. Schmidt, however, had one reservation: "*Seulement ce sont des cloches américaines c'est dire que la richesse ou la sonorité laisse à désirer. Cloches à vaches.*"<sup>78</sup>

Schmidt and older parishioners were appalled by the suppression of the traditional procession of the feast of Corpus Christi in 1897. The reason given was that the parish did not possess sufficient cantors but Schmidt challenged this by noting that there had not been a larger number in previous years. He attributed the suppression to the actions of the parish priest who did as he pleased during the bishop's prolonged absences.<sup>79</sup> Schmidt was also critical of another priest who preached an interminable sermon despite the fact that a terrible wind made the church shake on its foundations.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, Schmidt had nothing but praise for the "expeditious" clergyman who, in the midst of a July heat wave, continued to celebrate mass while the choir sang.<sup>81</sup>

The actions of Bishop A. Pascal, O.M.I., in the annual election of Catholic school trustees in Prince Albert were a cause of concern to Schmidt who claimed that the prelate lacked tact in attempting to influence the vote in favour of certain candidates. The issue was complicated by the fact that the trustees did not want to renew the contract of one of the sisters and the bishop was under the impression that they wished to replace all the sisters. Instead of discussing the matter with the trustees, Pascal called a meeting of ratepayers to be held in his palace. Only three people responded. A second meeting was announced and





Saskatchewan Archives Board. R-A19409.

Louis Schmidt. This picture was taken from *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, 14 March 1912.

only eight attended. The trustees did not attend either session.<sup>82</sup> Some time later the trustees and bishop met and Schmidt described the session as “some-what stormy”.<sup>83</sup>

Schmidt was even more critical of those who did not fulfill their religious duties. On the occasion of the celebration of the Métis feast day, 24 July 1902, he lamented the fact that few Métis had attended mass despite the splendid weather. He expressed his disgust in the phrase “*Quelle décadence.*” Some years later Schmidt recorded that thirty one parishioners in St. Louis had not completed their Easter duties. The spectacle was even worse the following year when, on the bishop’s orders, the passing bell was tolled for those who had not fulfilled their obligations. He noted that this was the first time this drastic action had been taken in the parish.<sup>84</sup>

After religion politics was the second interest in Schmidt’s life and he was an ardent Conservative who abhorred radical solutions and Liberals. He obviously took delight in an April Fool’s joke on Prince Albert Liberals who had been sent a telegram to the effect that Sir John A. Macdonald’s government had been defeated in the House over the Jesuits’ Estates Bill. Needless to say, the Liberals were embarrassed next day when that information proved to be false.<sup>85</sup> In the 1891 federal election Schmidt worked for the Conservative candidate D. H. Macdowall and campaigned among the Métis of Prince Albert where he discovered that most of them supported the Liberal candidate. In St. Louis the Liberals had an organization that worked “night and day” and he was forced to



admit that it would be difficult for the Conservatives to make any headway.<sup>86</sup> In the 1896 federal election Schmidt noted that there was division within Conservative ranks and predicted that if this were not resolved the Liberal candidate would be elected.<sup>87</sup> In a subsequent entry Schmidt wrote that the Liberals looked mediocre and properly speaking did not have a candidate.<sup>88</sup> The Liberals held an open air meeting in Duck Lake which merited the following observation: "*Peu de monde et d'enthousiasme.*"<sup>89</sup> However, interest intensified as election day approached and there were meetings and liquor everywhere. On election day Schmidt recorded that while the Conservative candidate obtained a majority in the west side of Prince Albert, Wilfrid Laurier carried the constituency and the country.<sup>90</sup>

Schmidt's partisan politics was undoubtedly a factor which contributed to the new government notifying him that effective 1 August 1897, his services would no longer be required at the Lands Office. Upon receiving this notice, he resigned immediately and three days later, on 10 July, he left Prince Albert to reside on his homestead in St. Louis.<sup>91</sup> This change in domicile did not alter Schmidt's political convictions. He continued to support the Conservative party but was not happy with the territorial election of 1902 which gave F. W. G. Haultain a large majority. Schmidt was not impressed with the former Commissioner of Education and Premier whom he referred to as "*le maudit.*"<sup>92</sup>

In addition to active campaigning Schmidt served as a member of the executive of the constituency organization.<sup>93</sup> Participants in the 1904 Liberal constituency convention provoked his ire. He recorded that an immigration agent was present as a delegate and was accompanied by a Galician "*qui a l'air d'un vrai sauvage, et pourtant c'est un délégué. C'est incroyable!*"<sup>94</sup> This individual appears to have engendered considerable discussion during the convention.<sup>95</sup> The news that a provincial election would be held in August 1908 surprised Schmidt because the administration still had a two year mandate. He lamented the fact that governments were not concerned with public interest but only in remaining in power. Redistribution had altered Duck Lake constituency which now included a number of predominantly French-speaking centres. Consequently, he was convinced that the M.L.A. should be French speaking.<sup>96</sup> W. Scott's Liberals were returned to power and Schmidt charged that the Galicians who had supported the Conservative candidate were bought off by the Liberals on the eve of the election.<sup>97</sup> In the end, Duck Lake elected a French Canadian representative but unfortunately he was the Liberal Attorney-General, W. F. A. Turgeon.

Many of the entries in Schmidt's journal reflect a sense of historical consciousness. On his trip to Quebec in 1891, for example, when he saw Lake Superior for the first time, his memories went back to his grandfather who voyaged there from the interior in a canoe.<sup>98</sup> In Quebec City a stroll on the Dufferin Boulevard evoked thoughts of the siege of Quebec.<sup>99</sup> There were recollections of the 17th and the 25th anniversaries of his departure from Winnipeg, of the 81st anniversary of the Seven Oaks massacre and the 40th anniversary of the encounter at Duck Lake.<sup>100</sup> There are only four references to Louis Riel. That of 16 November 1885 simply states: "*Le télégraphe nous annonce que Riel a été pendu à 10 hrs.*" Three subsequent entries refer to the fourth, sixth and twentieth anniversaries of Riel's execution.<sup>101</sup>

In addition, there are references to meetings with former acquaintances.



In 1891 on his way to Quebec Schmidt stopped in Winnipeg and in the station met John Gunn a former colleague in the Manitoba legislature.<sup>102</sup> For his part R. MacFarlane, the bourgeois at Cumberland House visited the Lands Office in Prince Albert and reminded Schmidt of their first meeting in March 1870. At that time, Schmidt, as Assistant Secretary of State in the Provisional Government, had provided MacFarlane with a safe conduct pass to enable him to leave Red River.<sup>103</sup> The entry of 1 September 1905, records a meeting with Gabriel Dumont. Schmidt noted that while Gabriel looked old he still liked to hunt and travel. In 1907, Schmidt met Superintendent Begin of the North-West Mounted Police a former student at St. Hyacinthe college. After nearly fifty years Schmidt did not recognize him but recalled that he had been a tall youth.<sup>104</sup> The following year, Schmidt was visited by William Henry Jackson, the former secretary of the Settlers' Union and later private secretary to Louis Riel. Jackson took Schmidt's photograph as well as that of J. B. Boucher a former member of the Exovedate.<sup>105</sup>

The diary also records the death of family members and acquaintances and here again Schmidt's remarks are characteristically short. On 13 December 1890, for example, he recorded the news of the death of his grandfather, Alexis Lespérance at the age of ninety three years. On 23 April 1901, Schmidt was informed of the death of his father and concluded the entry with the statement: "*Il a fait une sainte mort. R.I.P.*" Four years later on 4 February 1905, he recorded the death of his mother. The following year he commented on the passing of Gabriel Dumont and the confusion surrounding his precise age. The same entry also mentioned the death of Julie Riel and contained the comment: "*Je l'ai bien connue.*"<sup>106</sup>

It is unfortunate that Schmidt's diary provides no significant comments or insights on his relationships with the larger Métis community. The entry of 14 January 1908, however, indicates that his position as secretary treasurer of the local rural municipality had been a dominant issue in the recent municipal elections. Schmidt claimed that there were many who wanted his job and that two of the candidates in the recent election had declared that he had to be removed from office because he had been responsible for increased taxes in the district. The two other candidates were allegedly indifferent and did not defend Schmidt. For his part Schmidt predicted that a calamity would occur if he were removed from office. A short while later it came as no surprise to Schmidt that his employment had been terminated on the pretext of economic necessity.<sup>107</sup> Schmidt's dire prediction apparently came true because he was reinstated as secretary-treasurer in 1910.

It is interesting to note that it was in the midst of this controversy that Schmidt drafted the declaration mentioned earlier to refute the "odious calumny" that he had abandoned and betrayed the Métis in 1885. While there is no direct evidence to link the two the fact remains that many Métis resented Schmidt's views of Riel. There may also have been some resentment because Schmidt was so well integrated into the French Canadian community.

In 1910, Schmidt was asked to write his memoirs for publication in the recently established *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* in Duck Lake but unfortunately, the manuscript was destroyed in the fire that ravaged the journal's printing plant on 15 November 1910. He was asked to rewrite his reminiscences and they were published serially in the period 8 June 1911 to 11 July 1912. In the preface to



these memoirs Schmidt stated that he had no notes or draft to assist him and he feared that interesting details might have been overlooked.<sup>108</sup> Despite this assertion the details in his memoirs suggested that he probably consulted a much more extensive version of his diary than that which exists at the present time. Characteristically, his comments were brief, usually an account of what had taken place with little or no elaboration. His account of the death of Thomas Scott may serve as an example. Schmidt equated Scott's behaviour with that of a madman and he reiterated Riel's rationale for the execution with the words: "*Il fallait d'ailleurs donner un exemple de sévérité en même temps que de fermeté.*"<sup>109</sup>

In his account of the events leading to the rebellion of 1885 Schmidt was even more the simple chronicler of events. He did, however, blame the government's procrastination for starting the rebellion.<sup>110</sup> Schmidt avoided a delicate topic by not mentioning Riel's religious views and his break with the church. Turning to Riel's trial Schmidt claimed that the defence had been "vigorous and well conducted." Schmidt argued that Riel's death sentence should have been commuted because the death penalty was no longer handed down for political crimes and, furthermore, Riel had surrendered in good faith. Numerous petitions for clemency were ignored because "*Les orangistes avaient décidé sa mort et il mourut.*"<sup>111</sup>

Schmidt's memoirs were enthusiastically received by *Le Patriote's* readers. Nevertheless, the La Verendrye chapter of *l'Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Canadienne* (A.C.J.C.) in St. Boniface took exception to Schmidt's use of the word "revolution" in the 8 February 1912 issue to describe the events of 1869-1870. The A.C.J.C. was convinced that the term must have been used unintentionally because more than anyone else Schmidt should have known that "revolution" was inaccurate. The use of that expression by a Métis author would perpetuate the view that the Red River insurrection was "illegitimate and reprehensible" and, hence, the association asked *Le Patriote's* editor to have Schmidt remove the offensive term from the text.<sup>112</sup>

Another reader from St. Boniface, A. Goulet, also took exception to Schmidt's use of the term "revolution." Goulet also claimed that statements in the 8 February 1912, issue to the effect that in 1869-1870 the Métis in Red River were very religious implied that they were currently indifferent to religion. He was also offended by Schmidt's comparison of the faults of Ambroise Lépine and those of his father, Elzéar Goulet, who had been drowned in the Red River while fleeing from Canadian militiamen. Goulet claimed that being human his father was not without the faults associated with that status. Furthermore, Goulet was proud of his father who had always been faithful to the Métis cause.<sup>113</sup> For his part, the editor suggested that Schmidt clarify any misunderstanding concerning the use of the term "revolution" with a few lines of explanation.<sup>114</sup>

In the meantime, French-speaking Catholics in Saskatchewan met in Duck Lake on 28-29 February 1912 to form an association to protect their linguistic and educational rights. Schmidt was one of the speakers and his topic was indeed appropriate as he spoke on the status of the French language in the North-West Territories. Recalling the constitutional history of that region, he declared that the French language once enjoyed "the freedom of the city" in the West. In the meantime, the constitutional rights of the French had been violated



and the situation in which they found themselves was not due to chance but to the passion and fanaticism of a small minority who ruled the country. Schmidt's advice to the delegates was to follow Daniel O'Connell's example and "*agitate, agitate, agitez-vous faites du bruit.*"<sup>115</sup>

The outcome of this convention was the creation of an organization which later became known as *l'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne* (A.C.F.C.) During the sessions of the Duck Lake convention Schmidt was elected to the committee which was to facilitate and continue the organization of French Canadians in the province.<sup>116</sup> Schmidt was also selected as one of the fourteen delegates to represent Saskatchewan at the first congress of the French language in Quebec City, 24-30 June 1912, where he presented an eloquent and moving reply to the address of welcome extended to the Saskatchewan delegation.<sup>117</sup>

Schmidt was president of the St. Louis chapter of the A.C.F.C. and in that capacity he pressed for a solution to some of the problems inherent in providing French language instruction in schools.<sup>118</sup> He was also active in *l'Association Interprovinciale* founded in 1917 to recruit bilingual teachers and *l'Association des Commissaires d'Ecole Franco-Canadiens* created in 1918 to address the needs of French-speaking school districts. By this time the high point in Schmidt's career had been reached. He prepared a short history of Prince Albert for *Le Patriote* and this seems to have been his last contribution to that journal.<sup>119</sup> While he continued to be active in the affairs of the municipality, the school district, the parish and the local chapter of the A.C.F.C., he slid into greater obscurity with each passing year. To some extent Schmidt was the author of his own oblivion because he chose to remain silent on the subject of Louis Riel, the one topic that could have kept him in the public eye. The Riel of 1885 was an aberration which Schmidt eradicated from his memory.

In the meantime, age began to take its toll. In April 1924 Schmidt noted that he had been ill with the flu for ten days. Consequently, he had been unable to attend Holy Week and Easter Services for the first time in his life.<sup>120</sup> Travel also became infrequent but in August 1924, he made a trip to Prince Albert by car. While the vehicle in question could not be described as "one belonging to a prince," Schmidt remarked that the voyage was free of accident.<sup>121</sup> The following year one event made Schmidt very happy. *La Liaison Française*, a group from Quebec visiting French centres in the West, was visiting the neighboring town of Hoey. Arrangements had been made for Schmidt to attend and he enjoyed the banquet, speeches and songs. For a brief moment Louis Schmidt was again the centre of attraction as he noted: "*Je suis entouré par la plupart des voyageurs qui aiment à connaître le secrétaire de Riel.*"<sup>122</sup>

A few months later in October 1925, Schmidt and his wife left their rural home and moved into St. Louis.<sup>123</sup> While he continued making entries in his diary these were less frequent and less substantive. From time to time, he received letters from former associates and friends. Colin Inkster of Winnipeg, for example, had written Schmidt asking for information concerning the flag flown at Fort Garry during the Red River Insurrection and inviting Schmidt to attend celebrations commemorating that event. Schmidt thanked Inkster for his affectionate letters which "reminded me of many interesting events that occurred in my early days." Schmidt would have liked to visit Winnipeg but could not because of poverty. His only income was an old age pension of twenty dollars a month. On a more positive note, he affirmed that his health was "very



good" but that he walked "very slowly with the help of a stick."<sup>124</sup>

During the next five years death struck the Schmidt family three times. On 1 June 1932, one of Schmidt's sons, Louis Alfred, died after a lengthy illness. *Le Patriote* published an obituary and after reading it, a Winnipeg daily ran a news item announcing the death of Louis Schmidt *père*.<sup>125</sup> Based on this erroneous information Donatien Frémont, editor of Winnipeg's *La Liberté*, announced Schmidt's death. In recalling Schmidt's career Frémont, a former acquaintance from Prince Albert, indicated that Schmidt also had participated in movements to promote the interests of Catholicism and the French language. As a consequence of having gone to live in neighboring Saskatchewan Schmidt regretably had been forgotten by his compatriots in Manitoba. To make amends Frémont urged his readers to at least salute "*ce dernier des principaux acteurs du drame de 1869-70 et l'un des beaux types du Métis d'autrefois*."<sup>126</sup> The following week, an embarrassed Frémont published a retraction which resolved the ambiguity surrounding the deceased's identity.<sup>127</sup>

Death struck again on 21 April 1934, when Louis Schmidt's wife passed away. Twenty months later on 6 November 1935, "the patriarch of St. Louis"<sup>128</sup> died at the age of ninety one years eleven months. In commenting on Schmidt's passing *Le Patriote* recalled the highlights of his life by quoting extensively from his memoirs and the editor justified these citations by affirming that one could not comment on the life of Riel's former secretary without discussing the events with which he had been associated. Transcending the events of 1869-1870 and 1885, the editor recalled Schmidt's love of the French language and culture as well as the warm reception generated by his 1912 address in Quebec City. The obituary concluded with a phrase that would have pleased Schmidt: "*L'ange de la mort a paralysé ses lèvres, mais le souvenir ineffaçable de sa vie prêchera éloquemment la fidélité aux vertus qui en ont fait un grand chrétien et un grand patriote*."<sup>129</sup>

During his lifetime Louis Schmidt had been associated with one of the most controversial individuals in Canadian history and two of the most significant events in the history of the Canadian West. Circumstances were such, however, that Schmidt himself never became a prominent figure and was unknown and forgotten by those outside his immediate *entourage*. Nevertheless, Schmidt was a remarkable person in his own right. He was Métis and very proud of his mixed blood ancestry but his education and lifestyle made him an integral part of the French Canadian community. His diary and notes reflect that latter perspective especially on religious questions and the recourse to arms in 1885. On the other hand, Schmidt has been accused of being unable to write except in the "simplest and baldest fashion."<sup>130</sup> This critique is in reality a blessing in disguise because Schmidt's comments tended to contain basic factual information rather than a personal bias or interpretation. Schmidt was a man of conviction, one who stood to gain nothing by embellishing or distorting the historical record. Hence his comments are an even more valuable and reliable account. History may not have been very kind to Louis Schmidt but posterity is richer because of his historical consciousness.



## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Journal de Louis Schmidt [Journal] 11 mars 1886. Nicholas Andrews worked briefly for the North-West Company at Great Slave Lake prior to 1821 and his name does not appear on the roster of Nor'Westers who transferred into the service of the Hudson's Bay Co. In the family censuses of 1823-1825 Pierre Laferté is listed as having one wife and being the "immediate protector" of two male children. In the North-West Half-Breed claims, 1885 Alfred Schmidt alias Rabasca lists his birthplace as Big Slave Lake, 1825. His father was Peter Schmidt a French Canadian, his mother Marie Anne a Cree Indian. Alfred was married twice: in 1847 to Marguerite Lespérance in St. Boniface and in 1869 to Emilie Vivier at Fort Pitt. I am grateful to Dr. Mary Black-Rogers, Research Associate, Royal Ontario Museum for these genealogical details. Dr. Black-Rogers is currently working on a study of Métis families of the Athabasca and Upper English River posts in the first quarter of the 19th century.
- <sup>2</sup> D. Sprague and R. R. Frye, *Genealogy of the First Métis Nation*, (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1983), lists a Pierre Laferté married to Marie-Anne Génereuse, Table 1, 2505. Table 3 lists this individual as a fisherman employed by the Bay in the period 1851-1858.
- <sup>3</sup> *Le Patriote de l'Ouest [Patriote]*, 8 juin 1911.
- <sup>4</sup> Provincial Museum and Archives of Alberta, Baptêmes et Mariages faits dans les missions des Forts des prairies 1842-51, CII.103, Duplicate Register C, I.204, G.I.483.
- <sup>5</sup> Dom J.-P. Benoît Taché's biographer was aware of the original name in his reference to "Louis Smith ou Schmidt, dit Laferté" *Vie de Mgr Taché Archevêque de St-Boniface*, Vol I (Montreal: Beauchemin, 1904), p. 376.
- <sup>6</sup> In his final year Schmidt received the grade "Bien", the highest attainable by a student. Versification 1860-61 Examens de l'été, Séminaire de St-Hyacinthe.
- <sup>7</sup> Archives of the Archdiocese of St. Boniface [AASB], Fonds Taché, T0774-76, L. Schmidt to A.-A. Taché, 17 août 1861. In discussing the failure of Taché's plan to send promising children to Quebec colleges, Dom Benoît states: "Un de ces enfants fut chassé du collège pour désordres graves." The sentence is ambiguous and can also refer to Louis Riel. Dom J.-P. Benoît, *op. cit.* p. 376.
- <sup>8</sup> AASB, Fonds Taché, T1088-90, L. Schmidt to A.-A. Taché, 1 jan. 1862.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, T2953-54, A. André to A.-A. Taché, 9 oct. 1863.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, T2455-56.
- <sup>11</sup> *Patriote*, 22 sept. 1911.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 oct. 1911.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 jan. 1912. In all probability these notes were an early segment of a diary which Schmidt kept. The only extant entries are those for the period 1885-1934. An earlier section dealing with the events leading to the Rebellion of 1885 was sent to Bishop Taché, AASB, Fonds Taché, T29781-840, "Notes: Mouvement des Métis à St Laurent, Sask., T.N.O. en 1884."
- <sup>15</sup> *Patriote*.
- <sup>16</sup> AASB, Fonds Taché, T6570-71, Schmidt to Monseigneur, 31 mai 1869.
- <sup>17</sup> *Patriote*, 25 jan. 1912.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 fév. 1912.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 fév. 1912. Schmidt indicates that the flag was hoisted on 8 December.
- <sup>20</sup> Public Archives of Canada [PAC], MG55/29 No. 34. Louis Schmidt à son oncle John [sic] l'Espérance.
- <sup>21</sup> *Patriote*, 15 fév. 1912.
- <sup>22</sup> *Les Ecrits complets de Louis Riel/The Complete Writings of Louis Riel*, [Riel], Vol I 1861-75, 1-051; *Patriote*, 27 fév. 1912.
- <sup>23</sup> PAC, MG27 I F3, Vol I, No. 30, L. Schmidt to M. le Président, 31 mai 1870.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* No. 31, L. Schmidt to M. le Président, 1 juin 1870. This letter suggests that W. B. O'Donoghue, Sec. Tres. of the Provisional Government was the favoured person.
- <sup>25</sup> G. F. G. Stanley, *Louis Riel*, (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1963), p. 149.
- <sup>26</sup> Provincial Archives of Manitoba [PAM], MG3 D2, 2, 5, L. Schmidt to Mon cher ami, 26 sept. 1870.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, MG3 D1, 69, L. Schmidt to L. Riel, 7 jan. 1871.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 133, 3 fév. 1872.
- <sup>29</sup> AASB, Fonds Taché, T23969-70, L. Schmidt to Monseigneur, 5 juin 1880.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, T23970-72.
- <sup>31</sup> *Patriote*, 9 mai 1912.
- <sup>32</sup> AASB, Fonds Taché, T24448-51, L. Schmidt to Monseigneur, 11 sept. 1880.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, T30610-11, L. Schmidt to Monseigneur, 9 jan. 1885.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, T31401-04 (copy), L. Schmidt to A. M. Burgess, 26 mai 1885.
- <sup>35</sup> D. Frémont, *Les Secrétaires de Riel*, (Montreal: Editions Chantecler, 1953), p. 74.
- <sup>36</sup> AASB, Fonds Taché, T28830-33, L. Schmidt to A. A. Taché, 18 fév. 1884.
- <sup>37</sup> D. Frémont, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
- <sup>38</sup> PAM, MG3 D2, 2, 18 "Meeting Lindsay School House."
- <sup>39</sup> *Patriote*, 23 mai 1912.
- <sup>40</sup> *Le Manitoba*, 29 mai, 24 juillet, 7 août 1884.



- <sup>41</sup> D. Frémont, *op. cit.*, p. 81.
- <sup>42</sup> *Patriote*, 23 mai 1912.
- <sup>43</sup> *Riel*, Vol. III, 3-013.
- <sup>44</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board, [SAB], Riel Documents and Artifacts, No. 14. The memorandum is reproduced in *Riel* Vol. III, 3-014.
- <sup>45</sup> ASSB. Fond Taché, T29781-840, "Notes: Movement des Métis à St Laurent, Sask., T.N.O. en 1884."
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, T30936-37, L. Schmidt to A. A. Taché, 7 mars 1885.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, T31065, L. Schmidt to A. A. Taché, 8 avril 1885.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, T31419-21, L. Schmidt to A. A. Taché, 27 mai 1885.
- <sup>49</sup> PAM, MG3 D2, 5, 44 A. Lespérance to L. Schmidt, 14 juillet 1885, (copy).
- <sup>50</sup> D. Frémont, *op. cit.*, p. 171.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 174-175.
- <sup>52</sup> L. Schmidt, *Déclaration*, 16 déc. 1909.
- <sup>53</sup> *Riel*, Vol. III, A3-018.
- <sup>54</sup> Canada, *Debates*, House of Commons, 7 July 1885, p. 3155.
- <sup>55</sup> R. Denis, "Mes Mémoires", *Vie Française*, No. 11-12, 1968, pp. 302-303.
- <sup>56</sup> *Journal*, 11 jan. 1891.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 jan. 1891.
- <sup>58</sup> AASB, Fonds Taché, T49523-24, L. Schmidt to A. A. Taché, 2 juin 1893.
- <sup>59</sup> *Journal*, 9, 10, 11 dec. 1890.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 7 fév. 1891.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 fév. 1891.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 fév. 1891.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 fév. 1891.
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 avril 1891.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 nov. 1886.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 jan. 1891.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 jan. 1891.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 sept. 1890.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 sept. 1890.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 oct. 1894.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 sept. 1895.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 juin 1897.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 juin 1897.
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 juillet 1901.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 mai 1892.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 mars 1894.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 23, 24, 25 dec. 1894.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 juillet 1896.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 juin 1897.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 jan. 1903.
- <sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 juillet 1905.
- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 jan. 1896.
- <sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 mars 1896.
- <sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 mai 1926.
- <sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 2 avril 1889.
- <sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 fév. 1891.
- <sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 mai 1896.
- <sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 mai 1896.
- <sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 juin 1896.
- <sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 juin 1896.
- <sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 juillet 1897.
- <sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 juin 1902.
- <sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 oct. 1903; 27 jan. 1904.
- <sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 mars 1904.
- <sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 mars 1904.
- <sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 juillet 1908.
- <sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 août 1908.
- <sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 jan. 1891.
- <sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 fév. 1891.
- <sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 juin 1897, 19 juin 1905, 26 mars 1925.
- <sup>101</sup> The entry of 16 November 1890, should refer to the fifth anniversary rather than the fourth.
- <sup>102</sup> *Journal*, 30 jan. 1891.
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 fév. 1894.
- <sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 avril 1907.
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 avril 1908.



- <sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 mai 1906. The entry is corrected to indicate that the date of Dumont's death is 19 May 1906. Schmidt errs, however, in alleging that Julie Riel died on the same day. She died three days later, 22 May.
- <sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 jan. 1908.
- <sup>108</sup> *Patriote*, 8 juin 1911.
- <sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 avril 1912.
- <sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 mai 1912.
- <sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 juin 1912.
- <sup>112</sup> F. Lachance to A. Auclair, 17 mars 1912.
- <sup>113</sup> A. Goulet to L. Schmidt, 14 mars 1912.
- <sup>114</sup> A. F. Auclair to L. Schmidt, 20 mars 1912.
- <sup>115</sup> *Patriote*, 14 mars 1912. The address was reproduced *in extenso*.
- <sup>116</sup> H. Delmas to L. Schmidt, 28 mars 1912.
- <sup>117</sup> D. Frémont, *op. cit.*, p. 188.
- <sup>118</sup> SAB, Papers of *l'Association Catholique Franco Canadienne*, File 40W, L. Schmidt to A. F. Auclair, 16 mai 1915.
- <sup>119</sup> *Patriote*, 20 mars, 27 mars 1913.
- <sup>120</sup> *Journal*, 24 avril 1924.
- <sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 août 1924.
- <sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 juillet 1925.
- <sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 oct. 1925.
- <sup>124</sup> PAM, MG3 B20, L. Schmidt to C. Inkster, 27 June 1930.
- <sup>125</sup> *Patriote*, 8 June 1932.
- <sup>126</sup> *La Liberte*, 22 juin 1932.
- <sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 juin 1932.
- <sup>128</sup> D. Frémont, *op. cit.*, p. 191.
- <sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 nov. 1935.
- <sup>130</sup> G. F. G. Stanley, *op. cit.*, p. 22.



# “BUILDING THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON THE PRAIRIES”

## E. H. OLIVER AND SASKATCHEWAN EDUCATION, 1913-1930

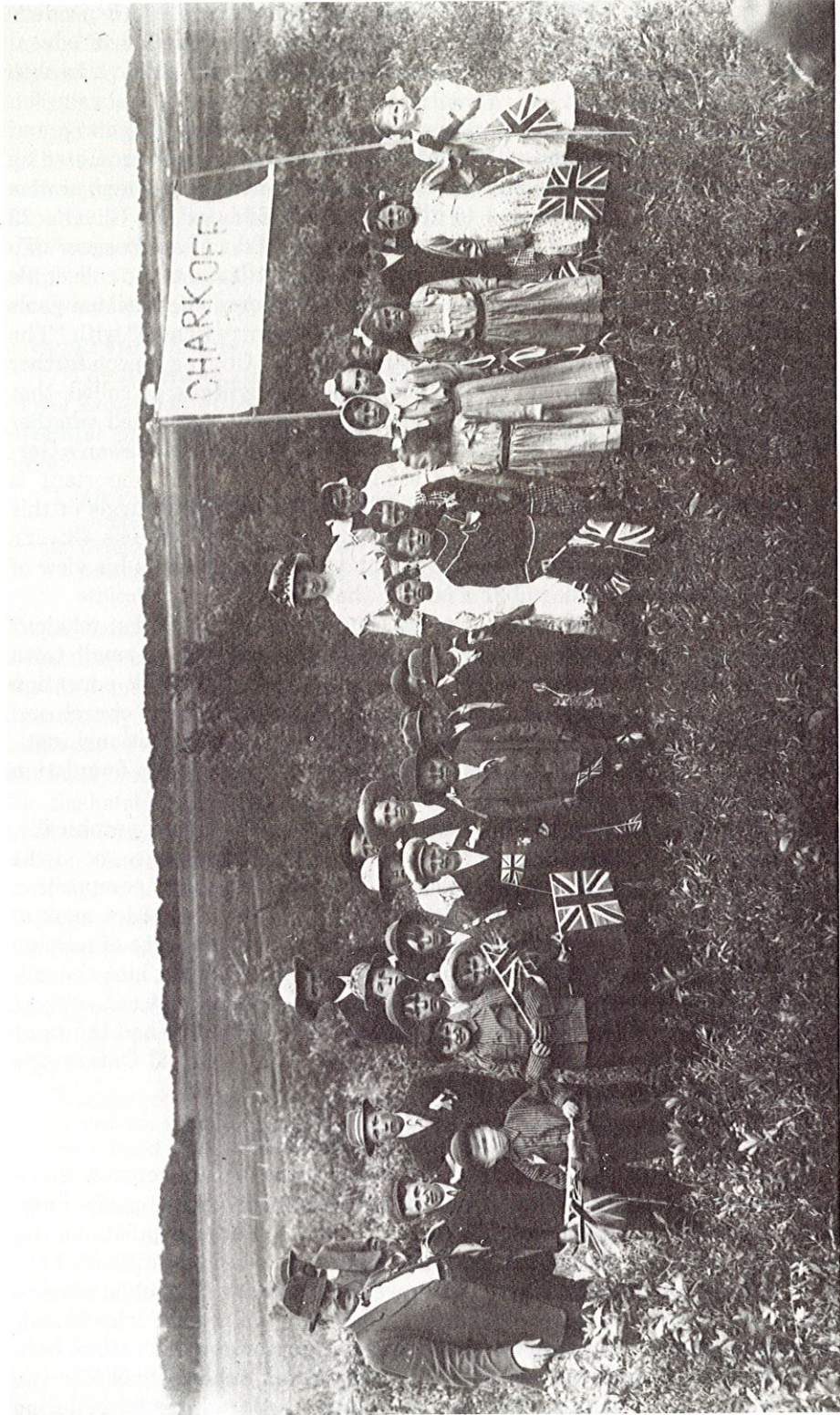
*By Michael Owen*

**I**n *The Canadian Congregationalist* of 4 March 1925, E. H. Oliver, Principal of St. Andrew's College, Saskatoon, outlined the respective nation-building tasks of the new United Church and the public school system on the prairies. While the church had “the high privilege” to make and keep the varied national, ethnic and religious population Christian, it was “the function primarily of the State or of the School” to make these diverse peoples “Canadian”.<sup>1</sup> Oliver's opinion of the complementary roles possessed by the public school and the Church reflected the dominant view among Canadian church leaders that both institutions were essential if the national and religious destiny of Canada was to be fulfilled. The public school and the church were seen as two institutions that would retain the West as a British territory and establish in the West “His Dominion”.

In his study of the Canadian expansionist movement and the west, Doug Owram claims that “for many religious leaders of the period, nationalism, religion, and loyalty to British traditions were the component elements” that would ensure the establishment of “a moral and stable society in the best traditions of the British Empire”<sup>2</sup> in the North West. This Anglo-Protestant vision of what Canada ought to be portrayed the West as the last chance for Canada to demonstrate its allegiance to the gospel of Christianity.<sup>3</sup> These unabashed defenders of Protestant British Culture perceived the church and the public school as twin institutions which would help develop that culture among the diverse peoples of the western provinces.

The massive influx of Southern and Eastern European settlers into Saskatchewan prior to the First World War threatened this vision of the Canadian West. Although Saskatchewan's school system had expanded in an effort to keep pace with the educational demands of a burgeoning population, many European immigrants settled in homogeneous ethnic, linguistic and religious blocs that appeared to be impervious to the Canadianizing agenda of the public schools.<sup>4</sup> Thus administrative problems of the Education Department — lack of schools in remote areas, insufficient numbers of trained teachers, unorganized districts with large “foreign” enclaves — combined with public controversies — constitutional protection to separate schools and provisions in the School Act which





Charkoff School probably at the Wroxton field day, 25 June 1914.



permitted non-English minorities instructional opportunities — to produce major educational crises which centred on and focused the attention of educational and religious leaders such as Oliver on the ability of the public school to fulfil its nation-building task.

The conflict between the educational goals of the ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities and the assimilationist ethic of “Canadianism” promoted by the provincial Department of Education, the public press and the mainline Protestant churches is highlighted in the Reverend Edmund H. Oliver’s 22 September 1915 speech to the Saskatchewan Public Education League.<sup>5</sup> To prepare for this speech, Oliver had toured the “foreign settlements” to collect his evidence on the conditions of schooling. He then juxtaposed the national goals of the public school and the imagery of the “Ontario Country School” with “The Country School in Non-English Speaking Communities”. Oliver’s speech further inflamed public opinion over the rural school and the privileges, so called, that were extended to the “foreign” settler.<sup>6</sup> This paper is not concerned whether Oliver accurately represented the educational conditions of Saskatchewan’s German, Mennonite, French or Ruthenian settlers. What is more important is Oliver as the symbol of Protestant Ontario in the West and the struggle of this remnant population to exert its will on reluctant subjects. I will use Oliver’s participation in the educational furore of the mid-1910s to delineate his view of the nation-building role of the public school in the West.

Edmund H. Oliver<sup>7</sup> represents a generation of western Canadian religious and educational leaders who, “reared in provincial bondage” of small town Ontario,<sup>8</sup> possessed an evangelical-like faith in non-sectarian public education and blurred the lines between the goals of the Christian (Protestant) church and the public school. These transplanted clerics, often leaders of educational institutions, envisioned the school and the church as partners laying the foundation for a new and brighter future for Saskatchewan and Canada.

Yet by 1910, Canada was “A Nation Transformed”:<sup>9</sup> demographically, socially, intellectually, religiously and economically. Canada, no longer the idyllic agrarian nation, had become a nation of cities. The Canada “racial” composition had shifted from a French and Anglo-Celtic population into a polyglot mass of over “60 nationalities”. Social Christianity prompted an urgent sense of mission which youthful clerical proponents, especially those on an errand into the wilderness of the West, found irresistible. This sense of mission was not solely a religious sentiment. While home missions in the Northwest never had the same drawing power as foreign missions, for some of the youth of rural Ontario the West did kindle a flame of religious fervour.

### EDUCATIONAL CONTROVERSY

Educational controversies in English Canada prior to 1925 centred, inevitably it seemed, about the issues of the separate school, second-language (non-English) instruction, and the assimilation of minority ethnic populations. By 1910 Ontario, New Brunswick and Manitoba had experienced agitation over the issues of separate schools and French-language instruction in the public schools. Manitoba was, during the First World War, undergoing a second school crisis which focused on minority language instruction and compulsory education, both of which highlighted the nation-building purposes of the public school. Ontario was in the throes of yet another debate over French language instruction during



the war. Saskatchewan had witnessed a debate over the constitutional guarantees afforded separate schools and minority language instruction during the Autonomy Bills debate and the subsequent provincial election of 1905. It was not unexpected, therefore, that Saskatchewan with its predominantly "Catholic" immigrant population intent on preserving its European heritage, with a school act which protected "separate" schools and second language instruction in the primary grades, and a vigorous and defensive Anglo-Protestant majority, would experience another debate over the efficacy of such educational provisions. All that was required was the proper setting. The Great War and an educational and religious elite strongly committed to symbols of national unity provided the catalysts for such a debate.<sup>10</sup>

### I. Separate Schools

The American educator Harold Foght, author of the influential 1918 *Survey of Education in the Province of Saskatchewan*, argued that there were "two essential principles involved in the separate school issue." These principles were:

1. All children, regardless of their religious affiliation, should be educated at public expense.
2. Religion is an essential part of all education. The school should make it possible for children of all denominations (or no denomination) to receive ethical, moral and spiritual instruction in the form that their parents desire.<sup>11</sup>

Foght claimed that the United States upheld the first principle and remained neutral on the second principle. Saskatchewan, on the other hand, carried out the first principle by providing education for children at public expense and "generously" encouraged the second principle by stipulating that the last one-half hour of the school-day could be employed for religious instruction wherever the local boards "so desired". However, Foght saw the constitutional guarantees for Saskatchewan's separate schools, Roman Catholic and Protestant, to be undesirable and the operation of these schools as unnecessary, inefficient, wasteful and divisive.

Oliver's opinion of separate schools probably helped to shape Foght's. In 1914, as chairman of the Committee on Recent School Legislation, Oliver urged the Saskatchewan Synod of the Presbyterian Church to protest as "prejudicial to the Public Schools" legislation permitting the distribution of corporate taxes equally between the public and separate schools. Ignoring the absence of opposition in the provincial legislature,<sup>12</sup> Oliver argued that such legislation strengthened

Separate schools by coercing the individual ratepayers of the faith of the minority into the support of the Separate School, and by legally disqualifying them for the support of the Public School in every community where a Separate School exists.

Oliver alleged the legislation made the support of public schools "a matter of faith test."<sup>13</sup>

The Synod encouraged his efforts to buttress the principles of non-denominational public schools by "respectfully but firmly" lodging its protest "against any public school being recognized either as Roman Catholic public schools or Protestant public schools".<sup>14</sup> Presbyterian missionaries working among Saskatchewan's non-Anglo-Saxon settlers also praised the nation-building potential of the public school and resisted any progress by the separate



schools. Oliver's colleagues in the Synod perceived any concessions to separate schools or the weakening of regulations governing those schools or the employment of religious orders in separate schools as another blow to the overriding need to strengthen the public school and to build up a common Canadian nationality on the prairies.

However, opposition to separate schools and the conviction that separate schools were wasteful, inefficient and divisive did not mean that Oliver and his colleagues opposed religious instruction in the public school. He argued that religious instruction was an essential component of the public school curriculum. Oliver encouraged his clerical colleagues to use the statutory one-half hour for religious instruction in the public school. The Saskatchewan Synod of the Presbyterian Church supported this view and passed a motion that "wherever practicable" Presbyterian ministers should exhibit

a warm interest in the teaching given in the public schools, encourag[e], as far as possible consistent with the Provincial law regulating such matters, its religious character, and if permitted by local authorities, plac[e] a copy of the sacred Scriptures in each school.

So strongly did the Presbyterian Church support religious instruction as an essential element of the curriculum that it combined with other Protestant denominations to prepare a religious instruction manual, published in 1921, for the schools.<sup>15</sup>

In spite of his apparent antagonism to separate schools, Oliver's personal papers and publications rarely mention the issue of separate schools. Even his strongest statement on the issue, in *The Winning of the Frontier* (1930), did not criticize the Roman Catholic Church which defended confessional schools as a right or the Liberal government of 1905 which "imposed" separate schools on Saskatchewan. This statement was befitting of the newly-elected Moderator of the United Church who counselled the building of a cooperative Christian community on the Frontier and claimed that separate schools hindered the assimilation of ethnic and religious minorities and the upbuilding of a Canadian nation.

It agitates political no less than church life. It quickens racial antagonisms and arouses to an intensity of passionate interest those, particularly, who are in the religious and ethnic minority in Canada. The growth of a country is registered on the Frontier. On the Frontier, then, the minority and majority alike are keenest to have their views prevail in what to them is dearest, in religion and education. The issue of religion in the schools of the Frontier concentrates in one single question the deepest and most fundamental issues that divide the nation. The matter of religion in the schools on the Frontier, however, need not be divisive. Provision . . . has been made . . . whereby something approaching adequate religious instruction could be given to those attending the public school. The door of opportunity in . . . the instruction of the children of the public schools has . . . stood wide open for the clergy of the churches to enter.<sup>16</sup>

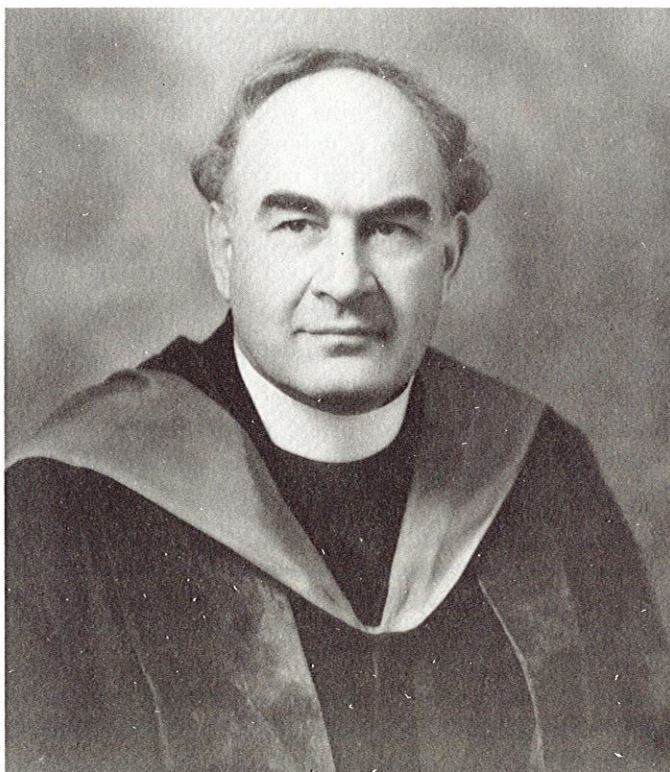
Oliver, conscious of the defeat of the Saskatchewan government in the elections of 1929 on the very issue of separate schools, steered a moderate course between the emerging radical Protestantism and the hardening views of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Yet he turned not to a liberal policy of accommodation but harkened back to the vision of the Ontario country school and his vision of the ideal rural school in Saskatchewan: a common public school where all, regardless of creed, would be joined together into a new stronger Christian nation.



## II. Minority Language and the "New Canadian"

Oliver's 1915 speech to the Saskatchewan Public Education League was a defense of the public school as a nation-building institution. This address, "The Country School in the Non-English Speaking Communities", delivered to the League in Regina in September, to the Saskatchewan Presbyterian Synod in November, and to the St. James' Men's Club, Saskatoon, in December of 1915, was acclaimed in the Saskatoon *Daily Star*. The *Daily Star* of 16 December 1915 praised this "Plan to Improve the Educational System", and particularly Principal Oliver's assertion that the public school was "our greatest national asset". Oliver's plan, the *Daily Star* reported, would safeguard the great "measure of success" achieved by the public school and extend its penetration of and usefulness in rural districts dominated by the non-English speaking population.<sup>17</sup> To this end, Oliver recommended that: compulsory attendance regulations be instituted, that regulations restricting the teaching of and in non-English languages be strictly enforced, and that the large administrative unit be introduced in rural districts. These were controversial issues in the West during the war years.

Compulsory school attendance or an efficient truancy act was one measure to ensure that all children of school age were "under efficient instruction". These regulations, combined with rigorous enforcement of regulations governing non-English language instruction and curriculum content, would, Oliver believed, assist the schools in their primary task of nation-building. More controversial, however, was the pre-eminence of English-language instruction in Oliver's plan. The target of his critique included constitutional protection for



Dr. E. H. Oliver.



the French language, provisions for bilingual education, and the "private" schools in European-dominated areas.<sup>18</sup> Oliver castigated the French schools in Grierson and St. Denis and the German schools of Humboldt district and Mennonite colonies, as stumbling blocks to the formation of a common Canadian nationality in Saskatchewan. His 1915 tour of "unorganized" districts had revealed that some German and Mennonite settlements refrained from organizing into school districts. Instead, private schools were created to serve the special needs of the community, one of which was "German" language instruction. Oliver alleged that the education of children in these private schools could, by "no stretch of the imagination" be designated as adequate: these children "are learning nothing of our literature, our history or our language" and, therefore, received no training in Canadian citizenship.<sup>19</sup> This contention was confirmed by the "simple fare" of Mennonite schools where little more than the A.B.C., the Catechism, the New Testament and the Old Testament were taught. In one Mennonite school which followed this regimen,

in the forenoon they sing and say their prayers, then study Bible History and practice reading. . . . For three hours in the afternoon they work at arithmetic and writing. . . . So through seven years they go from October to seeding and again one month in summer ignorant of the facts of Canadian history, untouched by the loftiness of Canadian ideals and taught that the English language will only make it easier to lapse into the great world of sin outside the Mennonite communities.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, teachers employed were, by standards of the public schools and advocates of a national school system, unqualified. Thus, Oliver stated, communities which substituted "a private for a public school" should be required to "secure a certificate . . . from the Inspector of Schools that the instruction received by their children is satisfactory." Oliver's point was that "an Inspector, an educational expert," would determine whether students received efficient instruction.<sup>21</sup> The school inspector, a defender of the public school system, would, he believed, impose the national curriculum on private schools and ensure English-language instruction.

When Oliver's criticisms of private schools were contested the *Saskatoon Daily Star* rose to his defence. Oliver had censured private German schools because they employed unqualified teachers who taught in German for at least one-half the day. Indeed, Oliver claimed that in "over two-thirds of the [German schools] not a single word of English is taught" — "German rather than English [is] their language of instruction." While defending Oliver against the jeremiad of the Humboldt priest, the Reverend Bruno Doerfler, the *Daily Star* commended as worthy of emulation the ideals of the German settlers — "that their children should become true Canadians without losing that precious treasure, the language of their forefathers", but forcefully responded:

If the English language is not the sole medium of instruction, we do not think that the children attending the private schools in Humboldt are receiving the full opportunity of developing true Canadian citizenship, which would be the ideal of all educationists in Saskatchewan. . . .<sup>22</sup>

Thus, Oliver's position that English ought to be the sole language of instruction had the support of the province's daily newspapers, leading educationalists, and the Saskatchewan Synod.<sup>23</sup>

Oliver irritated ethnic relations already aggravated by the European war



by his fixation on "one issue" — the uniting of the diverse ethnic populations into a Christian and British nation.

Are we to be a homogeneous people on these plains or are we to repeat the tragic sufferings of polyglot Austria? The question must be solved in our elementary schools. And we must solve it now. A few years and it may be too late.<sup>24</sup>

While Oliver censured Mennonite and German resistance to the assimilationist thrust of the public school system, particularly the use of German as the primary language of instruction, he viewed the rising nationalist spirit in Ruthenian districts as potentially more troublesome to the integrity of the public school's task of nation-building.

There were two reasons why Ruthenians were a greater threat than either the French or Germans to the nation. First, the Protestant churches had failed to respond to the social and spiritual needs of these immigrants. In Canora, north-east of Saskatoon, apart from the hospital equipped by the Presbyterian Woman's Missionary Society, the Protestant churches had made no real effort "towards their Canadianisation". The ethnic press offered, in Oliver's view, "no hope of Canadianising these people." Therefore, "the hope of Canadianising these people lies with the public school."<sup>25</sup>

Second, the standard of instruction, the qualifications of the teachers and the shortened school year mitigated against the public school fulfilling their nationalizing goals. Teachers, Oliver discovered during his tour of the Ruthenian districts in the summer of 1915, seldom had the training that would permit them to teach in other schools in the province. Fourteen of the seventeen schools he visited were summer schools and the teachers, the majority of whom were Ruthenians, regularly employed the Ruthenian language as a means of teaching English, especially in the primary grades. And most pupils were in the first three grades. Oliver was concerned as well about the impact of the Ukrainian nationalist movement on the public schools in the Ruthenian districts. The movement supported the "bi-lingual system of schools and . . . consider[ed] it our sacred duty to champion our natural rights to our mother tongue and . . . the position that our language should be taught in our schools with English".<sup>26</sup> "Though their children speak with the tongue of Ruthenians and of angels," Oliver countered, they "have not been touched with Canadian ideals and have not mastered the English language. [Thus], our system profiteth us nothing."<sup>27</sup> Oliver argued that if English was taught directly in the schools, and not through the medium of the Ruthenian language, the disadvantage that these children were under would be removed.

In addition, Oliver, who believed that teachers ought to be "thoroughly Canadian", questioned the "wisdom" of separate teacher training schools for<sup>28</sup> and "the rather generous granting of Provisional Permits" to Ruthenian teachers. The need, Oliver claimed, was for efficient training courses for all teachers without special privileges and the absolute necessity of "the policy of seeing that every child on leaving school should be able to read, write and speak English." Such a goal could not be achieved with short courses in teacher training, short periods of school attendance by children in non-English communities, and inadequate instruction in the English language. Combined these inadequacies undermined the educational and nationalising goals of the schools in non-English communities.



Oliver's program of not

making concessions[,] . . . uniform treatment of all non-English languages in our schools, a strict enforcement of the regulations governing the teaching of non-English languages . . . and . . . one dominating policy of making Canadian citizens here on the prairies<sup>29</sup>

received the concurrence of the Saskatchewan Synod. In 1915, the Synod transmitted to Premier Scott its opinion that,

the policy of seeing that every child in Saskatchewan on leaving school shall be in possession of an education adequate to Canadian citizenship, and at least be able to read, write, and speak the English language.

That the attention of the Government be called to the presence of unorganized school districts within the Province, and to the presence of private schools, as a serious menace to the best interest of our citizenship.<sup>30</sup>

Oliver's interest in, and influence over, the direction of the school controversy did not end with this address. Even after he joined the Western Universities Battalion in 1916 and was transferred to England, Oliver's influence was felt in Saskatchewan. In 1917 *The Bexhill-on-Sea Observer* reported that Padre Oliver had precipitated a tremendous discussion on school matters,

which is the chief issue in the present Election in that Province. . . . Dr. Oliver urges that the children of [the Ruthenians] and other races from Central-Eastern Europe should be taught to read and write English in the public schools, retaining their own language if they wish. Should the new generation grow up ignorant of English, the political and social problems of Western Canada will be extremely complicated . . .<sup>31</sup>

In addition, his public address to the Saskatchewan Public Education League in 1915 probably informed Harold Foght when the latter studied the problems presented by Doukhobors, the "old colony" Mennonites and Ruthenians in 1918. Foght's resolution for the problem of minority language instruction was remarkably similar to those presented by Oliver in his contentious 1915 address to the Saskatchewan Public Education League.<sup>32</sup> It is not unreasonable, then, to conclude that Foght had some knowledge of the debate that occurred in Saskatchewan in 1915-1916 and of Oliver's paper when we learn that Foght received "valuable advice and constant co-operation" from the "officers and members of the Saskatchewan Public Education League".<sup>33</sup>

It is difficult, however, to assess any continuing influence that Oliver exerted among his co-religionists while he was in Europe. Although he was highly regarded, as resolutions in the Synod demonstrated annually, Oliver's position *vis à vis* the school problem was probably more moderate than his colleagues in the Synod who, in 1917, reaffirmed their commitment to a unilingual English school system:

an education adequate to the needs of our Saskatchewan people must include the ability to speak, read and write the English language; and to obtain in this result we are convinced that the English language should be the only language of instruction in every school . . .<sup>34</sup>

The apparently increasingly moderate, yet still nationalist, position that Oliver championed may be seen in two pamphlets published in the immediate post-war era. In a pamphlet published in at least six bilingual editions, Oliver explained "What the Canadian does NOT expect" and "What the Canadian expects of the New Canadian".

*The Canadian expects the New Canadian to allow and encourage his children to*



*learn the English language.* The Canadian has no mind to perpetuate racial distinctions. . . . He does not object to anyone learning as many languages as he chooses. . . . But there must be in this Dominion some avenue whereby we can all learn to understand each other. And in this country the English language has the dominance. It is to the advantage of our children in trade, in social life, in politics . . . that they should be able to understand and converse with each other. So in our Public Schools all must learn English. The Canadian expects this and will enforce this. . . .<sup>35</sup>

In spite of the conciliatory tone which permeates the pamphlet, Oliver was one Canadian who worked to enforce this provision of Canadian nationality.

But Presbyterian leaders reassessed the ethnocentric approach of the church to the New Canadian. This reevaluation of its position with regard to the ethnic communities in the West was partly imposed upon the church by the increasing resistance of the communities to the "assimilationist" pressures of the Protestant churches and the public school. In 1919, the Reverend Colin Young, Home Mission Superintendent for North Saskatchewan, cautioned the Presbyterian Church that "many of the Ukrainians and others" were suspicious of "the intention of all our missionary enterprises". They believed, quite rightly, that the purpose of the missions was to "absorb and thereby exterminate all the distinctive national characteristics leaving no trace of them in our national life. The word 'assimilate' . . . they have grown to hate."<sup>36</sup>

Oliver had initiated his adjustment to the European communities' nationalism in *What the Canadian expects of the New Canadian*. His approach had matured by 1922 when he informed the National Conference of Canadian Students that "the New Canadian offers a real contribution to this land." While this was Oliver's viewpoint for the next decade, it co-existed with his earlier view of the European immigrant. In another post-war article, "The Challenge and Contribution of the New Canadian", Oliver stated that the non-English-speaking peoples were "a menace to us and a menace to themselves." Their presence imperilled New Land where they settled "like foreign substances in the body politic." Although not completely untouched by Canadian ideals, Oliver thought "they dilute the rich wine of national feelings and impulses" by their "very ignorance of our past, our language, of our aspirations". Therefore, they did not share "our common hopes." The presence of an "Old People in a New Land" was a menace because they might paganize Canadian life. "Their standards of sanitation, of education . . . are not ours." Oliver maintained, however, that these old people did add materially to the Canadian economy and, most importantly, they furnished a

new strain of life [which] will help create genius. It will help create moral and social problems. It will give a new trend to national type and character. This is a contribution. It is as well a challenge. We have a mixed people in the making.

But, "I find that the people to whom this world owes much. . . . the Greek and English peoples, — were mixed peoples."<sup>37</sup>

### Concluding Comments

In spite of a more conciliatory attitude toward non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants in the West by the early 1920s, Oliver's perception of the proper role of the public school and the Presbyterian Theological College really had altered slightly from the time of his 1915 speech on "The Country School in Non-English Speaking Communities" to the publication of *The Winning of the*



*Frontier* in 1930. Oliver still preached that the non-English immigrant should be acculturated to the dominant society. By maintaining this attitude, he differed little from his contemporaries, especially Dr. J. T. M. Anderson, Saskatchewan Director of Education among the New Canadians from 1919-1921. Anderson, in a passage reminiscent of Oliver's statement about the importance of the frontier to Canadian life, stated

It is surely manifest that the greatest agency in racial assimilation is the common or public school. This is the great melting-pot into which must be placed these diverse racial groups, and from which will eventually emerge the pure gold of Canadian citizenship.<sup>38</sup>

Oliver, under his *non-de-plume* Henry Esmund, expressed a very similar sentiment. "Out of this mixed people in this West we might in time make a greater stock than even the British, provided, of course, that the public school is given a chance and all contribute their best to the common store and stock."<sup>39</sup> Oliver argued not for acculturation but amalgamation. While he acknowledged the assets which the New Canadian brought to the nation, the underlying tone of his writings was one of assimilation. Oliver, in an ironic passage in his 1915 speech was chastising the protectiveness toward their private schools demonstrated by the German communities of Humboldt and Muenster, claimed that these communities embodied "a narrow, nationalist ideal against which we surely must set ourselves."<sup>40</sup> He failed to recognize that his efforts were no less narrow and nationalist.

### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> E. H. Oliver, "Building the Kingdom of God on the Prairies — A Challenge to the United Church," *The Canadian Congregationalist*, LXXII:5 (4 March 1925), pp. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Doug Owram, *Promise of Eden — The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Ideas of the West 1856-1900*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), p. 148. In *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914*, Carl Berger claims that "one of the most distinctive features of the imperialist mind was the tendency to infuse religious emotion into secular purpose. The contention that the British Empire was a providential agency, the greatest secular instrument for good in the world, was a widely held conviction among [Canadian] imperialists. . . ." Yet "the idea of mission was increasingly characterized by a note of anxiety lest the British people fail to respond adequately to the duties imposed by power — fail, that is, to discharge the will of God." (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), pp. 217-218.

<sup>3</sup> See John Webster Grant, "The Reaction of WASP Churches to Non-WASP Immigrants," unpublished presidential address to the Canadian Church History Society, 1968, N. Keith Clifford, "His Dominion: A Vision in Crisis," in *Religion and Culture in Canada/Religion et Culture au Canada*, edited by Peter Slater (n.p.: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, 1977), pp. 23-37; Marilyn J. Barber, "Canadianization Through the Schools of the Prairie Provinces Before World War I: The Attitude and Aims of the English-Speaking Majority," in *Ethnic Canadians: Culture and Education*, edited by Martin L. Kovacs (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1978), pp. 281-293; and Marilyn Barber, "Nationalism, Nativism and the Social Gospel," in *The Social Gospel in Canada: Papers of the Interdisciplinary Conference on the Social Gospel in Canada, March 21-24, 1973*, edited by Richard Allen (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1975), pp. 186-226.

<sup>4</sup> For an alternative view of the resistance of Eastern European settlers to the assimilationist tendencies of the public schools, see Stella M. Hryniuk and Neil G. McDonald, "The Schooling Experience of Ukrainians in Manitoba, 1896-1916," in *Schools in the West: Essays in Canadian Educational History*, edited by Nancy M. Sheehan, J. Donald Wilson, and David C. Jones (Calgary: Detselig, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> *Canadian Annual Review*, (CAR), 1915, pp. 678-679. The Saskatchewan Public Education League was founded in June 1915 at a conference called by the Premier and Minister of Education, Walter Scott. CAR, 1913, pp. 618-620, reported that the "Bi-lingual schools" were emerging as a controversial issue. Premier Scott stated that "There are no Bi-lingual schools in Saskatchewan. There are cases where the teachers have to use the mother tongue of the children in primary instruction, but English is the language of our public schools." However, A. H. Ball, Deputy Minister of Education, informed the Ruthenian Teachers' Convention that "It is a sad thing to



use this system [bi-lingual instruction] in the schools and, in general, it is unpedagogical. Canada is an English-speaking country, and is English in the full meaning of the word."

<sup>6</sup> For background to the Saskatchewan school experiences, see Raymond Huel, "The Public School as a Guardian of Anglo-Saxon Traditions: The Saskatchewan Experience, 1913-1918," in Kovacs (ed.), *Ethnic Canadians: Culture and Education*, pp. 295-302; and Clinton O. White, "Education Among German Catholic Settlers in Saskatchewan, 1907-1918: A Reinterpretation," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, XVI (1984), pp. 78-95.

<sup>7</sup> Edmund H. Oliver, born in Eberts, Kent County, Ontario, in February 1882, was raised in a strict Presbyterian family. Apparently a youth of keen intellect, he advanced rapidly through primary and secondary forms of Ontario's public and collegiate school system. Upon matriculation for the Chatham Collegiate, Oliver was awarded the gold medal as the institute's top student and the Edward Blake scholarship for being first in classics and mathematics in the Province. Academic honours followed at the University of Toronto where, graduating with an Honours degree in 1902, he was awarded the McCaul Gold Medal (1902) for academic excellence. Oliver studied for his M.A. at Toronto (1903), and won a scholarship to Columbia University where he received his Ph.D. (1905). Oliver lectured in history and economics at McMaster University, Toronto, from 1905 to 1909, when he was called to the University of Saskatchewan as its first Professor of History and Economics. Oliver completed his theological studies at Knox College, Toronto (1910).

Oliver went west to teach history and economics at the fledgling University of Saskatchewan but quickly assessed the great need for supply in western pulpits. Theological colleges in the East and Manitoba College, Winnipeg, were unable to provide sufficient numbers of well-trained clergy for the expanding and peculiar needs of the prairie provinces. The prairie minister, Oliver believed, required special training, over and above the essential theological and pastoral skills, so that he might serve the scattered prairie population, especially the New "Canadian". Therefore, in 1913 Oliver resigned his university post to become principal of the nascent Presbyterian Theological College, Saskatoon. As Principal of Presbyterian Theological College, he travelled the province presenting to congregations the needs of the college and urging upon young men the supreme calling of the ministry. After a term of service (1916-1919) with the Canadian Expeditionary Force as chaplain and President of the University of Vimy Ridge, Oliver returned to Saskatchewan to complete the task of constructing his theological college. Presbyterian Theological College under Oliver's guidance prepared men and women for their two-fold task as ministers of the Gospel and as missionaries of Canadian nationalism. They were to be committed to the building up of "His Dominion".

Oliver's publications focused on church history and the economic and social history of the prairie provinces. Acknowledged as one of the foremost agitators for organic union between the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregationalist churches, Oliver advised provincial and federal parliamentarians in their deliberations over enabling legislation. To Oliver, union was indispensable to the vitality of the Church on the Frontier and essential to the fulfilment of the mission of the Church and the nation in the west — the forging of a new people in a new land, in "His Dominion". In 1932 after two arduous years of persistently presenting his vision of Canada as Moderator of the United Church of Canada, he returned to St. Andrew's College, Saskatoon. Oliver died while on vacation in South Saskatchewan in 1935.

<sup>8</sup> Claude Bissell, "Introduction", in Sara Jeannette Duncan, *The Imperialist* (1904) (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), p. v.

<sup>9</sup> R. Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), especially Chapter 4.

<sup>10</sup> See Huel, "The Public School as a Guardian of Anglo-Saxon Traditions," pp. 295-302.

<sup>11</sup> Harold Foght, *Survey of Education in the Province of Saskatchewan* (Regina: King's Printer, 1911), p. 143.

<sup>12</sup> "The legislation of 1913 confirming the payment of school taxes, where Separate Schools existed, according to religion, aroused some strong discussion in Orange circles. The measure was unanimous so far as the House was concerned so that there were no politics in the matter there. The Orange *Sentinel* of Toronto proclaimed the legislation as tyrannical, the Saskatchewan Grand Lodge followed suit and condemned the Provincial Government . . ." *CAR*, 1913, p. 620.

<sup>13</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), United Church of Canada, Saskatchewan Conference. Presbyterian Church in Canada, Synod of Saskatchewan, Minutes, 1914, pp. 21-22.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1920, p. 263.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1913, p. 226; 1918, pp. 183, 189; 1919, p. 211; 1923, p. 4; 1921, p. 306.

<sup>16</sup> Edmund H. Oliver, *The Winning of the Frontier* (Toronto: Ryerson — The United Church Publishing House, 1930), pp. 227-228.

<sup>17</sup> University of Saskatchewan Archives (USA), 95/2, Oliver Papers, B. Newspaper Clippings III. Miscellaneous.

<sup>18</sup> See *CAR*, 1916, pp. 677-678.

<sup>19</sup> Oliver, *The Country School in Non English Speaking Communities in Saskatchewan*. (Saskatoon: The Saturday Press and Prairie Farmer, n.d.) Printed version of the address to the Saskatchewan Public Education League, Regina, 22 September 1915, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> USA, 95/2, Oliver Papers, B. Newspaper Clippings III. Miscellaneous.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, Editorial, "Our Private Schools," *Saskatoon Daily Star*, 16 January 1916.



<sup>23</sup> *CAR*, 1915, p. 678-679. The *Regina Leader* of 30 October 1915, cited the Rev. F. A. Bloedow, Superintendent of German-Baptist churches in Saskatchewan, as stating: "If Canada is to be a united nation, it must have a common medium of communication, a common language. And since we are a nation within the British Empire, this common language can be no other than English. Therefore, would I have every child of school age in all Canada, and more particularly in Saskatchewan, first of all learn to speak, read and write English." Bloedow was a prominent member of the Saskatchewan Public Education League.

<sup>24</sup> Oliver, *The Country School*, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Also see USA, Oliver Papers, Box 1, File 1a, Diary 1915. Oliver's diary of his trip contained detailed observations of each school and teacher visited.

<sup>27</sup> Oliver, *The Country School*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>28</sup> See M. P. Toombs, "A Saskatchewan Experiment in Teacher Training, 1907-1917: The Training School for Teachers for Foreign Communities," *Saskatchewan History*, 17:1 (1964), 1-11.

<sup>29</sup> Oliver, *The Country School*, p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> SAB, United Church of Canada, Saskatchewan Conference. Presbyterian Church in Canada, Synod of Saskatchewan, Minutes, 1915, p. 49.

<sup>31</sup> USA, 95/2 Oliver Papers, B. Newspaper Clippings, 1. War Years.

<sup>32</sup> Foght, pp. 148-149. The one exception to this general rule seemed to be Foght's recommendations regarding the Mennonites which, while similar to Oliver's, were based upon Foght's study of South Dakota Mennonite colonies after his return to the United States. Foght, pp. 148-149.

<sup>33</sup> Foght, p. 8. Oliver was vice-president of the Public Education League but was with the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Europe during Foght's visit to Saskatchewan.

<sup>34</sup> SAB, United Church of Canada, Saskatchewan Conference. Presbyterian Church in Canada, Synod of Saskatchewan, Minutes, 7 November 1917, p. 124.

<sup>35</sup> Prof. A. H. Oliver [sic], *What the Canadian expects of the New Canadian* (Yiddish edition) (Toronto: Presbyterian Board of Home Missions and Social Service, n.d.), p. 17. The other bilingual editions included Ruthenian-English and German-English printings.

<sup>36</sup> SAB, United Church of Canada, Saskatchewan Conference. Presbyterian Church in Canada, General Assembly, Acts and Proceedings, 1919, Appendices, "Report of the Board of Home Missions and Social Service", pp. 32-33.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, E. H. Oliver Papers, D28, "The Challenge and Contributions of the New Canadian", typescript, n.d. Also see D29, "A Study in the Antecedents of a People and a Present Problem — The Ruthenians of the Prairies", typescript, c. 1933.

<sup>38</sup> J. T. M. Anderson, *The Education of the New Canadians* (Toronto: J. M. Dent, 1918), p. 25.

<sup>39</sup> Henry Esmund, *Beaver Lodge. A story of a Frontier Settlement in Northern Saskatchewan*. Board of Home Missions, United Church of Canada, 1930, Toronto, p. 14.

<sup>40</sup> Oliver, *The Country School*, pp. 11-12.



# DOCUMENTS OF WESTERN HISTORY

## THE 1899 MANITOBA AND NORTHWESTERN RAILWAY DISPUTE WITH THE DOUKHOBORS

*By Victor O. Buyniak*

**B**y July 1899 most of the Doukhobor immigrants had arrived on the Prairies. A total of some 7,500 people settled in four colonies in what is now Saskatchewan. Some very influential individuals and organizations, including the writer, Leo Tolstoy, and the Society of Friends (Quakers), facilitated their exodus from Russia, and a number of prominent personalities accompanied the new immigrants to the land of their settlement. Among them were three men who became instrumental in arranging temporary employment for groups of Doukhobors at the Manitoba and Northwestern Railway Company in the summer and fall of 1899.

Arthur St. John, a former captain in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, was at one time in the Indian service. He resigned his commission, became a pacifist and Tolstoyan, and visited Tolstoy at his estate of Yasnaya Polyana in September 1897. Through Tolstoy he became acquainted with the Doukhobor cause, served as Tolstoy's and the English Quakers' envoy to them in the Caucasus, and brought the group, which was in dire material need, several thousand roubles that were collected for them by their sympathizers. The Russian authorities did not like St. John any more than they liked the unorthodox and non-conformist Doukhobors — he was arrested and expelled to Turkey for trying to cause foment among the group. Regardless of his unfortunate experience in Russia, St. John became a staunch supporter of the persecuted Doukhobors. He helped them at every occasion, interceded on their behalf *vis-à-vis* the British authorities regarding emigration from Russia, prepared the arrival of a party of Doukhobors in the summer of 1898 in Cyprus (their first relocation place), and, when this venture ended in failure, accompanied the Doukhobor exodus to Canada. He extended his unwavering support to the group at every opportunity in Canada, until his return to England.<sup>1</sup>

Leopold Antonovich Sulerzhitsky (1872-1916), became acquainted with Tolstoy through the latter's daughter Tatyana. He was an aristocrat but also a convinced anarchist-pacifist who had served a term in prison for refusing to take the oath in the army. He became a Tolstoyan, and together with St. John he visited the Doukhobors in the Caucasus during November 1897. Sulerzhitsky greatly facilitated the arrangements for the departure of the first shipload of Doukhobors from Batum, and accompanied them to Canada. Later he became



an active associate of the Director Constantin Stanislavsky in the Moscow Arts Theatre.<sup>2</sup>

Alexander Mikhaylovich Bodyansky (1842-1916), was essentially a different personality. A Russian nobleman, too, he had distributed his lands to his peasants and became a practising Tolstoyan. He became personally acquainted with Tolstoy in August 1892. He was arrested by the authorities for spreading unorthodox religious views, and was exiled to Transcaucasia where he became acquainted with the Doukhobors. For some years he was to play a controversial role in Doukhobor affairs. From the Caucasus Bodyansky found his way to the Tolstoyan colony at Purleigh in Essex, England, but his eccentricities proved unendurable to his colleagues there. He was persuaded to leave the colony and went to Canada shortly after the arrival of the Doukhobors there. He was always full of plans and projects and tried actively to work on their behalf, although not asked by them to do so, and he helped notably to crystallize their discontent *vis-à-vis* the Canadian authorities. Eventually, he was asked to leave Canada, and returned to Russia.<sup>3</sup>

In brief, these were the individuals who directed the Doukhobor working parties for the railroads in 1899. To supplement their families' income, the Doukhobors were initially obliged, like many other immigrants, to look for employment on various outside projects. An intensive construction activity by railway companies in the Prairies was an obvious source of work for the Doukhobors during their first summer in Canada. In June 1899 Sulerzhitsky helped a group of men to contract some work for the extension of the Canadian Northern Railway line.<sup>4</sup>

At first both sides were content: management, as well as the workers. The Superintendent of Immigration in the Department of the Interior in Ottawa, Frank Pedley, was quite satisfied with the reports of the Doukhobors' industriousness, adaptability to new conditions and their work ethics. In a letter to H. Harley, the Sub-Agent of Dominion Lands, Swan River District, Dauphin, Manitoba, dated 27 October 1899, he mentions, among other things:

It is gratifying to know that Mr. Charles McDougal, the Contractor on the Canadian Northern Railway, found the Doukhobors employed by him such good labourers, and I have no doubt but that they will prove very desirable settlers for our Western Country.<sup>5</sup>

Other positive testimony came from the Land Agent John Ashworth, who wrote to William Forsythe McCreary, the Commissioner of Immigration in Winnipeg, on 3 November 1899:

I also made inquiries from settlers in the districts I passed through and with a few exceptions they were quite satisfied with the Doukhobors and found them willing to work, in most cases giving complete satisfaction, in fact some preferred them to the Galicians.<sup>6</sup>

But everything appeared to go well only for a short time. Soon the men began to leave the work, complaining that they were able to earn very little. Sulerzhitsky, who "set out to investigate the situation," found that at some swampy stretches of the construction the men were indeed underpaid for their work, but that the main cause of dissatisfaction about insufficient earnings was really the men's loss of communal spirit: instead of contributing their entire wages to the community as a whole, they individually charged various expenses from their earnings for themselves and for their families. Sulerzhitsky managed





Doukhobor workers building the highway between Wadena and Kuroki, 1922. National Doukhobor Heritage Village - Saskatchewan Archives Board. NDHV-84-244.



to rectify the situation and the men went back to work.<sup>7</sup>

But, only for a while, because friction again developed. During the fall of 1899, a group of Doukhobors, working on the Manitoba and Northwestern Railway Company of Canada's extension west of Hamiota in Manitoba, felt that they had been mistreated by their superiors and began voicing their complaints. The leader of that particular group was Arthur St. John. Although he could easily communicate with the railway administration, the rules of employment were either not precise at the time, or he and his charges did not properly understand them. Moreover, working conditions in the swampy terrain were very hard and the pay was exceedingly low.<sup>8</sup>

Since McCreary was from the start associated with the general planning of the Doukhobor migration to the Prairies, was always sympathetic to the new settlers' needs and felt himself responsible for their well-being during the initial stage of their resettlement, their complaints and expressions of dissatisfaction about the working conditions were passed on to him first. He must have mentioned the complaints in a private letter to J. S. Smart, then the Deputy Minister of the Interior, because Pedley refers to this case in a letter he wrote to McCreary, on 23 November 1899. The letter in part stated,

... I beg to leave to say that the Doukhobors had better be given to understand that if they will not take the work that is offered them at fair wages for a fair day's work, this Department does not propose to extend itself very much in giving them assistance during the coming year. There is no reason why the majority of the men should not, under present conditions, find abundance of work and thus be able to carry their families through the winter and be in a position to make a very satisfactory start on their homesteads in the spring. This should be made plain to them so that there will be no mistake whatever as to the position of the Department.<sup>9</sup>

In December 1899 a dispute developed between Doukhobor workers and railway supervisory personnel, and the immigration officials were caught in the middle. McCreary got his information from J. S. Crerar, the Agent in Yorkton, the town nearest to the Doukhobor colonies. Apparently Crerar received a statement from St. John, registering the group's complaint regarding the Hamiota incident. In the beginning of December, McCreary who had been notified earlier by Crerar, contacted the Office of the Engineer, Manitoba and Northwestern Railway Company of Canada, in Winnipeg, demanding an explanation.

This demand resulted in the Engineer's ordering an investigation into the matter. The correspondence concerning this case is quite extensive: telegrams and letters from the Engineer, George H. Webster, to his Roadmaster in Portage la Prairie, Robert Watters, Webster's communication with McCreary, McCreary's with W. J. Pace, the Accountant to McGillivray and Company and to Pedley, and, of course, the most emotionally-charged part of the incident — the letters exchanged between McCreary and Bodyansky who was then in Yorkton.

To become acquainted with the history and the individual facts of the dispute it is best to furnish some key correspondence or excerpts from all the sides concerned. First, the point of view of the Doukhobors will be presented, on the basis of St. John's and the workers' relation to Bodyansky, and the latter's interpretation of the incident. Bodyansky sent the following letter from Yorkton to McCreary, dated 16 December 1899:



It is very painful to me to say what I want to tell you, but it will be much more painful to me if I keep silent. I and my fellow-believers, the Doukhobors, we left our native land with a feeling of disgust for the cruelty and injustice which the Russian Government allows itself to practice. With the hope that in Canada, we should meet better organization and better men, in a land, where reigns the most enlightened nation, we came here, but to our great regret and disappointment our hope is far from being realized. We have met not a few people from the class which has a greater power in reality than any Government. I mean the class of capitalists, who are capable of such inhuman deeds that even the Russian government is not capable of. The latter Government behaves cruelly with its opponents, but those who bring advantages to it, many rely on its help and protection, but those capitalists, I speak of, and whose names are known to you, have shown that they are even capable of starving and freezing those "cows from whom they have taken milk." You know Sir, what I mean. You know, that in October 150 men, Doukhobors, driven by want, consented to accept the offer of the Manitoba and Northwestern, and started off for Rapid City and Hamiota. I saw myself the way they were packed in, they were huddled up on freight cars — 75 men in a car and they were obliged to travel all the way standing up, as they were too crowded and unable to move. It is known that necessity will force a man to accept the hardest conditions. But what name deserve these people, who take advantage of the helpless condition of others to suck from them as much blood as possible? Can these people number among the civilized and enlightened nations? Can they be Christians; are they really those who are so reverent that consecrating the seventh day to God they neither allow themselves, or others, to attend to business.

The Railway Company of which I speak, did not only send the workmen like cattle — they did more than that. As you know the Company promised to take the workmen and bring them back free of charge; you know that not only the Company did not fulfil its promise, but mocked them in a senseless way. They sent them on foot in the frost over 20 miles, telling them that on the station the train would take them on. But at the station they were sent on foot again, on to another station, and these unfortunate men were doomed to walk 100 miles in the frost without warm clothes, without a cent of money and without bread! On the way they had to leave the sick and slept on the prairie in a heap of straw. When their brothers in Yorkton heard of this, we at once begged the railway company through the agent of the place to take pity on them, and then only the company condescendingly consented to comply to our request and to take up the sufferers in the train, on condition that the fare for their transport should be paid in advance. We collected amongst ourselves whatever we could and presented the money.

Another instance. At the end of November another company with Mr. McGillivray by way of sympathising with the hard position of the Doukhobors, consented to employ 150 men. They were sent. Once on the spot they were obliged to draw themselves and to carry the supplies at a distance of 25 miles. They fell into the water, and got drenched, both they and their supplies, and finally when they reached the place of work, they found everywhere continuous woody frozen marsh. They were not asked to work per day, but per yard, on condition that they took all their supplies from Mr. McGillivray's store. For their transport they were in debt of \$8 for each man and they had not a cent to return. Just think, Sir, if it is not moral to catch wild beast with traps, then how about enticing industrious people and to take advantage of their flesh and blood, their muscular work — betray the trust of strangers, who came to this country to seek refuge and protection — all this constitutes such cruelty that I do not know what to compare it with. Just think, Sir, how many lives will be shortened through these hardships! And yet men are hanged for manslaughter and murder.

I have only reminded you of two glaring cases — as for the others just as sad, but with a small number of sufferers, they are so numerous that one might



write a volume about them. Many of these cases are known to you, and more known to your subordinates.

To sum up, I must tell you that at the present moment, there are many sick Doukhobors, suffering from exhaustion and cold, and over a thousand men in the South Colony are on the verge of starvation.

The following reply was sent by McCreary to Bodyyanksy, dated 22 December 1899:

... It is now almost a year since the Doukhobors arrived here, and during that period I have laboured hard and earnestly to do the best I could to make these people self-supporting. In the first place, I procured the contract for those in the North Colony for clearing the Right-of-Way on the Swan River Extension. They were allowed about \$13.40 per acre for this work, and still were dissatisfied, notwithstanding the fact that the same work could have been contracted for with English-speaking people at about \$11 per acre; and that is the price at which it is now being done on the further extension of the same road.

I am quite aware that the corporations in this country have no souls, and that they exert every means to get the most labour for the least money out of English-speaking people as well as Doukhobors. However, we have got to take the situation just as we find it, and I think the Doukhobors have had as much fair play shown them as any other class.

Now, unfortunately, instead of encouraging the Doukhobors to get over those difficulties, and do the best they can under their adverse circumstances, St. John, as you know, is a pessimist and aggravates their discomforts and discouragements instead of cheerfully trying to get over them. ... While I admit the Doukhobors have been imposed upon in many cases, I am also personally aware of many cases where the Doukhobors have acted in an extremely dishonourable manner towards employers. ...

Now, fortunately, some time ago I have received the complaint from Mr. Crerar about these Doukhobors having to walk from Shoal Lake. I at once sent a communication to the Manitoba and North-Western Railway people and they have answered in writing, and I beg to enclose the copy of their reply, which I trust you will either be able to refute or admit.

When your letter arrived, there came on the same day one from Mr. Pace, who is accountant for Mr. McGillivray, where 116 Doukhobors went. I enclose a copy of his reply as to their statements concerning them, which would indicate that St. John had magnified the matter very much. It was never intended that these people should go down by the day, but were to work by the yard at 17 per yard; camps to be furnished by McGillivray. My letters to St. John as well as my telegrams pointed this out clearly; and I intend asking St. John, when he returns here, whether he misinterpreted this matter to the Doukhobors — if so, it was his fault. When Mr. McGillivray came in, after the first 60 Doukhobors had gone down by the day, he said that they were so slow in their movements he would take no more on those terms. Consequently, I notified Mr. Crerar, Captain St. John and Dr. Weletchkina that no more Doukhobors could get winter work there. They seemed very disappointed, and asked me to make another effort. I did so and secured five miles of work, or about 150,000 yards, at 17 c[ents] per yard; and St. John perfectly understood it.

Now, if the Doukhobors are going to dissatisfy the Railway corporations in the manner shown in these communications, then do not be surprised if the Railway companies agree among themselves next year not to employ one single Doukhobor on all their works. Two years ago the Galicians commenced making the same complaints. The C.P.R. took the matter up and told their Foreman to employ no more Galicians, and not to allow one of them to work between their rails all along their lines. I saw this was practically going to mean their starvation, because the Railway companies in this country employ most labour. I represented this to the Galicians, and they asked me to intercede to be given another chance. I saw the C.P.R. President, and he said that if they would agree



to work as other men were working without continually leaving their employment and complaining without real cause, he would try them again. I then sent a letter to all the Galician Colonies, stating these facts. The consequence is that the Galicians have turned out to be better men and, as you know, are getting along well. It is surprising that some of these people who have only been in the country to a year and a half, and who came with no means whatever, have been able, out of their earnings, besides supporting their families, to accumulate five or six cows. I regret to say that they make much more progress than the Doukhobors.

One of the greatest drawbacks to the success of the Doukhobors is that some of the men in charge of them are not practical, and although they are supposed leaders, they do not know as much about work as the Doukhobors themselves. For instance, St. John, educated as a soldier, knows nothing about manual labour. How can he instruct others?

Now, the Doukhobors have got to be told, and told very plainly, that they have to take such work as is offered them and be content with the same treatment as is being given to English-speaking people. You know, if you know anything about railroading, that 17 c[ents] a yard, is a good price for station work. They can board themselves; be their own bosses, and work as they desire. What more can I do? I am about tired and sick of fighting with contractors and others in the interests of these people, and if they are not satisfied with my exertions, then I will just wash my hands off the whole lot, as there are occasions when forbearance ceases to be a virtue. . . .

St. John will be here in a couple of days, and I intend reading him your report, and, if necessary, I will go back with him to this work, inspect it myself and take sworn affidavits from the Doukhobors themselves, as well as from the other English-speaking men working along the line, and endeavour to get at the actual facts. I trust, however, this will not be necessary. . . .

The following letters or excerpts may serve as supporting material representing the side of railway companies and contractors. In a short letter, dated 16 December 1899, the Engineer George H. Webster asked Robert Watters, the roadmaster for a detailed explanation of the incident. He received the following reply,

Regarding the attached, Mr. Crerar seems to have only one side of the story. These men in question were kept after the rest were laid off and I arranged with St. John and the men, to stay until the work was completed and he would give them transportation to Yorkton. The men did not fulfill their promise, but quit their work of their own accord, and left me without a man to fix the track. They stopped the work-train coming in from the front, and got on her and rode to Hamiota. I arrived in Hamiota the same night from the East and saw Duncan, the Foreman, and Martin, the Interpreter, and both told me that the men would work no longer, but wanted to go to Yorkton. Both Duncan and Martin told me that the men would do just as they thought fit, work as they chose. Eight and ten of them would be in the Scrub at a time, three and four times a day. If the Foreman told them to hurry up and get ties packed and dirt cast into the tracks, they would offer him the shovel and tell him to hurry up. They told the Foreman and the Interpreter that they have nothing to do with them. I wanted these men in the worst way, at that time, and I felt as though, walking to Yorkton was too good for them. They should have been horse-whipped for leaving this work and acting the way they did. I consider them the worst lot of men I have ever had, and have had more trouble with Doukhobors and their Interpreters, this summer, than I have had with Galicians for three years. Doukhobors expect a Railway Company to nurse them and feed them with a spoon, let them do as they choose, stand, sit and lay down on the work. I consider them the most expensive men in the Railway Company ever employed and will be, until a change is made in them.



Allowed to walk to Yorkton will do them good, and if we are not upheld in this, we had better not employ any more of these men. The men were well treated by us under the circumstances. They had plenty to eat, tents and stoves, and everything necessary for their comfort at this time of the year.

This man St. John is doing a great deal of harm among these men. He is or pretends to be one of themselves, in religion and all other acts, sleeps and eats with them, advocates for more wages for them, board for less than \$5.50 per week, wanted men to be boarded on wet or stormy days when they were not working, for half rate, whereas it would take a bushel of grub to fill one of these big Doukhobors. This man St. John is the most useless man I ever ran across. He will cause an endless amount of trouble among these men for some one. I have had the same kind of trouble with Galicians and I found that walking to Yorkton once or twice, did them good, and I know it will do the Doukhobors a great deal of good also. It will also have a tendency to stop them from leaving work before it is completed, same as it had with Galicians.

Regarding these men walking across country to Shoal Lake, I told the Interpreter to tell them they would get no transportation and they have better walk across the Shoal Lake and from there to Yorkton, or get tickets the best way they could. These men in question were not discharged, but the men that went away with St. John, were laid off work, and were entitled to free transportation.

In view of this information, Webster wrote a letter to McCreary on 16 December 1899, excerpts from which are quoted below:

I am sorry to say that the general opinion of our Roadmaster and all Foreman who have had the Doukhobors employed this summer is not at all favourable to these men, in fact they bitterly oppose having to take these men on to their gangs. It is quite evident from the actions of the Doukhobors themselves, that they are labouring under the delusion, that Public work in this Country were being arranged for their special benefit and that they can desert employment and behave in any manner which seems fit.

These remarks of course do not apply to all of these men, as I have heard some of them praised very highly, but it was a very small proportion of the total number we had employed last summer.

Regarding complaint against Mr. St. John made by Watters in his letter of the 9th, Mr. St. John may endeavour to justify his action on the grounds that he is endeavouring to get as much as possible for his men, but he should not forget that the men are quite inexperienced, and until they learn to speak English and have a couple of years experience in track work, that they are not worth as much per day as men who have this experience, and it is a mistake to lead the Doukhobors to expect that they should be as well paid as more experienced men. Owing to the shortage stringency in the Labour Market this fall, we have paid these men as high as \$1.75 per day, and I can safely say that at least 75% of them were not worth half that much. . . .

The Accountant W. J. Pace sent the following report to McCreary on 21 December 1899,

Referring to that portion of Bodjansky's letter dated the 16th instant, in reference to the men who went to work for McGillivray and Company on the Rainy River Railway, I beg to state that in regard to the statement made by Mr. Bodjansky that the men had to transport themselves and their supplies twenty-five miles, such is not the case. The men with their supplies, clothing etc., were moved to Shebandowan Lake by McGillivray & Company, and their camps were built — one camp a mile and a half and the other four miles and a half beyond the lake.

The Lake being frozen at the time, it was deemed advisable to move their supplies by sleighs this four miles and a half on the ice — on account of one portion of the ice being bad and the Doukhobors congregating round the sleigh,



the ice broke and let them into about two feet of water; but there was only one Doukhobor of the lot who got at all wet. The rest of them were moved on to their camp, and were perfectly satisfied there, and are at work.

Captain St. John, the man in charge of the Doukhobors says that they are perfectly satisfied.

As regards \$8 for the fare, this was agreed on before they left Yorkton.

I might say that the fifty men who came down previously are more than satisfied with the treatment they received from McGillivray & Company, and for the month of November they each averaged a net amount of \$31.00.

All this prompted McCreary to write his own letter of complaint to his superior Frank Pedley. This communication is dated 22 December 1899, and it reads:

I wrote the Deputy Minister a few days ago enclosing copy of a communication I had received from the Manitoba and North Western Railway Company about a complaint as to how certain men were treated on their line. Since sending that communication I have received a long letter from Mr. A. Bodyansky, one of their leaders at Yorkton, dealing with the same subject, as well as with some men who went down to work on the Port Arthur and Rainy River Road. I beg to enclose copy of Bodyansky's letter, as well as of Mr. Pace's reply — the Accountant for Mr. McGillivray, the Contractor on the Prince Arthur and Rainy River, and also copy of my reply to Bodyansky.

I regret to say that no more vexed question ever came before me than this whole Doukhobor business. I do not know what the result is going to be, unless they will agree to work as other people do. Unfortunately, the public sentiment will not permit us to allow them to starve. The newspapers and others would take it up in such a way that the Government would be bound to come to the rescue, as they had to do with the Galicians two years ago. Sensational articles would appear, and special correspondents sent out, which, of course, would not be a wise policy. Certainly if we are going to have this same trouble, I would ask you to send up a man, or get one here, who would take entire charge of the Doukhobors and their management, as my time will be fully taken up with other immigration in the spring and I cannot possibly give the attention to the Doukhobor matters that I have had to do during the last year.

As can be seen from the above presentation, the Doukhobors who worked in closely-knit groups during their first year in Canada and who were directed and helped by individuals equipped with a knowledge of the language, but not of the country, its laws, customs, and ways of life, were in practically the same position as any other new and inexperienced immigrants, working in groups or individually. It takes time to adjust to new circumstances. In the initial period, mistakes and false accusations are likely to be made by both sides. Due to inadequate knowledge of each other, mutual mistrust and inborn racial and ethnic preconception are very strong during this time. The railroad continued periodically to employ the Doukhobors during the next year or so until the latter became self-sufficient on their farms. Once the situation became clarified, the men adapted to the rules and demands placed upon them, and we do not hear any more of any glaring cases of disputes with their employers.



## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> L. N. Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Moskva: Gos. Izd. Khud Lit., 1928-1958, vol. LIII, passim. In English this publication is known as *Jubilee Edition*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. LII, passim.

<sup>4</sup> George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 161. J. F. C. Wright, *Slava Bohu*, Toronto: Farrar & Rinehart Inc., 1940, p. 158.

<sup>5</sup> Public Archives of Canada, Department of the Interior, Immigration Branch Records, vol. 184, part VI, file 65101. All subsequent references from this source relate to this file.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

<sup>8</sup> S. F. Rybin, *Toil and Peaceful Life*, San Francisco: "Delo", 1952, p. 39.

<sup>9</sup> Immigration Branch Records.



## Contributors

Raymond J. A. Huel is Professor of History, University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge, Alberta.

Michael Owen is Assistant to the Vice-President Academic, Athabasca University, Athabasca, Alberta.

Victor O. Buyniak is Professor of Slavic Studies, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

## Saskatchewan Archives Board

### Board appointment

Mr. Beattie Martin, MLA for Regina Wascana, has been appointed a member of the Saskatchewan Archives Board. With Mr. Martin's appointment, all positions on the Board have been filled. Current membership of the Board is as follows: Dr. Bernard Zagorin, Professor of History, University of Regina (Chairman); Mr. Ron Hewitt, Clerk of the Executive Council and Assistant Cabinet Secretary; Dr. John Courtney, Professor of Political Studies, University of Saskatchewan; Mr. Beattie Martin, MLA for Regina Wascana and Legislative Secretary to the Honourable Lorne Hepworth, Minister of Education; and Mrs. Marian Powell, Legislative Librarian (ex officio). The Minister Responsible for the Saskatchewan Archives Board is the Honourable Colin Maxwell.

### Staff changes

Recently the Board granted eight months' educational leave to Mr. D'Arcy Hande, Acting Director of the Saskatoon office, in order to research and write his M.A. thesis. Mr. Hande began his leave on September 8th. Mr. Wayne Crockett, formerly a Government Records Archivist in the Regina office has been appointed to the permanent staff in the Saskatoon office as archivist responsible for manuscripts and cartographic records. He began his duties on October 1st.

The Board has appointed Ms. Glenda Leslie, City of Saskatoon Archivist, as the next editor of *Saskatchewan History*. She succeeds Mr. Douglas H. Bocking who served as editor of the journal for many years and who kindly agreed to edit this issue. Ms. Leslie has considerable experience in editing and writing, including the publication of *The Nor'Westers* in 1985. She was recently elected President of the Saskatchewan Council of Archives.

To assist the new editor with the publication of *Saskatchewan History*, the Saskatchewan Archives Board has announced the establishment of an editorial board. The following persons have agreed to serve on the editorial board: Dr. David Smith, Mrs. Shirley Spafford, Dr. Bill Waiser and Dr. J. W. Brennan.





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