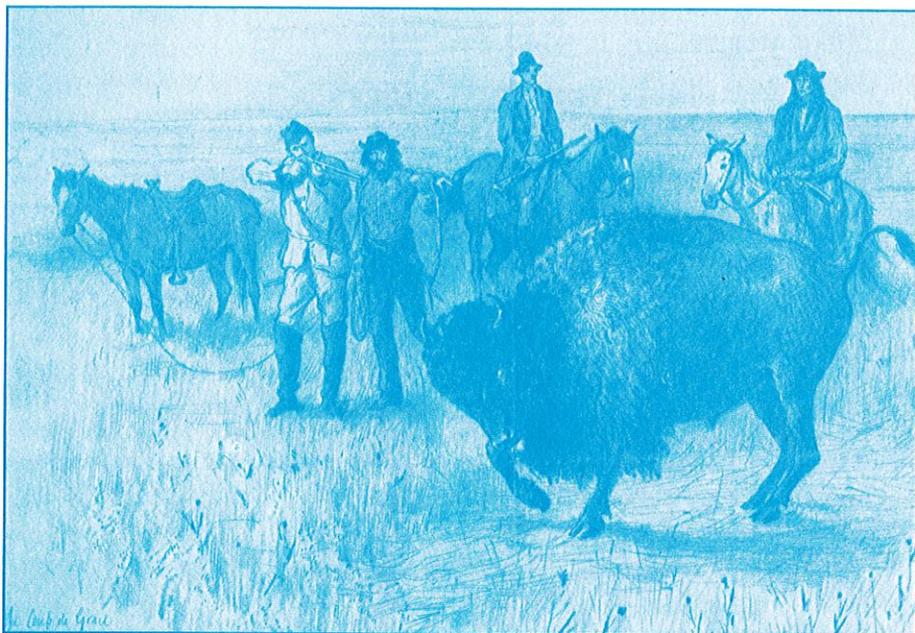


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Fur, Freight and Furore: The Longmores and The Saskatchewan
The Shirley Keyes Thompson Memoirs: 'A Prairie Wife's Tale'
Gender and The History of the Left

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FUR, FREIGHT AND FURORE: THE LONGMORES AND THE SASKATCHEWAN

By Victor Whitbread

When the Hudson's Bay Company obtained its charter for exclusive trade in Rupert's Land in 1670 it would be twenty years before it sent an explorer, Henry Kelsey, to the Saskatchewan River basin. Eighty years later it had still to establish a trading post on the river although traders out of Montreal had one at Fort à la Corne since 1744.

On 23 June 1774 Samuel Hearne left York Factory charged with building such a post and thereby offsetting the inroads in to trading with the native peoples being made by the Canadian Pedlars! His small party included carpenter Andrew Garrett and a man with a growing number of attributes, Robert Longmore. As an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company, Robert Longmore would be, by progression, seaman, labourer, canoemaker, trader, brigade leader, master and inland chief as well as shipping officer and superintendent at York.

In the June of 1900, another Longmore, John, died near Edmonton, Alberta. "Johnny Saskatchewan," as he was known to many, would be best remembered as a scout and guide but he was also an expert hunter and an experienced freighter.

Over the one hundred and thirty years when fur, freighting—and not a little furore—were the mainstays of men's occupation along the North Saskatchewan River, Robert, John, and their kin, made the Longmore name deserving of being seen as synonymous with the river and its peoples.

While Scotland still lay in the dark shadow of "The Forty-Five," when England put down the aspirations of the Stuarts and their supporters to the throne, and about the time the Canadians were establishing a post at La Jonquière in 1751, Robert Longmore was born in "the Parish of West Church, Edinburgh, Scotland."² Beyond the fact that his father's name is given as William, no details are known about Robert Longmore's early life. By what means or connections the Lowlander secured a position as a sailor with the Hudson's Bay Company is obscure, but in 1771, he became part of the complement of one of its annual supply vessels.

The *King George* sailed from Gravesend on 31 May.³ After the regular call at Stromness, Orkney, which they left on 26 June, the *King George*, the *Prince Rupert*, the *Sea Horse* and some brigs sailed as a fleet for Hudson Bay.

The *King George* arrived at Churchill on 24 August after a voyage that was not without incident. In mid-July she experienced "most uncommon weather" and on 28 July was driven trapped in ice for a week, losing sight of the other vessels and coming perilously close to Saddleback Island, causing ice to come on board and break a quarter-piece.⁴

The vessel remained at Churchill until 5 September. During that time

several crew opted to remain in Rupert's Land. On 3 September the Master's Journal notes "discharged Robert Longmore, seaman."⁵ What prompted the Scot to remain in North America at the virtual last minute we do not know.

We do know that Samuel Hearne was absent from the Bay forts on his third, and successful, journey to the Coppermine River and "the northern sea." Hearne returned to York in time to meet the 1772 supply ship. It was to be another year before the journals first formally linked the names of Hearne and Longmore. On 19 May 1773 they went to Sloop Cove to make the brig *Charlotte* ready for a "voyage to the North on the Trade"⁶ but appear to have only gone to the mouths of the Albany, Moose and Slude Rivers before being back at York by "the last of August."⁷

They then went down from Churchill to York intending to go inland that fall, charged with establishing the first inland trading post to offset the inroads being made by the Canadian Pedlars from Montreal. But there were insufficient canoes and they wintered at York refining their plans.⁸

Hearne, Longmore, carpenter Andrew Garrett and six others left York on 23 June 1774, travelling up the Hayes River and its tributaries with successive parties of Indians because they still had no suitable canoes of their own.⁹ They reunited at Split Lake. After portages to bring them to the Saskatchewan River they reached their destination of Pine Island Lake. By the time winter set in they had established themselves in "a log tent" as "Cumberland House,"¹⁰ today the oldest permanent settlement in Saskatchewan. It was perhaps a bitter pill of a name for Longmore, the Duke of Cumberland being known as "the Butcher" for his actions in Scotland.

The experience was not without physical pain for Robert Longmore. He had "both big toes much frozen,"¹¹ and was incapacitated for six weeks. The Europeans turned to the Indians for relief and "applied the inner rind of the larch tree which is generally used among the natives to stop or prevent a Mortification."¹² Longmore does not seem to have suffered any long-term disability from his exposure.

Hearne returned to York and was succeeded at Cumberland House by Matthew Cocking on 6 October 1775. Accounts vary as to whether, three days after his arrival, Cocking sent Longmore along with Malchom Ross and William Walker to compete with the Canadians,¹³ with Charles Isham to winter among the Pigogomew Indians up the Saskatchewan,¹⁴ or to go with Isham and Indians to build canoes.¹⁵ In the latter version, the Indians built six canoes but the independent traders bought two of them when the Company men were unable to pay or trade for them on the spot.

In the June of 1776, Cocking sent Longmore north towards the Churchill River, accompanied in a canoe by some Indians, five gallons of brandy, some ammunition and tobacco.¹⁶ On 17 June Longmore was unfortunate in finding himself at the same place as the independent trader-brothers, Joseph and Thomas Frobisher¹⁷ and Alexander Henry. The Pedlars demanded to know Longmore's right to the packs he had obtained. A struggle ensued but it was the plea of the Indian owners of the furs that persuaded Longmore to give up possession, the Pedlars having secured all the other furs when the Indians became drunk. Longmore was back at Cumberland House on 27 June.

When he went to York he found he had been ordered back to England. But the new Chief Factor at York, Humphrey Marten, considered Longmore to be the best canoeman in the Company service,¹⁸ ignored the order, and assigned

the ex-sailor to "peddling" out of Cumberland in the manner of the day.

On 5 October 1776 Longmore again left Cumberland House. He was accompanied up the Saskatchewan River by Ross and James Spence. In ten days they reached Fort à la Corne. A week later they were at the uppermost of independent posts just below the confluence of the Sturgeon River, a short way west of present-day Prince Albert. They remained there ten days before moving on in pursuit of their rivals. It was likely Longmore first met Peter Pond about this time, Pond wintering at the Sturgeon.¹⁹

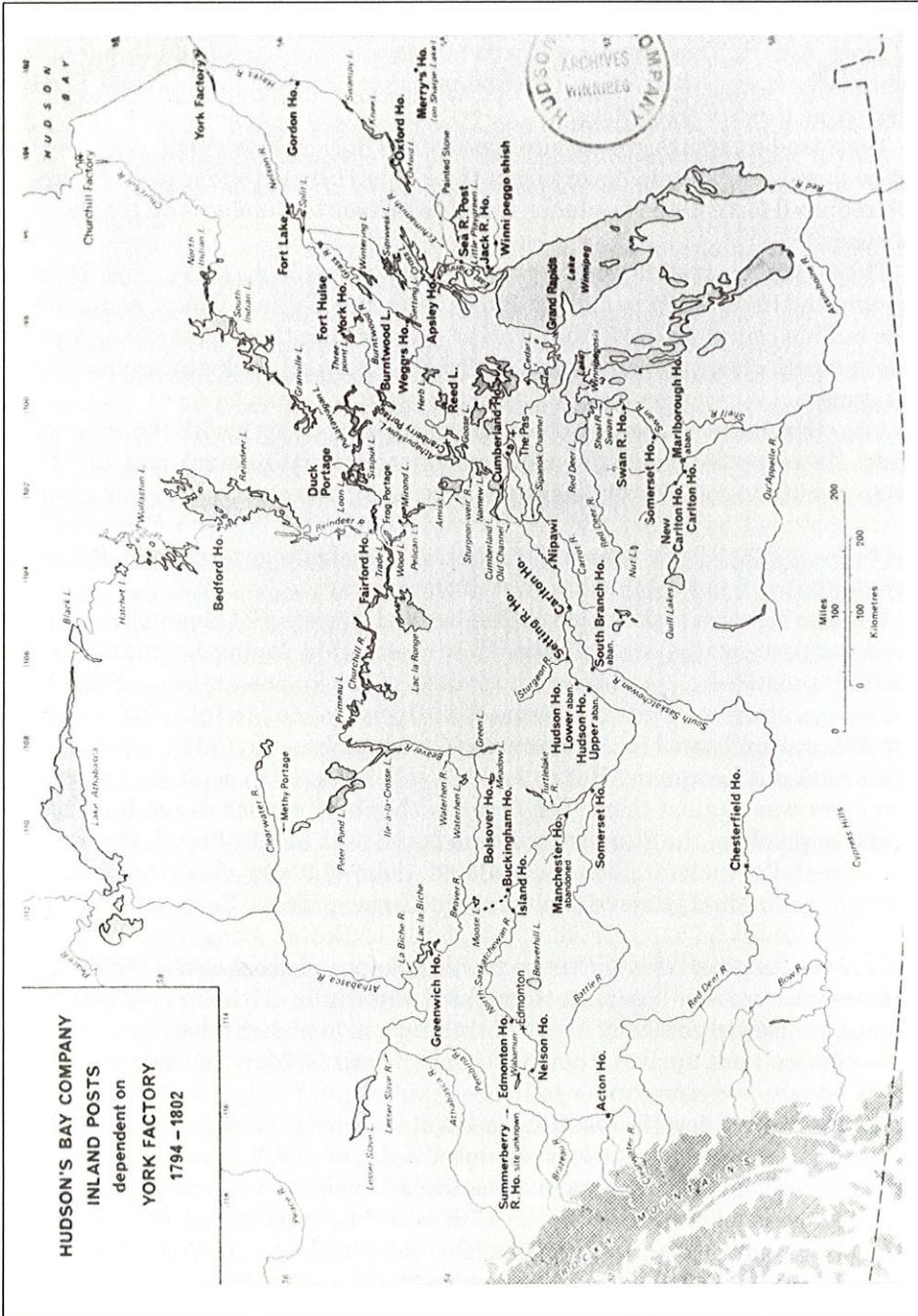
Their trading was to prove quite successful. On New Year's Day, 1777, they could be found readying to depart from the Eagle Hills with four sleds of furs which required forty days of arduous travel to deliver to Cumberland House on 7 February.²⁰

There was no rest if greater success was to be had. Three days later Longmore and Ross, accompanied by James Wass and William Oman, again left for the buffalo country. On 28 May Walker was seeking them at the Sturgeon. He met up with them the following day and they were all back at Cumberland on 10 June.

After the shortest of rests, Robert Longmore went to York with the summer brigade. He came back charged with establishing a permanent post on the prairies in buffalo country. On 22 September he again made his way up river, now accompanied by James Spence, Edward Loutit and William Flatt, later joined by Isaac Batt.²¹ They wintered in what was now familiar territory to Robert Longmore but did not establish a post of their own.

William Tomison took charge at Cumberland House on 24 September 1778. He had instructions to despatch Longmore west again saying Longmore had "faithfully promised . . . and in consideration of his known abilities, Fidelity and Courage," had been given a contract at thirty pounds to fulfil his earlier charge.²² Accordingly, and in the manner of Cocking, three days after his arrival Tomison sent out Longmore, Ross,²³ and ten others, together with six Indians. The weather was against them. The first day they only canoed two miles. They managed to get above the Sturgeon but were forced back to "the French House."²⁴ There Joseph-Barthelemi Blondeau offered them the use of an unfinished property four hundred yards²⁵ from where the Independents, Booty Graves and a man who would be a particular protagonist of Robert Longmore, William Holmes, were masters. After putting a roof, windows and doors on the building,²⁶ Longmore sent out small parties throughout the winter with varying success but found himself chronically short of trading goods and canoes.

Longmore went upriver from 26 February until 15 March.²⁷ Soon after he got back he received a newcomer to the Saskatchewan. Philip Turnor had been hired in London²⁸ to develop the topographical knowledge of Rupert's Land and was on his first journey inland as surveyor. A cabin and bed space was built for Turnor, and he and Longmore accepted a breakfast invitation from the irascible Holmes on 1 April.²⁹ On the 25th, word was received of the death of one-time Company man turned independent, John Cole, in a confrontation with Indians at his Eagle Hills post.³⁰ Two days later some of Holmes' men were threatening to kill Longmore's party.³¹ Longmore evacuated from Sturgeon over the next two days, accepting Blondeau's offer of a large Indian canoe but still having to leave considerable provisions behind. All arrived safely at Cumberland House on 21 May.³²



From Alice M. Johnson (Ed.), *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1967), Volume 63. Reproduced with permission of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives/Provincial Archives of Manitoba.

Turnor appears to have been nominally in charge of the brigade to York that summer but Longmore must have been more offended when Turnor chose Ross to steer his canoe. Turnor was nonetheless impressed by Longmore, regarding his adaptation to the environment.³³

Not satisfied with his accomplishments, Longmore volunteered to lead a party west from York to establish a post in the Athabasca River basin where the Independents were becoming well entrenched. But the emphasis remained on the Saskatchewan, and he was sent back to fulfil his commitment to set up a post to rival that of Blondeau. Accompanied by William Tomison, Lower Hudson House was begun on 8 October 1779.³⁴

Still plagued by a shortage of supplies, it was a winter more successful in the purchase of eight Indian canoes and by Longmore building two of his own,³⁵ a craft at which he had become adept. It was the winter Holmes and his ally, Peter Pangman, obtained coats loaned by the Hudson's Bay Company to Indians. In retaliation, Holmes reported Longmore had impounded the trade goods of Canadian, Patrick Small, but later released them on payment of three beaver coats.³⁶

After being in charge of the summer brigade to York in 1780,³⁷ Longmore was back at Hudson House in September with twenty-one men under his charge,³⁸ only to find himself even more deprived not only of trade goods but also of food as the Indians had burnt over the land and driven the buffalo off making the Company men dependent on the Indians for meat.³⁹ Fifteen of his men declared to Tomison they would never serve under Longmore again.⁴⁰ After delivering them all safely back to Cumberland House in the Spring, Longmore lodged his own complaint over Tomison's negligence of supply once at York.⁴¹

Now was the time for the Company to take up Longmore's offer of venturing into the Athabasca country. The venture was cancelled when it was found the Indians were being decimated by a smallpox epidemic.⁴² Although half the native population at Cumberland House was also killed by the epidemic, Longmore found himself back at familiar Hudson House.⁴³

Between 1781 and 1784, Robert Longmore appears to have concentrated on trading out of Hudson House. These were the years during which the French under Comte de Lapérouse sacked Fort Prince of Wales and Company operations were in a turmoil. For instance, in the October of 1783, Tomison had found himself buying supplies from Holmes at excessive prices.⁴⁴

By 1785 the Company had reestablished its equilibrium and Hearne was now in charge at Churchill.⁴⁵ While the Committee in London was insisting the Athabasca venture be pursued,⁴⁶ Hearne again sent Longmore to the Saskatchewan, now accompanied by the latest of the Company apprentices who would make a name for themselves, David Thompson.⁴⁷

Thompson was to go with Longmore to establish a House farther up the North Saskatchewan. The "Introduction" to Thompson's *Narratives* quotes Hearne's appreciation of Longmore:

"He possesses a very essential quality, which is that of being universally beloved by the Indians. To add to this his long residence in these parts (the Saskatchewan country) together with an invariable attention to the Company's interests, must long since have made him a competent judge of their affairs in this quarter."⁴⁸

Longmore and Thompson went sixty miles above the Battle River confluence to establish this new post, to be known as Manchester House but

also as "the Upper House" for a time. They began the work three weeks before Inland Master Tomison came up. It was the Company's deepest penetration of the Saskatchewan to date this far. Longmore's scourge, Holmes, soon followed, establishing Fort de l'Isle that year from his post near future Battleford.

Tomison tendered his resignation the following year, 1786, but there was a new Resident Chief at York, Joseph Colen, who had replaced the recalled Marten. Colen persuaded Tomison to withdraw his resignation and to return to the Saskatchewan with Longmore as his first lieutenant.

Occasioned in part by Longmore's criticism of Tomison over inadequate support and supply, it was not an arrangement that was likely to last. It was not surprising that Longmore did not return to the Saskatchewan after going down to York with the summer brigade in 1787. Colen quickly found him another role: to prosecute the discoveries made from Churchill⁴⁹ where William Jefferson was now in charge. While acting as second in command to Jefferson,⁵⁰ Longmore's task was again that of 1779 and 1781, to make a trial of the Churchill route to the Athabasca. Robert Longmore was now effectively separated from the Saskatchewan country, though not from present-day Saskatchewan to which the Churchill is an important river system.

London was looking not only for a route to the Athabasca but also for one through to the Pacific. In 1791 a Captain Charles Duncan was sent out to lead this search and Longmore was assigned to accompany him, mainly as interpreter. Longmore, along with others, disliked Duncan's manner as well as disapproving of the whole scheme.⁵¹ Partly due to Longmore's disputes with Duncan, the expedition did not materialize. A year later Robert Longmore returned to England. In 1793 Alexander Mackenzie found a route to the Pacific shore.

While there is no directly supporting evidence, it seems that Robert Longmore, like many of his contemporaries, took a wife from among the native population. In all likelihood, she joined him at York when he was re-engaged in 1793 in the position of superintendent. The following year he was redesignated "shipping officer."⁵²

Two years later his unease with the coastal post led him to ask to be allowed to go inland again.⁵³ This request took him into new territory as the Hudson's Bay Company sought to sever the Independents' lifeline by setting up posts between the Bay and Lake Superior. His first posting was to Red Deer River House⁵⁴ but he soon found himself in a familiar position, a shortage of supplies. He withdrew for the winter to "Charlton House" on the Assiniboine River.⁵⁵ There he experienced an unusual situation, competing for trade not only with the Canadians but with other Company men directed from Fort Albany.⁵⁶

He made his base at Red Deer River for four years, part of it as Master of the Swan River District at seventy pounds per annum.⁵⁷ He built a new post on the Swan River during this period but remained disgusted by Tomison's failure to supply him adequately.⁵⁸ In the summer of 1799 he was at York with every apparent intention of going back to England but decided against it and returned to the Swan. Although the Company historian, Edwin E. Rich, would suggest it was part of Tomison's policy, on 23 March 1800 Longmore transferred "New Charlton House" to Albany men⁵⁹ with renewed intent of leaving Rupert's Land.

A superior's persuasion again apparently won the day although for the next four years there is a dearth of substantial evidence as to his whereabouts. He did, though, remain on the roll of servants out of York at seventy pounds a year and with the rank of Master and Trader. In 1804 he emerged in the relatively minor position of assistant master at Island House (near Lake Eliza, Alberta). The master there was Henry Hallett, once Longmore's deputy.⁶⁰ Apart from a year at York in 1807, Robert Longmore remained at Island House until 1810.

There was plainly bad blood between the two men. On 23 March 1810, Hallett and Longmore quarrelled "and the latter attempted to stab the former with a fork."⁶¹ Later in the year, Hallett would be dismissed for the murder of an Indian but Robert Longmore had by then gone down the Saskatchewan for the last time, intent on retiring "to enjoy the fruits of his labours."⁶²

He had been away from Britain for eighteen years and the fruits were not inconsiderable. Thirty-nine years of service had accumulated him some eighteen hundred pounds.⁶³ But he left without the good wishes of the Company, presumably because of events at Island House. The Master's Journal for the voyage of the *King George* dated 24 August 1810 reads: "this morning I received Robert Longmore and his son on board with orders from Mr. Cook not to let him Mess in the Cabin or to show the least countenance towards him."⁶⁴ The son was named "Andrew, a native of Hudson's Bay." They appear to have been confined aboard until the vessel sailed on 5 September. Among the other passengers was William Tomison. It must have been a long and difficult voyage for father and son but they made good speed to Stromness in the Orkneys, arriving on 2 October. Possibly the Longmores disembarked there. The vessel did not sail again until 11 November, or dock in London until 7 December due to gales along the coast.⁶⁵

Another son, probably Robert, had been in school in Britain since 1808.⁶⁶ Mention of a William Longmore (presumably Robert's father) had been made as recently as 1803.⁶⁷

Whatever his reasons for going back, or his itinerary in Britain, Robert Longmore would not stay there long. 1812 was to prove a stressful year in British North America. It was the year that settlement of the Selkirk Grant was commenced through Hudson Bay. It was also a year of war with the United States. By February, 1812, Longmore was already established on a well-stocked farm near the Lake-of-the-Two-Mountains west of Montreal.⁶⁸ While it is possible this arose out of talks with Canadian Pedlars over the years, it is possible it was by connection with another Longmore: George.

George Longmore was born in Banffshire, Scotland around 1758.⁶⁹ A medical officer during the American War of Independence, he had married judiciously and assumed high offices in both medicine and politics. He also accumulated considerable land holdings mainly in the Quebec City region. He died on 9 August 1811. Although there is no proven connection between George and Robert Longmore it is possible that the latter benefitted from that demise.

Whether so or not, Robert Longmore does not appear to have enjoyed the fruits of his labours for long. The Albany Post Journal reported on 5 July 1814 that an employee had passed "the house where the late Mr. Longmore's family dwells."⁷⁰

By then the better-remembered Cocking, Hearne, Holmes, Pond and Turnor were all dead. Longmore had spent thirty years along the Saskatchewan extending the Company's trade and knowledge of the region. But interest in the family name might well have ended with him if it was not brought to international attention three generations later.



On 8 July 1874, a century plus fifteen days since Robert Longmore first set out with Samuel Hearne for the Saskatchewan, the newly-formed North-West Mounted Police set out to patrol the West. On 25 July "A" Troop was detached to Fort Ellice. Then "D" and "E" Troops separated to head north to establish a headquarters in the newly-built facilities known to it as "Swan River Barracks" and part of the complex to be known to the new Territorial Government, whose administrative seat would be there, as "Fort Livingstone."

The NWMP officers found the barracks unsatisfactory just as Robert Longmore had found the whole situation in the district untenable. Most of the NWMP wintered elsewhere. In the spring, "A" Troop marched parallel with the North branch of the river to establish Fort Saskatchewan. They passed other posts familiar to Robert Longmore, including Manchester House and his last assignment at Island House.

The government quickly discovered Fort Livingstone was as inhospitable as the NWMP did. In 1876 the capital was relocated to what had been previously known as "Telegraph Flats," where the thin wire to Fort Edmonton crossed the Battle River, but now to be known as "Battleford." This was only nine miles above where Cole had been killed at Eagle Hills and where Longmore had spent part of the winter of 1776.

The coming of Government and its agencies attracted "men whose fathers and grandfathers had served the old fur trade corporations."⁷¹ Among those men would be John Longmore. In 1881 his name would become known to newspaper readers in Britain as a guide to a western tour by the Governor-General, the Marquis of Lorne. He was already as well known to the hierarchy of the NWMP as he would be to the officers of the forces involved in the Riel insurrection of 1885. The blood link back to the elder Robert Longmore is not as easy to identify.

When the cartographer Aaron Arrowsmith published maps based on Peter Fidler's journeys up the South Saskatchewan in 1802 he would not commit himself to the course of the river by other than a provisional dotted line. The cautious researcher must approach a blood line such as the Longmores in a similar manner. A link from the elder Robert to John seems apparent enough but conclusive proof is often elusive.

According to Ross Innes in his *The Sands of Time*, John Longmore was born at Fort Pitt in 1850, son of William of the Hudson's Bay Company.⁷² Company records do not include a contract with a William Longmore but there is one dated 20 May 1863 hiring a John Longmore as middleman for one year at twenty pounds.⁷³ This was renewed for one year at twenty-two pounds, plus two pounds for tea and sugar.⁷⁴

Unfortunately, the Fort Pitt contracts of 1863–1864 do not give an age for John Longmore. Homestead records, however, show that John Longmore was born in 1847.⁷⁵ It is not inconceivable the contract is thus for him as it was not unusual for a youth of fifteen or sixteen to be in Company employ. What we do know

from the contract is that John Longmore could not sign his name and was "formerly of the Red River Settlement."⁷⁶

There is then a thirty-five year gap between the presumed death of the elder Robert Longmore around 1813 and John the guide's birth. We know there were at least two sons to the elder Robert, a Robert and an Andrew. The preponderance of evidence is that the younger Robert returned to the West some time between 1813 and 1830. The key evidence lies in a letter dated 15 November 1886 where a Mr. Schneider, a resident of Winnipeg, enquires of the Hudson's Bay Company Commissioner as to the disposal of an investment in Consols the elder Robert is known to have made.⁷⁷ Schneider says an elderly lady of his acquaintance living in Winnipeg, and known as Kitty Longmore, claims to be the granddaughter of Robert through his son Robert. She says she signed a witnessed document for Sir George Simpson on his last visit to Red River and he promised to bring her a large sum due her from the Company. Sir George died before a further visit and she heard no more about the money. She says her son, the younger Robert, was killed by Indians at Edmonton "many years ago."⁷⁸

"Kitty Longmore" is something of an enigma. On 3 June 1830, "Kitty, an adult Indian woman of Church Mission, Red River Settlement," was baptised there.⁷⁹ Seventeen days later, Catherine Longmore, "an adult woman of Red River Settlement" was baptised.⁸⁰ Two days later, Catherine Longmore married Andrew Linklater.⁸¹ Three months earlier, on 26 March, George Linklater was baptised as son to Andrew and "a native woman."⁸² Are "Kitty" and Catherine one and the same? Is the young Kitty of 1830 the old Kitty of 1886?

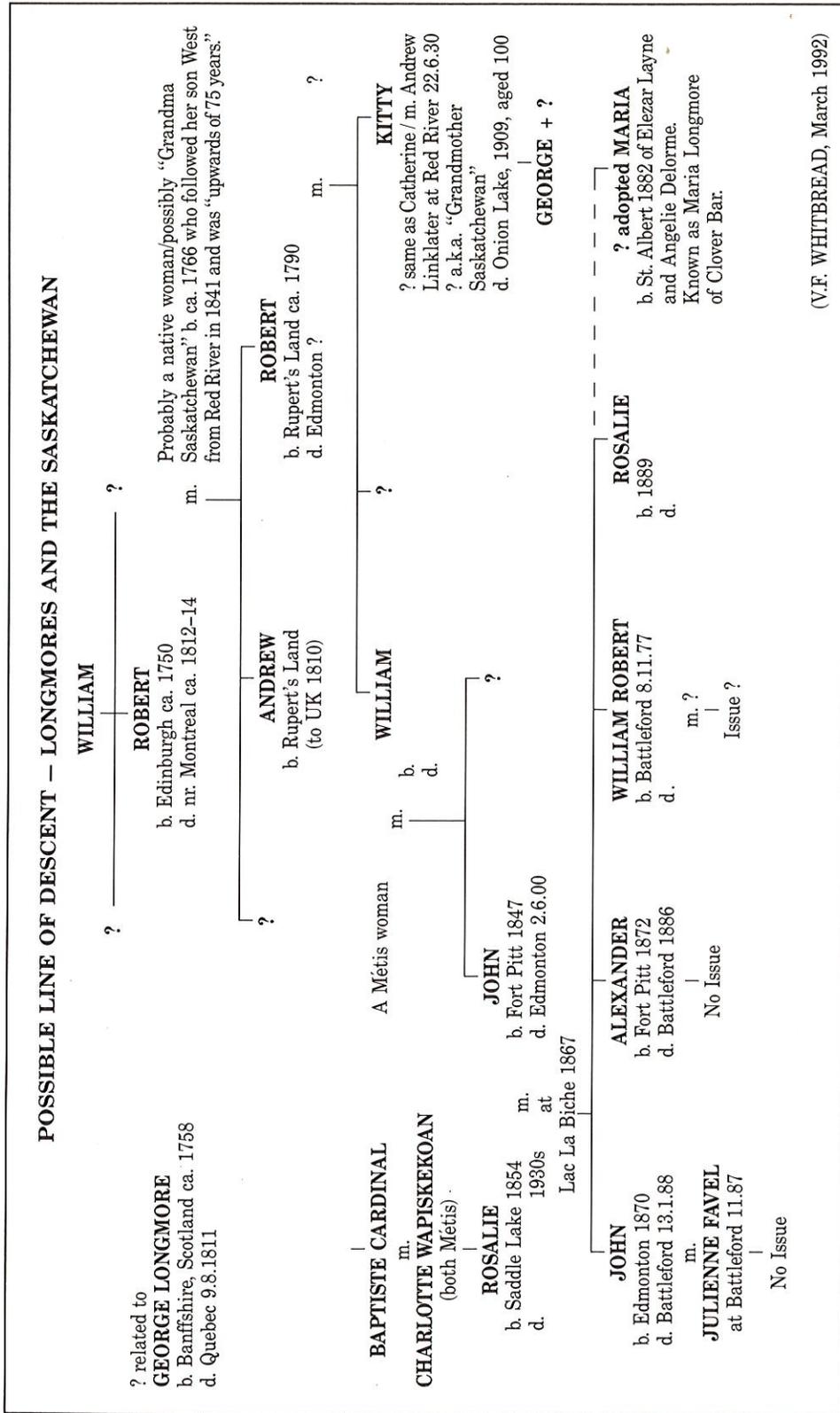
On 19 July 1841 Sir George Simpson was engaged in a world tour. As he travelled from Red River to Carlton House, his journal records him coming upon "one poor old woman upwards of seventy-five years who was trotting after her son to his new home."⁸³ She was a "native of the Saskatchewan the name of which she in fact bore" as "Granny Saskatchewan."⁸⁴ She had been absent from the river for eighteen years. If she had been born around 1766, it would equate well with her marrying the elder Robert Longmore by 1792. And her son would be the younger Robert relocating to somewhere between Fort Pitt and Edmonton. And a son of his would be of the age to have sons such as John Longmore born at Fort Pitt in 1848, a son whose sobriquet would be "Johnny Saskatchewan."

The marriage of young John Longmore to Rosalie Cardinal in 1867⁸⁵ is reasonable proof that the Longmores had come back to their Saskatchewan roots. The Cardinals of the territory between the Saskatchewan and the Athabasca were well known to Simpson. While said by T.W. Cashman in his *More Edmonton Stories* to be the daughter of a full-blooded Cree "born at North Battleford about 1850,"⁸⁶ Rosalie was the daughter of Métis parents, Baptiste and Charlotte (Wapiskekoan) Cardinal and born at Saddle Lake in 1854.⁸⁷

Saddle Lake was a telegraph station on the line from Battleford to Edmonton. It was astride the main freighter trail at a junction with an alternative trail between Fort Pitt and Lac La Biche, all along the route the aging "Granny Saskatchewan" traversed in following her son to his new home (a generation before the marriage of John and Rosalie). It was not thirty miles from the elder Robert Longmore's last post at Island Lake.

When the first NWMP men passed through the future Battleford in 1875 the consensus of evidence is that John Longmore was twenty-seven and his wife twenty-one; they had two sons, John, aged five and Alex, aged three. His wife was most commonly known as "Rosalind" in the district.⁸⁸

POSSIBLE LINE OF DESCENT — LONGMORES AND THE SASKATCHEWAN



By the time the authoritative *Saskatchewan Herald* was established in 1878, John Longmore primarily was recognized as a freighter. Although the local demand became significant, first by the substantial presence of the government and then the NWMP, the majority of long-haul loads were for the settlers or the old companies out of Fort Garry heading for Edmonton and Jasper, and increasingly for the Indian Department as well as the companies to Lac la Biche.⁸⁹

John Longmore's alternatives to freighting were mainly acting as a guide or messenger for one of the authorities, or hiring out his horses. A good guide could earn \$3.50 a day in the late 1870s, as "Johnnie Saskatchewan" is indeed shown as doing through the Indian Department. This supplemented the three hundred dollars or more he earned freighting for the Department and the NWMP. There was also the occasional windfall as when he supplied "one working ox for Strike Him" at sixty dollars in 1881.⁹⁰

1881 was the year when John Longmore's name first became noted far away from the Saskatchewan. It was the year of the Marquis of Lorne's vice-regal progress through Her Majesty's newly-opened up lands. John Longmore was to join with Chief Poundmaker and Louis Laronde as guides and interpreters for the trek south and west from Battleford towards Fort Macleod.⁹¹

It was a considerable caravan which left Battleford on 1 September, although there were only nine in the Governor's actual party.⁹² The rest was made up of fifty NWMP, twenty-one carts and wagons, nineteen tents and a boat. They would average thirty-one miles a day to Blackfoot Crossing and experience a high loss in horses. Attached to Lord Lorne's party were three accredited journalists from *The Graphic*, *The Telegraph* and *The Times* of London. A man from the *Toronto Globe* was said not to be accredited and was frequently left behind.⁹³ All of them made either direct or plainly-alluding references to John Longmore in their reports.

Sydney Hall of *The Graphic*, who was also an artist, regarded Longmore primarily as a hunter. The Reverend James McGregor called him "a clever half-breed," a term John Longmore was rather sensitive about, or so he appeared to be to the enumerator for the 1881 Census, having the word "half-breed" struck in relation to both himself and his family and insisting he was English by descent.⁹⁴ That he was English on his father's side is likely inarguable. On the other hand, Hall's sketch of John Longmore does depict him very much in the accepted image of the half-breed buffalo hunter.

Charles Austin as Special Correspondent to *The Times* also referred to the guides as one being a half-breed and the other an Indian. As he never named Laronde but said he found Chief Poundmaker "unusually charming" for an Indian, he plainly saw John Longmore as a half-breed too.⁹⁵ And it was to Johnnie (as Austin said Longmore condescended to allow himself to be more simply addressed) that Austin seemed to allude when he wrote: "as a matter of fact, though he has a quite marvellous sagacity, sometimes bordering on the superhuman in finding a place, his notions of distance are of the vaguest."⁹⁶ Austin correctly believed travel was judged in hours not miles by men like Johnnie Saskatchewan.

But of all the correspondents, the man from the *Toronto Globe* presents an unhelpful portrait. In the issue of 7 October 1881 he notes that Johnnie Saskatchewan "says that he is a pure Indian, but he talks good English and looks very much like a half-breed."⁹⁷ His readers could, presumably, take their own pick.

Regarding John Longmore's abilities as a hunter, all were more of a positive mind. The party much desired to see buffalo but their guides did not hold out any great hope. Then, "not deviating a wagon's breadth from our route, unless indeed, Johnnie Saskatchewan—to whom as a half-breed a buffalo is more tempting than a pig to an Irishman—secretly led us off our track to put us in theirs,"⁹⁸ through Poundmaker they espied a small herd.

Johnnie was singled out as the best hunter. He disappeared down the ravine on "a speedy brown kyuse" followed by Poundmaker "on a three-year-old roan pony" and Colonel Herchmer "on a roan broncho (Montana horse)."⁹⁹ According to Austin "three beasts separated from the rest rushed wildly back towards us up to the high ground . . . with the fiery Saskatchewan in hot pursuit. . . . One had the grace to drop in full view of us, the other two further away."¹⁰⁰ It took two shots in the leg by Colonel Herchmer with Johnnie Saskatchewan's rifle to bring one bull down. Laronde stopped the third but Johnnie had no bullet left with which to kill him. It was left to Captain Perceval to finish the beast with two shots from his Winchester. Austin reported "Johnnie Saskatchewan did his work marvellously well, wounding four, only one of which got away."¹⁰¹ Hall was presented with "a very spirited sketch" of Perceval's *coup de grâce*.¹⁰²

John Longmore also succeeded when, after a discussion with Poundmaker, he scouted ahead for potable water in what was a decidedly dry year. He found what Hall described as "a pleasant creek" of running water along the banks of which some pieces of coal were also seen.¹⁰³

Both Hall and Colonel Herchmer questioned the choice of crossing place on the Red Deer River which Johnnie made. It did not improve Herchmer's opinion when Johnnie told him he was unacquainted with the territory beyond the Red Deer,¹⁰⁴ although Austin seemed aware that Poundmaker was "being kept in reserve for the Blackfeet country."¹⁰⁵ Herchmer sent John Longmore back to Battleford with orders to collect five horses and a wagon with a broken axle along the way. He was back in Battleford for Tuesday, 11 October because that day the pony the Reverend Andrew Davis was relying on to get him from Winnipeg to Edmonton got away from him and John Longmore retrieved it.¹⁰⁶

A notable year for John Longmore closed with further evidences of his hunting prowess when the *Saskatchewan Herald* on 10 December noted that "John Longmore returned from the plains on Sunday bringing full loads of meat, having killed ten buffalo."¹⁰⁷ They were not only increasingly hard to find but harder to kill than some accounts would suggest.

For the next three years, John Longmore continued his mixed business of freighting, interpreting and horse-hiring. When the confrontation between the authorities and the Indians and Métis under Riel came about in 1885, Longmore and his son, John Junior, aged fifteen, both became members of the Battleford Home Guard. Several Battleford men lost their lives in this conflict. John Longmore's most notable contribution to events was his commission to take the instructions to Inspector Francis Jeffrey Dickens to evacuate Fort Pitt by way of the north bank of the river to Battleford.¹⁰⁸ Dickens would say he was unable to effect this and eventually came down by scow.

Like many area residents, John Longmore suffered material losses during the conflict, mainly from pillage. He placed a claim for \$549 with the appointed commission; of this, \$439 was approved. It included \$320 for four horses, \$75 for injuries to thirteen others, two sets of harness (\$20), miscellaneous items (\$20), and \$4 for boots.¹⁰⁹

The following year, 1886, John Longmore made his second celebrated guide expedition south and west to Red Deer. This time he accompanied the "D" Division of the NWMP under Superintendent Sam Steele. Longmore's main task was to locate suitable water en route to Marquis Crossing where "D" would exchange duties with the "C" Division coming up from Macleod. Arriving at the Red Deer River almost simultaneously with the "C" Division, Steele had Longmore and the Battleford horses return with "C." Neither Steele nor Cotton of the "C" Division made any criticisms regarding John Longmore's guidance in their reports.¹¹⁰

1886 was also to be a year of tragedy for the Longmores when their second son, Alexander, died at age thirteen.¹¹¹ He was buried in the cemetery at Battleford, subsequently restricted to members of the NWMP.¹¹²

Whether John was working for A. McDonald & Co. at Battleford before 1886 is not known but the *Saskatchewan Herald* of 28 October of that year noted Longmore's outfit of eight carts had arrived there three days earlier. As with most of the freighters, John Longmore combined the work with whatever sources of income they could generate. Some, like James Bird, would also take up homesteading.

By 1888 both the NWMP and the Indian Department were becoming more self-sufficient in their interpreting and messenger needs. The trails were better marked. The freighting business was more organized, but also more competitive. Companies like Leeson and Scott left relatively little for the smaller carrier. The latter began to fade from the scene.

In 1888 tragedy again struck the Longmores. On 13 January their son, John, died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound in a "fit of despondency."¹¹³ Only two months earlier he had married Julienne Favel at St. Vital Catholic Church, Battleford.¹¹⁴

His father and the rest of the family probably moved to Edmonton later that year or at the latest in 1889, for over the winter of 1889-1890, he is mentioned at least three times in the *Edmonton Bulletin*, although referred to as "Longman" in the issue of 26 October when arriving with a consignment of crockery for W.J. Walker.¹¹⁵ The issue of 22 March 1890 notes how severe the winter had been. John Longmore had returned from Battleford on the Thursday after a hard trip.¹¹⁶ The snow was so crusted it had cut the horses' legs and he had had to hire a fresh team at Saddle Lake to complete the run.

By then, progress in the shape of the railways was impinging on the freighting business severely. By 1891 the railway had already reached Saskatoon and when the first train from Calgary arrived in Edmonton at 11 p.m. on 27 July, the days of freighting the route were over!¹¹⁷ The last stage would run three weeks later!¹¹⁸ What loads were left were to the north, mainly to Lac la Biche for transfer. It had been familiar territory to the Longmores for nearly a century.

At the 1891 Census-taking at Edmonton, in addition to John (age forty-seven) and "Roasey" (age thirty-seven), there was only one child other than William (age thirteen): a daughter, also Roasey, then age two.¹¹⁹

By 1893 the Longmores were to be found on a quarter-section of land at Bremner, S.W. 6-53-22-W.4, a few miles east of the present-day oil refineries.¹²⁰ John had made entry for a homestead, having previously applied for his son's half-breed scrip entitlement. John did not farm, preferring to carry on all his old pursuits as demand arose. But, according to Cashman, he also had "a good deal of the English squire in him."¹²¹

Rosalind was now known locally as "Mary." As Cashman narrates, she continued what she had been independently known for back in the area of Battleford–Fort Pitt: the practice of native medicine handed down from her father.¹²² She continued to do so as long as anyone sought her help. She died just short of her ninetieth birthday, long outliving John and surviving yet another family tragedy when their daughter, Roasey, drowned in a northern river. She continued the line of remarkable "Saskatchewan" ladies from the Granny of 1841 to "Grandmother" who died at Onion Lake in 1909 at the age of one hundred.¹²³ They, too, applied the native cures derived long before the elder Robert Longmore needed larch-bark balm to ease the pain of his frostbite at Cumberland House in 1774. And Marie Rosalie continued another older tradition, speaking all but a few critical words in her native Cree until the very end.¹²⁴

John Longmore died on 4 June 1900. His death was not without controversy. He had been attending a sale. As it was ending he got into "a friendly scuffle."¹²⁵ When he fell to the ground it was assumed he had fainted but Rosalie's nemesis, Dr. James Henry Tofield, declared him dead from heart failure. At a *post mortem* demanded by the family, the verdict was confirmed: John Longmore was duly interred in Edmonton Cemetery.

Whatever Sydney Hall and his newsman rivals had written about him, and Colonel Herchmer reported, the compliments paid to the fur-trading Robert Longmore the elder could equally apply to the freighter. "Little or none inferior to a good Indian," Philip Turnor had said of Robert.¹²⁶ Even with his aversion to be referred to as a half-breed at times, John Longmore would not likely have objected to the intended compliment to his Scottish ancestor any more than he did to the sobriquet "Saskatchewan" passed down from the family ladies.

And it could be said to be fitting that, like the two Roberts, his days in the West should end in "a friendly scuffle" because, in the era begun by Robert the elder through four generations, life along the Saskatchewan was a combination of trade and tempestuousness; of fur, freight, and a little furore.

ENDNOTES

All references to Hudson's Bay Company Archives records that follow are made with the kind permission of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives/Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

- ¹ Gordon Speck, *Samuel Hearne and the Northwest Passage* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1963), 97. Based on Joseph Burr Tyrrell, ed., *The Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1934), hereafter cited as *Samuel Hearne*.
- ² Hudson's Bay Company Archives/Provincial Archives of Manitoba (hereafter HBCA/PAM), A. 16/33, York: Officers and Servants, 1781–1793, micro. 307, fol. 130. The parish can be more accurately identified as the West Kirk, outside of the city walls beyond the castle, an ancient edifice on the shore of a small lake and dedicated to St. Cuthbert, the patron saint of sailors.
- ³ HBCA/PAM, C.1/375, Ship's Log: *King George*, 1771, micro. 2M 34–5, no fol. 34–35.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ See *Samuel Hearne and the Northwest Passage*, 248.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 272–273.
- ⁸ *Samuel Hearne*, 28.
- ⁹ Andrew Graham, *Observations at Hudson Bay, 1767–1791* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1969), Vol. XXVII, lxiv.
- ¹⁰ Edwin E. Rich, ed., *The Cumberland House Journal and Inland Journals, 1775–1782* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1951–1952), Series I, Vol. XIV, 115.
- ¹¹ Edwin E. Rich, *The Hudson's Bay Company, 1763–1870* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1959), Volume II, 63. See also *Samuel Hearne*, 139.
- ¹² *Samuel Hearne, ibid.*
- ¹³ Frances G. Halpenny and Jean Hamelin, eds., *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), Vol. IV, 157. See also *Cumberland and Inland Journals*, Series I, Vol. XIV, 14.
- ¹⁴ *Dictionary*, Volume V (1983), 500.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 450. Robert Longmore was robbed of trade goods and abandoned without provisions by the Indian accompanying him on the trail to Cumberland House in October, 1775, see Marcel Giraud, *The Metis in the Canadian West* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1986), Vol. I, 165.

- ¹⁶ *Cumberland and Inland Journals*, Series I, Vol. XIV, 53.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 61-64. Also see xlvii where Frobisher is seeking Longmore's services.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xlvii and 85.
- ¹⁹ *Dictionary*, Vol. 5, 683.
- ²⁰ *Cumberland and Inland Journals*, Series I, Volume XIV, 115.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 190.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 262.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 307-336. This is the Post Journal for Hudson House (Upper), 1778-1779, kept by Longmore.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 311.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 311-312.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 312.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 324-325.
- ²⁸ *Samuel Hearne*, 215, footnote 1.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 221-222. Also see *Cumberland and Inland Journals*, Series I, Vol. XIV, 328, footnote 1.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 332.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 333.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 335-336.
- ³³ *Dictionary*, Vol. V, 500. But see *Samuel Hearne*, 251, where Isham and Ross included in praise.
- ³⁴ *Cumberland and Inland Journals*, Series II, Vol. XV, 19.
- ³⁵ *Dictionary*, Vol. V, 500. Also see *Hudson's Bay Company*, 77; and Alice M. Johnson, ed., "George Sutherland Journal, A Journal of Transactions at Edmonton House, 1796-1797" in *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1967), 63, footnote 1. Longmore built two canoes "after the Pedlars' manner" in 1776 and was paid 20 pounds in goods for them. He then built one in 1777, one in 1779, two in 1780 (including one 28' long by 4'5" wide) and three in 1781. *Cumberland and Inland Journals*, xlviii and xlix.
- ³⁶ *Dictionary*, Vol. IV, 365-366.
- ³⁷ *Cumberland and Inland Journals*, Series II, Vol. XV, 50-51.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 161-193, including reference to Longmore's attack of dysentery, 184-185.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, xxxiii for Indians starving.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Series II, Vol. XV, 183.
- ⁴¹ *Hudson's Bay Company*, 80.
- ⁴² *Cumberland and Inland Journals*, Series I, Vol. XIV, xxxiv.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴ *Hudson's Bay Company*, 113-114 for general situation.
- ⁴⁵ See Speck *re* Longmore as possible replacement for Hearne.
- ⁴⁶ Longmore was originally chosen to trade up the Churchill River but was replaced by Ross. Richard I. Ruggles, "A Country So Interesting" (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), 51-52.
- ⁴⁷ *Hudson's Bay Company*, 1763-1870, 147.
- ⁴⁸ *Samuel Hearne*, 253. Also see J.B. Tyrrell, ed., *David Thompson's Narrative* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), xxviii, footnote 1.
- ⁴⁹ *Thompson's Narrative*, xxxvi.
- ⁵⁰ *Samuel Hearne*, 97, footnote 2.
- ⁵¹ *Hudson's Bay Company*, 146.
- ⁵² *Samuel Hearne*, 97, footnote 2.
- ⁵³ *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 63, footnote 1.
- ⁵⁴ *Hudson's Bay Company*, 281-282.
- ⁵⁵ *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, lxiv. The post was referred to as "Charlton" in several documents, including the Post Journal maintained by Longmore.
- ⁵⁶ *Hudson's Bay Company*, 177.
- ⁵⁷ *Thompson's Narrative*, xxxviii, footnote 1. See also *Cumberland and Inland Journals re* Longmore's return to Swan River, 1799-1800, after he refused to go down from York until supply ship's arrival.
- ⁵⁸ *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, xlviii.
- ⁵⁹ *Dictionary*, Vol. V, 500, but also see *Hudson's Bay Company*, 282 and *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence*, 224, footnote 2, where post was transferred to John Sutherland in orderly manner, 22 March 1810.
- ⁶⁰ See *Dictionary*, Vol. V, 501 for return to Britain.
- ⁶¹ *Samuel Hearne*, 97, footnote 2.
- ⁶² *Cumberland and Inland Journals*, Series I, Vol. XIV, Introduction, xxxi, quoting from Alexander Henry's Journal; Elliot Coues, ed., *New Light on the Early History of the Greater North West* (New York: F.P. Harper, 1897), Vol. II, 599. See *New Light*, 507, footnote 72 where it states David Thompson found Longmore on Swan River, September, 1797.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 599; most of which he invested in Consols, the last 1125 pounds of which would be disposed of by 26.2.11 (HBCA/PAM, D. 13/8, Commissioner's Correspondence: London Letter Book, 1886-1889, micro. 3 M 135, fol. 122).
- ⁶⁴ HBCA/PAM, A. 16/34, Officers and Servants: York, micro. 307, fol. 84.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁶ *Dictionary*, Vol. V, 501 *re* son, Robert.
- ⁶⁷ HBCA/PAM, A.5/2, London Correspondence: Out, micro. 27, fol. 137, 170.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, B.135/a/102, Post Journal: Moose, micro. 1M91, fol. 17d.
- ⁶⁹ *Dictionary*, Vol. V, 501.
- ⁷⁰ HBCA/PAM, B.3/a/117b, Post Journal: Albany, micro. 1M10, fol. 17d.
- ⁷¹ James Grierson MacGregor, *The Battle River Valley* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1976), 62.
- ⁷² Ross Innes, *The Sands of Time* (North Battleford: Turner-Warwick, 1986), 101, footnote 1.
- ⁷³ HBCA/PAM, A.32/39, Servants' Contracts, micro. 405, no fol.

- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁵ Provincial Archives of Alberta, Homestead File No. 393452, John Longmore, Micro, 2025.
- ⁷⁶ HBCA/PAM A. 32/39, Servants' Contracts, micro. 405, no fol.
- ⁷⁷ HBCA/PAM D. 13/8, Commissioner's Correspondence: London Letter Book, 1886–1889, micro. 3 M 135, fol. 122.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, E.4/1.a., Red River Baptisms, micro. 4M4–5, fol. 76.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 77d.
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, E.4/1.b.2, Red River Marriages and Burials, micro. 4M5, fol. 228.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, E.4/1.a., Red River Baptisms, fol. 75.
- ⁸³ Ralph C. Russell, *The Carlton Trail* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1955), 17, based on Sir George Simpson, *Narrative of a Journey Round the World* (London: Henry Colburn, 1847), Vol. I.
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁵ Glenbow/Alberta Institute, M7144, Charles Denney Papers, 338000, citing reference to scrip records, 1900.
- ⁸⁶ A.W. (Tony) Cashman, *More Edmonton Stories: Life and Times of Edmonton, Alberta* (Edmonton: Institute of Applied Art, 1958), 165.
- ⁸⁷ National Archives of Canada, Department of Interior, Dominion Lands Branch, Land Records, Metis and Original White Settlers, RG 15, DII, Vols. 1339–1340.
- ⁸⁸ *Saskatchewan Herald*, 14 January 1888, 1.
- ⁸⁹ Sands, 101, footnote 1.
- ⁹⁰ Canada, *Sessional Papers*, Public Accounts, Part III, Miscellaneous Statements, Volume 14, No. I, 1880–1881, 57. Also see 68, 70, 75–76 *re* freighting payments.
- ⁹¹ John P. Turner, *The North-West Mounted Police* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1950), Vol. I, 593–594.
- ⁹² Reverend James MacGregor, "Lord Lorne in Alberta," *Alberta History*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (September, 1964): 2.
- ⁹³ *Ibid.* But see *The Globe* (Toronto), 6 October 1881, 6, where Williams caught up with main party on 2 September.
- ⁹⁴ Canada, Dominion Census of 1881, North-West Territories, District 192, Battleford Town, National Archives of Canada, micro. C–13285. The records list John, 33; Rosalette, 27; John, 11; Alex, 9; and William, 4. All are reported of Church of England faith except Rosalette, Roman Catholic.
- ⁹⁵ *The Times* (London), 1 November 1881, 8a; also see *The Globe*, 7 October 1881, 5.
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1 November 1881, 8a.
- ⁹⁷ *The Globe*, 7 October 1881, 5.
- ⁹⁸ *The Times* (London), 9 November 1881, 8a.
- ⁹⁹ *The Globe*, 8 October 1881, 5.
- ¹⁰⁰ *The Times*, 9 November 1881, 8a.
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰² *The Graphic* (London), 26 November 1881, 531. Also see *Western Odyssey, 1881, With the Marquis of Lorne and Pencil Sketches by Sydney Prior Hall* (Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada and National Film Board, 1975), photograph no. 32.
- ¹⁰³ "Lord Lorne," 5.
- ¹⁰⁴ Canada, *Sessional Papers*, Annual Report of the Department of the Interior, Part III: North-West Mounted Police Force, Vol. 15, No. 8, 1882, 45. No. 18, 1882, 45.
- ¹⁰⁵ *The Times*, 1 November 1881, 8a. Austin was thankful Poundmaker did not require being called "Oo-pee-loo-ho-rah ka-na-poo-whe-yan."
- ¹⁰⁶ *Carlton Trail*, 117–118.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Saskatchewan Herald*, 10 December 1881, 2.
- ¹⁰⁸ E.K. Lake, "The Story of Three Scouts," *The Scarlet and Gold*, Issue II (1920): 68 quoting Corporal Sleigh's diary.
- ¹⁰⁹ Canada, *Sessional Papers*, Annual Report of the Auditor-General: Appropriation Accounts, Claim No. 86, Vol. 20, No. 3, 517.
- ¹¹⁰ *The North-West Mounted Police*, Vol. II, 302.
- ¹¹¹ Cemetery List: North-West Mounted Police Cemetery, Fort Battleford, n.d.
- ¹¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹¹³ *Saskatchewan Herald*, 14 January 1888, 1.
- ¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21 January 1888, 1.
- ¹¹⁵ *Edmonton Bulletin*, 26 October 1890, n.p.
- ¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22 March 1890, n.p.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1 August 1891, n.p.
- ¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 22 August 1891, n.p.
- ¹¹⁹ Canada, Dominion Census of 1891, North-West Territories, Alberta District No. 197, Sub-District 18: Edmonton, National Archives of Canada, micro. T6425, 37.
- ¹²⁰ Provincial Archives of Alberta, Homestead File No. 393452, *op. cit.*; National Archives of Canada, Department of the Interior, Dominion Lands Branch, Land Records, RG 15, Vol 566, file 170156, "Half-Breed Scrip Certificate in Favour of Johnny Longmore," 1886–1888.
- ¹²¹ *More Edmonton Stories*, 165.
- ¹²² *Ibid.*
- ¹²³ See "Lord Lorne," *op. cit.*
- ¹²⁴ *More Edmonton Stories*, 168.
- ¹²⁵ *Edmonton Bulletin*, 8 June 1900.
- ¹²⁶ *Samuel Hearne*, 25.

RECOLLECTIONS AND REMINISCENCES

The Shirley Keyes Thompson Memoirs: “A Prairie Wife’s Tale”

The Shirley Keyes Thompson memoirs, twenty-four chapters long, document the trials and adventures of farming near Biggar, 1916–1924, recounted from the perspective of an eloquent and educated wife of a dairy-turned-wheat farmer from the eastern United States.

Married in their home village of Lisbon on 29 February 1916, Shirley Keyes Thompson, an upstate New York girl with an associate degree in philosophy, and her devoted husband, Lewell John Thompson, trained at the State School of Agriculture at Canton, New York, immediately boarded the train to Ogdensburg to begin their trip west to form a farming partnership with relatives, Nora and Jim Graham, in faraway Biggar.

Optimistic reports of the wheat fields of western Canada from several of Lisbon’s young farmers who had ridden the harvest excursion trains spurred them on. In the summer of 1916, Mrs. Thompson’s parents, creamery-owners in Lisbon, joined the young couple at Biggar for health reasons.

The Thompson reminiscences describe the impact of the prairie experience on the young couple in their unusual new surroundings—as Mrs. Thompson writes—eight years of “rubbing against the elements” on section 32, township 34, range 15, west of the third meridian. They end with the farm auction sale in 1924, where their cherished mahogany music cabinet with its bevelled glass mirror sold for one dollar.

Upon their return to New York state, Lewell Thompson found employment as a farm foreman for the George Sisson Jersey Farms at Potsdam. Shirley Keyes Thompson pursued a teaching career and continued her education. In 1941, the Thompsons purchased a sixty-acre, truck-garden farm, the challenge of their later years, and raised Jersey cattle as a hobby. In 1948, they returned to Biggar to visit the old farm and their friends. Mrs. Thompson wrote her memoirs during the 1950s, a summer respite from teaching and graduate school. The Thompsons (Shirley May Keyes, 1891–1979, and Lewell John Thompson, 1893–1971) are buried in the White Church Cemetery at Lisbon.

Mrs. Thompson’s poignant, honest and often humorous writings evaluate their prairie years:

[They] . . . changed my value system and demonstrated the relationship between cause and effect in a most direct and personal way. Our primitive life was a leveller opening up to me insights into neighbourly charity, tolerance and understanding. . . . The prairie conjured in man a vision of execution on a large scale, she held out to him the apple of promise, blue skies, fecund land, spring moisture and sun warmth. Then, when man responded and gave his best, she slapped him down with drought or grasshoppers, or early frost, or dust storms, or hail, and mocked his temerity in daring to hope that he could tame the elements. Yet we loved the prairie. . . .

We are grateful to Dr. Dean V. Thompson of Houston, Texas, for editing his mother’s memoirs and making them available to Saskatchewan History. An educator whose career spans fifty years, Dr. Thompson had an opportunity to revisit the family farm at Biggar, where he had spent his early childhood years, during the summer of 1991.

Excerpts from the first seven chapters and the twelfth one follow.

The Editor

Honeymooners' Arrival

Our first [experience with the prairies began] with my cousin Stanley, on a cold winter day in March of 1916. He met us as we stepped off the Grand Trunk Limited at the rail station a mile north of Biggar. Stanley—young, impulsive and altogether lovable—was not a farmer by training but was learning to be one and trying hard to acquire prairie ways. He was so excited driving in to meet us that he forgot to bring a neighbour woman's fur coat for me for the ride home.

I was dressed in my wedding suit of blue serge, silk hose, patent leather pumps, and a silly little hat covered with a gossamer-like veil. A woolen scarf to swathe my head in would have been more appropriate.

As a result, I was forced to submit to being rolled up in a smelly horse blanket and before long gladly snuggled down into the clean oat straw in the bottom of the sleigh. The cold was the most penetrating that I had ever encountered.

Poor Lewell was wearing only a light worsted top coat for his fur coat was in his trunk which for some reason hadn't arrived yet. His felt hat should have been replaced by a cap with ear muffers; his scanty scarf did protect his neck a bit. So there we were, fourteen miles from shelter, and both dressed like nincompoops.

Lewell and Stanley ran beside the bob-sled and at intervals swung their arms. Lewell's predicament was the worse because he had only kid gloves. So had I, but I kept my hands in my arm pits or under my knees. Eventually I was glad to have the weight of a sack of flour and a hundred weight of sugar piled around and partly on me, notwithstanding the sacks' resistance to body curves.

After what seemed interminable riding I was greatly relieved to hear Stan's jolly call, "Well, here we are!" I was more than glad to be exhumed from my state of semi-hibernation.

This primitive ride was only the prelude of more to come. The house we were about to enter was a house, not a shack, but what a different one from Aunt Nora's home back East with its hard-wood floors, electric lights and furnace heat. My first impression was of bachelor housekeeping: layers of dust, ashes strewn around the hearth, kindling wood on the floor and a picture frame askew on the wall.

The littered window sills attested to the fact that Aunt Nora was now distant in the city of Saskatoon with her husband, Uncle Jim, who was convalescing from a broken hip. The accident occurred when he was driving a wagon-load of wheat and slipped off the seat, letting a rear wheel roll over his leg. As a consequence he had spent most of the winter in a city hospital experiencing the use and misuse of plaster casts and plates or pins. Thus Stan "bached-it" alone all winter on the farm and took care of the horses and stock.

"What's that vile smell coming from the kitchen?" I asked. "That's mash for my pig," said Stan. "It's heating in that black iron kettle."

Had I been a lover of antiques, I might have noticed the charm of the round-bellied black pot with its sturdy three feet. However, the meal mash was mixed with potato peelings and other scraps and I wondered why pigs must have this mess hot.

My first unspoken criticism of the chaos evident in the kitchen was nothing to the surprise I felt when I learned that sitting-room and dining-room functions took place in the same room. However, after seeing other bachelor's quarters in the West, I had to rank Stan's in the upper quartile.

The dishes on which we ate were clean and the food served there that evening was relished as much as any concocted by a French chef. By comparison, we had last eaten in Biggar in a greasy restaurant where warmed-over potatoes and lumps of woody turnips were featured. Perhaps we had not found the best eating-place in the wind-swept town. . . .

On To Our Land

Although Lewell and I had been married but for a week, life for us was now beginning in earnest. We were driving our newly-acquired team of horses and wagon across a Saskatchewan prairie on a trail not distinctly marked. We had yet to discover how splendid and dreadful, how breath-taking and back-aching, and how glamorous and humdrum—living and working on a western prairie farm could be.

Two miles behind us lay Biggar, a raw town of about eight hundred souls some sixty miles west of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; twelve miles ahead on the twisting trail was the six hundred and forty acres on which we were to make our first home and, like Wallingford, get rich quick. The sun's red disc was within an hour of the horizon's edge and by its light we had to cover as much of the nondescript brownish prairie grass as possible.

We had been told that two tall grey grain elevators looming in the distance to the southwest marked our route. These guides to our questing, uncertain minds seemed like friends. Towards these we would go, choosing among the several partly-discernable trails, the one that appeared to bear in the right direction. If we could make these towers before dark, we need not be anxious, for then our way lay straight south for three miles. . . .

The main road at the north end of our soon-to-be acreage wound around an alkali slough before continuing in a southerly direction for three more miles to my aunt and uncle's home where we would stay till we found this land to rent and a house to live in.

It is easy to do seven miles an hour in a buggy on Eastern paved roads, for I have often driven my father's roly-poly brown Morgan mare from Lisbon to Ogdensburg in an hour. But driving twelve miles here was a different proposition on this cold March night in 1916. The tracks on the trail were filled with snowy slush through which the wheels of our double-decked wagon did not move easily.

The wagon, brand new and bought that very day, was shiny green with bright red wheels. Our broncho team—Bidly of narrow head, wicked eyes and dangerous hooves and Peggy with a white star in her half-Clyde forehead, her gentle manner and her steady swinging gait—were also newly-purchased.

Lewell and I decided to divide ownership of the two bronchos between us. Because Peggy needed no urging and seemed bent on getting somewhere, I chose her for mine. Lewell seemed content with Bidly as second choice. Secretly I felt sorry for him, but I needn't have. Being a tenderfoot, I didn't suspect Peggy's lively demeanor. How was I to know that in two hours her energy would turn to apathy, her head would droop and her white feet would drag?

Later I learned that horse dealers have a way of streamlining the horses; however, the drug-induced pep is short-lived and helps only to make the sale. I needn't have felt sorry for my tall and wise husband. He owned the tougher

horse in Bidy. Her knotty neck and lean flanks kept the tugs taut long after Peggy's sleek, plump neck was hanging low.

We were grateful for those hazy elevator outlines, as the twilight had not lasted long enough and darkness fell swiftly. The rutted wheel tracks were filled with fast-freezing slush. Both horses were plodding along; both acted tired. We didn't dare to urge them much more for their reserve was an unknown quantity. And they had little incentive to go on, they knew not where. Certainly they were on a strange road and driven by a strange master.

And I, perched on the high, spring-supported seat, was not so eager and not so sure of things as when I had mounted by way of the wagon wheel hub back in the machine-littered yard of the International Harvester Company. There I had questioned the safety of the horses' halters made of small and tightly-twisted three-quarter inch rope. What a make-shift, I thought. Why not use leather halters with buckles and straps like those worn by my father's team? As I questioned their use in the yard, I was soon sorry for I found I was attracting attention from groups of men looking amused. The moment of realization left me very embarrassed.

The rope halters came with our four hundred-dollar team. We had only to insert steel bits in our horses' mouths and secure them to the halters by cheap lead snaps. The contraptions then could be called bridles. Lewell assured me that the bridles were strong and safe, but when I looked at the restless bronchos champing to be off and caught Bidy's "stand-for-no-nonsense" eyes, I thought we were headed for trouble.

Wherever buying and selling takes place, I suppose one must expect interested witnesses to be present. Back East in our village store, we called these onlookers "the breadbasket sitters" or "cracker-barrel watchers." Though buying nothing themselves, they allowed no one else to buy without checking on the price and the amount paid down.

Here in Biggar, mixed among the loafers, were sturdy, bewhiskered immigrants from the Old World who, I sensed that day, found a woman's protest spoken publicly to be a strange thing. Their women folk didn't question their husbands' opinions or conclusions, let alone dissent publicly. I learned, too, that these women fed their men first and sat at the table only after their satisfied men had risen and needed no further waiting on. The women's place was truly in the home, rearing children, cooking, washing and in some cases going into the fields to help.

But I digress. Where were we before I took the bridle path? Perched on the stiff-sprung wagon seat and just about to arrive on section 32-34-15 west of the third.

As we neared the end of our journey, we were guided by the light of a kerosene lamp burning murkily in a four-room shack that marked the turn off the road into what was to be our home. Kindness met us, but not convenience. The owner, who was to rent us this land, welcomed us with solicitude. We were most ready to sop up any concern or help.

Here we exchanged the cumbersome double wagon for a vehicle called a "stone-boat." Its rough planks were held together with two-by-fours which also served as runners. This contraption slipped along easily on the icy crust; our spirits rose and even the horses seemed relieved. It was just three miles straight south to my Uncle Jim's where awaited warmth, food and shelter.

We didn't get lost in this land of no rural telephone poles and no fences. However, our stone-boat overturned and ended in the ditch along with me. I had not learned to balance myself on a small wooden box which had functioned as my seat. Lewell picked up his bride, slapped the reins on the bronchos' backs and on we joggled.

After years of reflection, I think Lewell might well have foreseen the need of a few nails to make fast the box to the stone boat. However, in the first flush of my hero worship, he could do no wrong. Something like the Divine Right of Kings here? As for the things I didn't do and should have and the things I did do and shouldn't have, I'll leave that for him to write about.

The upset was the only incident of note on the last lap of our fourteen-mile trip from Biggar to the Grahams.

Home-Making

How shall I recount the story of our shack, its short history, and its major house cleanings? We grew to know the four rooms intimately. The walls throbbled with harmony and discord; indeed, they ran the gamut of human emotions.

The shack itself was a low, one-storey affair which had humble beginnings as a one-room soddy in a side hill. When its owner married a widow with two children, it was moved and another room was added with its roof slanting down from the ridge pole.

As the family grew, so did the shack when first one bedroom and then a second were added in the rear. The additions necessitated the extension of the roof which must needs continue on a slant downward until the back wall scarcely allowed a five-foot tall person to stand erect.

My first impressions were of the windows: how small they were—about twenty inches square. The three windows in the entry room, which functioned both as kitchen and dining room, had been installed at different times and were not uniform in their construction.

The newest was of unweathered wood and held one pane of glass; the second sash, water-stained and unpainted, boasted two panes of glass; and the oldest sash encased four small panes of glass. The front window was so close to the slanting ceiling that when we papered, there was room for only a narrow border above the window. Of the remaining windows, one slid straight down in the wall and when closed was held up by a wire and a hook; the second one slid east or west to open. And I can't recall how the third one opened.

The floor was of narrow strips of fir wood. Had we known enough to oil same, it would have lasted longer, and the mop and my fingers would not have picked up so many slivers.

On the morning we took possession of our prairie shack, Rover the black-and-white mongrel, was the only one to greet us. He did his best to wag his welcome, for he had become sick in the warm closed room in which he had partaken without stint of chicken and biscuit and gravy, the left-overs of his departed master's last meal.

Rover had given up the contents of his stomach and the mess was there to clean up. This was our introduction to our new home. Lewell gallantly cleaned up the spill preliminary to making the house clean and livable.

Armed with lye, brushes, a knife and pails of hot water—Lewell and I began. The knife seemed the quickest way to dig out the dirt from the corners. Liberal

applications of Gillette's lye, both sprinkled on the surfaces and stirred into the soapy hot water, assaulted both wood and hands.

The procedure cleansed the wood and burned our hands and forearms. Our blistered skin didn't let us forget our too generous use of lye. That we lost the outer layer didn't matter too much since it was lost in a good cause. At last the shack smelled sweet and clean, and could be our home in more than name.

One of my first undertakings that spring of 1916 was to make doors for the lower section of the homemade dish cupboard. Heretofore, the lower shelves containing baking tins and certain food supplies had been protected from dust by cheesecloth curtains.

Finding shingle nails, saw, hammer and an old packing box, I pounded together two wild-looking zig-zag doors whose front bore the inscriptions: SELECT TOMATOES, Size 2. Reinforcing the doors with cross cleats, I bent the too-long nails over with the hammer and secured the hinges with screws to the thin boarding. Getting the finished doors to shut without binding taxed the limit of my ability in carpentry. My handicraft was laughable.

[We soon discovered that] the shack was not free of all creeping and crawling living things. As March melted away and April warmed, Lewell and I became aware of not sleeping well. We had no trouble in getting to sleep; we worked hard enough by day to insure sleep at night. To stay asleep was the rub.

Our mattress was a straw-filled tick with two depressions in it: one for Lewell and one for me. The worn springs let the mattress sag in the middle, our heads up and our heels up. I must admit that the depressions gradually accommodated to the contours of our weary bodies but still we could not remain asleep. We were awakened again and again; and being aroused from our first heavy sleep, we turned over, each in his hollow, to settle for our next nap, which was always shorter and lighter. Furthermore, the narrowness of the bed was such that if one turned over, the other must turn also. Finally, such restless rest was beyond endurance and so one night we lit the oil lamps.

Our tormentors were quite visible: countless numbers of them on the sheets and on the walls were coming and going. Their hurrying and scurrying made me think of Scott's "Lochinvar": "There was racing and chasing on Canobie Lee." We killed all we could find of the tough-shelled bugs but many of them escaped, withdrawing from the light as do evil things.

The unplastered walls of lath covered with building paper of a sickening blue afforded plenty of hideouts. Over and over I washed and sprayed and powdered the cracks and joists. Fresh wall paper with poison in the paste helped to seal off ancestors. However, against the hatching progeny, we were almost helpless. Our efforts were futile with cracks in the floor boards and ill-fitted mop boards.

We didn't realize at first the hopelessness of our task. Our arsenal included the use of every device known to the experts: fumigation, Black Flag, liquid poison for those who drank and powder for those who ate. We used everything but what we should have used, namely fire. Fire would have been used if we had had the money to rebuild.

However, it must be said in praise of the Timothy Eaton Company that it knew the problems of hastily-constructed homes of unseasoned lumber. The bedbug annihilator from T. Eaton was the best we had tried. Gradually our defensive campaign became an offensive one; we had the bugs on the run. . . .

Until this experience, I had never seen a bedbug but had heard of them. Only shiftless people have bugs; bugs and dirt go together. These were my pronouncements said, I imagine, with a sniff of disdain, for at this point in my twenty-four years of living, my life had been rather sheltered and perhaps pampered.

I had collected a neat bundle of platitudes which I smugly used on occasion: people who aren't lazy needn't be ragged or dirty or hungry; one can be clean no matter how poor; a person can have whatever he wants most; desire intense enough brings fulfillment.

What bosh I was spouting. In high school I had lived on a diet of Thoreau and Emerson: "the best things in life are found in Nature" and "a foolish consistency is the hob-goblin of little minds." I remember sermonizing in a speech contest with an entry entitled: "Keys to Success" which reflected the admonitions of my seminary English classes.

However, all this was before I met the prairie. If eight years of unadulterated striving hadn't given me riches, the experience did give me a more wholesome and charitable mind set. . . .

Have I gone far afield? I want to defend, not sloth and indolence, not dirt and vermin, but my predecessor lest the reader underestimate her. She was just another prairie wife struggling to make a home. If this gallant soul failed to reach standards of cleanliness, there were extenuating circumstances. The prairie homemaker fought against great odds.

New Trials

It can't be said that my work was heavy that spring and summer, though there was a lack of equipment and conveniences. Lewell was the one who had to work early and late; he carried the over-riding responsibility. Major tasks included the sowing of eighty acres of virgin plowing to wheat and the cultivation of one hundred and twenty acres of stubble in preparation for planting to oats and barley. He had a garden to make and one hundred acres of land to summerfallow.

Beside routine chores, he had the inevitable extras such as pounding out dull plow-shares. I don't know how pounding them sharpened them, but it did. An Eastern farmer with one-third the size of our cultivated land would think a hired man a necessity. Lewell had no help, not enough horse power and, I am loathe to say, the pre-coddled me wasn't a bundle of sunshine.

I had anticipated unforeseen trials in this prairie endeavor, but the actuality seemed ominous. The novelty of our new life was waning. I became aware that I felt wretched. My small tasks, like the proverbial mole hills, seemed like mountains. What was the matter with me? I had started in to work with Lewell toward a common end with vim and enthusiasm. The vim was gone. Our life together was to have been a partnership, each investing equally of strength and time. And here I was feeling rotten and incapable of carrying my share of the load.

A bit later it appeared that I was carrying my share of the load in a different way. The curse laid upon woman in the Garden of Eden prevented me from working with my usual enjoyment and satisfaction. In fact I was thoroughly disgruntled to find out that I was going to have a baby. I couldn't think straight. Something had me that I couldn't get away from. It wasn't fair; a woman's part

in the divine plan concerning "be fruitful and multiply" was not just. Assuming Adam's prerogative of placing blame, I, like many an Eve, blamed Lewell for the whole mess.

It was becoming clear to me that the much-written-about first year adjustments of married life had not been over-estimated.

Lewell and I had played together but never worked together. Our dispositions and backgrounds were different. His mother bore eight children and I imagined he wondered why I couldn't have one without so much fuss.

On his farm he was used to getting up early and going to bed early; in the village of Lisbon I was used to going to bed late and getting up late. Furthermore, he liked the early morning hours. I didn't. Stephen Leacock in his *How To Live To Be Two Hundred* says, "Get up when you have to, not before. If you have to get up at seven, don't be afraid to say you despise it."

Whatever Lewell thought of my inertia and slackness, he was considerate and kind. Mornings he brought me something to eat in bed hoping that I would not be so nauseated. It didn't seem to help but it did give me something to vomit besides bitterness.

Lewell was awfully quiet these days. His long silences irritated me. If he had said sharp things to me, I could have lashed out with stinging rejoinders. It might have cleared the air, for our life together was now dismal enough.

Lewell's eyes didn't twinkle; they looked bewildered. He let his whiskers grow long and black. He wasn't so attractive in his greasy overalls. His placid acceptance of our material condition made me peevish. I rebelled and instead of admiring his self-control, I maligned him. Not aloud, nor would I have allowed anyone else to.

Sundays I moped and dragged myself around our sandy yard. I like to think now that my physical condition was responsible for my self-pity and pettishness.

I must have been feeling pretty abnormal for I remember attending a school picnic that summer and finding no joy sitting with the women watching the home talent races. I suppose the three-legged race was amusing. I wasn't amused. Many women were laughing and I noted they had children with them, some even in arms. They must have been in my predicament once, and yet they could still laugh. Quite sincerely I wondered if I'd ever feel like laughing again.

Our food was tiresome that first summer and consisted of potatoes, bread, milk, and eggs. Two pounds of butter lasted us two weeks; Lewell didn't eat any but left it all for me. In lieu of meat we each ate six eggs daily until, on the doctor's advice, I stopped ingesting so many eggs in order to reduce the albumen in my diet.

I craved fresh fruit; there was none for we had no money to buy it. In later years we paid four dollars a box for apples shipped in from British Columbia. I never could believe the box held a bushel. Oh, for the juicy Snow apples that grew so abundantly in the St. Lawrence river valley.

I'm ashamed to tell that when I could manufacture some excuse for getting a horse, tired as he was from a long day's work in the field, I'd ride to the Argo store, three miles from home, for a chocolate bar. . . .

Grain Growers' Meetings

One excuse for time off from work was the monthly meeting of the district Women's Grain Growers' Association. Women who could wrangle a horse away from farm activities came in buggies, picking up others not so fortunate and



Lewell gets a haircut.

R to l.: Shirley, Lewell and Dean Thompson, ca 1920.

delivering them to the appointed home for the afternoon. The meeting consisted of a business period, a literary program and refreshments.

I cannot recall any business we ever transacted except to select a meeting place for the following month and determine a program. However I do remember with pleasure the cakes with thick icing and the hearty sandwiches accompanied by quantities of black tea. Hungry or not, I always enjoyed the food; culinary efforts from my own kitchen never tasted as good.

My first meeting was at Mrs. Rob Dale's home. It was a real house comparing favorably with Eastern farm homes. The floors were level; the walls were plumb and tight; the windows were standard size; and ceilings such that one could stand

upright in any part of the house. Somehow one felt good and well dressed here whether or not that were the case.

The kitchen cabinet cutting board was noticeably white, yet the meticulous Scotch housewife was giving it a last furious scrubbing as we arrived. The ten members present constituted a good turn-out. The women were warm-hearted and friendly but I was two thousand miles from home and lonesome for my own. My initiation began that day for I was asked to write and read a paper for our next meeting. The title: "Who Should Carry the Pocketbook, the Wife or the Husband?"

For twenty days I dreaded the task and put it off. Then just as I used to dash off a term paper in the last hours before it was due, so did I start writing on the last day of grace and was still copying the first draft thirty minutes before my talk.

It proved to be a glowing defense of women's right to equality in the home, financially and in every other way. No man was present to profit by its wisdom but the grain-growing ladies were hearty in their appreciation. In fact they were so stimulated that they voted to have it published in the *Grain Growers' Guide*.

I'm glad now I never saw it in print for it was a tirade condemning the male species as Scrooges.

Notwithstanding, it was to this literary effort that I attribute my selection as delegate to the annual provincial convention in Saskatoon. . . .

Hosting a Meeting

My shack must look its best for this occasion but could never equal any of the homes we had met in to date. I took pride in our mahogany writing desk and music cabinet and hoped that our two Axminster rugs, the stencilled curtains and the pictures, "Song of the Lark," "The Angelus," "A Dutch Windmill," and a Venetian boat scene would speak of better things in general than now met the eye. How we cherish a high place in the opinion of others!

It had been a disappointment not to use my marquissette curtains; they were dainty and attractively designed; however, I could not cut them to fit windows eighteen by twenty inches. Neither would I let them lie in the trunk, for they were a link with my parents' home and a more seemly way of living.

It was comforting to use them as drapes between the kitchen and the living room, however inappropriate. I knew them to be an incongruous sight hovering over the slivered fir floor. Such filmy allure would have been more appropriate in a sultan's harem.

On this long-planned afternoon, the best linen towels were doing their bit to uphold the family escutcheon, though they could be placed only on a broom stick rack on our home-made dresser. The dresser, a commendable creation made of dry goods boxes, boasted two shelves concealed by pleated cretonne curtains and one deep drawer high on the left side which opened and shut most crankily, especially if one was in a hurry; but it was adorned by a hand-carved round knob beneath which was a three-leaved design done by jackknife. The whole was stained walnut and its crudeness softened the display of my Piralin ivory hand mirror and brush with their gold monographs "S.K." Certainly this cubby-hole of a bedroom exuded a brave and saucy air.

To this scrubbed, polished, and proudly-decorated shack came my new friends. Aunt Nora was the first person to arrive and a bit early, probably to help me and see that all was in readiness. She well knew my girlhood penchant for procrastination and allowing too little time to get ready for any event. True to form I was just icing the cake when she came. I know she wanted her niece to make a good showing that day.

The problem that pressed heaviest on me was not one of food or entertainment and it had nothing to do with the duties of a hostess. It was how to keep my dark secret: my pregnancy.

For some inexplicable reason I seemed determined that no one should know of my condition. Aunt Nora knew only because she chanced to call on me one day when I was quite prostrate after giving up some nine or ten times all that within me lay. The so-called morning sickness had extended itself in my case to all-day bouts.

Physically, my state was not yet apparent unless by a reflective or glistening look in my eyes. And for today I must be excessively gay and light-hearted to throw off any suspicion. Now I wonder at my defensiveness. Why should one feel embarrassed over nurturing a new life? . . .

Concerning my debut as hostess of the local chapter of the Grain Growers,

I can recall nothing of note that happened that afternoon, nothing to enrich the historical records of the province; but perhaps, that pause from routine toil and the refreshment of mind attendant on the exchange of ideas made for stronger partnerships in contented homes.

My guests continued to arrive and were greeted cordially. Such genuine people. Each an individual. Of course that day I couldn't do thumb nail sketches of them as became possible after eight years of friendly association.

There was the thin, wispy second wife of an old man whose brood of children overloaded the buckboard with the squeaking wheels when the bedraggled and harried mother occasionally got her way and drove them the two-and-one-half miles to school. One of her husband's favorite remarks after partaking heartily of a more than substantial meal, was: "I always stop eating when I could eat more." Sad, but maybe this was true for he was a very gaunt man.

Another guest was the English bride—about my own age—who was most engaging and, as they say, "just over." She sang for us unaccompanied and in a very true voice: "Thora" and "I Hear You Calling Me." I liked the songs so well, I ordered both as soon as I could find the money. . . .

Annual Convention, 1918

Now for the story of S.K.T. representing our sisterhood of Grain Growers at the annual provincial convention in Saskatoon during the winter of 1918, emphasis on winter.

I anticipated an intellectual treat, since our first two years on the prairie had been devoid of lectures and concerts.

Our weekly mental food had been the sermon in the school house, usually a modest and unpretentious discourse, sincere but not particularly challenging.

The first few Sundays we drove to church in our double wagon, our only family carriage. Lewell did the driving and I felt foolish and unnecessary sitting up there on a double wooden seat with nothing to do with my hands.

It was a far cry from driving my Dad's Rambler automobile. I found use for my feet, however. Quite unconsciously I was pushing the foot-board trying to move the conveyance faster.

Although the going was slow, sometimes I saw the humor of it all. Teetering along on the high seat, I nearly laughed aloud when I pictured ourselves arriving at church in Lisbon in this fashion with the Sunday morning crowd looking askance at our wagon and team.

In addition to church we enjoyed the summer Chautauqua, one or two nights during the annual visit since it was physically impossible to attend more than this after a hard day's work. To keep awake riding behind plodding farm horses the eleven miles home from Biggar was untenable.

You can understand why I anticipated going to the convention for intellectual renewal and the stimulation of new sights and sounds. Then, too, one can get desperately lonely for the pavements of the city.

In my two years on the prairie, my clothes had worn thin. Had I realized how long it would take before I could possibly get new ones, I would have taken better care of what I had. I wore them unthinkingly at any and all times as I had been accustomed to do.

As I look back on it, my attempts to make myself look presentable were pathetic. I was determined that I could make an outfit for myself. Accordingly,

I ordered a black and white pin-checked material from T. Eaton and undertook to make a skirt. The cloth was flimsy and although the pattern was simple, it was only after much grief that I managed a passing fit.

The blouse I tried to make of white voile resembled nothing so much as a twisted, ill-fitting shirt. One can't imagine my gratitude when the mail brought me a little corn colored *crepe-de-chene* blouse from my blessed mother.

My home-made hat was something of a triumph. The rim was pasteboard covered with black satin to which was fastened a closely-pleated satin crown. New patent leather slippers completed my outfit.

When Lewell put me aboard the Canadian Pacific passenger car at Biggar I promptly removed my high-buckled overshoes over Lewell's protest and sent them home with him saying that I would buy some rubbers or low-cut overshoes in Saskatoon.

Such poor judgment on my part, or false pride, or disgusting foolishness! This once I wish that L.J.T. had set his foot down and made me take the overshoes. If he had, coming events would have been so different and this episode need never have been recounted.

I didn't buy new overshoes because I stayed at the convention long past the closing time for the stores. I was enjoying seeing and meeting so many people of common purpose engaged in constructive planning. The chairmen of the various groups were engaging and the community singing thrilled me. I recall a speaker from the old country who explained cooperative buying and criticized the new insistence on a greater profit margin which made the cost to the consumer almost prohibitive. The discussion of methods for raising better crops and the plans for stabilizing prices also appealed to me. Indeed, I was thinking of the inspiring report I could take back home. It was late afternoon before I broke away.

Until now I hadn't taken the time to look up the location of the friend with whom I was to spend the night. She was the girl who had offered the fur coat that Stanley had forgotten to bring with him when he met us at the railroad station in Biggar on that cold March day in 1916. I was dismayed to find that the avenue on which she lived was so far out on the other side of the city.

In my silly patent leather pumps my feet were none too warm although I had taken the street car whenever possible. After a good hot supper in town I felt sure that I could find my way and get by without overshoes. But long waits for the right street car on the wrong corner more often than not delayed me until my feet were numb.

Oh what I would have given for my shabby high top over-boots! It hadn't been snowing downtown, but it was snowing and blowing out here. The snow flakes stung and were not melting on my face. My body was cold and my mind chilly with apprehension.

With the determination of necessity, I left the friendly protection of the street car to follow the motorman's directions as best I could. A rising wind swooped me along. Fine dry snow swirled through the air. I hurried with mounting uncertainty, peered at street names, rushed up close to the houses to read their numbers and stamped my feet at intervals.

Once I stopped and held first one foot and then the other in my hands to try and coax some feeling into them. Nothing availed and the numbness crept up my ankles. When I seemed to walk on sticks that didn't hurt and when I realized that I was surely lost, my fear turned to terror.

This was a thinly-settled section of the city; many lots were vacant; only a few house lights shone in the long blocks. I was not only being properly punished for my vanity, but unless I got help, I knew I was in danger.

Without hesitating I walked up somebody's steps on peg legs and stated my need with what face I had left. What these warmly-housed and sensibly-dressed people must have thought of a woman in her twenties plowing alone through the drifted sidewalks on a forty-degree below zero night in patent leather pumps, I can imagine, although I'd rather not.

In my stubborn need to see my penance through, I had floundered around longer than I had realized.

As the warmth of the house began to penetrate my feet, the pain became terrible. It was agony I could no longer endure before strangers.

I left as abruptly as I had arrived for I was within a block and a half of Bernice's house. I kept my eyes riveted on her lights and hobbled along. Soon I was safe and found myself both crying and laughing at the same time.

Bernice put my bare feet in a pail of snow and rubbed them for awhile. While this may not be accepted practice for frostbite nowadays, it was the correct treatment for my problem.

I truly rate this escapade as my worst and I hope my last exhibition of such willfulness. After this experience I wore woolen hose and felt boots anywhere and everywhere.

The Flu

In February Lewell went to Regina as a delegate to attend the provincial convention of the Grain Growers' Association. We've always thought he brought the flu germ home with him. He took sick first; then we all took sick within twenty-four to thirty-six hours, one by one, with no warning symptoms. We fell not unlike sheaves being dropped by the binder.

Dean proved to be the toughest of us all. He lay beside me one day and one night refusing to eat, burning with fever, and saying nothing. The next day saw him change. He called out, "Pie," his word for something to eat. A great load lifted from my heart. He was better. Although he moped around in second gear for awhile, the worst was over.

I seemed to get along quite well and soon got up one day and sent Lewell back to bed. Aunt Nora had been with us until she had to go home to care for Stanley. Lewell felt so weak that he didn't need much urging, although some one had to be up to do a few things about the house and barn. I feared for him because he was so big and strong and never took care of himself. Rumor had it that the strong were dropping out faster than the weak.

The flu was a tricky business anyhow. Your recovery was like a capricious child, one minute in tears, the next in sunshine. You were sure you were better one minute only to have your knees buckle the next. Lewell started for the barn one day thinking he was feeling fine. Before he got back he was wringing wet and staggering, wondering if he would make the short distance. This, he didn't tell me at the time.

I must have decided to leave my bed on a spurt of false energy for I, too, was as functional as the blind trying to lead the blind only to fall in the ditch. As a result I had a relapse that nearly blew me away.

Wendell, now about four months old, developed congestion of the lungs.

He lay so still and quiet that I was frantic. We were in a state of seige and the enemy was within our gates.

However, we were blessed with good neighbours. Uncle Jim and cousin Stanley did our chores until their family got sick. Then Edgar Covey, a bachelor farmer just a half-mile south, came and fed the stock. Although we were not quarantined, people could not risk coming into the house. They left milk in the shed, and talked to us through the window.

We had no doctor of course. And it was of little use to send for one. All doctors were too busy and too exhausted tending the sick in town. There wasn't much a doctor could do anyway unless one developed pneumonia. We had the simple remedies on hand, treated symptoms and guarded against exposure.

The "Macs" [McDougals] never failed to bring food and say a cheery halloo through the window. They found a practical nurse who made a cotton-batten jacket for Wendell and kept it soaked with camphorated oil for days. Under her care and God's care, he got well.

When I seemed to be approaching a crisis, the nurse telephoned the Mac's for brandy. The lines had just been strung in the fall of 1918 and many of our neighbours had not yet installed phones. Still Uncle Billy drove six hours Sunday till he found some spirits. Only one who has hazarded his life on snowy trails at sixty-below zero knows the full meaning of this desperate mission. Done out, he got home with the brandy and Aunt Mac relayed it on to me. We learned later that she fell out of the cutter six times as the horse plowed through three miles of snow drifts.

I marvel at their good deeds: the Macs risked all they had for us with such unselfish acts.

In my weakest moment I felt light and ethereal. I remember the nurse called to Lewell saying, "Help me." It seems that I was sweating one minute and cold and clammy the next with fever. She and Lewell made quite a team: he kept the Turkish towels hot and she kept scrubbing me. As fast as she threw one down, he handed her a hot one. When I felt as if I were floating out into space, I hung on to the idea that God would save us. And he did.

As soon as I dared, I bundled up and drove to Aunt Nora's. She had been terribly ill. Her face with its staring eyes I can never forget. She had just pulled through. The men couldn't prepare anything she would eat. And I hurried home and made some cornstarch pudding with lots of eggs and took it back to her. To her dying day she attributed her returning strength and the consequent will to live to that simple food.

It was while we were convalescing that Lewell prepared his report on the Grain Growers' convention. He gave me the highlights and his reactions. Together we jotted down notes, organized the material, and wrote the speech: the trick being to have it sound like Lewell, unadulterated by my wordiness. Lewell read the speech over and over. I had a sneaking suspicion that it didn't quite suit him; however, he wouldn't say so after my zealous efforts to help. . . .

The next Grain Growers' meeting was held at the Clunie School. There was a big crowd. My heart was fluttering as badly as though I were to speak myself. When I saw Lewell disregard his written report, I had a bad moment. But he gave his speech in his own straight-forward way. The facts, though not embellished, were more forceful. He sat down amid honest appreciation and acclaim. . . .

REVIEW ESSAY

Gender and the History of the Left

By Georgina Taylor

Olenka Melnyk, *Remembering the CCF: No Bankers in Heaven* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1989).

Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950* (Regina: Whelan Publications, 1990).

Ed and Pemrose Whelan, *Touched by Tommy: Stories of Hope and Humour About Canada's Most Loved Political Leader, T.C. Douglas* (Regina: Whelan Publications, 1990).

The Canadian Left has received a great deal of attention in the writings of scholars, journalists, and left-wing activists in the past. But it is only recently that we have begun to pay attention to the importance of gender as a category of analysis along with the familiar categories of class, ethnicity, religion, and region. Three books reflect this change. Olenka Melnyk and Ed and Pemrose Whelan's books consider gender, and Joan Sangster's study of women in the CCF and the Communist Party focuses directly on gender.

Melnyk, an idealistic journalist, was feeling "defeated and disillusioned" in the early 1980s as neo-conservatism took hold in Canada. She began to wonder how the CCFers she had interviewed in her years with the *Edmonton Journal* were dealing with the changes in the political wind in Canada. In 1982 she interviewed over seventy CCFers from Cape Breton to the west coast, and researched primary and secondary sources. Melnyk decided that she wanted "to write a personal rather than a chronological history" and "to tell the story from the inside out." An obvious admirer of rank-and-file CCFers, she chose not to focus on national leaders; instead she tells the stories of twenty-six local members grouped under the categories of farmers, labour, women, minorities, radicals, politicians and grassroots. Unlike many writers, who think that they have disposed of women when they give them off into a section of their own, Melnyk also includes women in other sections: Nancy Zaseybida the farmer, Kay Shimizu of an ethnic minority, Mildred Fahrni the radical, and Saskatchewan's militant grassroots organizer, Elsie Gorius.

The result is a collection of readable, convincing portraits of idealistic socialists who questioned an economic and political system which they believed was not giving people a "square deal." Melnyk includes the stories of four Saskatchewan socialists that were interviewed in the early 1980s during my research on the Saskatchewan CCF. She used the tape recordings of my

interviews with them, held by the Saskatchewan Archives Board, and did further interviews herself with Toby Nollet, the long-time CCF Minister of Agriculture, Betsy Naylor, the Saskatoon organizer who was a Vice-President of the CCF, Elsie Gorius, the most successful of the CCF organizers, and Frank Coburn, who was President of the CCF during the medicare crisis.

Melnyk astutely captures the spirit of all four of these Saskatchewan socialists. Gorius' politics, Melnyk says, were "intrinsically populist. Although she had respect for many party leaders, she revered none of them." Gorius scorned "Tommydolatory." Nollet's political skills, his rough rancher's language and the partisan sense of humour which made him very popular with other CCFers show in Melnyk's portrait. Carlyle King recalled that Nollet leaned over to him after John Diefenbaker's burial and said, "I don't think he'll stay there. He'll rise up in three days." Although Melnyk does not say so, Nollet's Flemish Catholicism contributed to his irreverence. She has a clear appraisal of the "voluble and self-assured" Coburn who has "the warm, confidential manner you associate with a good shrink." Melnyk is accurate in her account of the role Naylor played except that she does not understand the importance of Naylor's endorsement of fund-raising by women. In the CCF days, before income tax exemptions encouraged individual donations and the unions supported the party financially, women's work at teas and fowl suppers was essential to the success of the party. Most grassroots CCF women did not see this as demeaning work.

One of the best informed of the CCF women, Pemrose Whelan, wrote for the party paper. She organized CCF women in the years following the party's defeat in the 1964 provincial election and she was a Vice-President of the Saskatchewan party. Defeated in her bids for another term as Vice-President and for the Presidency, she withdrew from party work except for her support of her husband Ed, who was an MLA. Her ability as a writer and the skills she then learned when she went to university, graduated in history, and did archival work are in evidence in the Whelans' *Touched by Tommy*. Ed's skills as a long-time politician and one of the most amusing of the CCF raconteurs are also obvious. The Whelans, who unabashedly admire Tommy Douglas, include their own accounts of Douglas' defeat in Regina in 1962, when they ran his campaign, and numerous other insider's insights which have not been published before.

Although their book focuses on a male politician, the Whelans give women credit for their support of Douglas and the CCF. The numerous pictures also reflect the gender balance in the CCF which was well served by women. I do, however, have one regret about this book which obviously required a considerable investment of their time. The Whelans had an extremely interesting political partnership and they have historical skills unusual in political activists. An autobiographical book about the complexities of a partnership between a CCF/NDP MLA and a woman who travelled the difficult road from a social democratic consciousness to that of a feminist within a party, which did not welcome feminists in her day, would be a valuable addition to CCF literature. It is to be hoped that the Whelans now go on to write the story of their own political partnership.

Joan Sangster's book grew out of her doctoral dissertation on women in the Canadian CCF and the Communist Party from 1920 to 1950. Until recently we have had few accounts of the role women played in politics in the years between the Persons Case in 1929 and the advent of the modern women's movement in the late 1950s. Sangster's *Dreams of Equality* is a notable contribution to our understanding of these years.

Sangster shows that, although women in both parties had "dreams of equality," in neither party were they equal to the men. Almost always the male class interests of workers and farmers were judged to be more important than the women's interest in such issues as equal pay, consumer matters and birth control. Sangster points out that there were many ideological differences between the Communists and the democratic socialists but in both parties there was a general acceptance of the importance of separate women's sections. She asserts that,

although women's committees generally remained subject to party control, they were also the living product of women's perceived needs, their ideas about women's social role, and even their feelings of oppression. And without this energetic commitment to women's self-organization, the women question would have remained almost dormant and lifeless in both parties.

The Saskatchewan CCF was the exception to this rule, as it was to so many generalizations about socialism in Canada. Neither Sangster nor I fully understand why there was no provincial women's committee in Saskatchewan. The research for my Master's thesis showed that this tradition grew out of the farm movement, but just how this had come about was a mystery to both of us. My recent research has shown the key roles played by the agrarian feminist, Violet McNaughton, and Annie Hollis, the first Woman President of the United Farmers of Canada. They were influential members of the committee which negotiated the amalgamation of the Farmers' Union and the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association, to form the United Farmers of Canada in 1926. McNaughton and Hollis insisted that the interests of women would be better served if the UFC have constitutional guarantees of the participation of women on the provincial executive and the board of directors than they would be by retaining the SGGA women's section. As the UFC evolved, the women did begin to organize a yearly United Farm Women's Week at the University of Saskatchewan. When the Saskatchewan CCF grew out of the UFC in the early 1930s, influential women opposed a separate women's section in the Saskatchewan CCF and the men were opposed to constitutional guarantees of leadership positions for women. In the end result, although the Saskatchewan CCF had some local women's clubs, at the provincial level there was no women's committee, no constitutional guarantees, and no separate meetings. It was not until after the defeat in 1964, when Pemrose Whelan was Vice-President, that this began to change.

Very few left-wing women in Canada referred to themselves as feminists in this period. Nevertheless, Sangster asserts, "there was an element of feminism in the political beliefs and practices of women who, in their own way, tried to expose and alter women's social and economic inequality." However Sangster

does not define what she means by the term "feminism." We can no longer take it for granted that we have a common definition. Feminism is not monolithic; there were, and are, many different feminisms. The problem which arose from the lack of definition is now evident not only in Sangster's book but also in my MA thesis. Because neither of us defined the term at times, she seems to regard a woman such as Gladys Strum, the Saskatchewan MP and MLA, as a feminist while I insisted that the same woman was an agrarian socialist rather than a feminist. In spite of this Sangster's study should be essential reading for scholars interested in the history of Canadian politics.

All of these books have an enlightened approach to gender and, taken together, they add a great deal to our increasingly complex understanding of the Canadian Left.

CONTRIBUTORS

Roy Currie, the original owner of Radio Station CJWW, is a veteran broadcaster residing in Saskatoon.

Patrick Kyba is a Professor of Political Studies at the University of Guelph.

Georgina Taylor is a Carleton PhD candidate and teaches history at the University of Saskatchewan.

Dean V. Thompson, who edited his mother's memoirs, "A Prairie Wife's Tale," is a retired Superintendent of Schools for Exxon in Aruba. He presently teaches mathematics at the University of Houston.

Victor Whitbread is a freelance researcher and writer with a special interest in biography and regional history, currently of Saskatoon.

BOOK REVIEWS

PRIVATIZING A PROVINCE: *The New Right in Saskatchewan*. By J.M. Pitsula and K. Rasmussen. New Star Books, Vancouver, 1990. Pp. 294. \$24.95 (Cloth), \$14.95 (Paper).

DEVINE RULE IN SASKATCHEWAN: *A Decade of Hope and Hardship*. By L. Biggs and M. Stobbe (eds). Fifth House Publishers, Saskatoon, 1991. Pp. 342. \$16.95 (Paper).

The Devine government has flouted the conventions of parliamentary democracy, failed to be properly accountable for the spending of public money, meddled with the independence of the judiciary, indulged in outrageous patronage, and demonstrated a level of incompetence that can only be described as astounding. (*Privatizing a Province*, 2)

Saskatchewan is now a place where people have learned to fear the government, and have been cowed into silence. . . . Most serious of all, Saskatchewan is now a place where intolerance is normal, expected and, indeed, respectable. (Millard in *Devine Rule*, 47)

Two assessments of the performance of the government of Grant Devine prove, if nothing else, that the passions of politics burn as high in Saskatchewan as they ever did. *Privatizing a Province* and *Devine Rule in Saskatchewan* examine the record of this government from 1982 to 1990 and find it wanting in virtually every respect.

The authors of *Privatizing a Province*, professors at the University of Regina, declare that “the purpose of this book is to describe and analyze the impact of the new right upon Saskatchewan since 1982” (1), and the book does begin with a useful description of the content and objectives of neo-conservative ideology. From there on, the book is a chronological critique of the Devine Government’s failings in nearly all fields of endeavour—economics, the welfare system, family life, labour relations, and the use and abuse of power in a parliamentary democracy. The attack builds slowly because the government, in its first term, rarely overstepped the bounds of acceptable behaviour and did not threaten the core elements of its predecessor’s economic and social policies. Later, when a declining economy and mounting deficits combined with neo-conservative ideology to cause the government to sell some Crown Corporations and to cut some welfare programmes, the attack becomes relentless. According to the authors, when free enterprise did not rush to Saskatchewan after 1982, Devine turned first to government-supported free enterprise and then to privatization in its efforts to develop the province and this led to fiascos such as the Giga Text scandal, the abortive attempt to privatize Sask Energy and the use of closure for the first time in Saskatchewan’s history to end debate on the bill to put Sask Potash on the market. In fairness, the authors give credit where privatization proved beneficial to the province, such as in the case of Nor Sask Forest Products which was purchased by the mill employees and ten native bands near Meadow Lake. However, they also point out that an economic strategy, which may have proved successful in a country such as Great Britain, may not adapt too well to an economy as different as Saskatchewan’s, especially given the province’s smaller population, tinier pool of investment capital, and its distance from most major markets. In sum, Professors Pitsula and Rasmussen make a convincing case. Grant Devine’s “vision” of the future of Saskatchewan may be laudable, but his methods of attaining it, especially in the economic sphere, are definitely open to argument.

If possible, *Devine Rule in Saskatchewan* is an even more damning indictment of the Tories’ years in office, although perhaps this should not be

surprising given the fact that, of the sixteen contributors to the book, one is an NDP MLA, another is a former Deputy-Minister in the Blakeney administration and, of the others known to me, all are definitely of a "leftist" persuasion. This book does not assess the government's actions chronologically, but rather discusses them issue by issue. As such, *Devine Rule in Saskatchewan* covers much the same ground as *Privatizing a Province*, but the articles, although uneven in quality, treat the issues in greater depth. Many articles are also full of evidentiary charts and statistics and thus provide even more information than Pitsula and Rasmussen. This book, as with its counterpart, is also unrelenting in its criticism of the government's policies. For example: "by the end of the 1980s, the government of Saskatchewan collected more of its revenues from the sale of liquor than from collecting corporate income tax" (Stobbe, 25); "although the government's farm policy superficially appears to benefit farm families, closer analysis reveals it is aimed at promoting the interests of 'super farms' and large-scale agri-business" (Pugh, 80); the Tories have shown "a disturbing disregard for the environment" (Prebble, 111); "with the possible exception of the Bennett/Vander Zalm governments in British Columbia, the attack on working people in Saskatchewan . . . has been unmatched by any jurisdiction in Canada since the Second World War" (McCuaig, Sass & Stobbe, 149); and "Tory times have been sorry times for child care in Saskatchewan" (Martin, 235).

Many such criticisms appear justified given the evidence presented; others do not. It may be fair, for example, to attack the Devine government for its Orwellian measures to keep people off the welfare rolls; it is not fair to blame it for the failings of other governments, as in the case of the settlement of native land claims or the dumping of subsidized grain on the world market. Finally, it is worth noting two points made by authors, Warnock and Stobbe, which provide much food for thought. First, "there is no tradition of the laissez-faire 'free market' in Canada and particularly Saskatchewan" (Warnock, 285). Second, "Devine likely regrets having bought the Thatcher recipe for political success. It now appears that he has created a situation wherein if he proceeds with his privatization program, he will be defeated in the next election. Should he not proceed with the program, he will likely be defeated even more soundly" (Stobbe, 108-109). The former comment may explain the genesis of Grant Devine's current political problems. The latter may explain why he may have such difficulty in extricating himself from them.

Together, these two books offer a fascinating commentary on the politics of Saskatchewan during the past nine years written from a leftist perspective. They are well written, scholarly and build a well-documented case against the Devine Government. For partisans of the New Democratic Party, they provide any number of reasons to work to ensure that the Conservatives do not return to power. Conservative supporters, on the other hand, will have to turn to *Battleground: The Socialist Assault on Grant Devine's Canadian Dream* for solace. However, even the authors of this defence of the Devine Government—two former members of the Premier's staff—admit that Devine proceeded too quickly to remake Saskatchewan in accordance with his "vision." In fact, it is clear that during his second term of office the Premier placed himself outside the mainstream of the province's political culture. Indeed, he and his colleagues placed themselves outside the boundaries of traditional Saskatchewan conservatism. Several aspects of modern neo-conservatism are not attractive politically and the economic and social consequences of governing inspired by these parts of the ideology are often lamentable. The Conservatives' loss of the 1991 election make the future for the party and its current leader somewhat dim. Neo-conservatism has been defeated, at least for the time being, and the party will have to find a different motivating ideology. Perhaps its best hope would be to return to the less aggressive and more traditional provincial conservatism of previous leaders such as John Diefenbaker, Alvin Hamilton and Martin Pederson. However, if the party does turn in this direction, these two books make clear that Grant Devine most probably could not or would not want to remain as its leader.

Patrick Kyba

ON AIR: Radio in Saskatchewan. By Wayne Schmalz. Regina: Coteau Books, 1990. Pp. 167. Illustrations. \$24.95 (Cloth), \$14.95 (Paper).

This is the only book which deals with the story of broadcasting in Saskatchewan. To be sure, other authors have written about broadcasting in Canada, notably T.J. Allard's *Straight Up, Private Broadcasting in Canada, 1918-1958*.

Wayne Schmalz's history begins with the first amateur and commercial stations to go on the air in Saskatchewan, the personalities who performed on them, the difficulties encountered in dealing with a new medium and its attendant primitive technology. The first station on the air in Canada was a Montreal station, CFCF, established in 1919. Indeed, it was the first regularly-operating broadcasting station in the world. It continues operating under those call letters to this day.

This history is a welcome one and an important one. Schmalz has done a great deal of research on his subject. By interviewing people in the business, and researching library and newspaper files, he has created a most interesting picture. The author describes the problems broadcast entrepreneurs had with government regulations administered by the Department of Marine and Fisheries, as they operated in cramped and makeshift studios with unpredictable equipment. It is interesting and fascinating to read how these pioneers improvised and indeed invented to keep their operations going. The story is sprinkled with amusing and sometimes hilarious incidents they encountered in order to meet the rigid demand of keeping the sound going out on the air, details told by men and women still living who recall them in detail.

Broadcasting developed faster on the prairies than in any other region of the country. In the 1920s most of the population of Saskatchewan lived in villages, small towns and on farms. To the lonely country dwellers the sound of other human voices, getting the news and hearing musical performers must have been exciting.

From the crystal set receiver and the often home-built transmitters to the present day powerful, twenty-four hours-a-day operations, the story progresses. The broadcasters and the technicians were always ahead of the regulations. Indeed, they still are. The Department of Marine and Fisheries was compelled to write new regulations regarding hours of operation and securing permission to advertise. Advertising has always been closely regulated.

Those who did the announcing and reading of the news became household names and indeed star personalities. They were welcomed into the homes as familiar guests. Local orchestras, singers, and radio preachers became famous.

The writer carefully records the growth of broadcasting in Saskatchewan. He notes when stations came on the air, who owned them, who performed on them, how they were received in their districts and how they overcame financial and technical problems. Schmalz devotes a chapter to the spirited battles that occurred over religious and political broadcasting and over the way vital agricultural news and grain reports were handled. These aroused the temper of groups who agitated for more government control, who lobbied to suppress those with whom they did not agree and who strove to assist those wishing to get on the air.

In the early days of broadcasting in Saskatchewan, local stations could be picked up quite easily. Many American stations could also be heard, but no Canadian broadcasting station could be heard from other sections of the country. Schmalz takes us through the attempts at creating a national service.

The C.N.R.'s contribution to network broadcasting is noteworthy. It played a central role in creating the first full network (albeit on primitive lines) in 1927. It was a broadcast commemorating Canada's Diamond Jubilee. He traces the development, through government regulations and technical advances to the present day national service of the C.B.C.

Radio broadcasting during the 1930s was being built on an enduring foundation, not only through the technical advances in transmitters and receivers, but more information was being disseminated. Attempts were made to be responsible

concerning the material going over the air. To be sure, entertainment played the largest role. It was welcomed during the long depression of the "dirty thirties."

The war years brought radio to prominence. Listeners in the remotest places could keep up with the war news. Networks supplemented the local fare with news and happenings from around the world. Responsible stations built up their own news departments. Some became well known for the quality and merit of the service. Notable among them was the news department set up by Godfrey Hudson of CFQC, Saskatoon. It was a multiple award-winning operation.

After the war, radio in Saskatchewan expanded rapidly. New stations came on the air. More cultural programs were heard and radio drama reached its height. Its power and influence were great.

The writer takes us through the struggle which private broadcasters had with the federal government and C.B.C. It was felt that the C.B.C. as broadcaster and regulator had too much of a clear advantage in regulating the industry. The result, as Schmalz has admirably outlined, was the formation of the B.B.G.—the Board of Broadcast Governors, as an independent body of regulators. The story is interesting in that he supports the conflict with amusing and interesting anecdotes by people and personalities, many of whom are still living.

After television came into our lives, radio broadcasting changed. At first radio operators felt their days were numbered. Some operators baled out but most remained to meet the new challenges. The writer describes how technology enabled radio to change and compete with television. Transistors and car radios made radio listening mobile and portable. One could hear it nearly everywhere. Programming changed and more recorded popular music was presented, interspersed, of course, with thirty-second commercials. Phone hot lines and more listener participation attracted daytime listeners in large numbers.

Radio today has left the pioneers behind, and has left many of its early characters and personalities fading into the background. The early era of broadcasting was an exciting adventure for broadcasters and listeners alike. It was new, it was local and it was growing. Everybody was learning.

Part Two of *On Air: Radio in Saskatchewan* deals largely with the state of the industry today. The broadcast fare is bland, non-challenging and non-stimulating. Operators do not take the risks the early pioneers took. The object of the game is to attract the greatest number of listeners for their advertising.

The state of radio in Saskatchewan today is much the same as in any other province. It is quite understood by knowledgeable citizens. There is no longer a mystique about radio. The excitement has gone, the aura of star quality in its performers no longer exists. Schmalz intersperses the changes with opinions of today's broadcasters and concerned citizens on the future of radio. In general, Part Two loses the bright and cheery aura of the first part. The author strays from the historical interest to write of the technological aspects of sound transmission, the philosophy of oral communication, news gathering and presentation, all of which are interesting but not historical.

Despite these observations, Schmalz's book is a most interesting history. He has researched it carefully; he has enlivened it with stories and funny incidents. He has brought its history alive. Many black and white photographs with captions are included; bibliographical notes and sources are cited along with photograph credits. It is a very welcome addition to Saskatchewan history and it deserves the attention of all who are interested in our past.

Roy Currie

SASKATCHEWAN ARCHIVES BOARD NOTES AND RESEARCH NEWS

The Saskatchewan Archives Board has recently acquired a collection of photographs, films and textual materials documenting the work of eminent Saskatchewan filmmakers, **Dick and Ada Bird**.

Born in England in 1892, Dick Bird was an adventurer with a keen and inquisitive personality. Before arriving in Saskatchewan in 1921, Bird had already acquired extensive documentary experience in China, South America and Mexico, including filming the efforts of the Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force in 1918.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s he dominated cinematography in Saskatchewan, producing countless documentary, educational and instructional films for the provincial government. With camera in tow, he was present at the dedication of Regina's Albert Street Bridge, the opening of Saskatchewan's first radio station in 1922 and at countless visits from dignitaries. Working in relative isolation, he was a pioneer in every sense, experimenting with different techniques and modifying and constructing his own equipment.

During the 1930s, the Birds became interested in nature photography and were active in the Saskatchewan Natural History Society. Over the next two decades, they gained international prominence for their nature movies, travelling extensively on the lecture tour circuit. Their audiences included those at Harvard, the National Geographic Society and the Smithsonian Institute. For a number of years, their tours were sponsored by the Audubon Society. Between 1952 and 1955, the Birds were contracted by Walt Disney to film birds.

The Bird Collection consists of approximately six thousand photographs, hundreds of reels of film and textual records. It is one of the most significant documentary collections ever acquired by the Saskatchewan Archives Board, representing the life and achievements of Saskatchewan's most famous filmmakers. Following inspection, conservation, identification and cataloguing, the collection will be available to the public for study and research purposes at the Regina office.

For more information on the Bird records please contact Provincial Archivist Trevor Powell at (306) 787-4066 or Chris Gebhard, Sound and Moving Image Section, 787-3381, at the Regina office of the Saskatchewan Archives Board.

The Saskatchewan Archives Board, Saskatoon Office, has completed the processing of four sets of records of women's organizations. This was made possible through a grant from the Canadian Council of Archives Arrangement and Description Backlog Reduction Cost Shared Cooperative Program.

The records are those of the **Anglican Church Women, Diocese of Saskatoon**, 1905–1985, the **Saskatoon Local Council of Women**, 1916–1967, the **Daughters of Penelope, Telemachus Chapter No. 69**, 1938–1970, and the **Saskatoon Women's Centre**, which developed from the women's liberation movement, 1970–1975. The records selected for this project, therefore, relate to a variety of spheres of women's activities, and should be of interest to students of social history and women's history.

Finding aids to the records are now available for the use of researchers at both offices of the Saskatchewan Archives Board.

For further information, please contact D'Arcy Hande, Director, Saskatoon Office, Saskatchewan Archives Board at (306) 933-5833.

Lloyd Rodwell, an archivist with the Saskatchewan Archives Board's Saskatoon office from 1964 until 1986, received the City of Saskatoon Heritage Award for Volunteer Public Service on 17 February 1992. Exemplifying individual heritage commitment, he served on the City of Saskatoon's Special Committee for the Identification and Listing of Historic Sites, a first attempt to inventory Saskatoon's architectural heritage over a decade ago. In 1988, he purchased the Lyell Gustin and Trounce Houses, the former being the residence of his internationally-renowned piano teacher which has the oldest surviving wooden house in Saskatoon (built in 1883) located at the rear of its property. Both houses have been designated heritage sites. Considerable restoration has been made to the Gustin House, and it continues to be actively used for musical events. Congratulations, Lloyd!

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