

Saskatchewan History

Volume 58
Number 1
Spring 2006



Henry Black, the Conservative Party and the Politics of Relief

Frank Eliason: A Forgotten Founder of the CCF

Developing Letterhead in a Small Prairie Town

A Short History of the Porter's Office in Truax, Saskatchewan

The Editorial Cartoons of Edmund A. Sebestyen

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The Saskatchewan Archives Board was established by provincial statute in 1945 under the Archives Act (RSS 1978, Ch. A-26). The board is responsible for appraising, acquiring, preserving and making accessible documentary records in all media on all aspects of the history of Saskatchewan as well as facilitating the management of the records of government institutions. Two offices, affiliated with the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina, are maintained to provide public access to a rich collection of archival materials for research and reference.

In addition, the Saskatchewan Archives Board has produced several authoritative works on the province's history and a number of reference booklets and directories to assist historical research about the province. The journal, *Saskatchewan History*, first issued in 1948, has earned a reputation for excellence, receiving awards in 1962 from the American Association for State and Local History and in 1970 from the Canadian Historical Association.

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Saskatchewan History

Volume 58, Number 1, Spring 2006

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The Saskatchewan Archives Board, University of Saskatchewan, 3 Campus Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 5A4, publishes *Saskatchewan History* twice a year.

Canadian subscription rates are \$16.05 (CDN) per year, GST included. Subscriptions outside Canada are \$17.50 (CDN) per year. Subscribe online using the Government of Saskatchewan's Publication Centre, via <http://www.saskarchives.com/web/history-subscriptions.html>

The Editor of Saskatchewan History welcomes the submissions of articles relating to the history of the province. Manuscripts can be submitted via regular mail or email and must be double spaced and letter quality print. The endnotes, prepared according to *The Chicago Manual of Style*, should also be double spaced. Electronic submissions should be in Word format. Qualified readers will review manuscripts. The Saskatchewan Archives Board assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors.

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ISSN 0036-4908

Printed by: Houghton Boston

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40064458
RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO
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3 Campus Drive, University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, SK S7N 5A4
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Saskatchewan Archives Board News



D'Arcy Hande
Photo by Kathlyn Szalasnyg

Saskatchewan Archives Director Retires

After over thirty years of dedicated service to the Saskatchewan Archives Board, D'Arcy Hande has taken early retirement, effective January 2006.

D'Arcy began his archival career at the Provincial Archives of Alberta in Edmonton, 1973-1974, and then moved to Saskatoon to work as an archivist with the Saskatchewan Archives Board. He became director of the Saskatoon office in 1988, and was Director of the Historical Records Branch from the mid-1990s. Over the years, D'Arcy also volunteered with genealogical and archival organizations in both Saskatchewan and Alberta.

D'Arcy will be missed by both colleagues and research clients, who have long admired his excellent

administrative skills, his attention to detail, his patience and tact, his fairness and kindness, his depth of knowledge and understanding related to the history of Saskatchewan and Canada, to the collections of Saskatchewan Archives and to the theory and principle behind archival practice.

New Acquisitions

The Saskatoon Office of Saskatchewan Archives is pleased to announce the acquisition of two interesting new collections: the Edmund A. Sebestyen fonds and the Rose Family fonds.

Ed Sebestyen was hired by the Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix* in 1949, where he worked as a photographer, engraver, editorial cartoonist, reporter, news editor, managing editor, marketing and general manager and Executive Vice President (Planning and Corporate Development), until he retired in 1991. His earliest job at the *Star-Phoenix* was engraving zinc plates to be used in the printing process. He tried his hand at drawing a few editorial cartoons that were well-received by the paper's editorial staff and this developed into work as the *Star-Phoenix's* first and only full-time editorial cartoonist (c. 1957-1964). Sebestyen recalls this period as the best of his newspaper career.

The Sebestyen fonds was donated to Saskatchewan Archives in 2005. It consists of 1287 original pieces of artwork for editorial cartoons that Sebestyen prepared for the *Star-Phoenix* from c. 1957-1964. Sebestyen's cartoons documented local, provincial, federal and international politics and issues from the period 1957-1964. The cartoons also document Sebestyen's family and community life, since he often drew on personal experience as inspiration for his drawings. Some of Sebestyen's best cartoons are those which look at world issues from a local perspective. While many of Sebestyen's cartoons are whimsical reflections on the life of everyday people, others provide witty social commentary on attitudes and trends of the times.

[Editor's Note] Selected cartoons from the fonds appear in this issue.

The Arthur Rose Family has resided in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, since 1913. The family owned and

operated dry cleaning and furrier businesses, and members of the family have been actively involved in Saskatoon's Jewish community and in other community and service organizations within the city.

The Rose Family fonds was donated to the Saskatchewan Archives in 2004-2005. It consists of records created, accumulated and used by the Rose Family from 1913-1999, and relates to the operation of the family dry cleaning and furrier businesses, to the involvement of family members in Saskatoon community and Jewish community organizations, and to individual family members Arthur Rose, Elsie Rose, Gerald Ferris Rose, and Gladys Rose.

The record of the family's dry cleaning and furrier businesses are comprehensive, with a near-complete set of financial statements, minutes, agreements from acquisitions of competing businesses, a full run of advertising clippings in scrapbooks (many of which were annotated by Arthur Rose himself), photographs and Arthur Rose's own dry cleaning recipe book. Within the personal records of the family, of particular note is the extensive wartime correspondence between Gerry Rose and his parents, Arthur and Elsie Rose, while Gerry was in active service in England during World War Two. Gerry and his parents wrote back and forth several times each week. The correspondence documents Gerry's wartime experience during training in eastern Canada and then during his service as a lieutenant in the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals from December 1941 to March 1945. Because the Rose family was very open with each other in their letter-writing, the letters document the relationship between a Canadian son and his parents during wartime. The correspondence also provides a steady and ongoing look at the life of Arthur and Elsie Rose, and documents happenings in the family business and on the home front in the community of Saskatoon during the Second World War.

Letter from the Editor

First and most importantly, hello! This issue of *Saskatchewan History* marks the beginning of my editorship and I would like to thank my predecessor, Bruce Dawson, for his many years of work on the journal. I only hope that I can match his diligence and success.

Our first two articles focus on individuals who had a profound effect on Saskatchewan's political history but who have been largely forgotten. The first article is written by Gregory P. Marchildon and Don Black and explores the fortunes and political career of long time Conservative supporter Henry Black. The second article, written by George Hoffman, examines the contribution of Frank Eliason to the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. In our People and Places section Frank Korvemaker provides an interesting piece of local history and Nadine Charabin has uncovered some funny, witty and occasionally hard hitting editorials by Edmund A. Sebestyen. They will become a re-occurring feature in upcoming issues of the journal for they are a literal treasure trove of social, political and cultural commentary on Saskatchewan history.

I would also like to ask you the reader to take a look around where you live. As demonstrated by Frank Korvemaker, local history can be found all over the province and you may find information for an article or a piece in our People and Places section. I would look forward to that contribution.

Sincerely,

Jason Zorbas

Henry Black, the Conservative Party and the Politics of Relief

By Gregory P. Marchildon and Don Black

In November of 2004, a large collection of documents recording the business and political career of early Regina resident Henry Black came to light. The collection, spanning the years 1903 – 1960, had been stored in the Black Block in downtown Regina. It included boxes of purchase orders, bank statements, newspapers, ledger books, letters, income tax forms, employee time sheets, blueprints for early Saskatchewan buildings, orders from British Columbia sawmills, invoices from Manitoba quarries, even copies of eviction notices from the 1920's for long-dead tenants of Henry Black's apartment blocks. In 1931, at the request of Premier J.T.M. Anderson, Black stepped back from his business and agreed to head the Saskatchewan Relief Commission. Black's Relief Commission personal correspondence files were included in the collection found under the stairwell in the Black Block. This article draws heavily from those documents. The letters and documents provide fascinating insights into the political machinations of the 1930s as well as the hard reality of life in a province that was brought to its knees by events outside of its control. Acknowledgement and thanks must be given to Jack Sharp and Al Mannle of Westland Properties – Mr. Sharp bought Henry Black's business from the estate and stored the documents. Al Mannle alerted Don Black to the documents' existence.

From 1931 until 1934, Henry Black was the Chair of the Saskatchewan Relief Commission, the largest organization of its type in Canada during the Great Depression. Because of his business acumen as well as his impeccable Conservative credentials, Black was entrusted by the Conservative coalition government of J.T.M. Anderson to lead an organization that distributed about \$35 million worth of relief, equal to approximately \$525 million in 2005 dollars.¹ In the

Commission's first year alone, it distributed relief to about 305,000 people – very close to one-third the Saskatchewan population of 921,785 in 1931.² A volunteer chair, Black donated almost all of his time and energy to managing this unprecedented relief effort in the most non-partisan and effective

\$3,290,192.60 in 1932-33, and \$9,312,277.60 in 1933-34 (up to 31 May). While the total amounts to just over \$31 million, the Commission continued in operation until August 1934. In "The Saskatchewan Relief Commission, 1931-1934," *Saskatchewan History*, Vol. 3, no. 1 (Spring 1950), 54, H. Blair Neatby estimates that the Commission administered \$35 million worth of relief. Using the Bank of Canada's inflation calculator, \$100 in 1933 would cost \$1,502 in 2005.

² HBF, Saskatchewan Relief Commission report by C.B. Daniel to Henry Black, 15 June 1934. Up to the date of the report, 304,410 individuals received relief in 1931-32 while 120,875 and 214,742 received relief in 1932-33 and 1933-34 respectively.



Henry Black, circa 1930

Collection of the author

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, the correspondence relied upon comes from the Henry Black fonds, a private collection belonging to Don Black hereafter referred to as HBF. In his 15 June 1934 report to Henry Black (HBF), C.B. Daniel, general manager, Saskatchewan Relief Commission, calculates that the Commission distributed \$18,734,995.05 in 1931-32,

way he could. He was able to recruit a strong staff to take care of daily administration at the Relief Commission. Black concentrated on the interface between the federal and provincial politicians and the SRC and spent a considerable amount of time chasing Prime Minister R.B. Bennett and Federal Agriculture Minister Robert Weir for money.³ Black managed difficult negotiations between the Commission and special interests of groups such as the Saskatchewan Retail Merchants Association, the national railroads and the Province's flour millers and fuel dealers.

Black expected to be rewarded politically by the Conservatives for his service as Chairman of the SRC and his significant provincial and national contributions to the Conservative party. When he was not given a promised Senate appointment, the minimum he felt he deserved for the years of service

3 In a speech to the Canadian Conference on Social Work held in Hamilton on May 29, 1934, Black stated: "I am convinced that the cost of (the SRC's) administration being 3.18 per cent, will be very difficult to ever again closely approximate. Due to the economic depression and the drought throughout the province, collections agents, salesmen and executives who had earned \$200.00, \$300.00 and up to \$500.00 per month were walking the streets. As a result, competent and efficient men and women accepted very low paying positions. This is in some measure responsible for the favourable administration cost."

he had rendered, Black temporarily stopped supporting the Conservative Party.

Henry Black: Boom-time Developer and Conservative Die-Hard

Like many other emigrants to Western Canada, Henry Black originally came from Ontario. He was born on the family farm near Kemptville (just south of Ottawa) in 1875, one of a family of eight children. His parents had emigrated from Ireland and life on the farm was governed by the strict values of the Presbyterian church including abstinence from intoxicants, hard work and strict observance of the Sabbath. After completing high school and a course at a business college in Kemptville, Black managed a general store at a railway construction camp in Russell County, Ontario.⁴ Lured by stories of the rail and construction boom in Western Canada, he traveled to the mining town of Kaslo, British Columbia, where he operated a lumber, coal and shipping business from 1899 until 1903. The local newspaper provides a glimpse into the local politics of the day in the rough-and-tumble mining town. Under the front page headline of "Disqualify the Mayor", it is revealed that Henry Black (a Conservative) was suing to have

4 "Henry Black on King's Honors List" *Regina Leader Post*, 2 Jan. 1935, p. 2.



The Black family homestead, located just south of Kemptville, Ontario

Collection of the author

the then current Mayor Archer (a Liberal) removed from office and fined \$2500 because the City's Water Commissioner had purchased a \$2.00 pole from a hardware store that the Mayor had an interest in.⁵ At the April 19, 1903 Council meeting the paper reported that Mayor Archer resigned. An election was held within the week and Mayor Archer was put back into office by acclamation.

Henry Black sold his business in Kaslo and moved to Regina early in the summer of 1903. He became a building contractor and real estate speculator, getting in on the ground floor of the city's construction boom. Drawing on his business experience in Kaslo, Black shopped competitively throughout the interior of British Columbia for lumber, utilizing sawmills in Armstrong, Cranbrook, Nelson, and Moyie. During the summer of 1904 he spent more than \$6000⁶ at a wide range of Territorial firms. Purchases included lumber from the Canadian Elevator Company, Smith and Fergusson Hardware and Regina Lumber and Supply Company, bricks, lime and plasterer's hair from W.F. Eddy, paint from Couch Brothers, and nails, tarpaper and screws from the Western Hardware Co.⁷ A promotional pamphlet published by the Regina Board of Trade in 1911 boasted that Regina's property had an assessed value of \$1.2 million in 1903 but had grown almost twenty-fold, to \$20 million by 1911.⁸

Henry Black would quickly become one of Regina's most prominent builders and property owners. His business records of the time document the realities of being a contractor in a period of rapid growth. A labour shortage in 1910 forced him to place ads for non-union bricklayers in papers across the dominion.⁹ He was the contractor for the officer quarters and stables at the Royal Canadian Mounted Police

headquarters. He built Regina department stores, schools, farmer's markets and apartment blocks. He joined many who were speculating in property and very soon, he owned property throughout Regina as well as large tracts of farm land beyond the city. His straightforward and honest business style earned him the trust of many in the community and he entered politics, solidly aligning himself with the Conservative Party, as he had done in Kaslo.¹⁰

In 1904, almost immediately after his arrival in the city, Henry Black was elected President of the Conservative Association of Regina.¹¹ He served as Regina alderman in 1915 - 17, 1923 and 1924 and Mayor in 1918 and 1919. At the time, provincial and federal party politics directly influenced local politics. When he decided to stand for re-election as mayor in 1918, it was as a prominent Conservative against J.F. Bole, the "local Liberal Member for Regina."¹² The *Leader*, the local Liberal newspaper, attempted to give Bole support by attacking Black with a "two column front page editorial with a heavy type headline" entitled "Black's Black Record."¹³ The lead editorial in the December 5, 1918 *Regina Morning Leader* was headlined "A Black Record" and went on to lambaste Henry's first year in the Mayor's chair. Despite the concerted Liberal attack, Black won the contest handily and was re-elected the following year as Mayor of Regina.

As Mayor, Black faced two potential crises. The first was the influenza epidemic during which he had to ban all public gatherings in the city including church services. The second was the labour unrest that followed soldiers home from the Great War. The Conservative paper of the day credits him with convincing labour leaders in Regina not to participate

5 "Disqualify the Mayor" *Kaslo Kootenaiian*, 26 March 1903, p. 1.

6 The Bank of Canada Inflation Calculator estimates value as early as 1914, \$6000 in 1904 would be worth in excess of \$100,000 today. http://www.bankofcanada.ca/en/rates/inflation_calc.html

7 Invoices, H. Black, May to July, 1904

8 Saskatchewan Council For Archives and Archivists web resources: http://scaa.usask.ca/gallery/regina/central/downtown_business/downtown_CORA_botstatistics.html

9 HBF, letter to London Free Press, Petrolia Advertiser, Lethbridge Herald et al., 30 July 1910 "Dear sir, kindly insert the following notice in your newspaper for six insertions – Bricklayers wanted. 60cts per hour, non-union, McGregor and Black, Contractors, Regina, Sask."

10 For example: "I would like to state that if an occasion should arise where I would have another opportunity to do business with Mr. Black that I would not have the slightest hesitation in engaging in any enterprise with him, without having any recourse to any legal agreement, as I consider his word once given would not in any way be strengthened by any legal document which might be drawn to confirm his verbal undertaking." HBF, reference letter, H.C. Cowdry, manager of Greenshields, Regina, 18 May 1931.

11 HBF, letter, Oliver Dean to Hon. Robert Weir, 6 Aug. 1932.

12 At that time, elections were held each December. Only men who owned property could vote. In the December 1914 election, there were 28 hopefuls vying for the 10 aldermanic seats. Henry Black received 1386 votes – 9th place

13 HBF, letter, Black to R.B. Bennett, 11 Sept. 1933.

Henry Black's Regina Home

Collection of the author



in a general strike along the lines of the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919.¹⁴

Black's entrepreneurial ventures continued throughout most of his life. In July of 1917 he and a group of Regina businessmen opened the Prairie Biscuit and Confectionery Company. The revolutionary idea behind the concept was simple. Instead of growing wheat and shipping it to Winnipeg where it would be processed into biscuits and cookies that were shipped back to Regina merchants for re-sale, the biscuit company would manufacture the product in Regina and sell direct to Regina consumers. A biscuit expert was hired from Glasgow, a large factory was built on the corner of Rose Street and 6th Avenue in Regina's booming warehouse district and a spur line from the CPR was laid.¹⁵ However, a wartime sugar shortage extinguished the fledgling enterprise and by the end of 1918, the biscuit making equipment was sold to a baker in Edmonton.

Black was not a frugal man. He built a large (almost 5600 sq. ft.) home at 2310 College Avenue and lived there for 30 years before moving into a gracious Storey & Van Egmond-designed home on the corner of Lorne Street and College Avenue where he lived until his death. In the 1920s he built a family cottage at Saskatchewan Beach. Most winters he traveled to Santa Monica, California or Vancouver for a few weeks escape from the cold. Black's real estate skills remained, and income from his apartment buildings, farmland, houses and commercial properties provided a relatively steady income stream during the periods of boom and bust that Regina endured. He gave generously to a number of charities and supported worthwhile community causes such as the construction of the Salvation Army building and the rebuilding of the YMCA. His hobbies were few. He never bothered with popular wealthy men's clubs of the day and, for the few hours he was not devoting to business or politics, he preferred to spend them in his spacious house being with his family or in his garden raising his flowers.¹⁶

While Henry Black enjoyed success as a businessman and a civic politician, he would often be frustrated at a

14 Regina *Daily Post*, 19 May 1919, p.3.

15 "The Prairie Biscuit Company was incorporated in February of 1916 with an authorized capital of \$100,000 and with the object of manufacturing biscuits and confectionery to supply the increasing demand in western Canada....The factory is now employing 20 people and as business increases, there will be additions made to the staff." Regina *Morning Leader*, 14 July 1917, p. 8.

16 John Hawkes, *The Story of Saskatchewan and Its People* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke, 1924).

provincial level. By the time of the 1921 election, his party had hit rock bottom. That year the Conservatives only nominated four candidates – including Henry Black. Despite the fact that he faced certain defeat, Black ran against William Martin, the Premier of the province since 1917. With no effective machine backing him, Black had to bear all of his own electoral expenses as well as putting up the deposit for his Conservative running mate in what was then a two-member constituency.¹⁷ As predicted, Black was badly beaten, and the Conservative vote was reduced to slightly less than four per cent of the total ballots cast.¹⁸

17 HBF, letter, Black to R.B. Bennett, 11 Dec. 1934.

18 Martin received 7,300 votes, “allegedly the highest” in any provincial election to that date. Ted Regehr, “William M. Martin,” in Gordon L. Barnhart, ed., *Saskatchewan Premiers of the Twentieth Century* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2004), 61. Appendix A in Howard Leeson, ed., *Saskatchewan Politics: Into the Twenty-First Century* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2001), p. 407.

No fair-weather friend, Henry Black kept the Conservative faith after the election, continuing to organize, contribute and fundraise. He would eventually see his party’s fortunes gradually improve over the decade. By the mid-1920s, the federal Conservatives had become a major threat to the Liberals, actually taking office for three months in the summer of 1926. In Saskatchewan, the Conservatives were still building on their respectable showing in the 1925 election when they managed to poll 18 per cent of the vote despite running candidates in only a quarter of the ridings. By the time of the next provincial election, Black was Regina’s single major financial contributor to the Conservative Party. In addition to direct financial support, he had also bought the presses for the Conservative paper of the day, the *Regina Daily Star*.¹⁹ On June 6, 1929, the Conservatives won 24 seats. Although this was 4 seats short of the Liberals, the provincial Conservative leader, J.T.M. Anderson had forged an electoral partnership with Independent

19 HBF, letter, Oliver Dean to Hon. Robert Weir, 6 Aug. 1932.



The Broder Building, the original home of the Saskatchewan Relief Commission

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and Progressive party candidates who together had captured 11 seats, enough for a majority coalition government.²⁰

After securing the province, Saskatchewan Conservatives began to sense that the federal Liberals under Mackenzie King could be defeated by a new Conservative team under the leadership of R.B. Bennett of Calgary. When the Conservative nominations for the 1930 federal election were held, Henry Black's name was put forward. The day before the convention, however, a prominent Conservative lawyer by the name of Frank Turnbull approached Black and asked him to step aside in his favour. A deal was struck between the two men. If Black put up \$1,000 towards Turnbull's campaign fund, and if the Conservatives were elected nationally, then Black would be appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Saskatchewan or, at a minimum, to the Senate in Ottawa.²¹

Within weeks of Bennett's successful election, (which included a victory by Frank Turnbull) the new Conservative Prime Minister was being dunned by letters recommending Black for appointment as Lieutenant-Governor of Saskatchewan.²² Those writing including Murdoch MacPherson, the Attorney-General of Saskatchewan and one of J.T.M. Anderson's most important cabinet ministers. As MacPherson explained it, Black was not only a long-time Conservative supporter, he was also "independently wealthy and in a position to uphold all

the dignities of the office." Moreover, Black's elegant wife, Jennie Lenore, had "all the qualifications that a Chatelaine of Government House should have."²³

It was not to be. On March 31, 1931, another provincial Conservative, Hugh Edwin Munroe, was made Lieutenant-Governor of Saskatchewan.²⁴ Nor did Henry Black receive a Senate appointment. Why could he not secure one or the other of these appointments despite his long years in the political trenches, the commitments made and the glowing recommendations from life-long Conservatives as well as others? We may never know. It appears that Black himself was not sure although he came to believe that Frank Turnbull and Conservative lawyers, seeking their own federal judicial appointments, betrayed him at the time.²⁵

By the summer of 1931, everyone was beginning to recognize that the depression that had begun in 1929 was not going away. Moreover, the drought that had begun in 1929, covering a huge swath of southern Saskatchewan, refused to relinquish its hold on the land and 76 municipalities in the province were facing their third successive crop failure.²⁶ The situation was disastrous for Saskatchewan wheat farms and for the small businesses that populated hundreds of towns and villages in the heart of the great wheat belt. The depression with its low grain prices was bad enough but the drought was forcing the province, and with it the Conservative coalition government, to its knees.²⁷

20 Patrick Kyba, "J.T.M. Anderson," *Saskatchewan Premiers of the Twentieth Century*. Appendix A in *Saskatchewan Politics*, p. 408.

21 This "arrangement" was explained by Henry Black himself: HBF, letter, Henry Black to R.B. Bennett, 11 Dec. 1934.

22 National Archives of Canada, R.B. Bennett fonds, MG26K (hereafter referred to as NAC, Bennett fonds), vol. 438, reel M1098: A.M. Carmichael (Independent Progressive M.P. for Kindersley) to R.B. Bennett, 22 Sept. 1930; and W.J. Hetherington (Secretary, the Conservative Association of Regina) to R.B. Bennett attaching minute recommending Henry Black for appointment and forwarded to Robert Weir, federal minister of agriculture, and F.W. Turnbull, member of Parliament for Regina, 20 Oct. 1930. At the time, the Conservative Association of Regina honorary presidents were R.B. Bennett and J.T.M. Anderson and its honorary vice-presidents were Conservative members of the legislature, M.A. MacPherson and James Grassick, and its offices were located in Henry Black's building at 1757 Hamilton Street. Entry for Archibald Morrison Carmichael in *Saskatchewan Politicians: Lives Past and Present* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2004), p. 42.

23 NAC, Bennett fonds, vol. 438, reel M1098, M.A. MacPherson (Attorney-General of Saskatchewan) to R.B. Bennett, 28 Jan. 1931.

24 *Saskatchewan Executive and Legislative Directory, 1905-1970* (Regina and Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Archives Board, 1971), p. 7: Hugh Edwin Munroe (1878-1947), the Lieutenant-Governor of Saskatchewan from March 31, 1931, until September 9, 1946, may have been the older brother of Frederick Munroe (1881-1955), a Conservative from Moosomin constituency who served as Minister of Public Health in the Anderson government from 1929 until 1934: *Saskatchewan Politicians*, 176-177. Bennett appointed Joseph Marcotte of Ponteix to the Senate in 1931. Marcotte was a Conservative lawyer who had represented Canada in the 1904 International Billiards Tournament in New York City.

25 HBF, letter, Henry Black to R.B. Bennett, 11 Dec. 1934.

26 HBF, letter, M.A. MacPherson to Henry Black, 1 Sept. 1931.

27 Gregory P. Marchildon, "The Great Divide," in Gregory P. Marchildon, ed., *The Heavy Hand of History: Interpreting Saskatchewan's Past* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2005), pp. 51-66.

Henry Black and the Saskatchewan Relief Commission

J.T.M. Anderson and his cabinet knew full well the enormity of the problem they faced. First, with the collapse of the farming economy, and with it the property tax base that supported the municipalities, the provincial government was increasingly being required to step in to provide relief to starving farm families in the dozens of drought-stricken municipalities that were no longer able to distribute relief. At the same time, almost every dollar being expended on relief was questioned by those individuals not (yet) on relief. This had been the case from the beginning, whether the municipalities or the provincial government were distributing relief. Decisions concerning the recipients, as well as the type and amount of relief, were seen through the lens of past grievances and partisan political differences to the point that even when justice was done it was rarely seen to be done. Indeed, the assumption was the opposite given the prevalence of government patronage in the past.

The Anderson government desperately needed an arm's-length agency that would be perceived to be absolutely impartial and non-partisan in the distribution of what was the largest relief initiative in the country. Thus the idea of an "independent" relief commission was born. Anderson had campaigned hard on the platform of a non-partisan public service and had promised to break the "Gardiner machine" – shorthand for the patronage methods of Anderson's predecessor, Liberal Premier Jimmy Gardiner.²⁸ The creation of the Saskatchewan Relief Commission with five volunteer commissioners drawn from different political persuasions and a staff selected by the Commission without interference from Cabinet or the Conservative Party would prove the Conservative government's bona fides. Of course, it was important for Anderson and his cabinet to have a reliable and loyal Conservative as Chair of the Commission given the differing political stripes of the other Commission members.

There is no record of what went through Henry Black's mind when he was first approached to become chair of the Saskatchewan Relief Commission. Far from a cushy appointment, this unpaid position would turn out to be one of the most challenging jobs in the country during the Great Depression, one that he not only had to do for free but one that would take valuable time away from his own business interests. Black's financial records of the time show that during the depression, income from his business dropped dramatically. He carried a number of tenants – preferring to see the suites and storefronts occupied and maintained, albeit for 'free' rather than falling into disuse and disrepair, and even reported a loss on his 1933 tax return.

Black met with Anderson in early August of 1931 and agreed to take on the job on a voluntary basis.²⁹ Both assumed that it would last no more than eight months, the time the Commission needed to supervise the distribution of relief to drought-stricken farmers over the winter, but agreed that if the Commission had to go longer that Black would be provided with at least a modest honorarium for his time and trouble.³⁰

They then reviewed names of other potential members of the Commission, spending most of their time selecting the high-profile Liberal member of the Commission. Black suggested Victor Sifton, the son of Sir Clifford Sifton as well as the current owner of the Liberal newspapers in the province. The *Leader*, Victor Sifton's Regina paper, had already written an editorial to the effect that any proposed commission for the distribution of relief should be composed of members of all political parties. At the time, Black was almost certain that Sifton would say no but argued that the fact of such a request would force a more careful editorial line on the Commission in the future. Premier Anderson agreed.³¹

Victor Sifton was asked and, predictably, refused on the ground that his acceptance would prevent his newspapers from "commending or criticizing work which is of the greatest public importance."³²

28 On Gardiner's methods, see Escott M. Reid, "The Saskatchewan Liberal Machine before 1929," in Norman Ward and Duff Spafford, eds., *Politics in Saskatchewan* (Don Mills, ON: Longman, 1968), and Norman Ward and David E. Smith, *Jimmy Gardiner: Relentless Politician* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), pp. 93-104. On the election campaign of 1929, see Patrick Kyba, "J.T.M. Anderson", in Gordon L. Barnhart, ed., *Saskatchewan Premiers of the Twentieth Century* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2004), pp. 109-38.

29 *Regina Leader-Post*, 13 Aug. 1931.

30 This is at least Henry Black's own version of the meeting as set out in his letter to R.B. Bennett, 11 Dec. 1934, HBF.

31 HBF, letter, Black to R.B. Bennett, 11 Sept. 1933.

32 HBF, telegram, Colonel Victor Sifton to M.A. MacPherson,

The Anderson government then went to a second, then a third, Liberal, but they too refused, likely anticipating the political implications of accepting the Conservative government's invitation.³³ Finally, they found a Liberal in W.G. Yule, the supervisor of the Royal Bank of Canada's operations in Saskatchewan. Yule's Liberal credentials were criticized by Cameron McIntosh, a Liberal MP from North Battleford who argued that Yule more represented the interests of the national banks than the provincial Liberals. McIntosh also charged that "every relief agent" was "appointed by an out and out Conservative."³⁴

The other members of the Commission were A.E. Whitmore, a Conservative supporter and Regina businessman, W.A. Munns, Manager of the Executors and Administrators Trust Company of Moose Jaw and Pearl Johnson. Contrary to McIntosh's allegations, Johnson was not a Conservative. In fact, she was a highly identified supporter of what would soon become known as the Canadian Co-operative Federation or CCF.³⁵

Ultimately, the charges of partisanship would not stick. In his article published well after the Great Depression, Canadian historian H. Blair Neatby concluded that, over its three-year life, the Saskatchewan Relief Commission had an "enviable record" of achievement without "the slightest indication of political influence, profiteering or partiality."³⁶ This positive judgment on the Commission has never since been revised.³⁷ At the time, however, it seemed to Black that his efforts in establishing a non-partisan and effective relief organization were constantly being thwarted, at least initially, by Liberal attacks on the Commission as well as a lack of communication, and at times a lack of

agreement, between the Conservative government in Ottawa and the Conservative government in Regina, on funding.

Although the Saskatchewan Relief Commission was, in theory, only accountable to the government of Saskatchewan, in reality it found itself also accountable to the government of Canada because of the way in which relief was financed. From the beginning, the federal government footed a significant portion of the relief bill even if the administration of that relief was the responsibility of the province. The federal and provincial governments divided up the drought-stricken region of the province into three groups. In the first year of the Commission's operations, Group A targeted 95 municipalities that had suffered three successive crop failures and for which the federal government agreed to bear the total cost of direct relief and the province the total cost of indirect relief which included seed and other supplies intended to keep farms in operation. Group B included the 77 municipalities that had suffered two successive crop failures while group C were the 68 municipalities with one crop failure. For groups B and C, the federal and provincial governments split the cost of direct relief.³⁸

In an ideal world, Henry Black and the Commission should have received a provincial appropriation large enough to meet the relief needs of the province and the two governments would have sorted out the actual transfer of money. In practice, the provincial government had great difficulties forecasting the relief requirements given the inherent unpredictability of climate in general and drought in particular. Moreover, with its own revenues rapidly diminishing, the province needed the federal relief grants before it could transfer money to the Commission. The catch was that the federal government required receipt of itemized accounts from the Saskatchewan Relief Commission before it could forward funds to the province.³⁹

As a consequence of this chaotic arrangement, there was a significant lag between the time that the Commission incurred obligations and time it received

11 Aug. 1931.

33 HBF, letter, Black to R.B. Bennett, 11 Sept. 1933.

34 "Hold Relief Commission Political" *Regina Leader Post*, February 19, 1932, p. 1

35 NAC, Bennett fonds, vol. 793, reel M1449, letter, anonymous to R.B. Bennett, 26 Sept. 1933.

36 Neatby, "The Saskatchewan Relief Commission", p. 56.

37 Peter A. Russell, "The Co-operative Government in Saskatchewan, 1929-1934: Response to the Depression" (M.A. thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1970). In his biographical essay on J.T.M. Anderson, Patrick Kyba states that the Saskatchewan Relief Commission was the one major achievement of the Anderson government during the Great Depression: "J.T.M. Anderson" in *Saskatchewan Premiers*, p. 129.

38 Neatby, "The Saskatchewan Relief Commission", p. 42. HBF, letter, R.B. Bennett (as Minister of Finance) to Black, 26 Jan. 1932.

39 HBF, letter, Black to R. Weir, 5 Dec. 1931.

money to meet its obligations. Since relief recipients were “paid” in food and clothing rather than cash, the Commission tried to manage its cash flow problem by delaying payments to the hundreds of town and village stores that actually provided foodstuffs and other necessities. Needless to say, this created dozens of disputes between the Commission and the many merchants supplying relief. Thus, Henry Black’s job included damage control so that the disputes would not destroy the Commission’s reputation, hurt the two levels of government or drive the local merchants out of business. Over and over again, Black wrote to federal and provincial ministers about the damage this unreasonable arrangement was causing the relief effort, even threatening to resign if the problem was not fixed.⁴⁰ Indeed, the dominant theme of much of the correspondence between Black and the federal and provincial governments during this time is the hardship created by their chronic inability or unwillingness to deliver oft-promised funds.⁴¹

Unfortunately for Black, the funding problem would never get fixed over the course of the Commission’s life. Worse, Black had to contend directly with R.B. Bennett who initially acted as his own government’s Minister of Finance.⁴² Bennett would periodically wreak havoc by demanding detailed information on the Commission’s expenditures from Black. Bennett even issued orders for the “immediate curtailment of expenditures in Saskatchewan” as he watched with alarm as the province absorbed federal relief money like an ink blotter.⁴³ Black soon concluded that the

Bennett government was delaying payment in order to pressure the Commission into kicking thousands of people off the relief roles and became so upset at the Prime Minister’s actions that he again threatened to resign. However, nothing Black did or said changed the behaviour of Bennett or his government.⁴⁴

By the winter of 1931-32, the Saskatchewan Relief Commission had become a political football in the House of Commons. Henry Black was constantly being peppered by requests from Conservatives in the Bennett government for information so that they could answer the opposition’s pointed questions and allegations.⁴⁵ Saskatchewan Liberal members of Parliament led the charge against the Commission trying to embarrass the Conservatives.⁴⁶ No one was more on the spot and intent on getting answers from Black than the Conservative point man on the issue, Robert Weir. The federal minister of agriculture, Weir was a “prosperous farmer and stock-breeder” from the Melfort area. One of eight Conservatives from Saskatchewan elected in the 1930 election, Weir was the Anderson government’s own recommendation to Bennett for the highly-desired Agriculture portfolio. Despite his lack of experience, Weir soon established himself as one of Bennett’s best ministers.⁴⁷ Indeed, Weir would be instrumental in launching the Bennett government’s drought land reclamation through the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act.⁴⁸

Although Weir was growing weary of defending the Saskatchewan Relief Commission against opposition attacks in the House of Commons, he faced an even larger problem among his cabinet colleagues, none of whom were from Saskatchewan and almost all of whom believed that relief had become too easy to obtain in Saskatchewan compared to their provinces. Trying to strengthen his position, Weir begged Black to cut the number of relief recipients so that he could argue that the Commission was taking a tougher attitude. In the meantime, federal money would be difficult to get for Saskatchewan because of the “strenuous claims” for relief money from other cabinet members, especially those from Ontario and

40 HBF: letter, Black to R. Weir, 5 Dec. 1931, and response, 9 Dec. 1931; letter, Black to M.A. MacPherson, 7 Jan. 1932.

41 HBF: letter, Black to M.A. MacPherson, June 24, 1932: “I now feel that meeting payments and stalling is the biggest job of the Commission, and if it continues as it is at present for very long it will go a long way to undo the work we have done in carrying so many through the winter. It is also costing the country considerable by keeping the staff writing letters stalling. It also retards the progress of closing the Commission. As you are no doubt aware there are close to one million dollars worth of cheques issued and withheld awaiting funds to meet them.”

42 On Bennett’s prime ministerial style, see Larry A. Glassford, *Reaction and Reform: The Politics of the Conservative Party under R.B. Bennett, 1927-1938* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp. 100-10. Bennett was Minister of Finance from 7 Aug. 1930 until 2 Feb. 1932: Robert B. Bryce, *Maturing in Hard Times: Canada’s Department of Finance through the Great Depression* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1986), p. 235.

43 HBF, telegram, R.B. Bennett to P.H. Gordon, 14 May 1932.

44 HBF, letter, Black to R. Weir, 18 May 1932.

45 HBF, letter, W.D. Cowan, M.P., to Black, 20 Feb. 1932.

46 HBF, letter, W.D. Cowan, M.P., to Black, 7 Mar. 1932.

47 Glassford, *Reaction and Reform*, pp. 104-5.

48 Entry for Robert Weir (1882-1939) in *Saskatchewan Politicians*, pp. 239-40.

Quebec. In Weir's own words, he was finding it increasingly difficult "to keep continuously before the minds of Cabinet, the difference in the Saskatchewan situation."⁴⁹

The provincial Liberals, under opposition leader Jimmy Gardiner, also attacked the Saskatchewan Relief Commission in the Legislature in Regina. Black became so annoyed at the repeated requests for information from members of the legislature that he finally sent a letter to M.A. MacPherson warning him that if the Commission continued to provide "prompt answers" to the "constant flow of question", this political work would end up "impairing" the "distribution of relief."⁵⁰ Although sympathetic, MacPherson could not control what the Liberals did in the legislative assembly. He wrote Black that, "More objection to it by the government would induce further requests by these gentlemen." At the same time, he wanted Black's fellow Commissioner, W.G. Yule, to talk to his Liberal friends to try and get them to back off a little.⁵¹

By the beginning of March 1932, the ammunition provided by Black and the Commission to Conservative members in both Parliament and the provincial Legislature had punctured the Liberal assault. One Conservative backbencher in Ottawa pointed out that "even the Leader of the Opposition", Mackenzie King, "had to admit that the work of the Commission... was virtually above criticism."⁵² Few were more grateful than Weir. In late February 1932, he wrote M.A. MacPherson, the Commission point man in the Anderson cabinet, stating that the Commission had in fact "protected" both Conservative governments and, "looking at it now, rather than from the beginning, I do not like to think of what might have happened in the way of public resentment, had we not had that protection."⁵³ A Saskatchewan Conservative backbencher wrote Black to assure him that the Liberals were becoming increasingly timid in their criticisms until finally they were "scared out of their wits" to ask questions about the Commission for fear of the Conservative response. He went on to advise Black and his fellow Saskatchewan

Conservatives to just continue "giving the people of Saskatchewan good Government, and keeping it clean as you have done, and the merit of your administration will be the only answer that is necessary."⁵⁴ Weir followed up with a letter to Black praising his efforts:

It must indeed be a source of great satisfaction to you people that, after having undertaken such a colossal task with so little preparation and having built up the machine... whose work is its best commendation, many who have tried to find fault with it are unable to do so. The work of your Commission is really the healthiest note in the House.⁵⁵

By the late spring of 1932, conditions throughout the wheat belt looked like they were improving. Assuming that the Commission would be wound up by the provincial government, Henry Black felt that the time had come for his Senate appointment. Once again, his political friends and associates advanced Black's name to the Bennett government.⁵⁶ By the end of summer, however, the government realized that large amounts of relief would again have to be distributed. Although yields were up, grain prices dipped even further, and drought again savaged a sizeable area of southern Saskatchewan.⁵⁷ The provincial government realized that tens of thousands of people would again be forced on to the relief rolls for the winter and Premier Anderson asked that Black and the Commission continue with their work for another year. In addition, Anderson asked the Commission to take on the responsibility for distributing relief to single and homeless unemployed men that had congregated in and around the urban areas of the province.⁵⁸ As Anderson explained to Black, "your Commission is praised throughout the whole of Canada because of its efficiency and business-like management of relief matters" and the provincial government was understandably reluctant about stepping into the relief business directly.⁵⁹

49 HBF, letter, R. Weir to Black, 9 Dec. 1932.

50 HBF, letter, Black to M.A. MacPherson, 22 Feb. 1932.

51 HBF, letter, M.A. MacPherson to Black, 24 Feb. 1932.

52 HBF, letter, W.A. Beynon, M.P., to Black, 3 Mar. 1932.

53 HBF, letter, Weir to MacPherson, 26 Feb. 1932.

54 HBF, letter, W.D. Cowan, M.P., to Black, 7 Mar. 1932.

55 HBF, letter, R. Weir to Black, 4 Apr. 1932.

56 HBF, letters: Oliver Dean to R. Weir, 6 Aug. 1932; M.A. MacPherson to Black, 19 Aug. 1932.

57 E.W. Stapleford, *Report on Rural Relief due to Drought Conditions and Crop Failures in Western Canada, 1930-1937* (Ottawa: Department of Agriculture, 1939), p. 32.

58 HBF: M.A. MacPherson to Black, 10 Nov. 1932; Black to J.T.M. Anderson, 19 Nov. 1932.

59 HBF, letter, J.T.M. Anderson to Black, 21 Dec. 1932.

Despite his deepening concern about his lack of attention to his own business interests and his private losses as a consequence, Henry Black continued his work at the Commission on a voluntary basis. He was given some assurances, however, that the job would end for certain by March 31, 1933, at which time he would finally get his proper reward.⁶⁰ But that season, the drought along with a grasshopper infestation swept the wheat belt. Seeing that the Commission would have to continue, Black wrote both Anderson and MacPherson asking to be relieved as Chair. By this time, the government itself was teetering and both pleaded with Black to stick it out as they needed at least one clear success with which to face the coming election. Reluctantly, Black agreed, his loyalty to the Conservative Party once again coming to the fore.⁶¹

On May 29, 1934, just three months before the Saskatchewan Relief Commission was wound down, Black addressed the Canadian Conference on Social Work held in Hamilton. He mentioned that he had been asked if Saskatchewan residents appreciated the relief goods sent to them from the eastern provinces. He replied that there was a tremendous amount of gratitude and reminded the audience that "... Saskatchewan residents in the greatest numbers originally came from Ontario and the Eastern Provinces, and you will agree with me that those who went west were more adventurous than those who were satisfied to stay in the east, where opportunities were not so promising. I claim to be a westerner and am prepared to admit, those who were farmers in the east and pulled up stakes and went west where land was free to the homesteader, were not in every instance, Ontario's most successful and economical farmers."

The Conservative Denouement

On June 19, 1934, the Anderson government was defeated by the Liberals and five years of continuous drought and depression. Although the Conservatives garnered nearly 27 per cent of the vote, not one member was able to keep a seat. The election attacks still fresh in his ear, Henry Black wondered whether he and his fellow Conservatives had been wise in investing so heavily in a non-partisan relief commission. At the same time, he let Prime Minister

Bennett know that he had been approached by the Gardiner Liberals to continue as Chair of the Commission, and agreed to do so only if Bennett wanted him to do so.⁶² By August, however, the Gardiner government had decided to terminate the Commission and put relief back into the hands of government departments, where it would reside until the end of the Depression.⁶³ Gardiner wrote Black expressing "the appreciation of the government and the people of the Province to you and other members of the Commission for the unselfish manner in which you have given of your time and ability to the handling of the very difficult piece of work" and asked Black to gather up his Commission members for a private "exit" meeting with the Premier the next day.⁶⁴

After three years of toiling on the Commission, Henry Black was finally able to return to his business interests on a full-time basis while waiting for appointment to the Senate by Primer Minister Bennett. He waited through the fall until finally, in early December, the long-anticipated letter from the Prime Minister's Office came. But instead of the promised Senate nomination, Bennett recommended that Black receive a Commander of the British Empire (CBE).⁶⁵ It would all be too much for Black who felt that insult had now been added to great injury.

Black exploded and wrote a letter back to the Prime Minister. In it, he accused Robert Weir, Frank Turnbull and other Conservatives of blocking and interfering with his appointment in the past. He reminded Bennett of his over thirty years of contributions to the Conservative Party, including financial contributions that ran "well up into five figures" and his anger at being ignored while the Conservatives held office provincially and federally from 1930 until 1934. He argued that, at a minimum, he had been promised appointment to the Senate and rejected Bennett's offer of a CBE as simply insufficient "for all the services" he had "rendered the Conservative Party during the past thirty-two years."⁶⁶

60 HBF, letter, Black to R. Weir, 4 Jan. 1932.

61 HBF, letter, Black to R.B. Bennett, 11 Dec. 1934.

62 HBF, letter, Black to R.B. Bennett, 29 June 1934.

63 "At the time, these were the departments of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture.

64 HBF, letter, J.G. Gardiner to Black, 16 Aug. 1934.

65 1933 Senate appointments were Byron Homer from Blaine Lake and Walter Aseltine of Rosetown.

66 HBF, letter, Black to R.B. Bennett, 11 Dec. 1934.

While the letter appeared to both surprise and upset Bennett, he did not arrange a Senate appointment for Black. Although Black eventually accepted the CBE, he temporarily ended his support of the Conservative Party from that time forward. He did, however, maintain sporadic contact with R.B. Bennett until 1944.⁶⁷ In early 1935, for example, he suggested to Bennett that "...we call a convention of the C.C.F. and Conservatives...and nominate a Candidate of whichever party has had the strongest support" to avoid three-way contests. Again, in 1937 he tried to convince Bennett of the merits of a new all-party anti-Liberal coalition that would replace the Conservative Party, going so far as to say: "I have refused for the past four years to take part in any Conservative activities or organizations, or to contribute to the cause, as I feel it is a waste of time and money in this province. But if an organization along the lines as suggested [by Black] were approved, I would be pleased to lead every effort in its success."⁶⁸ A partisan Conservative who harboured nothing but hostility for the new socialist party, Bennett could hardly have been enamoured of these suggestions from Black.

However, the taste for politics had not quite left Henry Black and he swallowed his bitterness to run under the Conservative banner one last disastrous time. Relying somewhat on the supportive editorial policy of the *Regina Star*, Black gave the impression of being an extremely reluctant candidate for Mayor in the 1937 Regina civic election.⁶⁹ All through October, it had looked like Mayor A.C. Ellison was going to be re-elected by acclamation and he, in turn, would be highly influenced by a left-leaning council that included C.C. Williams and Clarence Fines of the C.C.F. A week after the Saskatchewan Conservative party held its annual convention, with J.G. Diefenbaker as leader and R.B. Bennett attending as federal leader, Black announced his candidacy as mayor. But 40 minutes after the polling stations closed on November 23, Black was forced to concede

defeat. He received only 2,722 votes compared to A.C. Ellison's 11,202 votes, the largest margin of defeat ever recorded in a Regina civic election until that date, and a clear signal that the Conservative's were spent as a legal force in the province until their resurrection four decades later.

Five years after his humiliating defeat, Black wrote to Bennett with a request that he be appointed to join Bennett on the Board of Directors of the Royal Bank of Canada. Bennett was, by this point, a rather tragic, defeated and lonely figure living in self-imposed exile in an immense mansion in Surrey, England. His reply to Black's request was evasive and non-committal: "To be frank, this is one of those matters one can speak about but which preferably not write about unless one is asked for an opinion by the President. Were I not a Director, I could easily write, but being a Director I am afraid it would be misunderstood were I to write about it. I could speak of it casually and I am afraid that is all I can say."⁷⁰ Black was not appointed to the bank's board.

After his civic defeat, Black had turned away from public life to concentrate solely on his family and his business. In 1943 he built the York Apartments, adjacent to the General Hospital and across the street from the Crescent Annex, which he also owned. In 1944 he built the St. Andrews Apartments on Dewdney Avenue, adjacent to the Franklin, another one of his blocks. He bought speculative lots in Lakeview on which he built houses. In 1946 he bought property on the corner of 13th Avenue and Scarth Street. Ten years later he and his sons formed a partnership with the Hills and the Kramers to construct the Financial Building on the site.⁷¹

After the death of his wife Jennie Lenore in 1950, he remained active in the affairs of his business, at times intervening to remind tenants that their children should be quiet in the hallways, at times asking them not to sunbathe on the balconies or have noisy parties. He also wrote paternalistic notes to his tenants in a style and tone similar to this letter to a family renting one of his apartments in Regina's Crescent Annex:

Dear Friends:... The complaints mostly

67 HBF, letter, Black to R.B. Bennett, 11 Dec. 1934: this letter presents Black's view of a litany of sins and treacherous self-aggrandizing plots hatched by various Conservatives, and Conservative lawyers, in Regina since The First World War. Black's attitude towards Bennett is more forgiving: "I must confess that you were the only one whom I was satisfied was loyally behind me through the three years that I was Chairman of the Commission."

68 HBF, letter, Black to R.B. Bennett, 25 March 1935.

69 *Regina Daily Star*, 13 Oct. 1937, p. 3.

70 HBF, letter, R.B. Bennett to Black, 12 Jan. 1943.

71 See W.A. Riddell, *Regina from Pile O'Bones to Queen City of the Plains*, (Burlington, Ontario, Windsor Publications, 1981), page 204, story of McCallum Hill Ltd.



Jennie Lenore Black

Collection of the author

are about the noise of children running up and down the stairs, and then jumping two and three steps at a time. There are a number of children who do not belong to the apartment and along with the occupant's children make a lot of noise. The door of your suite is always left open and this encourages outsiders, I'd also bring to your attention our Rule No. 12 which states that children must not play in the halls. With children you should insist they be quiet. Trusting you will endeavour to make living conditions better for your adjoining tenants, Very truly yours, Henry Black⁷²

Henry Black died on July 29, 1960. He died a proud capitalist, a teetotaling Presbyterian and, despite his great disappointments during the 1930s, a devout member of the Conservative Party.⁷³ He was often

characterized as ruggedly honest in business and public life. For him, public service was an obligation, particularly for those who, like himself, had become wealthy through business.⁷⁴ His beliefs had carried over in his directing of the largest relief scheme in Canada in which recipients did not receive charity. Instead, they accepted a loan from government that included their signature on a promissory note for repayment. Black had always paid his bills and he expected nothing less from relief recipients in the long run. Moreover, as a businessman who had always paid his bills on time, he was dismayed to find himself in the position of having to shield the Saskatchewan and Canadian governments from bill collectors when they did not provide the Commission with the funds required to pay the suppliers of relief goods.

When the Relief Commission was first established, Provincial Secretary M.A. MacPherson provided Black with guidance on the work responsibilities of the Relief Commission. After going through the Government's wishes for fuel distribution, clothing distribution and the relationship with the retail merchant's association, MacPherson urged Black to observe two cardinal principles – "alleviation of distress and no wastage of public money."⁷⁵ Even if the Commission could only alleviate some of the distress caused by drought and depression, Black did everything humanly possible to ensure that no public money was wasted.

As for the lack of reward for his immense sacrifice, Black may have been one of the most extreme examples of the unfairness of the patronage system but he was hardly alone. As historian Larry Glassford has pointed out, R.B. Bennett's Conservative government was extremely ineffective in dispensing patronage to its supporters. This was, in part, a consequence of the Great Depression itself as Bennett became so preoccupied with the problems of governing in a fiscal

used or rented for the sale or manufacture of intoxicants." The Presbyterian Church had become part of the United Church of Canada by this time, and Black had also directed a \$10,000 donation in his will to the United Church in Regina.

⁷⁴ A December 9, 1917 *Regina Morning Leader* ad for Black's Mayoralty put it more plainly: "Your vote for H. Black, retiring alderman, is respectfully solicited for MAYOR 1918. Mr. Black is now completing his third year as alderman and is fully in touch with all municipal matters. Being a heavy taxpayer, Mr. Black is vitally interested in an economic administration of local affairs."

⁷⁵ HBF, letter, M.A. MacPherson to Black, 1 Sept. 1931.

⁷² H. Black, letter to Williams, May 9, 1956,

⁷³ His will stipulated that none of his properties could "be

crisis that he often delayed, or forgot about, Senate and Lieutenant-Governor appointments.⁷⁶ Henry Black was one of the forgotten.

Postscript: A Friend from the Past Reaches Out

Although employees of the Relief Commission, under General Manager, C.B. Daniel, handled the day-to-day administration, Black intervened personally on occasion and received letters like the following:

Pierceland, Sask
June 17, 1932

Dear Henry:

I have been tempted to write you for some time and finally the temptation has got the better of me. However, after an acquaintanceship of some 25 years I have no hesitation in writing you, knowing full well that if you do not fully agree with what I have to say, you will not be highly indignant nor again prostrate with joy at receiving the information. Your position as Chairman of the Saskatchewan Relief Commission, I am sure, is not a very pleasant one during this trying time of food depression and far be it from your humble servant to add to your worries.

How I got up here in Township 61-26-3 is a chapter all by itself. It might sound something like the Children of Israel trekking out of Egypt but Moses is not at hand and the Red Sea refuses to part its waves. In short, I am what is generally known as a 'homesteader' in these parts as "...a two-headed billy-goat who had signed on the dotted line, promising to love, cherish and greatly improve 160 acres of fairly heavy timber, mosquitoes and sand-flies (with the aid of none save Divine Providence) but one who unfortunately forgot to leave his stomach and the attendant occasional desire for food in the so-called dried-out areas of Southern Saskatchewan.

If you were to put yourself in my position you would readily understand what is worrying me – with nine of us all told, on land 55 miles from railway – no cow, no garden stuff until possibly this coming fall – nothing except four uncompleted buildings – just a strong desire to continue to live. This week the Relief Officer left me an order from your commission covering two months' period amounting in all to \$11.35 or \$5.66 a month. This figures out as considerably less than one cent per meal for each of us. When one has absolutely no other subsistence except this order (as is the exact truth in my case) it is practically impossible to live for that length of time, especially when groceries are purchased at prices not at all similar to city groceries. "Strange as it may seem" I have lost exactly 54 lbs. in weight up here due largely to under-nourishment and hard work on the dear old homestead and believe me, if this continues, I will be able to make Mr. Mahatma Gandhi look like the fat man in a circus.

I can only conclude that the Commission is not aware of the exact state of affairs among a lot of the newer settlers in this area.

Surely you have been misinformed and I am not speaking for myself alone, but for quite a number of others who are exactly in the same boat. I sincerely hope that you will make it your business to have some reliable party come up here and investigate and this should be done at once, as I know in my own home we will not have more than we can scrape along with (using every economy) for more than two weeks.

If many of us had cattle, hogs and a garden from last year, it would be a slightly different tale. Fish abound in the lakes north of here but, as a matter of fact, it has been almost impossible to get fish all winter. There are lots of good beef cattle on some of the adjacent ranches but beefsteak is almost an unknown quantity. We only had meat about three times all winter. For the last two weeks we subsisted chiefly on bread and water. I was clearing 10 acres of land at the time and had to quit, as I played out on this rigorous diet.

I think I have told you enough so that if you see fit to take any action you will have something to go on. If I ever get down to Regina again, I intend going straight from the Union depot over the street to Jim Cooksley's butcher shop to see if T-bone steaks are still in existence.

With kindest personal regards to yourself and family, I am
Yours sincerely,
W.C. Bettschen

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Don Black is Henry Black's grandson. He has been researching and writing about Saskatchewan history since serving as Manuscript Editor for the 1985 publication, *Historic Architecture of Saskatchewan*.

76 Glassford, *Reaction and Reform*, pp. 132-3.

Frank Eliason: A Forgotten Founder of the CCF

by George Hoffman

The history of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) has received considerable scholarly attention. Some might argue that as in the case of another Canadian third party movement, Social Credit in Alberta, nothing further needs to be said. Curiously, however, the growth of the CCF in Saskatchewan, the only province where it won power, has not been studied extensively, and many questions remain unanswered. Generally political scientists have analysed the Saskatchewan CCF in light of prairie populist ideologies and have used terms such as left and right populism and social democratic populism in discussing it.¹ Sociologists have used a 'calming of the storm' argument, suggesting, rather simply, that the CCF won power because it moderated its early radicalism.² One noted commentator concluded that the CCF arose in Saskatchewan because of the strong British influence there, unlike in Manitoba which resembled Ontario, and Alberta which was more American.³ However, this falls far short of explaining the amazing historic success of the movement in Saskatchewan and the continuing resiliency of the NDP. In the end one has to admit that the best book on the Saskatchewan CCF remains the classic, *Agrarian Socialism*, by Seymour Martin Lipset, an American, published more than a half century ago.⁴ It

1 The best examples are David Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies, 1910 to 1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press) and John Richards and Larry Pratt, *Prairie Capitalism: Power and Influence in the New West* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979).

2 Peter Sinclair, "The Saskatchewan CCF: Ascent to Power and Decline of Socialism," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 54, no. 4 (December 1973): 419-33.

3 Nelson Wiseman, "The Pattern of Prairie Politics," in *The Prairie West: Historical Readings*, eds., R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1992): 640-60. The fact that Saskatchewan had a larger percentage of people who were not of Anglo-Celtic origin in the 1930s than either Manitoba and Alberta should make one distrustful of this sweeping generalization.

4 Seymour Martin Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950). Not surprisingly, Nelson Wiseman would not agree. He observes that Lipset's footnotes in *Agrarian Socialism* reflect his training at Columbia University and that the "background to agrarian socialism in Canada was certainly

is clear that the party's roots, its organization and its long-term success still have not been satisfactorily explained.

This paper does not propose a new and all encompassing thesis regarding the rise of the Saskatchewan CCF. Rather it points to its complex and varied historical roots as a basis for understanding its success. In particular, it is an examination of the career of one individual, Frank Eliason, an important but almost forgotten founder of the party. Eliason was not a product of British labour, British Methodism or British Fabianism. He was certainly not a Marxist. He had no direct connection to the social gospel, and he was not radicalized after 1930 by the despair of the prairie dust bowl. And, though he was a Swedish immigrant, he had left his homeland in his youth and did not bring with him a mature Scandinavian social democratic outlook. The most formative years of Eliason's life were spent in Minneapolis, Minnesota. His experiences there in the early 1900s and the influences of a variety of tenets that were then a part of American progressive thought greatly influenced him for the rest of his life. Later he brought these ideas of late nineteenth and early twentieth century American radicalism, especially of the mid-west, with him to Saskatchewan where they further evolved. They formed the basis of his thinking as he helped bring the CCF into existence.

Frank Eliason was born January 13, 1883 in the province of Dälsland in Sweden. In 1902, when he was nineteen, Eliason immigrated to the United States. He spent a year in Pennsylvania and began to learn English. He was employed as a railway construction worker at twelve cents an hour. He never forgot the exploitation of immigrant Italian railway workers, later recalling that they gathered grass to use in salads and that there were terrible accidents: "I saw many of them losing life and limbs. Yes, we saw their bodies mutilated and the pieces carried away."⁵ In

more British and Fabian than American." He then points to M.J. Coldwell and Tommy Douglas as proof. Nelson Wiseman, "Social Democrats on Social Democracy," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 144.

5 Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), Eliason Papers, "Biography of a Swedish Immigrant" (sic), unpublished typescript, n.d., 13. Eliason wrote this ninety-page autobiography in the 1950s during the last part of his life. It was never published and apparently never entirely completed. The section describing his involvement in politics is handwritten and in draft form and is not

1903 he moved west to Minnesota, where many of his countrymen had settled.

Eliason lived in Minneapolis until 1910. This was a particularly formative period in his life. He soon married and by 1908 had three children; "I do not know of any couple that were more sincerely in love," and "I loved my family and wanted the best for them," he later wrote.⁶ However, the realities of immigrant working class life quickly became apparent. Eliason worked hard at a variety of jobs but never found steady employment and at times had no income. He felt that

a part of the typescript. Eliason gave a copy of the autobiography to members of his family. I received this last information in a telephone conversation on February 19, 2003 with his daughter-in-law, Mrs. Frank Eliason Jr. of Langley, British Columbia.

6 SAB, Eliason Papers, "Biography of a Swedish Emmigrant" (sic), typescript, 16.



Frank Eliason
SAB R-A10415

he was not supporting his young family adequately. Then his wife's health broke, and she was confined to bed. There were doctor bills, and medicines had to be purchased. The situation became desperate. Luckily they stumbled across a young doctor who refused to accept payment for his services. By 1910 Eliason was looking for a new start and a better life elsewhere.⁷

Minneapolis was the laboratory in which Frank Eliason received his education. In the early 1900s it was vibrant and growing rapidly but still in many ways a city of the frontier. It was a railway centre and a regional headquarters for the grain trade and flour milling companies connected to the agricultural hinterland to the west. Not far away, to the north, were lumbering and mining areas. It was a city of class divisions, of wealth and success but also of poverty and unfulfilled expectations. The legacy of the Populist revolt of the 1890s was very much alive. It was the time of Eugene Debs and William Jennings Bryan, an optimistic era when a new millennium, be it based on socialism or 'free silver,' seemed possible. Here Eliason likely was introduced to the financial theories of William 'Coin' Harvey. He attended meetings where religious, labour and political speakers expounded on various issues. Clarence Darrow, the famous defence lawyer, spoke of defending the McNamara brothers, labour leaders accused of bombing the *Los Angeles Times* building and killing twenty-one people. 'Big Bill' Haywood of the radical Western Federation of Miners was discussed; so were the Industrial Workers of the World, the famous 'Wobblies.' When the eloquent anarchist, Emma Goldman, spoke in Minneapolis on her 1908 tour, Eliason was there. He recalled that she was very beautiful and wore a red dress. She told those assembled to get together, study your problems, and "some day our time will come." "It was perhaps," Eliason remembered, "the best address I had ever heard." "I did take Emma Goldman's advice and studied harder than ever."⁸ He came to support the Socialist party in various elections and in 1908 cast his ballot for Eugene Debs for president.⁹

7 Ibid., 16-25.

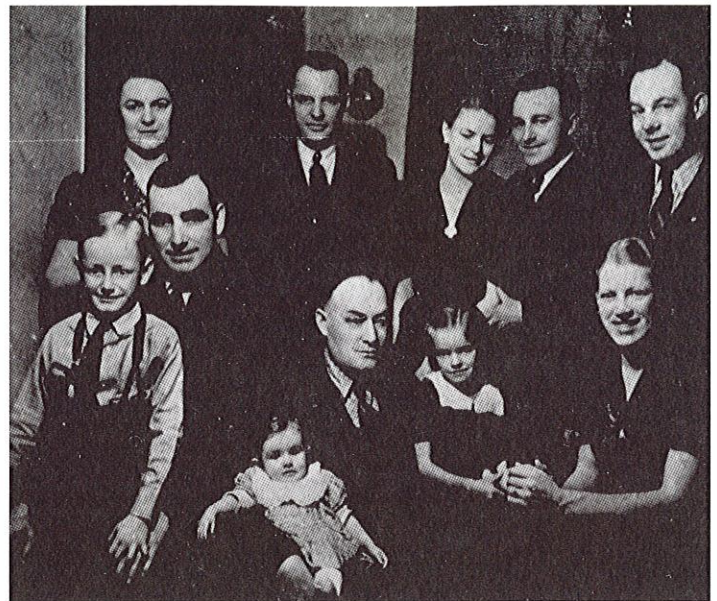
8 SAB, Eliason Papers, "Biography of a Swedish Emmigrant" (sic), typescript, 16-21.

9 Ibid., 18. When the Saskatchewan Farmer-Labour party suffered a disappointing defeat in the 1934 provincial election, Eliason consoled party leader, M.J. Coldwell, with this advice: I experienced a similar defeat twenty- five years ago. It

Eliason's American experiences led him to conclude that the producers of wealth, the labourers and the farmers, should unite to build a new society based on cooperation.¹⁰ He forever remained true to that populist principle.

In 1910 the Eliason family left Minnesota and moved to Wynyard, Saskatchewan. They travelled northward by train through Winnipeg and Yorkton, before continuing on to Wynyard.¹¹ Here Eliason found employment as a carpenter, which was his main occupation for the next twenty years. The family did well in Saskatchewan. By 1921 there were nine children, six of whom were born in Wynyard. They built a new house; they kept cows and chickens; they were involved in the community. But then personal tragedy struck. Eliason's wife died suddenly, and he was left with the responsibility of providing for a large family.¹²

Eliason became involved in politics shortly after his arrival in Saskatchewan. He met a farmer from Wisconsin who subscribed to *Appeal to Reason*, the American socialist paper published in Girard, Kansas. Soon he was helping organize a few fledgling units of the Socialist party of Canada in the Wynyard area. A member of one unit gave him a copy of the *Grain Growers' Guide* and told him that the grain growers practiced socialism, but in Saskatchewan it was called cooperation.¹³ Eliason became deeply involved in the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association (SGGA). He served as the secretary of the Wynyard local of the organization for twenty years. "The Grain Growers



Frank Eliason, his children and grand-children
SAB R-A10419

had a slogan," he wrote, "'Equal rights to all, special privileges to none' that sounded good to me and my socialism became cooperation or socialism applied."¹⁴ Eliason adopted the cooperative ideology of the farm movement. He supported the organization of the wheat pool. He also was an active participant in the Progressive party and learned some valuable lessons about practical politics that he later attempted to apply to the CCF.¹⁵ By the 1920s Eliason's experiences in Minnesota and Saskatchewan had formed a political and economic outlook that never wavered in the future. Words such as cooperative, agrarian, egalitarian and progressive best describe it.

In 1929 Eliason moved to Saskatoon where he spent most of the rest of his life. The Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association and the Farmers' Union of Canada had amalgamated in 1926 to form a single organization, the United Farmers of Canada, Saskatchewan Section (UFC). There was considerable division within the new body, and in 1929 a new executive, headed by George Williams, assumed

is heartbreaking, but we must learn from experience, and we must not give up this fight. SAB, CCF Papers, Subject Files, 1931-1952, Eliason to M.J. Coldwell, June 21, 1934, p. 4066. The earlier disappointment might well have been the relatively small number of votes Eugene Debs received in the 1908 presidential election after his famous 'Red Special' campaign. Debs spoke to six thousand people in St. Paul, Minnesota.

¹⁰ SAB, Eliason Papers, "Biography of a Swedish Emmigrant" (sic), typescript, 18.

¹¹ Ibid., 26-28. During the trip one of their daughters became ill with the measles. When they reached Yorkton, they stayed for two days and two nights at the Balmoral Hotel, owned by Harry Bronfman, and were only charged eight dollars. Eliason could never join in any future condemnation of Bronfman. He wrote: "We were hungry and he fed us, tired and cold and he gave us shelter - God bless him.... He made millions, but his heart was warm, he was sympathetic toward those who were in need."

¹² Ibid., 28-31.

¹³ Ibid., 29.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Eliason believed that the Progressive party failed because of its lack of political organization. In his view the Progressives had ideas and could give speeches but couldn't or wouldn't organize a poll. In the 1930s he warned CCF supporters that some "seem to feel that it is a lot easier to stay at home and read about the establishment of the Cooperative Commonwealth than to go out and take off their coats and fight for it." SAB, CCF Papers, Subject Files, 1931-1952, Eliason-Williams Correspondence, Eliason to George Williams, March 31, 1932, p.11929.

control midst bitter controversy.¹⁶ Eliason became the new UFC provincial secretary at the head office in Saskatoon. He held this position until 1949 when the UFC was reorganized as the Saskatchewan Farmers' Union. Certainly he was the single most important individual in the history of the UFC.

Eliason assumed his position at the UFC central office at a most inauspicious time. The Great Depression was just beginning, and soon the internal strife within the farm organization was overshadowed by greater problems. Commodity prices plunged, and drought devastated the wheat fields of the Great Plains. The UFC suffered accordingly. Eliason noted that "if our members had to decide whether to pay their dues or buy food, they bought food, and the membership dues were left in arrears."¹⁷ He was forced to run the organization almost single-handedly: "financial resources made it impossible to hold regular meetings of directors, therefore I had to use my own judgement."¹⁸ He corresponded with UFC locals urging them to carry on and prepared briefs for presentation to governments. A used clothing depot was set up in the Saskatoon office in response to desperate appeals for help from rural areas, and eventually sixty tons of clothing was distributed.¹⁹ In 1933 Eliason and Premier J.T.M. Anderson were at the centre of a bitter exchange that was given extensive coverage in the press. Anderson publicly assured people that despite the hard times no one in the province was starving. Eliason had received a letter from a UFC member in the Hafford district,

stating that a local girl had died from a lack of food. Using this as evidence, he challenged the premier's assertion.²⁰ Then Dr. A.O. Rose, Superintendent of the Hafford General Hospital, informed Eliason by letter that though the girl's death certificate identified typhoid fever as the cause of death, the truth was that the family was so malnourished that it was "just as true to say that this child died of starvation."²¹ Dr. Rose's letter was published in the press supporting Eliason's contention and causing the Anderson government a major embarrassment.²²

The UFC had long debated whether to take direct political action. Initially the consensus was that it should not, but, in 1931, as the economic crisis deepened, delegates at the annual provincial convention voted to enter politics.²³ Many of the details on how to proceed were left to Eliason. From the UFC central office, he replied to requests for information and coordinated speakers and meetings. Progress was slow, but by the spring of 1932, he could report that a skeleton organization existed in almost every constituency and that several were reasonably well organized.²⁴ Once the decision was made to enter politics it was assumed that there would be some cooperation with labour. Eliason played a major role in initiating contacts and formalizing them. In 1931 while in Regina on UFC business, he invited M.J. Coldwell, the leader of the Regina Independent Labour party (ILP), to his room in the Champlain Hotel for discussions. "Within an hour Mr. Coldwell and 8 of his associates appeared," Eliason recalled. "We compared the Economic Policy approved by the UFC Convention with the Policy of the Independent

16 F. Steininger, "George H. Williams: Agrarian Socialist" (MA thesis, University of Regina, 1976), 33-41.

17 SAB, Eliason Papers, "Biography of a Swedish Emmigrant"(sic). This is from the handwritten part of the document. This section never appeared in the typescript. The page is numbered page 39. Spelling and grammar errors are more common here than in the typescript, no doubt reflecting, not surprisingly, that Eliason never entirely mastered the intricacies of the English language. His correspondence in the UFC and CCF letters does not contain similar errors. He clearly had the help of very capable secretaries. Nevertheless, the hundreds of letters Eliason wrote on behalf of the UFC and the CCF and his general use of English were an amazing feat, considering he knew no English when he came from Sweden and received no formal instruction in his new language. Apparently he spoke English with a Swedish accent. See Jim Wright, *The Louise Lucas Story* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1965), 81.

18 SAB, Eliason Papers, "Biography of a Swedish Emmigrant" (sic), handwritten, 44.

19 Ibid., 44-50.

20 *Leader-Post* (Regina), April 27, 1933, p.8. *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, April 4, 1933, p.4. Eliason also referred to reports in the *Star-Phoenix* that some babies in Saskatchewan were learning to walk without shoes and that mothers were making moccasins for them out of old, worn-out gloves. SAB, CCF Papers, Subject Files, 1931-1952, Eliason to M.J. Coldwell, March 23, 1933, p.3191.

21 SAB, UFC Papers, Political-Press Clippings, 1933-34, Dr. A.O. Rose to Eliason, April 24, 1933. Also see Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2005), 297.

22 *Leader-Post*, April 27, 1933, p.1.

23 George Hoffman, "The Entry of the United Farmers of Canada, Saskatchewan Section Into Politics: A Reassessment," *Saskatchewan History*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1977): 99-109.

24 SAB, CCF Papers, Subject Files, 1931-1952, Eliason - Williams Correspondence, 1931-1934, Eliason to George Williams, April 7, 1932, p.11964.

Labour party and agreed that in Principle the Political and Economic aims of the two groups were almost identical.”²⁵ Soon, as well, Eliason was active within the Saskatoon branch of the ILP.²⁶

In 1932 it was decided that the UFC and ILP would hold their respective conventions and then meet jointly on the final day. At that meeting, held at the end of July, 1932 in Saskatoon, the Farmer-Labour party, which after the 1934 provincial election became the Saskatchewan CCF, was formed. Eliason, as UFC secretary and then as secretary of the political directive board of the new party, played a central role in these events. He wrote: “This was one of finest conventions that I have ever attended. There was evidence of a desire to unite for the common good. The delegates had left the Old Political Parties behind them and were proceeding forward.”²⁷

The national CCF was launched at a conference in Calgary in August 1932 and at a convention in Regina in July 1933. Eliason played an important role in regard to both. In 1932 he wrote to farm, labour and progressive leaders across the country, including the ‘Ginger Group,’ the radical remnant of Labour and Progressive members in the House of Commons, inviting them to a meeting in Saskatoon in April. It was to be a national meeting at which the “establishment of a new social order would be discussed.”²⁸ Apparently the various groups he contacted were agreeable to such a conference. However, J.S. Woodsworth soon informed Eliason that the MPs unfortunately could not attend because of an unexpectedly short parliamentary recess over Easter.²⁹

25 SAB, Eliason Papers, “Biography of a Swedish Immigrant” (sic), handwritten, 42. This was the first time Eliason and Coldwell met and was the beginning of a long association.

26 UFC Papers, Correspondence with the Federal Government, J.S. Woodsworth, 1930-1935, Eliason to J.S. Woodsworth, January 4, 1932.

27 SAB, Eliason Papers, “Biography of a Swedish Immigrant” (sic), handwritten, 43. Eliason was now the main administrative officer of both the new party and the UFC: same office, same staff, no money.

28 SAB, UFC Papers, National Conference File, 1932.

29 SAB, Eliason Papers, “Biography of a Swedish Immigrant” (sic), handwritten, 44. There is some disagreement about the background to the Calgary conference. The most common account is that its origin was May 26, 1932 in the parliamentary office of labour Member of Parliament, William Irvine, at a meeting attended by Irvine, J.S. Woodsworth and Alberta UFA MPs. See Michiel Horn, *The League for Social Reconstruction: Intellectual*

As a result the national meeting was held instead in Calgary at the beginning of August.

The Calgary conference, at which the national CCF was formed, began on August 1, 1932, immediately after the founding convention of the Farmer-Labour party in Saskatoon. Saskatchewan delegates travelled directly from Saskatoon to Calgary. Eliason was one of the representatives, and he went fully prepared. He wrote:

Having had some experience with Conventions, I thought that perhaps very little if any preparatory work had been done for the Calgary meeting, and I therefore prepared a draft agenda, a Draft for a national Constitution and a draft for a Federal Policy based upon Resolutions passed by our Saskatoon convention. This involved working with one stenographer until 2 A.M., and we left for Calgary at 5 A.M.³⁰

He produced a fourteen -point program that he carried in his pocket to Calgary³¹. It was presented to the conference and formed the basis of the eight point provisional platform for the new CCF.³²

Origins of the Democratic Left in Canada 1930-1942 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 37. However, Anthony Mardiros, William Irvine’s biographer, notes that the suggestion for the Calgary meeting came from the UFA, a few months before the meeting in Irvine’s office. Anthony Mardiros, *William Irvine: The Life of a Prairie Radical* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1979), 181-82. But as indicated above, it also can be argued that the impetus for such a conference came from Eliason and the UFC. This is what S.M. Lipset contended. Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism*, 114.

30 SAB, Eliason Papers, “Biography of a Swedish Immigrant” (sic), handwritten, 44-45.

31 Ibid., 45. Ninety dollars was collected in Saskatoon to pay the expenses of nine delegates who took two cars to Calgary. One car arrived at its destination without brakes, and the other, in which Eliason was riding, was involved in a serious accident near Beiseker, fifty kilometres from Calgary. He was able to proceed to Calgary in another car, but others, including George Williams, remained under doctor’s care for a day in a Beiseker hotel room. See *ibid.* Also see Wright, *Louise Lucas Story*, 127. Wright’s details of these events differ slightly from Eliason’s account.

32 Eliason’s fourteen points were reduced to eight by eliminating some of the specific proposals. For example, “the development of Churchill, Manitoba as a seaport” was dropped. Walter Young, *The Anatomy of a Party: the National CCF, 1932-1961* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 42.

The following summer the first national CCF convention was held in Regina. Eliason was one of a large Saskatchewan delegation in attendance. He reported to the gathering on behalf of the Saskatchewan Farmer-Labour party³³. A detailed program, the Regina Manifesto, was adopted by the convention; after all clauses of the document were approved, Eliason was the delegate who moved the motion that it be adopted as a whole.³⁴ The Regina Manifesto was largely based on a draft written by Frank Underhill, a University of Toronto historian and a member of the League for Social Reconstruction, a left-wing think tank. The original version was modified somewhat by the delegates in Regina.³⁵ The final document was more comprehensive, certainly contained more words and was more eloquent than the Calgary program. However, parts of their content and certainly their spirit were similar. The Manifesto concluded with the famous ringing condemnation of capitalism, words future CCF leader, M.J. Coldwell would describe as "a millstone around our neck"³⁶ Constitution scholar and LSR member, Frank Scott, later admitted that the Calgary program would have been a more effective political document than the Manifesto.³⁷ Frank Eliason had largely composed the former, hurriedly working through the night with a stenographer in a Saskatoon office; the latter was the work of Professor Underhill and his colleagues.

The first challenge for the Saskatchewan Farmer-Labour party was to prepare for an upcoming provincial election. The period from 1932 to 1934 was filled with frantic activity, and Eliason from his office in Saskatoon was at the centre of it. He urged Farmer-Labour supporters to organize their ridings and dealt with local constituency problems. He coordinated the requests for speakers, as M.J. Coldwell, George Williams, Louise Lucas, Clarence Fines and others crossed the province addressing

meetings in villages and rural schools. At one point he reported that pamphlets were now available in English, German, French and Ukrainian but that Russian language pamphlets were still needed.³⁸ Finances were a constant problem, and some times Eliason paid the postage out of his own pocket so that literature could be mailed to constituencies. A year before the 1934 election he reported that the party's cash at hand and bank balance totalled \$17.49.³⁹ "You may rest assured that I have my mind on every constituency in the province," he wrote party leader, M.J. Coldwell, "but working as I am without money I sometimes find it difficult.... I plan my work at night.... All in all I am having a very interesting time."⁴⁰ Louise Lucas, one of the party's most popular speakers, stated: "Mr Eliason works like a horse."⁴¹ On one occasion he explained why he was willing to persist despite the personal sacrifice: "Most of us are reaching the age where we need not worry about the outcome as far as we are concerned, but personally I have eight children and most of the officials and leaders of this movement are in the same position.... So to make a long story short we are fighting in reality for the next generation."⁴² Certainly no one was more important to the life of the Farmer-Labour party during its first two years of existence than Frank Eliason.

Farmer-Labour leaders were disappointed with the results of the 1934 election. Expectations had been high, but after an exhausting campaign only five Farmer-Labour candidates were elected.⁴³ Initially it appeared that Eliason would carry on; indeed he

33 W. G. Godfrey, "The 1933 Regina Convention of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation" (MA thesis, University of Waterloo, 1965), 37.

34 Ibid., 51-52.

35 Michiel Horn, "Frank Underhill's Early Drafts of the Regina Manifesto, 1933," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 54, no. 4 (December 1973): 393-418.

36 Quoted in Young, *Anatomy of a Party*, 44n.

37 Michiel Horn, "The LSR, the CCF and the Regina Manifesto," in *Building the Cooperative Commonwealth: Essays on the Democratic Socialist Tradition in Canada*, ed., J.W. Brennan (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1984): 36.

38 SAB, CCP Papers, Subject Files, 1931-1952, Eliason to M.J. Coldwell, November 24, 1932, p.3130. SAB, CCF Papers, Minute Book of the Farmer-Labour Group, 1932-35, June 4 and 5, 1932, p.1.

39 SAB, Eliason Papers, "Biography of a Swedish Emmigrant" (sic), handwritten, 46. SAB, UFC Papers, Minutes and Reports, Farmer-Labour Group, 1932-1934. In 1934 Eliason was owed \$2300 in unpaid salary by the party. This was written off because there were no assets. The amount was, he later noted, a "part of my contribution to the CCF movement in Saskatchewan." SAB, Eliason Papers, "Biography of a Swedish Emmigrant" (sic), 46.

40 SAB, CCF Papers, Subject Files, 1931-1952, Eliason to M.J. Coldwell, November 24, 1932, p. 3132.

41 Quoted in Wright, *Louise Lucas Story*, 114.

42 SAB, CCF Papers, Subject files, 1931-1952, Eliason to M.J. Coldwell, June 2, 1933, pp. 3223-24.

43 George Hoffman, "The 1934 Saskatchewan Provincial Election Campaign," *Saskatchewan History*, vol. 36, no. 2 (1983): 41-57.

seemed less discouraged than most, and two days after the election sent a long letter of encouragement to M.J. Coldwell.⁴⁴ The fight, it appeared, was just beginning. But within six months Eliason had resigned as party secretary. His role as an active CCF leader ended and was never resumed. He gave two reasons for his resignation: the lack of financial support to carry on the central office efficiently and the decision of the UFC executive to withdraw from direct involvement in politics and to attempt to revitalize the farm organization on a less partisan basis.⁴⁵ Eliason often had warned that the movement could not survive unless people were prepared to support it financially. As well, he was intensely loyal to the UFC and believed that a strong farm organization was vital. However, there was a more important underlying factor related to the resignation. Following the 1934 election, the Saskatchewan CCF became bitterly divided into two camps, one aligned with M.J. Coldwell, the other with George Williams. Eliason sided with Coldwell, who entered federal politics and eventually resigned the leadership. Williams, one of the five successful Farmer-Labour candidates, became provincial leader; when he assumed control, party headquarters was moved to Regina. For Eliason the split was both personal and ideological. Bitter accusations and counter accusations between Williams and him followed. In one case, Williams wrote to the UFC president, George Bickerton, asking for a written copy of a statement Eliason apparently had made "in order that I made ascertain... what action I shall take legally or otherwise."⁴⁶

44 SAB, CCF Papers, Subject Files, 1931-1952, Eliason to M.J. Coldwell, June 21, 1934, pp. 4064-65.

45 SAB, CCF Papers, Minutes of Meeting of the Political Directive board of the CCF, Saskatoon, December 8, 1934, p. 23190. Eliason explained his decision in a letter directed to CCF candidates and campaign managers who were preparing for the upcoming federal election. SAB, CCF Papers, Eliason to Federal Campaign Managers and Candidates, December 11, 1934, p. 36.

46 SAB, UFC Papers, CCF Members, 1934-37, George Williams to George Bickerton, July 29, 1935. Also see the following letters, all from the SAB, CCF Papers: George Williams to J.F. Herman, April 10, 1935, p. 28062; Eliason to George Williams, December, 1935, pp. 23274-76; George Williams to Myron Feeley, January 29, 1937, p. 28135. The last letter accused Eliason and the UFC of being engaged in a campaign against the CCF. The fullest account of the Eliason-Williams split, told from the perspective of Williams, is Steininger, "George H. Williams: Agrarian Socialist," ch. V. Divisions plagued the Saskatchewan CCF during Williams' leadership and continued into the 1940s. For more on the Coldwell-Williams factions, see Thomas H. McLeod and Ian McLeod, *Tommy Douglas: The Road to Jerusalem* (Edmonton:



Frank Eliason with the Freedom Cross of Norway, awarded for his aid work to the nation.

SAB R-A25153

Eliason remained as UFC secretary until 1949. It was a constant struggle to keep the UFC afloat, and he laboured valiantly during difficult times. He also was involved in various other activities. Like many western farm leaders, he believed in the development of Churchill as a seaport, and in 1944 he became the secretary of the Hudson Bay Route Association, a position he held until his death.⁴⁷ In 1940 after Russia invaded Finland, he organized a group of Saskatchewan citizens to aid Finnish victims of the war. When Norway was invaded by Nazi Germany later that spring, his committee extended its work, and a campaign was launched to aid Norwegians.⁴⁸ In 1945 and 1946 he was a member of the Royal Commission on Forestry established by Joe Phelps, then Minister of Natural Resources in the first Douglas

Hurtig Publishers, 1987), 55 and 100-05.

47 *Leader-Post*, March 23, 1956, p.2. Eliason included the development of Churchill as one of the fourteen points in the document he prepared for the Calgary conference in 1932.

48 SAB, "Tribute to Saskatchewan Farm Leaders, Frank Eliason," Saskatchewan Agricultural Hall of Fame, Saskatoon, 1995. In 1946 King Haakon of Norway awarded Eliason the Freedom Cross of Norway in recognition of his services.

government. Phelps was a controversial left wing figure in the cabinet and was close to Eliason. Both believed in the need for a strong farm organization. In later interviews, Phelps credited Eliason for influencing him to enter politics and added "Frank Eliason was like a second Dad to me."⁴⁹

The last years of Eliason's life were spent in retirement in Saskatoon. The old commitment remained (as Joe Phelps put it in a statement to the press when Eliason died: "he never counted the cost and never admitted defeat"),⁵⁰ but it was mixed with nostalgia, as he looked back on his career. He was proud of the accomplishments of the Douglas government. In 1952 he attended the laying of the cornerstone for the new university hospital in Saskatoon. Toby Nollet, Minister of Agriculture, as a part of the ceremonies, spoke of the need to build a cooperative society. Eliason agreed and noted proudly: "No Old Party Cabinet Minister would ever speak along them (sic) lines and I am glad that I had the privilege of helping to place the Cornerstone of the New Order."⁵¹ In 1953 he presented a brief to the provincial Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life. Many of the presentations emphasized matters like roads and rural electrification, but Eliason was more concerned with the bigger picture and told the commission that he wanted "to upset the entire financial racket."⁵² In the last years of his life he corresponded with political associates from the past, many of them Progressives from the 1920s, including William Irvine, M.N. Campbell, William Ivens, George Bevington, Henry Spencer and M.J. Coldwell.⁵³ Eliason died March 22,

1956 in Saskatoon. The following telegram arrived from the old wheat pool prophet, Aaron Sapiro, living in Los Angeles: "One by one the old oaks fall, their shade and comfort disappear, but the acorns sprout and great memories take form. Frank Eliason, you served the province nobly, when only a few dared to speak and lead."⁵⁴

In retrospect, what is the significance of Frank Eliason's life and ideas? What do they tell us about agrarian radicalism and the CCF? In particular, how does Eliason's career help explain the nature of the party in Saskatchewan? Three points seem especially instructive: his continuing American perspective, his advocacy of monetary reform and his anti-communism.

Eliason's radicalism was indigenous to the North American mid-west, to the Great Plains region and its fringes. He was a rather Americanized Scandinavian, whose experiences in Minnesota and then Saskatchewan during the first twenty years of the century set the stage for thirty years of political activism. On occasion he harshly criticized the United States, referring to it sarcastically as the "so-called land of the free."⁵⁵ But his outlook remained firmly anchored in the region of the continent where he spent most of his life. In the early 1930s, as the UFC entered politics and the CCF emerged, Eliason was greatly encouraged by the rising tide of agrarian radicalism which engulfed the western farm states.⁵⁶ Like American farm radicals, he was sceptical of the early Roosevelt New Deal and compared its moderate tone to Liberal and Conservative tactics in Canada. He encouraged M.J. Coldwell not to overlook the programs of American politicians and to follow their activities closely.⁵⁷ Eliason saw parallels between the

49 SAB, Interviews with Joe Phelps conducted by Lloyd Rodwell, December 1, 1970 and by Jean Larmour June 1, 1982. Both interviews are in typescript. I would like to thank Eileen Forrieter, who has written an MA thesis on Phelps, for information on Eliason's involvement on the royal commission.

50 *Western Producer*, March 29, 1956.

51 SAB, Eliason Papers, Eliason to M. Lindfors, September 22, 1952. Eliason mentioned that he had heard the cornerstone had been under police guard for three weeks before it was laid after a rumour that it might be stolen by jealous political opponents because Tommy Douglas' name was engraved on it.

52 Ibid., Eliason to William Irvine, June 24, 1953. In this letter to Irvine he urged him to send John Evans, former Progressive MP, a card on his upcoming 86th birthday. "It would make him very happy I am sure."

53 Ibid., Eliason to M.N. Campbell, November 19, 1952; William Ivens to Eliason, June 8 and 13, 1953; Eliason to George Bevington, July 16, 1953; Henry Spencer to Eliason, n.d. (1952?); M.J. Coldwell to Eliason, May 28, 1953. Spencer, living

in Vancouver, related news of the famous concert attended by over 30,000 people at the peace arch on the U.S.-Canadian border, near Blaine, Washington, given by Paul Robeson, the left wing African American folk singer who was refused entry into Canada.

54 *Commonwealth*, April 16, 1953.

55 SAB, Eliason Papers, "Biography of a Swedish Emmigrant" (sic), typescript, 29. Such comments reflected his Minnesota experiences and possibly a left wing reaction to the political climate of the Cold War in the United States during the 1950s when the autobiography was written.

56 A moving account of the revolt in the American heartland can be found in T.H. Watkins, *The Hungry Years: A Narrative History of the Great Depression in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company), 336-485.

57 SAB, CCF Papers, Subject Files, 1931-1952, Eliason

Canadian and American situations and believed that what was occurring in Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota and elsewhere was similar to the movement he was a part of in Saskatchewan. And from within the Farmer-Labour party, he actively encouraged contacts.

In 1932 the Farmers Holiday Association, with Milo Reno as its president, was organized in Iowa. Its aim was to restore farmers' purchasing power by withholding produce from the market, in other words a farm strike or 'holiday,' in order to drive up prices. Reno was colourful, militant and evangelical in the best Populist tradition. He tirelessly defended farmers and called for a united national effort to save the farms and homes built by "the sweat, the toil, the sacrifice of those who occupy them."⁵⁸ Not surprisingly, Frank Eliason agreed. He wrote to the headquarters of the Farmers Holiday Association in Des Moines, Iowa and "outlined the situation in Canada and advised them of the steps which we were taking to bring about the emancipation of the common people."⁵⁹ He enclosed a copy of the Saskatchewan Farmer-Labour party's economic program and other party literature and soon received a reply from Milo Reno. He then suggested that a delegation be sent to Des Moines to attend the Farmers Holiday Association 1933 convention.⁶⁰ Apparently three or four representatives, including Eliason, travelled to the United States in early May.⁶¹ Coldwell's parting advice was to inform the Americans that "We are not interested in a farmers' strike but we are interested in an American CCF...."⁶²

Plans were made to meet with Floyd Olson, Farmer-Labour Governor of Minnesota, as a part of the trip to the United States. Floyd Bjerstjerne Olson must have seemed a particularly compatible individual to Eliason. He was a Minnesota Scandinavian, a former Wobbly and a child of the Non-Partisan League, the radical agrarian movement that had swept the northern American wheat belt during the World War I era. He

was elected governor in 1930, and under his leadership the Minnesota Farmer-Labour party came to dominate state politics. Olson talked of abolishing the profit system and saw government ownership as providing a transition to the establishment of a cooperative commonwealth.⁶³ "I will endeavour to persuade Governor Olson of Minnesota to take the lead in calling a C.C.F Convention in the States," Eliason noted before he left Saskatchewan.⁶⁴

Another American governor also attracted Eliason's attention. Like Saskatchewan, the wheat economy of North Dakota was devastated by depression and drought. A revived Non-Partisan League captured the Republican party, resulting in the election of William 'Wild Bill' Langer as governor. Langer believed that desperate times required radical action. During his successful 1932 gubernatorial campaign, he told farmers: "Shoot the banker if he comes on your land. Treat him like a chicken thief."⁶⁵ While governor, in an attempt to raise wheat prices, he implemented an illegal and short-lived, but very popular, embargo on the shipment of wheat from the state. North Dakotans remained loyal to 'Wild Bill' through thick and thin. A relief administrator in the state said that even though Langer was a convicted felon and was described privately by the press as a double-crossing son-of-a-bitch, voters saw him as "God's own gift to the farmer, the labourer, and all the underprivileged and unfortunates of North Dakota."⁶⁶ As the 1934

63 For an interesting portrait of Olson see Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Politics of Upheaval* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960), 98-104. The phrase 'co-operative commonwealth' dated from the 1880s and had been coined by Henry Demarest Lloyd, an American populist. J.H. Thompson, *Forging the Prairie West* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998), 130.

64 SAB, CCF Papers, Subject Files, 1931-1952, Eliason to M.J. Coldwell, April 22, 1933, p. 3206.

65 Catherine McNicol Stock, *Main Street in Crisis: The Great Depression and the Old Middle Class on the Northern Plains* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 140. Journalist, Lorenda Hickok, travelled through parts of the United States and wrote confidential reports on depression conditions for Harry Hopkins who headed the Federal Emergency Relief Agency. In 1933 she was in North Dakota. Her report, some of it from communities close to the Saskatchewan border, is a remarkable document on the human tragedy on the Great Plains in the 1930s. Richard Lowitt and Maurice Beasley, eds., *One Third of a Nation: Lorena Hickok Reports on the Great Depression* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 55-76.

66 Quoted in D. Jerome Tweton, "The Politics of Chaos: North Dakota in the 1930s," *Journal of the West*, vol. 41, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 31. In 1934 Langer was charged with misappropriation of

to M.J. Coldwell, May 16, 1933, pp. 3210-11.

58 Watkins, *Hungry Years*, 348.

59 SAB, CCF Papers, Subject Files, 1931-1952, Eliason to M.J. Coldwell, March 14, 1933, p. 3185.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid., Eliason to M.J. Coldwell, April 22, 1933, p. 3206. It is unclear who made up the delegation. Eliason hoped that both Coldwell and George Williams would go to Des Moines, but neither apparently did. Williams did not go because of seeding.

62 Ibid., M.J. Coldwell to Eliason, April 26, 1933, p. 3207.

provincial election approached, Eliason wanted to bring Langer to Saskatchewan to address meetings. He drew up a list of possible locations and contacted campaign managers in constituencies in the southern part of the province with large numbers of former Americans. He was convinced that there would be no objection to an American, recalling that Aaron Sapiro had been accepted when he came to Saskatchewan to help organize the wheat pool in the 1920s.⁶⁷ Coldwell, however, was less certain: "I am rather doubtful as to the wisdom of bringing him in before the election since it might lend color to the propaganda which has died down that in some way or the other we are connected with the Non-Partisan League.... Think this over before placing the governor at any Saskatchewan points."⁶⁸ Langer did not come. It was a case of a leading North Dakota politician being too radical for the political climate in Saskatchewan.

As well, Frank Eliason was a fervent monetary reformer. He was suspicious of the 'moneyed interests' and believed that the 'financial racket' had to be broken. These ideas were grounded in American Populism, in what one historian described as "the greenback critique of American finance capitalism."⁶⁹ Eliason felt that a fundamental issue had to be addressed if the Farmer-Labour party won power in Saskatchewan. In short, what system would be adopted if the financial interests boycotted the province after electoral victory? "I am of the opinion," he wrote to George Williams, "that we must work out a very definite plan...which could be put into

operation should we obtain control provincially."⁷⁰ To the end of his life Eliason continued to believe that "it is the manner in which the money is put into circulation that is effecting (sic) society adversely," and "there must be sufficient money in circulation to enable us to purchase the goods we produce."⁷¹

Much of the discussion of monetary reform and the Saskatchewan CCF has centred on the party's relationship to the economic theory of social credit and its political manifestation in Canada, the Social Credit party. Two points in particular have been emphasized. First, between 1935 and 1940, especially during the 1935 federal and 1938 provincial elections, various cooperative arrangements were reached with Social Creditors in order to present a united reform front and avoid splitting the third party vote. Some in the CCF, however, saw this as a betrayal of socialist principles, and a great debate ensued.⁷² The most famous example involved Tommy Douglas and the CCF-Social Credit relationship in the Weyburn constituency in the 1935 federal election.⁷³ Secondly, any sympathy for social credit ideas within the CCF has been interpreted as watering down socialism and evidence that the radical nature of the party has been exaggerated. Thus, the argument goes, those who emphasized banking and currency questions were at heart conservatives, even possibly not unlike William Aberhart and Ernest Manning. Or, others suggested that in some cases, when CCF leaders spoke of monetary reform, they simply were favouring the socialization of finance and were not advocating social credit principles.⁷⁴

Generally Frank Eliason would not have agreed with the above arguments. He did not look upon

funds and removed from office by the state supreme court. Later he was exonerated and re-elected governor. From 1941 until his death in 1959, he served in the United States senate in Washington.

67 SAB, CCF Papers, Subject Files, 1931-1952, Eliason to M.J. Coldwell, May 1, 1934, p. 4043. This was at the time that Langer's legal problems were mounting.

68 Ibid., M.J. Coldwell to Eliason, May 2, 1934, p. 4045. This refers to the Non-Partisan League's brief entry into Saskatchewan from the United States during the First World War. League officials were denounced as "Reds" and "Bolsheviks" and a "foreign importation." See Paul Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada*, 1948 (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1997), 57-76. Later opponents of the CCF sometimes attempted to discredit it by linking it to the League. There, indeed, were some links.

69 Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 13. Goodwyn emphasizes that the importance of financial questions (currency control, interest rates, relations of creditors and debtors, the very definition of money) cannot be exaggerated in understanding populist thought.

70 SAB, CCF Papers, Subject Files, 1931-1952, Eliason-Williams Correspondence, Eliason to George Williams, April 25, 1932, p. 11968. He enclosed a copy of the platform of the veteran monetary reformer, Jacob Coxey, who was the American Farmer-Labour party presidential candidate in 1932. Among American Populists, Coxey was a legendary figure who had led a band of jobless men, Coxey's army, in a march on Washington D.C. in 1894.

71 SAB, Eliason Papers, Eliason to Alister Stewart, December 14, 1953.

72 Steininger, "George H. Williams: Agrarian Socialist," chs. VII and VIII.

73 Ibid., 166-81. Also see McLeod and McLeod, *Tommy Douglas*, 60-66.

74 Steininger, "George H. Williams: Agrarian Socialist," 152 and Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought*, 173.

dialogue, or even cooperation, with Social Creditors as mere political opportunism. He would not have viewed social credit ideas as signs of moderation and betrayal of principle. Nor did he in any way sharply distinguish between his ideas on monetary reform and social credit. He had much in common with Henry Spencer and George Bevington, Alberta Progressives who emphasized monetary issues in the 1920s, and William Irvine, a father of the CCF, but also referred to in one historical account as the “father of Social Credit in Canada.”⁷⁵ Eliason would have applauded M.J. Coldwell’s 1933 speech in which the Farmer-Labour leader described the existing monetary and banking system as “the greatest racket on earth,” and “the principle(sic) cause of a depression in the midst of plenty.” “Bankers of the world,” he continued, “control the destiny of the human race and Sir Herbert Holt controls the destiny of Canada...”⁷⁶ Eliason believed that social credit analysis, especially that there must be sufficient money in circulation to enable people to purchase the goods they produce, was in line with CCF principles. To one Farmer-Labour supporter in 1934, he wrote that “we have no fault to find with the principle which the Douglasites advocate” and to another he explained: “With regard to the Douglas theory it is alright in theory because Major Douglas advocates that purchasing power be placed in the hands of the people to an amount which would enable them to produce all of the goods produced and this is what he calls social credit.”⁷⁷ In the 1950s, he lamented that the CCF had not placed greater emphasis on monetary reform and complained to M.J. Coldwell that the federal party was neglecting the issue: “Let us have a real overhaul of money distribution...We have the substance of this

in the Regina Manifesto, but it must be clarified.”⁷⁸ “Banking and monetary reform has (sic) has been sadly neglected since the 1920s,” he wrote to George Bevington. “Unless and until the monetary problems are solved I am sure that the people shall continue to stand still economically.”⁷⁹ Progressive legislation and building cooperatives were beneficial, but in doing that, as Eliason put it, “we are...only playing with marbles.”⁸⁰ He believed that before a cooperative commonwealth could be achieved the financial system had to be fundamentally altered. For Frank Eliason, as for American Populists, financial questions were central, not peripheral.

Eliason’s long-term interest in William ‘Coin’ Harvey is also interesting and significant. Harvey was an eccentric publicist whose books and pamphlets attacking the financial system and advocating ‘free silver’ were read by millions of Americans who were suffering during the depression of the 1890s and experiencing a contracted currency. His most famous pamphlet, *Coin’s Financial School*, published in 1894, was a wildly inaccurate analysis of the monetary system, filled with references to gold conspiracies. Nevertheless, it was effective propaganda and was read by millions. One American congressman said that it “is being sold on every railway train by newsboys and at every cigar store....It is being read by almost everyone.”⁸¹ More than a generation later, Jim Wright, an author with first-hand experience in the UFC, wrote: “Saskatchewan’s organized farmers, fearful of increasing debt and mortgage foreclosure, evolved their own prophetic amalgam...which included... W.M. ‘Coin’ Harvey, who...put forward a simple though far-out cure-all for economic ills.”⁸²

When the old monetary reformer died penniless in 1936, Eliason purchased most of his books from his widow in Arkansas for a hundred dollars and sold them through the UFC central office. In 1953 he donated the few that remained to the Saskatchewan archives with the “hope that someone some day

75 J.H. Thompson with Allen Seager, *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 238.

76 *Leader-Post*, January 17, 1933, p.8. No doubt such comments can also be interpreted as good politics. Jimmy Gardiner, who knew a thing or two about winning elections, reported to Mackenzie King that there were two ways to become popular in the west at present; “one was to hammer the banks, and the other was to hammer the Tories.” PAC, King Papers, Gardiner to Mackenzie King, October 5, 1932, p. 162615.

77 SAB, CCF Papers, Subject Files, 1931-1952, Secretary’s Office, Eliason to Wm. Olsen, February 10, 1934, p.25063. Later, Eliason said that he could not follow Douglas’ theory entirely because of its complexity but did accept the fundamental concept related to currency and people’s purchasing power. SAB, Eliason Papers, Eliason to Alister Stewart, December 14, 1953.

78 SAB, Eliason Papers, Eliason to M.J. Coldwell, November 19, 1952.

79 Ibid., Eliason to George Bevington, July 16, 1953.

80 Ibid., Eliason to William Irvine, June 24, 1953.

81 Goodwyn, *Populist Movement*, 245-46. Harvey spent the last years of his life in the Ozarks in Arkansas, where he was involved in a number of unsuccessful and unusual ventures. In 1932 he ran for president on the Liberty party ticket.

82 Wright, *Louise Lucas Story*, 62-63.

make good use of them.”⁸³ One of the books, entitled *Paul’s School of Statesmanship*, outlined a system of currency that Eliason was convinced “if adopted would save the present Civilization.” And he continued: “I am further convinced that if the C.C.F. would revise Harveys (sic) proposals so as to meet present world conditions they would sweep into Power at the next election.”⁸⁴

All of this no doubt was a part of what one historian called the ‘woollier plans’ associated with the early CCF.⁸⁵ However, ‘woollier’ is in the eye of the beholder. Eliason’s emphasis on financial questions was not simply ‘quack economics’ which should be quickly dismissed. Rather it reflected the reality of the crisis people faced and was a legitimate search for a solution. And it was a significant strand of thought within the Saskatchewan CCF. An editorial in the *Western Producer*, the province’s leading farm paper, not only argued that there was no contradiction between the socialism of the CCF and the Douglas plan of social credit but stated that the reason so many prominent members of the CCF were interested in monetary reform was because they were socialists.⁸⁶

Frank Eliason’s anti-communism is also significant for understanding the early Saskatchewan CCF. It was most clearly illustrated between 1932 and 1934 when he was at the centre of the daily operations of the Farmer-Labour party. Should a united front be formed with communist-affiliated groups, or should the CCF disassociate itself from Communists completely? How should the party react to cases where clearly support for cooperation with Communists existed within local constituency associations? Debate on such questions raged within the Saskatchewan CCF for the better part of a decade, in a manner not unlike the controversy over Social Credit.⁸⁷

In December 1930 the Farmers’ Unity League (FUL) was founded at a conference in Saskatoon.⁸⁸ The

initiative for this radical agrarian organization came from the headquarters of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) in Toronto. The FUL established a central office in Saskatoon and attempted to organize local units through out the province. Its purpose was to work inside and outside of existing farm organizations to encourage their disintegration and to move their rank and file members in a more radical direction. Inevitably this led to conflict with the UFC and the Farmer-Labour party. *The Furrow*, the FUL newspaper, described the 1932 UFC convention as “radicalism in word, and reaction in deed.”⁸⁹

Eliason led the counter attack. In 1932 he was at the centre of the controversy involving the FUL in the Elrose constituency. It appeared that members of the Farmer-Labour party there were prepared to nominate a joint candidate with the FUL to contest the next provincial election. In October a local constituency committee agreed to meet with League representatives to plan a united front. Eliason immediately contacted members of the Farmer-Labour committee and warned them of the dangers of lining up with the FUL⁹⁰. He sent each local party official a copy of extracts from the 1931 Communist party trials in Toronto, indicating the links between the FUL and the politburo of the CPC. He also wrote a special letter to members of the Farmer-Labour committee who had been appointed to meet with FUL officials. He pointed out that a Farmer-Labour candidate must fully support the party leader and must subscribe to the economic policies of the party.⁹¹ Eliason’s swift intervention effectively

ed., David Bercuson (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974): 78-87. David Monod, “The Agrarian Struggle: Rural Communism in Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1926-1935,” *Social History*, vol. 18, no. 35 (May 1985): 99-117. Also see George Hoffman, “The Saskatchewan Provincial Election of 1934: Its Political, Economic and Social Background” (MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, Regina Campus (1973), 154-65. The FUL dissolved in 1936 in accord with the popular front strategy adopted by the Communist party at the time.

89 *The Furrow*, March 1932 and January 1933.

90 SAB, CCF Papers, Subject Files, 1931-1952, Eliason to M.J. Coldwell, October 26, 1932, p. 3110.

91 Ibid., Eliason to Members of the Farmer-Labour Constituency Committee in the Elrose Provincial Constituency, October 26, 1932, 12958-61. One of the documents seized at Communist party headquarters in Toronto, after the arrest of the Communist leaders in 1931, was the party’s agrarian policy, clearly linking it to the FUL. Later, Tom Ewen, one of those who were brought to trial, testified that all farmers who were members of the Communist party went into the FUL and formed the leadership of the League. Hoffman, “The Saskatchewan Provincial Election of

83 SAB, Eliason Papers, “To Whom It May Concern,” Saskatoon, December, 1953.

84 Ibid., Eliason to Alister Stewart, December 14, 1953.

85 Young, *Anatomy of a Party*, 42.

86 *Western Producer*, April 19, 1934, p. 6.

87 Steininger, chs. VII, VII and IX. Peter Sinclair, “The Saskatchewan CCF and the Communist Party in the 1930s,” *Saskatchewan History*, vol. 36, no. 1 (Winter 1973): 1-10.

88 Ivan Avakumovic, “The Communist Party of Canada and the Prairie Farmer: The Interwar Years,” in *Western Perspectives I*,

blocked the nomination of a joint candidate, although the constituency remained a problem for Farmer-Labour leaders in the time ahead.

Eliason's opposition to the extreme left was unrelenting. In an article on the UFC page of the *Western Producer* he wrote that the tactics of the Farmers' Unity League include "misrepresentation, lack of faith and double dealing."⁹² He informed one Farmer-Labour supporter that Communist speakers in Saskatoon were advocating armed rebellion from public platforms, and he "wondered why these men are not arrested by the powers that be."⁹³ In 1933 he prevented Fred Fix, an outspoken Marxist and member of the Melville branch of the ILP, from speaking at Farmer-Labour meetings, after receiving reports that Fix had been advocating collectivization of farms. "The industrial socialist...will do us more harm than any other kind of speaker that I can think of," Eliason noted. No doubt he was relieved to hear when Fix withdrew from the Farmer-Labour party and left Melville for Alberta.⁹⁴ Eliason's direct involvement in politics ended in 1934, but his views did not change. As the reorganization of the UFC began in 1935, he expressed fears of the influence of the extreme left and even in 1947, as the UFC was winding up its operations, he warned of the danger of continuing communist influences within the farm movement.⁹⁵

Not surprisingly, the left bitterly criticized Eliason. He was a central figure in the CCF that Communists at the time denounced as social-fascist and Canada's third capitalist party. He was a favourite target of *The Furrow*; one editorial compared him to R.B. Bennett and added: "Mr. Eliason is welcomed to his alliance with capitalist lawyers and stool-pigeons."⁹⁶ In 1940 George Taylor from Saskatoon published an article in

the *Mid-West Clarion* critical of Eliason's opposition to the Soviet invasion of Finland, arguing that Finland was not a cooperative democracy like Eliason had said and that the Soviet armies were liberating Finns from reactionary rule.⁹⁷ Here apparently was the final proof that the UFC secretary was a traitor to the farmers and workers of the world.

Eliason's anti-communism was based on his experience with the FUL and other groups. He understood clearly what was at stake politically for the Farmer-Labour party. Thus in reference to cooperation with the FUL in the Elrose constituency he noted: "The Liberals and the Conservatives would, of course, like to see a union of our forces...They would then immediately tag us definitely with the Russian tag and it may mean the loss of many votes in the rest of the Province."⁹⁸ He not only felt that the Communist program was impractical but also dishonest. They were more concerned with the interests of international communism than with helping people who were in desperate need. "They cry out in support of the poor toiling farmer, he noted, "but when they are asked what should be done in a practical way...they are void of any practical suggestions."⁹⁹ Eliason believed that Communist-led demonstrations in Saskatoon in 1932 against inadequate city relief policies were intended only to provoke conflict with the police and garner publicity. The legitimate grievances of relief recipients were secondary; "this was not the way to help people who needed it," he wrote.¹⁰⁰ Eliason also disagreed philosophically with Communists on how a new social order could be achieved. He pointed out that they openly admitted that change in the economic structure could not be made by constitutional methods and that armed rebellion might be necessary. "That is the law of the jungle", Eliason argued, "and such

1934," 155-56.

92 *Western Producer*, December 15, 1932, p. 5.

93 SAB, CCF Papers, Subject Files, 1931-1952, Secretary's Office, Eliason to Mrs. J.L. Maedel, March 6, 1934, p. 24975.

94 Ibid., Subject Files, 1931-1952, Eliason-Williams Correspondence, Eliason to George Williams, March 16, 1933, p. 12071. Ibid., Subject Files, 1931-1952, Secretary's Office, R.E. Gaffney to Eliason, March 13, 1934, p. 24546.

95 SAB, UFC Papers, Correspondence-Miscellaneous, 1925-1950, Eliason to D.J. Christie, March 28, 1935. SAB, Eliason Papers, "Biography of a Swedish Immigrant" (sic), typescript, 72.

96 *The Furrow*, January 15, 1933, p. 2.

97 SAB, UFC Papers, Finland File, 1938-1940. Taylor adopted the Red Finn interpretation of the Winter War and referred to Finns from Canada who escaped poverty in Canada by moving to Soviet Karelia. For a different view, with a Saskatchewan context, see Larry Warwaruk, *Red Finns on the Coteau* (Outlook, SK.: Larry Warwaruk, 2004).

98 SAB, CCF Papers, Eliason to H. Greenwood, January 11, 1933, p. 24612.

99 SAB, UFC Papers, Correspondence, Miscellaneous, 1925-1950, Eliason to J.F. Hogg, April 4, 1935.

100 SAB, Eliason Papers, "Biography of a Swedish Immigrant," (sic), typescript, 58. For an account of the demonstrations see Don Kerr and Stan Hansen, *Saskatoon: The First Half-Century* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982), 299-301.

statements are an insult to our intelligence...we will and must match our wits against that of the capitalist group and if we cannot beat them at their own game then we deserve to be defeated."¹⁰¹

In the end Eliason viewed the extreme left as at best tangential and at worst antagonistic to the dominant radical agrarian culture of which he was a part. His opposition to communism was not unlike that found within the American populist tradition, where it was common. He never went as far as A.C. Townley, the socialist firebrand whose organizational genius brought the Non-Partisan League to power in North Dakota in 1915. Townley ended his career as a crusading anti-communist.¹⁰² But Eliason would have agreed entirely with Floyd Olson, Farmer-Labour Governor of Minnesota, who said that an opportunist was one who tries to do what can be done, while "communists wait for 'the day' and won't tell what they are going to do when it comes."¹⁰³

S.M Lipset noted in *Agrarian Socialism* that the CCF succeeded in Saskatchewan because there it reflected "the general values of the culture in which it had risen."¹⁰⁴ That was a most perceptive comment. In parts of the country, no doubt, the CCF was predominantly British, labour and urban. And those elements were also present in Saskatchewan. However, the Saskatchewan CCF was far more complex and diverse, reflecting the province's cultural history and the unique circumstances of the 1930s. Frank Eliason's life and ideas help to draw attention to aspects of this distinctiveness and to the considerable diversity within the movement. It must be emphasized that in Saskatchewan the CCF was born midst a devastated wheat economy that can only be compared to other areas on the Great Plains. It was agrarian and much more a product of the UFC than the ILP.

Election results in the 1930s clearly showed that it received most of its support in rural areas.¹⁰⁵ Eliason's career relates especially to this aspect of the early CCF and illustrates some of the disparate ideas that were a part of its appeal. The links to American agrarian radicalism seem especially significant because they have not commonly been acknowledged and their importance likely has been underestimated.¹⁰⁶ The unique success of the CCF in Saskatchewan was because it was so multifaceted. The CCF cut a wide swath in the province, and its roots went down deep.

105 During the 1930s the Saskatchewan CCF did not win a higher percentage of votes in cities than from farms, as one study suggests. See Wiseman, "Social Democrats on Social Democracy," 145. The party won five seats in the 1934 provincial election and ten in 1938; all were rural constituencies. A study of the 1934 election shows that the Farmer-Labour party did best among rural voters outside of the cities, towns and even small villages. See Table 8.4 in Hoffman, "The 1934 Provincial Election," 278.

106 From a present perspective, perhaps, one hesitates to look southward when attempting to explain the origins of Canadian socialism. But one should recall that North Dakota has been described convincingly, in a classic account, as the most consistently radical American state. Michael Paul Rogin, *The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Specter* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1967). In 1912, for example, Eugene Debs, the Socialist candidate for president, carried Burke County that borders on Saskatchewan. See William C. Pratt, "Rethinking the Farm Revolt of the 1930s," *Great Plains Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 133. In 1919 the *Grand Forks Herald* described the state as "the socialistic laboratory of the country." Quoted in Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 343. Chapter 16 of Robinson's excellent history of the state is entitled "A Socialistic State in the First World War." The historic strength of agrarian radicalism in Sheridan County, Montana is shown in two articles: Charles Vindex, "Radical Rule in Montana," in *Americans View Their Dust Bowl Experience*, eds., John R. Wunder, Frances W. Kaye and Vernon Carstensen (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1999): 281-302 and Gerald Zahavi, "'Who's Going To Dance With Somebody Who Calls You A Mainstreeter': Communism, Culture, And Community In Sheridan County, Montana, 1918-1934," *Great Plains Quarterly*, vol. 16 (Fall 1996): 251-286. Sheridan County is in the extreme northeast corner of the state, bordering on North Dakota to the east and Saskatchewan to the north. Plentywood, the county seat, is a few miles from the Saskatchewan border.

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101 SAB, CCF Papers, Subject Files, 1931-1952, Secretary's Office, Eliason to J.H. Harris, October 19, 1933, p. 24647.

102 Larry Remele, "Equal Time For Townley: Media Politics in North Dakota, 1956-1959," *North Dakota History*, vol.52, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 24-34.

103 Quoted in Schlesinger, *Politics of Upheaval*, 102. Schlesinger states that Marxists particularly irritated Olson and that he had nothing but contempt for the Communist party.

104 Seymour Martin Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism*, Anchor Books edition (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968) 160.

Developing Letterhead in a Small Prairie Town

by Frank Korvemaker

The Dollar Land Company

With two historic photographs, three documents, a local history book and some oral tradition, Frank Korvemaker has recreated a scenario that might account for the design of the letterhead for this early 20th century Saskatchewan business.

Around 1920, J.D. (Bud) Porter, former manager of the Bank of Commerce in Truax, joined in partnership with John Schuett, a local farmer and carpenter, to establish a real estate business called the Dollar Land Company. Both men were businessmen in this small developing prairie railway town, situated about 80 km SW of Regina, on the Canadian Northern Railway branch line between Radville and Moose Jaw.

Real estate was an attractive commodity, although not as lucrative as it had been before the Great War. Truax was not even a decade old when the company was formed, and much of the surrounding farmland was still in the process of being settled, or was into its second generation of land ownership. Hence, the opportunities for a new real estate company to succeed in the growing town were considered quite reasonable. The Dollar Land Company established its offices in

a small wood frame structure – the former Fitchell Butcher Shop - recently acquired by Bud Porter. Located on Main Street, just a half block down from the railway station, it was in the heart of the Truax business community.

However, the building's wood siding and sloping wooden awning lacked the kind of business image that these entrepreneurs desired, and so they removed the awning and applied sheets of pressed metal featuring imitation brick to the façade, and incorporated stylized columns at the corners and a complimentary cornice to the boom-town fronted parapet. A decorative stained glass window was positioned above the front window. Business prospered and within a few years the building was expanded first to the back and then to the side.

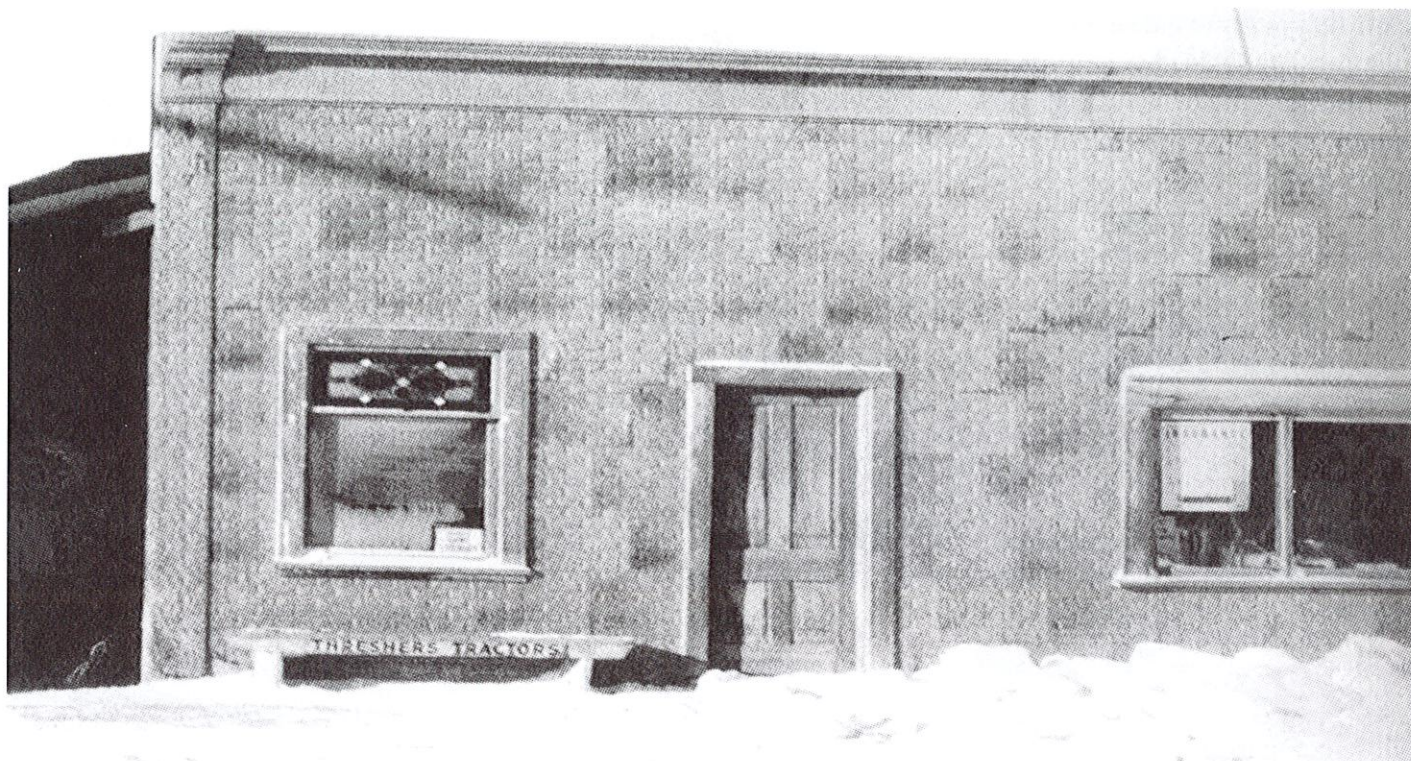
With the office make-over and expansions completed, Bud and John now fixed on establishing a corporate image, based on some imaginative letterhead. The choice was really quite obvious, once you took into consideration the name of the firm – the Dollar Land Company. "Of course", they said, "we need to have a dollar bill on our letterhead." And so they set about their task with the same zeal that they would apply to the sale of some nearby prime real estate. But first they had to do some homework.

Out came some bills from their wallets, to see exactly what it was that they were looking for. The first was



Fitchell's Butcher Shop, Truax, c1911

Collection of the author



Dollar Land Company, Truax, 1940s

Collection of the author

a One Dollar bill, featuring Princess Patricia. It had been issued by the Government of Canada in 1917. But these men were not totally comfortable with having a woman so prominently displayed on their letterhead. Not that they had anything against the Princess, but her representation just was not the kind of image that they felt would evoke real estate – then very much the domain of the male populace.

Out came another bill, this one a Two Dollar bill, issued in 1923. It featured the very popular Edward, Prince of Wales, looking quite dashing in his military uniform. Now here was an image that they could appreciate. The Great War was still a very clear memory for everyone, and the Prince was a well-

recognized figure in western Canada – why he even owned real estate here – the EP Ranch in southern Alberta. But the Two Dollar bill had a reputation in some circles, particularly in nearby Moose Jaw, as being currency that no self-respecting young man would carry in his wallet, and certainly would never offer to a lady.

The next step was obvious – take the best of both bills, and create a hybrid. That would also get around any legal problems that might arise over copying legal currency. No sense getting in trouble with the law over this whole letterhead issue, was there?



Facsimile of a One Dollar Bill - 1917 issue

Collection of the author



Facsimile of a Two Dollar Bill, 1923 issue

Collection of the author

So, off they went to a designer, someone who could translate their idea into something practical. Unfortunately, the name of the artist who did this fine penmanship is unknown, but her or his original linen artwork has survived.



Rough Pen Sketch

A close comparison of this sketch notes the following adaptations:

From the One Dollar Bill:

- Overall exterior border design
- Company name replacing the words "Dominion of Canada"
- Company slogan "will sell to the public" in the same position as the government's commitment "will pay to the bearer on demand"
- Placement of flags on either side of the portrait oval
- Replacement of the serial numbers with the words "Farm Lands" and "Real Estate"
- Retention of the denomination value in the four corners and on either side of the portrait oval
- Replacement of the bank officials' names with those of Bud Porter and John Schuett

From the Two Dollar Bill:

- stylized portrait of the Prince of Wales, but facing more to the right, and looking much more like a generic soldier than the actual Prince.

Perhaps the original draft looked too much like a real dollar bill, especially as it was to be printed in green on beige paper. It was therefore decided to make some further changes:

- elimination of the words "ONE" on either side

of the portrait oval

- placement of Porter's and Schuett's names in the centre of the bill, rather than at the bottom
- renaming Porter's function from "solicitor" or "manager" (the former might have resulted in some problems with the legal profession).



Their work completed, Bud and John proceeded to have their letterhead printed. How much was ordered is not known, but even in the midst of the Great Depression - December 1934 - a new order for 1000 copies was made to the Sterling Press, in Regina, including 1000 envelopes, for a total cost of \$5.07.

The end product was certainly very noticeable, as it dominated almost a third of the page, not to mention the promotional lines at the bottom of the page.

How long this letterhead was used, or even how long the Dollar Land Company remained in business, is not yet known. John Schuett died unexpectedly in 1949 and Bud continued alone in this and various other business ventures for another quarter century.

In 1981 Frank Korvemaker bought the abandoned and ransacked former Dollar Land Company building from the RM of Elmsthorpe. For the sum of \$100, he not only acquired the building and land, but also many boxes of records relating to Bud Porter's various business and public service activities, some dating from c1918 - the time of his arrival in Truax, until his death in 1975.

Today, most of the records of this Company, and of many of the other business ventures undertaken by Bud Porter, are housed at the Saskatchewan Archives Board (Accession R99-270). That collection comprises 760 cm of records, including: Justice of

Phone 29431 1700 Scarth Street

The Sterling Press

Regina, Dec. 4th. 1934 N^o 1777

J. D. Porter Truax Sask.

1000 Letter Heads	green Stock 20lb.	5.00
1000 Env.	White Stock	4.20
		9.20
	Sales Tax 6%	.57
		10.07
		5.00
	bal.	5.07

Will Call Friday the 21st.

the Peace records, Village of Truax correspondence (Porter was secretary to many organizations in the area), business operational records, advertising, posters, and records of the Crown School District No 3518 and Oregon School District No 1697).

(Note: The statements in this article are all factual; however, the rationale for substituting the image of Princess Patricia with that of the Prince of Wales is purely conjectural on the part of the writer.)

Order for Company Letterhead, 1934

Collection of the author

ONE

DOLLAR LAND COMPANY

WILL SELL TO THE PUBLIC

FARM LANDS

REAL ESTATE

J. D. PORTER
MANAGER

J. A. SCHUETT
VALUATOR

ONE

TRUAX, SASKATCHEWAN
February 11th-1938.

Secretary Treasurer,
Rural Municipality of Elmthorpe No 100,
Avonlea, Saskatchewan.

Dear Sir:- -Re N.W. 31-9-23-W2nd-
-Re SW. 6-10-23-W2nd-

Would you be good enough to advise
us who is the assessed owner, of the above quarter
sections of land, thanking you in advance for
your kindness in this matter.

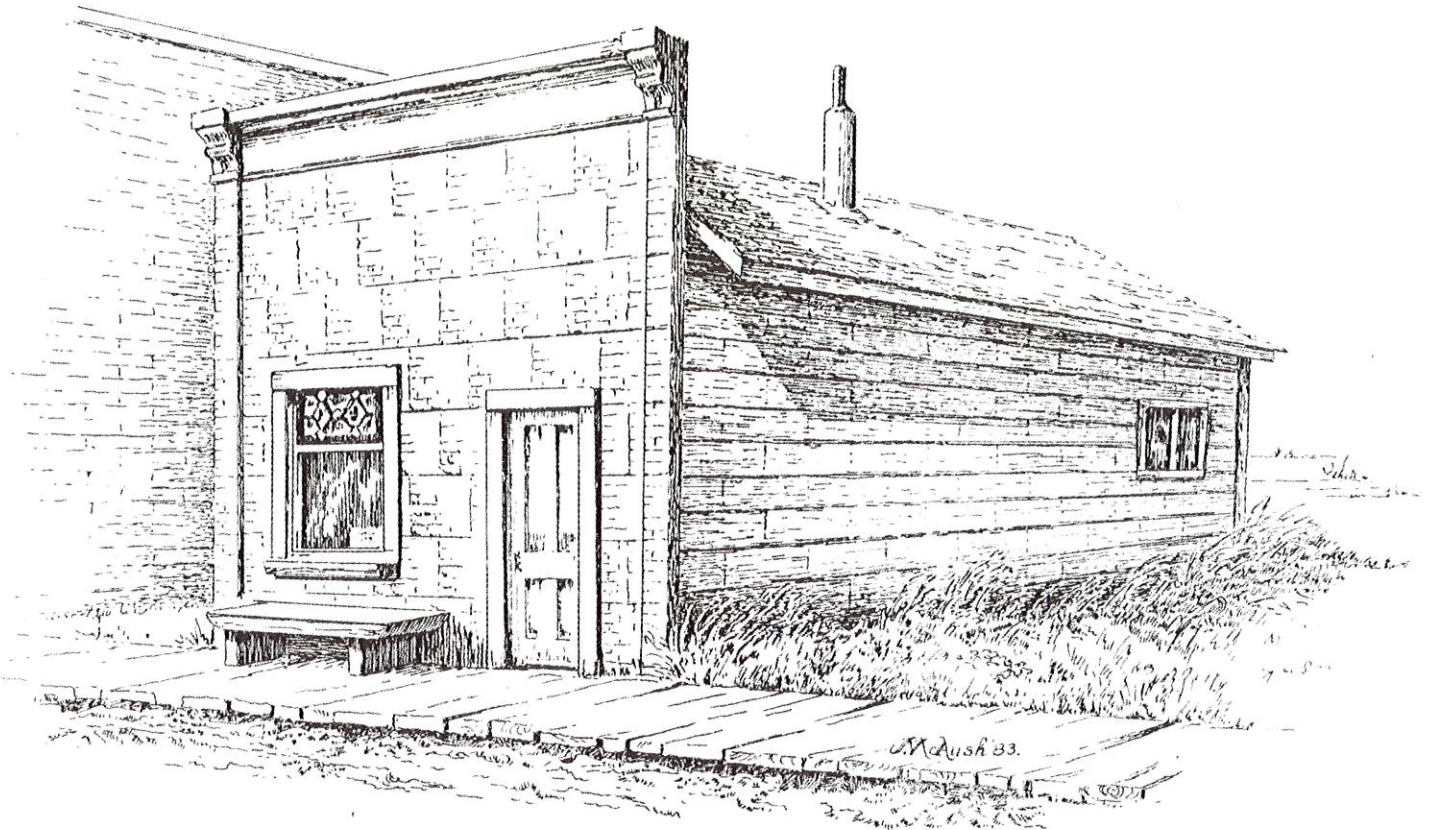
Yours truly,
Dollar Land Company,
Manager.

S.W 6-10-23 belongs to the Canada Life Co
Regina. 9-23 is not in this R.M.

If You Want to Buy Land, See Us-If You Want to Sell Land, See Us
See Us Anyway
Power Farm Machinery and Farm Supplies

Sample of Company Letterhead, 1938

Collection of the author



Collection of the author

Porter's Office, Truax, Saskatchewan

By Frank Korvemaker

This building was built in 1911 by rural postmaster George Riebel for use as a post office in the proposed new town of Truax. Not yet knowing the exact location of the town or of the railway, Riebel erected his building near where he thought the town would be located, only to discover that it was right in the middle of the railway's right-of-way. So, when the Canadian Northern Railway finalized its line location and constructed the rails through town later that year, George had to move his building onto one of the now properly surveyed town lots along Main Street. However, before the new post office could open for business, the federal election of 1911 tossed out Sir Wilfrid Laurier's Liberal government, and the new Conservative government of Robert Borden cancelled many of the Liberal appointments - including that of the Truax postmaster. George then sold his vacant building to Charles Fitchell, of Smith Falls, Ontario, who opened a butcher shop here - the second commercial building in the new town.

By 1918 Mr. Fitchell had moved to the Tessier district (SW of Saskatoon) and J.D. (Bud) Porter bought the shop. Bud conducted various businesses from this office, including the sale of meats, insurance, real estate, farm implements, hardware and beer - sometimes all at the same time! He was also a Justice of the Peace, Village Secretary, and secretary for various school districts from 1923 until his death in 1975.

The original 14 x 16 foot structure was enlarged twice and served as the office of the Dollar Land Company during the 1920s and 1930s. It was during this time that Bud added the sheet metal facade over the original wooden exterior. John Schuett and Bud Porter were partners in this real estate venture, which had its office in the north annex to the building. In 1933, the store was rented out for one year to Mr. and Mrs. P.H. Roundy, who used it as a residence. Later, a fire scorched the interior of the original building and, in the late 1950s, the north annex was demolished. The remaining section of the building was then moved over the concrete cistern of the recently vacated Truax Cafe. This provided Bud with a secure source of water in case another fire should break out. (The



Collection of the author

brick cairn which stands next to this building is on the original site of the old butcher shop.)

By the 1960s, this building housed boxes and filing cabinets full of Bud's business records and stood basically unoccupied for the next 20 years. After Bud's death in 1975, the property was transferred to his son, Fraser, and later to the R.M. of Elmsthorpe. The building was bought by Frank Korvemaker in 1981 in order to preserve the historical records still stored inside, some of which dated back to 1918. They detailed the extensive variety of Bud Porter's career, and were fairly representative of the activities of similar businesspeople and community leaders in small towns throughout Saskatchewan in the 20th century. Over the years, virtually all of these records were transferred to the Saskatchewan Archives Board offices in Regina.

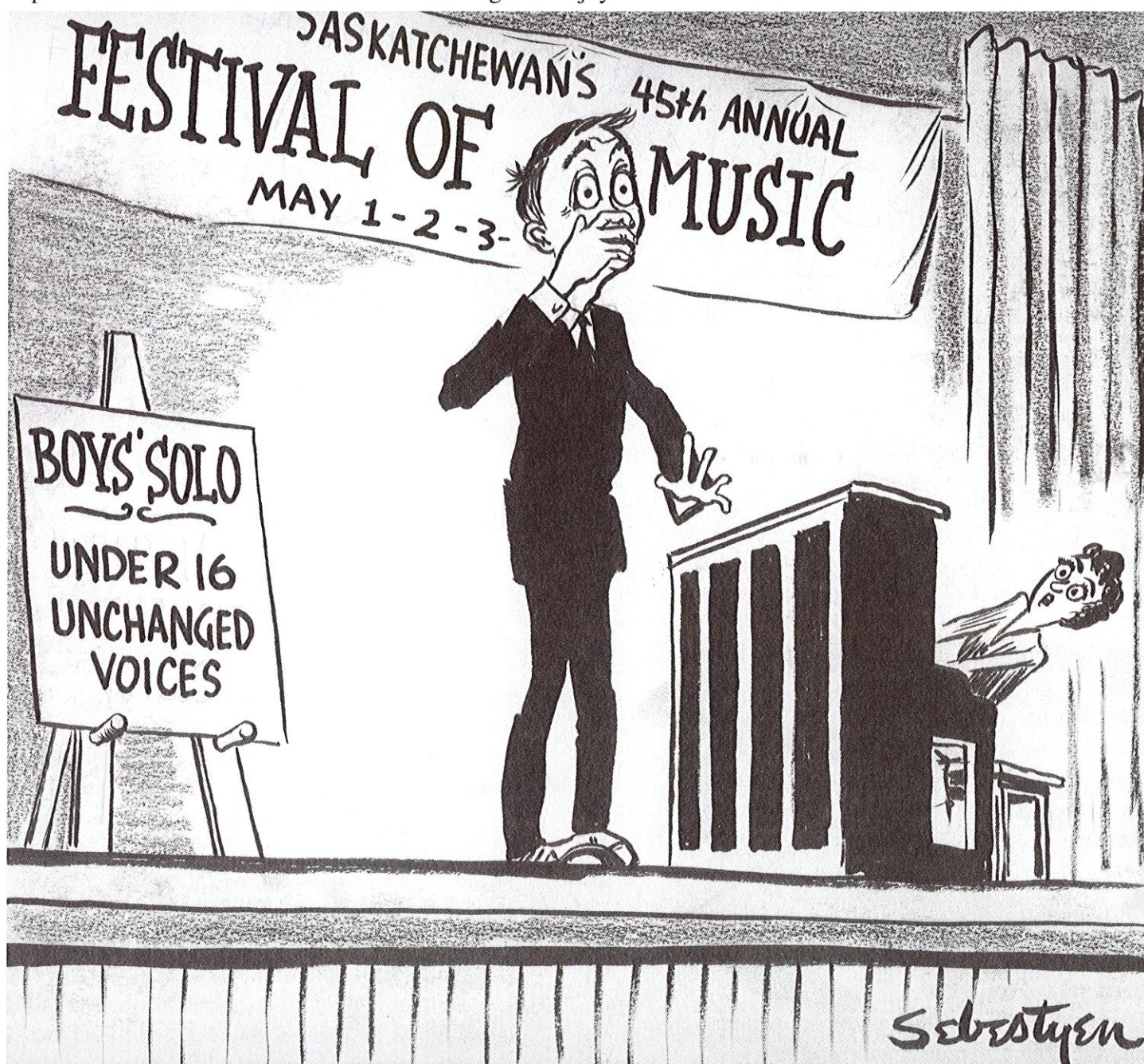
While no longer occupied, Porter's Office, as it has been known for decades, has been a small but consistent landmark in Truax, and has somehow managed to survive both fire, prairie wind and rain.

For further information, contact:

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E-Mail: fkorvemaker@cyr.gov.sk.ca

The Editorial Cartoons of Edmond A. Sebestyen

Edmond A. Sebestyen was a long time contributor to the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*. Now retired, he donated his records to the Saskatchewan Archives Board. Nadine Charabin, *Saskatchewan History*'s Administrative Manager, alerted the editor to this jewel of pictorial history and selected a number of them to appear in this issue. Editorial cartoons provide a glimpse into the cultural, political and social issues of the day and Mr. Sebestyen captured the heart of the matter time and time again. Enjoy!



SAB F379-71

S.F.U. SUPPORTS FARMERS MASS MARCH TO OTTAWA



SAB F379-183

“I just hope that it’s not during our
Bonspiel!”

1,500 RURAL SASK. HOMES MAY GET INDOOR PLUMBING THIS YEAR



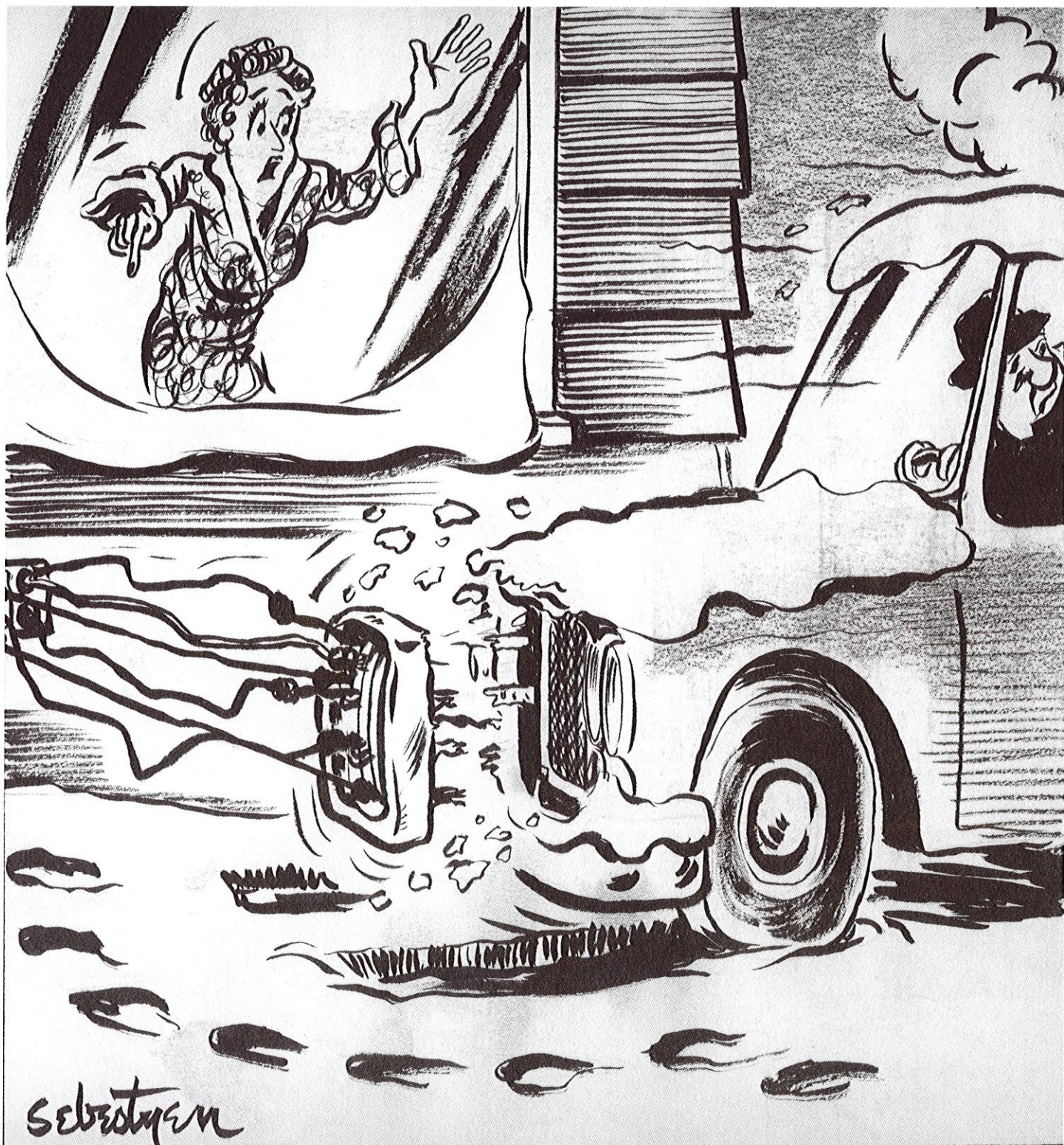
SAB F379-396

“...can't handle any more - unless its
an unusual model!”

Reluctant Candidates?

SAB F379-661



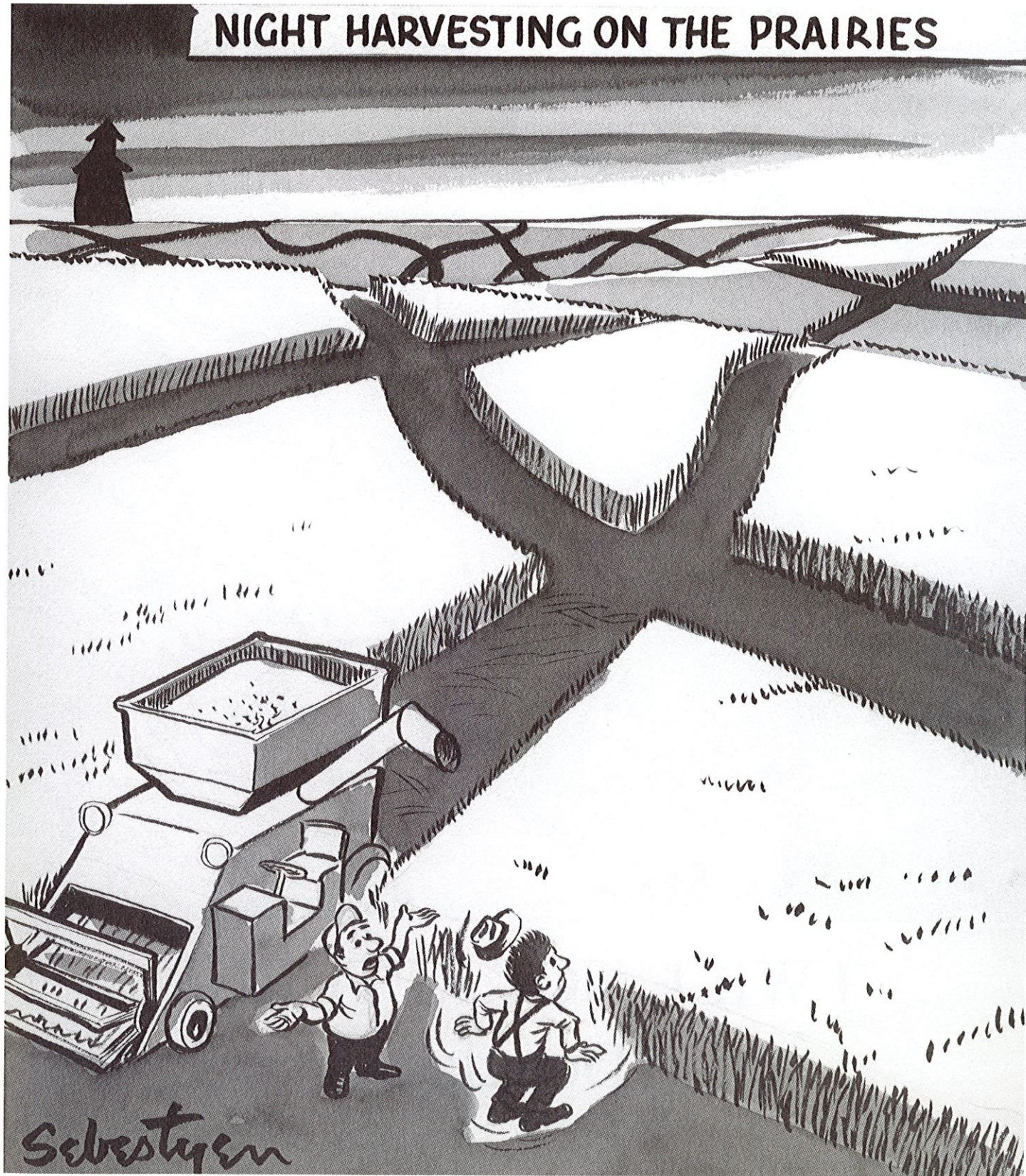


SAB F379-727

“Sorry boss, but my lights
burnt out!”

SAB F379-1041

NIGHT HARVESTING ON THE PRAIRIES





SAB F379-865

I WILL NOT RETURN!
Douglas

Saskatchewan History

Volume 58
Number 1
Spring 2006

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Frank Eliason: A Forgotten Founder of the CCF
George Hoffman

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ISSN 0036-4908



PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40064458

