

# Saskatchewan History

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THE HOSPITALS AT SASKATOON

(From a sketch by Edward E. Kirk, M.D., Asst. Surgeon, Field Hospital Corps, 1885-86)

Why Are All Those Names on the Walls? The University of Saskatchewan and World War I

Called to Duty: Medical and Nursing Care in Saskatoon and Moose Jaw During the North-West Rebellion

Reluctant Homesteader: A French Settler's Story  
Part I: A Parting of the Ways

Reluctant Homesteader: A French Settler's Story  
Part II: Rookie Fur Trader

# The Saskatchewan Archives Board

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

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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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# Saskatchewan Archives Board News

## New Provincial Archivist Announced

The Saskatchewan Archives Board is happy to announce that effective October 1, 2006, Don Herperger became Saskatchewan's new Provincial Archivist. The appointment was made by the Board after an exhaustive national search assisted by a Saskatoon-based executive recruitment firm.

"We're delighted that Don has agreed to take on such an important role," said Merrilee Rasmussen, Chair of the Saskatchewan Archives Board. "Don's long history with the organization means Saskatchewan's archives will continue to flourish under stable and experienced leadership."

Herperger has worked in Saskatchewan Archives since 1978 and has worked as a staff archivist, director and acting provincial archivist. His focus over the past 15 years has been on the management of government information and the administration of the Archives. He has also assisted the University of Regina as a sessional lecturer in prairie history.

"I'm honoured that the Saskatchewan Archives Board has expressed such confidence in me," said Herperger. "I believe in the employees and work of Saskatchewan Archives, and am strongly committed to the people of Saskatchewan."

"The archives belongs to the citizens of Saskatchewan and it represents our legacy as a people and province. I'm humbled to be given a chance to preserve and protect this legacy."

The Saskatchewan Archives was established through legislation in 1945 as a joint university-government agency operating through an independent board. Subsequent legislative changes have continued university and government participation within a broad community board. The Saskatchewan

Archives is funded by the Province of Saskatchewan and maintains a comprehensive archival collection documenting the province and its people.



## The Saskatchewan Settlement Experience, 1870-1930

The Saskatchewan Archives is happy to announce the launch of a new virtual exhibit, "Saskatchewan Settlement Experience, 1870-1930" at [www.sasksettlement.com](http://www.sasksettlement.com).

The provincial motto "From Many Peoples, Strength" captures the essence of what happened in Saskatchewan between 1870 and 1930. People from around the world arrived with a sense of optimism to develop a prosperous agricultural society in what is now Saskatchewan.

With determination, vision and cooperation the pioneer experience would transform the 'last best west' into the 'world's granary'. The transformation that occurred in Saskatchewan, and the prairies as a whole, was a key to the 'twentieth century being Canada's century'.

The realities of the land combined with railway building, homesteading, and the cooperative spirit made Saskatchewan a unique society.

This virtual exhibit includes digital reproductions of archival documents such as photographs, publications, correspondence, diaries, and maps, to tell the story of the settlement period. The exhibit also offers extensive teacher resources for grades four to twelve. Students will not only learn history, but will gain an understanding of original documentary evidence used to reconstruct the past.



Trevor Powell receives a gift from the Saskatchewan Archives Board in appreciation of his many years, at a celebration held in his honour in Regina on May 4, 2000.

## Resignation of Trevor Powell as Provincial Archivist of Saskatchewan

On March 31, 2006, the Chair of the Saskatchewan Archives Board, Merrilee Rasmussen Q.C., announced the resignation of Trevor Powell as Provincial Archivist of Saskatchewan. Mr. Powell worked for the Saskatchewan Archives for 33 years and close to 20 years as head of the institution.

“Under Mr. Powell’s leadership, the Saskatchewan Archives has made great strides in meeting the needs of modern government and the people it serves,” Rasmussen said. “There have been significant accomplishments including the passing of new Archives legislation, expanding and strengthening the role of the Saskatchewan Archives in managing government information, standardizing the description of archival materials within its holdings, improving

reference and outreach service to users, bringing the Archives to a wider public through virtual exhibits and the digitization of records and finding aids, to name a few.”

“These achievements are not due to one person, but to board, management and staff working together to ensure Saskatchewan’s documentary heritage is better managed, preserved and made accessible,” Powell said. “It has been a great privilege for me to have worked with such dedicated and talented people during my lengthy professional career with the Saskatchewan Archives.”

“We, the board, management and staff, are sorry to see Mr. Powell leave, but understand that he wishes to pursue other interests,” Rasmussen said. “We wish him well and thank him for his services to the Saskatchewan Archives, to the provincial and national archival community and to the archival profession.”

## Letter from the Editor

*Saskatchewan History* has always tried to combine the best of both academic and popular history and offer articles that cover the whole range of historical inquiry. In this issue we continue this trend. Our first article examines the students of the University of Saskatchewan who fought in the First World War. Dr. Michael Hayden explores the lives of the soldiers who names adorn the walls of the College Building on the University Campus. Our second article explores the role of nurses and medical care during the North-West Rebellion, shedding light on a previously unexplored aspect of the conflict. In our People and Places section Jocelyne Scott has unearthed the story of Victor Colvez, a French settler who arrived in Canada at the turn of the century. Victor’s story makes for fascinating reading and will continue to appear in future issues of *Saskatchewan History*. Meanwhile, Rob Vanstone, the Regina based journalist and Jazz lover has reviewed *The Jazz Province* by Ken Mitchell. Finally, last but certainly not least, *Saskatchewan History* is proud to once again feature the editor cartoons of Edmond Sebestyen. Enjoy the issue!

Jason Zorbas

# Articles

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## Why Are All Those Names on the Walls? The University of Saskatchewan and World War I

By Michael Hayden

Four years have passed since the tragic event now universally known as 9/11. September 11, 2001 may prove to have been a turning point in the history of the United States. Not enough time has passed to know if that is the case. It is well known, however, that the declaration of war on Germany by Great Britain on August 4, 1914, ninety-one years ago, was a turning point in the development of Canada as an independent nation. In this article I will argue that it was also a turning point in the University of Saskatchewan.

There can be no question that World War I left a physical mark on the University of Saskatchewan. The walls of the halls on the first and second floors of the newly restored College Building of the University of Saskatchewan contain memorials to veterans of World War I. The criterion established in 1916 by the University Board of Governors for the choice of the individuals whose names were to be inscribed on the so-called "ribbons" that already existed on the walls of the College Building was that they had been connected in some official way with the University of Saskatchewan before they became soldiers, sailors, airmen or nurses. Eventually, 332 names were chosen, four of which do not meet the criterion.<sup>1</sup>

During my research I found an additional seventeen individuals who fit the criterion of connection with the university before the war. The University plans to add these names to the walls in the near future. In 1928 the Memorial Gates were built at the U of S to honour those who died in World War I. I found that two individuals who should have their names on the gates are not there, even though their deaths are recorded on the College Building walls. They are George Israel Peters who was killed in action on June 3, 1917 and Herbert Ernest McRitchie who died of sickness in England on March 2, 1919 while still in the army. I hope this oversight can be corrected during the university's centennial year. I have also

identified twenty-one graduates of the University of Saskatchewan who first attended classes after serving in the armed forces during World War I and, therefore, did not meet the criterion for inclusion on the walls of the College Building.<sup>2</sup>

The group I will be discussing in this article is made up of 349 individuals – that is the 332 whose names were originally inscribed on the walls of the College Building and the seventeen others I found. This group is significantly different from what has heretofore been supposed. Three of those whose names are already on the walls attended the U of S only after World War I. Another, Charles Bunn, a collegiate student, never would. Forty-one of the 349 had already graduated from the University of Saskatchewan before they took part in the war. Another twenty-four of the 349 had taken classes at the U of S, but were not enrolled when they enlisted and at that time had an occupation other than student, though for some it may have been summer employment. Some of these men returned to the U of S after the war, some did not. Twelve of the 349 were faculty members. At least eleven, and perhaps as many as fifteen were staff members. One of these was John Reaney, the Bursar, who President Murray was relieved to see go off to war. The others worked on the university farm, in its power house or in its rooms and halls as janitors and painters.

That left a total of 253 University of Saskatchewan students among the 349 veterans whose names are now or soon will be listed on the walls of this building. Only one of these was a woman. The 252 male students came from a male student population of the years 1914-18 that has been estimated at approximately 450 individuals. In other words, 56 per cent of the male students of the year 1914-18 served in the armed forces during the First World War. They were joined by half of the male graduates of 1914 or earlier, 20% of the male faculty and 20% of the male staff.

The one female student who became directly involved in the war was Claire Rees who went off to England to be a military nurse. On Nov. 26, 1916 she formed a different relationship with the U of S by marrying the head of what was then called the School of Engineering, Lieutenant Chalmers Jack Mackenzie, who had enlisted in the Canadian army in 1914 along with most of his faculty and students (not as grandiose

as it sounds – only twenty people were involved). Mr. and Mrs. Mackenzie continued their service, she as a nurse in Manchester, he in the trenches. They eventually returned to Saskatoon where he became Dean of the College of Engineering. Among his other achievements, Mackenzie designed and supervised the building of the Broadway bridge before moving on to Ottawa to head the National Research Council.

What follows is based largely on the so-called “attestation papers” filled out by those who enlisted or were drafted as they entered service in what was known as the Canadian Expeditionary Force. The total number of individuals for who these papers were available online when this study was conducted was 273; 78% of the 349.

The largest group of those missing from the study were the forty men who joined the Royal Flying Corps or its successor the RAF directly without prior service in the CEF. Also missing are two students who joined the U.S. Navy, five who joined the U.S. Army and one who set off to join the Russian Army. Five of the seven who joined U.S. forces were students and gave a Saskatchewan address when they enrolled at the U. of S. Most likely that they were the sons of immigrants from the United States.<sup>3</sup>

Also missing are those few who enlisted directly into a British Army unit. Richard St. Barbe Baker, later famous as the Man of the Trees, joined the King Edward Horse. James Heathcote, most probably a staff member, joined the Coldstream guards. Samuel Heal, a student of Emmanuel College, the Anglican Divinity college on the U of S campus, as was Baker, joined the Imperial Army shortly after the war. David Hossie who had received his B.A. in 1912 and was the first Rhodes Scholar from Saskatchewan, joined the King Edward Horse and then switched to the Royal Field Artillery. Harry Accelton, a staff member, also served in the Royal field Artillery. Baker and Heal were wounded, Heathcote was killed, while Hossie and Accelton survived the war unscathed.<sup>4</sup>

Another of the missing is John Besrodny, the student who set off to join the Russian army. He was born in the Crimea, then part of the Russian Empire. He emigrated by himself to Canada in 1914 at the age of 20 and in 1916, partially supported by an aunt still living in Russia and another living in Switzerland,

began to study agriculture at the U of S. In the fall of 1917 he tried to join the Royal Flying Corps because his aunt told him it would be next to impossible to return to Russia. But Besrodny did not meet the requirement of the corps that a recruit's father had to have been a British subject. Walter Murray tried to get this requirement waived, but to no avail. Despite the fact that Russia was in chaos because it was involved in both a war and a revolution, Besrodny set off to join the Russian Army. Whether he made it and what happened to him is not known. For anyone who wants to follow a very uncertain and cold trail, I know that there was a Major Besrodny in the German-sponsored, anti-Communist Russian Nationalist National Army during World War II.

A more modest project would be to convince the powers that be to correct the spelling of Besrodny's name on the College Building walls. While they are at it they could go across the stairwell from Besrodny's name and put John Henry Warren's full name on the wall. Unlike everyone else, he has only a small shield inscribed with his initials and two abbreviations which indicate he was a captain who received the Military Cross – no mean feats. Only twenty-eight soldiers from the U of S achieved that rank, only ten a higher rank, and only thirty-eight received a medal.

The most chilling information found in the records about the 349 individuals I am talking about is that almost half of them died or were wounded during the years 1914-1918. Fifty-three were killed in action; twelve died of wounds and four died of other causes. Eighty-seven were wounded, two were incapacitated by poison gas, one suffered severely from shell shock and six were invalided. In other words, 20 per cent of them died and 28 per cent were seriously injured because of their involvement with the war. A 48 per cent casualty rate was very high by any standards. In the Canadian context it is horrifying since the U of S mortality rate was twice that of the entire Canadian armed forces.

Who were these men who suffered this fate? Analysis of the data available provides a portrait of the typical U of S soldier of World War I. He was a twenty-three year old, 5' 8" Presbyterian who had been born in Ontario to a family with roots in the British Isles and had come west with his parents to farm in Saskatchewan. This description, of course, hides the



Fourth University Company, Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry, from Saskatoon, in Montreal 1914  
S-B 6992

diversity of the group. Nevertheless, the men involved were much more homogeneous in heritage, education, physical characteristics and beliefs than would ever again be the case at the University of Saskatchewan.

Canada was the birthplace of 60 per cent of the 273 veterans. The UK was the original home of 38 per cent of them. Of those born in the UK, sixty-one claimed England as their birthplace, seventeen named Scotland, eleven said it was Ireland and Wales was named by four. Of the remaining 2%, ten came from the USA, three from Newfoundland and one each from Sweden, Germany and France. The one from Germany had an English father, while the person born in France had Canadian parents.

Of the 165 men born in Canada, seventy-five (almost half) had been born in Ontario, while thirty-nine (close to a quarter) had been born in Saskatchewan. Manitoba was the original home of twenty-two of them. Nova Scotia contributed seven while Alberta and New Brunswick each contributed six. Quebec and

Prince Edward Island each were the original home of five of the 165.

At the time the 273 individuals joined the Canadian forces three quarters of their next of kin lived in Canada. Eighty-six per cent of these Canadian next of kin lived in Saskatchewan. Almost always the next of kin was a parent, but eighteen listed a spouse and 13 a sibling. Seventy-six per cent of kin lived in Canada. The UK was the country of residence of 22%. Germany, Newfoundland and the United States were the homes of the remaining 2%. The 158 Saskatchewan next of kin far outdistanced the twenty-six who lived in Ontario. Manitoba was home to eight. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island each was home to four next of kin, while British Columbia, Alberta and Quebec were each home to one.

The religious affiliation of the U of S recruits matched exactly the religious make up of the U of S student body. Forty per cent of them were Presbyterians, 30% were Anglicans and 19% were Methodists.



Together these 244 accounted for 89% of the recruits. In addition there were fourteen Baptists, three Congregationalists, three Roman Catholics, two Lutherans and one Unitarian. One recruit claimed membership in "Christ's Church" and four provided no information on religious affiliation.

The attestation papers also provide information about the recruits' height, size of chest when fully expanded and extent of the expansion. The height of these men ranged from 5' 3" to 6' 2". Five per cent of them were over six feet tall and 5% were shorter than 5' 5". Seventy-one per cent measured between 5' 5" and 5' 9". The median height was 5' 8".<sup>5</sup>

The median age on enlistment was 23 years and two months. Two-thirds of the veterans entered the armed forces between the ages of 19 and 25. One was seventeen year old, thirteen were eighteen. The seventeen year old was a student, Willis Clark, born in Brampton Ontario and now living with his parents in Saskatoon. He enlisted on March 17, 1915. Clark was wounded on June 3, 1916 and was awarded the Military Medal. After the war he became a journalist in Windsor Ontario.

Thirty-five of the U of S soldiers were between the ages of 30 and 34 when they enlisted, two were thirty-five and one was 43. The latter was Robert Gloag, a painter on the university staff, originally from Edinburgh, Scotland. He enlisted on March 24, 1916, became a corporal, survived the war and went back to painting the halls of the university buildings. The oldest U of S enlistee was William Yeates Hunter, born in Margate, England. He was a veteran of the Boer War and a lecturer in English at the U of S. On March 17, 1916, at the age of 47, he enlisted as a captain and soon became a major. A year and five months later he was killed in action, less than two months before the end of the war.

The first known enlistee in the Canadian forces connected with the U of S was Professor of English Reginald Bateman. He filled out his attestation papers on August 26, 1914, three weeks after Britain declared war on Germany. Bateman raised hackles among some students when he enlisted because there was no one immediately available to take his classes and because of what the editor of the *Sheaf* called his "Viking-like lust for glory." This was exhibited in a

speech Bateman gave to the YMCA glorifying war. He rose through the ranks from private to major before reverting to the rank of captain so that he could lead troops to battle. Bateman died on September 3, 1918 during the attack on the Hindenburg Line.

The editor of the *Sheaf* and former newspaper reporter who attacked Bateman was John Ross Macpherson who had resigned his job to take classes from Bateman. He later joined the army, rose to the rank of major in the Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry, was awarded the D.S.O., and was killed in action on August 26, 1918, after over three years in the trenches and participation in four major offensives.

Hunter's and Bateman's names are on the walls in the southeast quadrant of the first floor corridor. This is where most of the faculty are listed, along with Claire Rees. The name of Robert Gloag, the painter, is found at the opposite extreme of the building, on the northern end of the second floor corridor, along with those of almost all staff members. There does not seem to be any particular reason for the placement of the other names, except that the thirty-four names on the list in the south staircase are RAF veterans, along with several last minute entries. John Diefenbaker's brother Elmer is in that list. As for John, himself, he ended up at the far northern end of the second floor, beyond the staff, in a location that is often behind an open door, as inconspicuous a place as possible. As far as I know he did not comment publicly on this placement.

The first U of S students to enlist were the five who joined the army at Camp Valcartier, Quebec at the end of September 1914. Then, at the end of October, fifteen students and one faculty member joined in Saskatoon. Only eight of these twenty-one individuals survived the war unscathed; three of them were dead by November 1918, as were three of the five students who enlisted in December 1914.

The faculty member who joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force in October 1914 was Louis Brehaut, Professor of Philosophy and Greek and a friend of Reginald Bateman. While stationed in England in August 1915 he was diagnosed as suffering from dementia praecox – schizophrenia in today's language – and released from the army. He returned to teaching at the U of S until the Spring of

1918. Feeling unable to continue, he resigned and returned to his home in Prince Edward Island where he died in 1933 at the age of 51.<sup>6</sup> It is a disgrace that Louis Brehaut's name was not among the 332 names originally placed on the walls of the College Building. He was too well known on campus for this to have been an oversight. Fortunately, this error will soon be rectified.

During 1914 a total of twenty-seven men from the U of S enlisted. Seventy would do so in 1915, with twenty-two joining between March 16 and 19 of that year. Before they had received sufficient training the twenty-two March recruits became replacement troops in Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry which was suffering heavy casualties. Many paid for this with their limbs or their lives. Only one survived the war unscathed, while nine of the twenty-two were killed in action or died of wounds. As the Canadian Expeditionary Force increased from 150,000 to 500,000 men between October 1915 and 1916, lack of sufficient training became a reality for every soldier who ended up in the trenches.

As the war continued more and more men who had gained experience in the trenches, and had managed to survive, were promoted to the rank of lieutenant, because they were needed to lead the troops out of the trenches into the unrelenting machine gun fire of the enemy. One-third of all U of S recruits moved through the ranks from private to lieutenant, almost all in 1917 and 1918. Half of them were wounded or killed in action. The highest U of S casualty rates were among the seventy-three members of the Princess Pat's and the twenty-six members of the 46<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Seventy-three per cent of the former and seventy-six per cent of the latter were killed or wounded. There is a tablet commemorating the members of the 46<sup>th</sup> Battalion on a boulder located on the grass just to the northwest of Nobel Plaza. The memory of the Princess Pats is kept alive in the name of a hockey team – the Regina Pats.

The early recruits from the U of S have often been described as a group of English immigrants studying at the Anglican and Presbyterian theological colleges affiliated with the University of Saskatchewan. In fact over 40% of the 1914 enlistees and almost 60% of the seventy 1915 enlistees had been born in Canada. The

others were all from the UK, except for one who was born in France of Canadian parents.

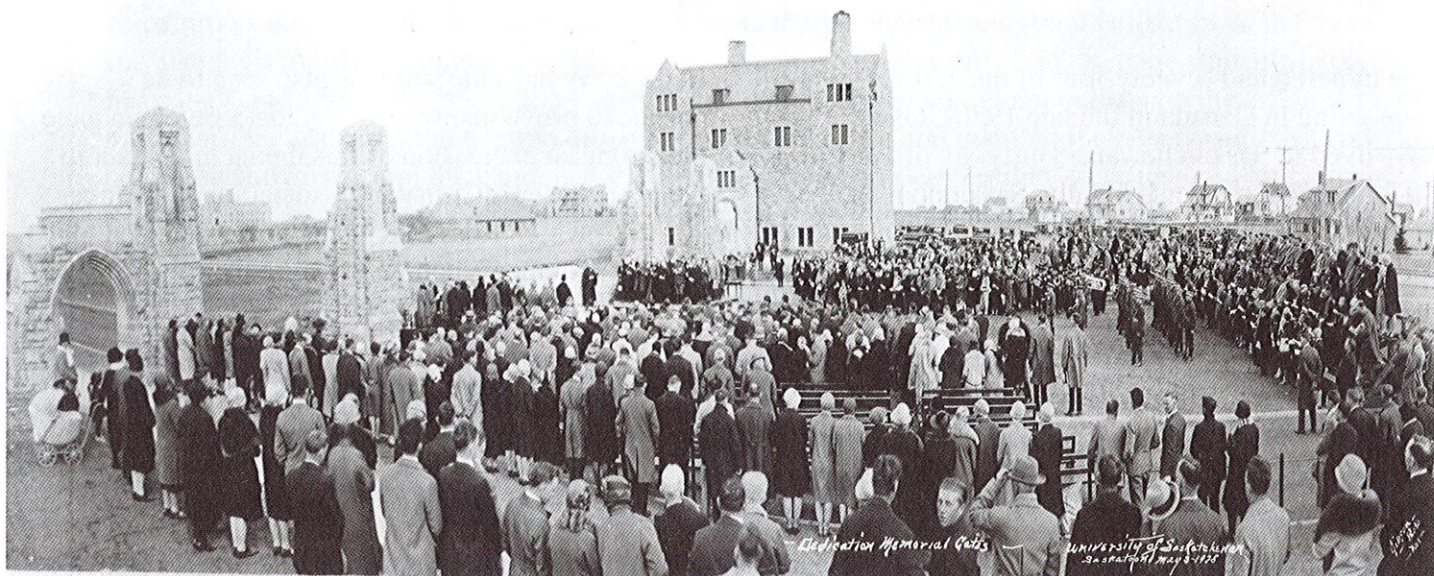
Given the small enrollment of the two theological colleges, a significant number of their students did enlist. In the years 1914-15 twenty-four of the men who had come from England to train as missionaries enlisted. They were joined by six fellow divinity students who had been born in Canada. The most striking moment of the divinity student enlistment came in November 1915 when ten Anglican divinity students went off to war.

The peak of enlistment came in 1916 when forty-three percent of the U of S men whose attestation papers were available for analysis joined the Canadian forces. Sixty-three of the 116 enlistees of that year joined between February 21 and April 6. These students did not, of course, finish their year of study, but the Board of Governors agreed to grant a year's credit to those who enlisted. This was of no use to the twenty of sixty-three who died during the war.

*The Sheaf* presented an upbeat picture of the war through a series of letters from soldiers. However, the biographies of some of the students who had been killed in the trenches were also presented in the student publication. These biographies and, perhaps, letters that students were receiving from their friends overseas, were evidently having an effect. This is testified to by the recollection of a 1917 Arts graduate who wrote in the university yearbook of 1928:

We would like their memory to be as green for the students of the future as it is for us who knew them, and their high hopes, who saw them drill and go, who packed boxes for them, knit for them, awaited their letters or chatty field post cards, followed them on Professor Morton's war map, dreaded grim news of them, and often received it. Through those four year of college, through all the warp and woof of study and other college activity, there ran the scarlet thread of war....<sup>7</sup>

After 1916 enlistment dropped off. Only twenty-four U of S students joined the forces freely in 1917. Twelve of these were recruited by Edward Duval,



Crowd at dedication of memorial Gates at the University of Saskatchewan, May 1928

S-B 6234

Superintendent of the Saskatoon division of the C.P.R. With almost no training they were rushed into the trenches with the Princess Pats. Duval and five of the twelve students were dead within a year, two others were wounded.

Because the need for soldiers was unrelenting, conscription was introduced in 1917. In that year eleven U of S students were drafted. In 1918 six enlisted and eighteen were drafted. These were the years when many of the forty students not included in the 273 individuals under study joined the RAF to escape the trenches, where the generals continued to use the eighteenth century tactics against twentieth century armaments. They chose wisely – only two of the forty U of S RAF recruits were killed during the war. Nine of the thirty-five in the 1917 group who joined the army died and three were wounded. Most of the 1918 group were spared service at the front; none died and only one was wounded.

The death dates of sixty-six of the 69 U of S men who died during World War I are known. Two died in 1915 (one, Arthur Gruchy, by drowning and one, Edward West, as the result of illness). The first death connected with battle was that of Arthur Parlett, an Agriculture student originally from England. He died of wounds on February 19, 1916. Thirteen others were killed in 1916, including seven at the Battle of Sanctuary Wood in June – six of them on one day – June 2 and the other on June 3. Four were killed in October and November at Courcellette. In April 1917

the Battle of Vimy Ridge took the lives of nine U of S soldiers. Six died during the Battle of Passchendale in November of that year. In all twenty-five fell in 1917. The year 1917 was the worst for wounds – sixty-one U of S recruits suffered them that year, compared to forty-four in 1916 and 46 in 1918. Twenty-four U of S soldiers were killed in 1918. The worst times in that year were the fighting at Monchy in August and Tilloy in September. Five U of S soldiers were killed on September 28 – seven weeks before the end of the war.

The last U of S soldier to die during World War I was Wellesley Wesley-Long, an Anglican divinity student. He died of wounds on October 11, 1918, exactly one month before the end of the war. Unfortunately, his name is among the last minute entries in the north staircase list, as is that of another soldier who was killed, James Heathcote. As is evident to anyone who looks at the Memorial Gates, if anyone does now that they are dysfunctional as gates and isolated from the university, Heathcote's name was also a last minute entry there also.

A decade after the end of World War I officials at the University of Saskatchewan compiled a list of the whereabouts of those connected with the university who had been in the armed forces between 1914 and 1918. Two hundred and twenty individuals were located. Twenty-three veterans had returned to the UK, including one each to Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Thirteen had moved to the USA, two live in Chile and one in Argentina. One veteran was also to

be found in each of Newfoundland, New Zealand and Japan.<sup>8</sup>

One hundred and seventy-four of the 220 veterans were living in Canada in the late 1920s. Over 60% lived in Saskatchewan. Thirty-six of the 136 Saskatchewan residents lived in Saskatoon, sixteen in Regina and seven in Prince Albert. The rest were spread across the province. Twelve veterans lived in Ontario, eleven in Manitoba, six in Alberta, five in British Columbia and one each of Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. In other words, a solid majority of the men who had moved west with their families in the early years of the twentieth century returned to Saskatchewan after World War I and took up their lives again. It would be interesting to know what percentage of their descendants still live in Saskatchewan today.

Many of the veterans who had served in the trenches never spoke of their experiences. Others waited for decades before saying anything, and then spoke with great bitterness of what they had witnessed and suffered. Walter Murray who had actively encouraged students to enlist never forgot what had happened to so many of them. He blamed the catastrophe on lack of training and became an advocate of military training for all male university students. Whether or not this training was in any way responsible, the death rate was much lower than that of World War I, though some 200 of the more than 2,500 U of S students who served in that war died – an 8% mortality rate.

Why had the graduates, students, faculty and staff of the U of S enlisted? Those who had been born in Britain felt obliged to return to fight for their country, their kin and their civilization against an enemy who was portrayed in the propaganda of the day as the incarnation of evil. This included the divinity students who, though they had come to Canada to spread their variety of Christianity, returned home in 1914-15 to kill for the British Empire.

Canadian-born students were also caught up in a surge of imperial patriotism during the first years of war. President Murray sent a group of students off to war in November 1914 with an official proclamation glorying in the fact that they were “inspired by the highest ideals of the Anglo-Saxon race,” and urging them to

emulate King Arthur and his knights while fighting for the honour of the British Empire.<sup>9</sup>

In the early days the war was also seen to be a chance to prove manliness. Reginald Bateman gave the strongest expression of this theme in his talk to the Young Men’s Christian Association on October 24, 1914 which Ross Macpherson had objected to. Among Bateman’s comments were the following words:

The Power Who manifests Himself to us in the phenomena of this Universe has apparently decreed that war should be the supreme test of both the nation and the individual.... war is the one supreme, the only entirely adequate test of a nation’s spiritual quality....

Self-sacrifice, self-denial, temperance, hardihood, discipline, obedience, order, method, organizing power. Intelligence, purity of public life, chastity, industry, resolution, are some only of the national and individual attributes which go towards producing the efficiency of modern armaments....

When the more dangerous of lower animals have been tamed or exterminated, when locomotion by land, air, and sea has become safe and easy, when – greatest blessing of all – war has ceased to exist, then surely we shall see the return of the Golden Age enjoyed by a spineless and emasculated race of beings, who have forgotten the meaning of the words courage, honour and self-sacrifice.<sup>10</sup>

Captain and Chaplain E.H. Oliver, the first professor of History at the U of S and then Principal of the Presbyterian theological college on campus was known for his pro-empire speeches and talks. He wrote in *the Sheaf* in 1916:

During recent months through suffering and sacrifice the human race has learned for the first time the full glory and import of what a colony really

is. We have learned that a true colony not only shares in the traditions, constitution and life of the Motherland, she also feels the same impulses and faces the same fiery ordeals.... We must learn the lesson of the fire and the cross, the University and the Church, the lessons of struggle and sacrifice and self-control.... Today we are fighting for civilization, we are fighting for Christ. He fights best who keeps clean.<sup>11</sup>

So in 1914-15 they went for God and for country (just as the motto of the U of S called on them to do). They also went to prove to themselves and others that they were manly, brave, disciplined, courageous – and clean.

In later years many went because they believed the propaganda that the war would be “the war to end all wars.” In 1919 John Cameron, the editor of the *Sheaf* and a veteran who had been wounded in 1916, wrote that this was the motive for enlistment for the majority of citizens, and that they would have served in vain unless a way could be found to “make a repetition of the holocaust of the last four years impossible....”<sup>12</sup>

In 1914 and early 1915 very many believed that the war would not last more than a year. The Huns would be trampled and students would return to the university. But the war continued and there was a surge of enlistments in the late winter and spring of 1916. Then reports of more and more battlefield casualties began to arrive on campus.

As noted earlier, enlistment slowed down and more of those who did enlist went into the Royal Flying Corps which in 1918 became the RAF. Some joined the air force for adventure or excitement, but many others did so because they knew that the training period was much longer than that for the army. The reason for this was that the generals were desperate for bodies to put into the miles and miles of filthy, waterlogged, rat-infested, stinking trenches stretching through northern France and Belgium. The generals needed canon fodder, or more often machine gun fodder, to participate in the suicidal attacks they continually ordered.

Nevertheless, the pressure to enlist was still there. Walter Murray encouraged it, saying at one point that all male students should either be home on the farm or in the army. Some female students harassed those males who did not enlist, waving white feathers in their face and taunting them as cowards as they walked by. Perhaps they were inspired by mothers who were members of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE) which had adopted a similar polity toward unenlisted males.<sup>13</sup>

On November 11, 1918, as reports of battlefield deaths continued to be published in *the Sheaf*, the war ended. On the campus of the U of S the end of the war did not bring peace – it brought a plague. The influenza epidemic that swept the world in 1918 approached Saskatoon in the fall of that year. The U of S tried to protect itself by quarantining in residence those students and faculty who were willing. Under these conditions some teaching went on. The isolated community of scholars was safe until desperate city leaders turned Emmanuel College into an emergency hospital. Twenty-two people – students, faculty wives and a few women from the community – volunteered to serve as nurses and orderlies. Mrs. J.A. Macdonald, the wife of the Professor of French and a trained nurse, provided leadership. The Murrays moved out of their house to provide a residence for the volunteers. Eleven of the volunteers caught the flu and one of them, William Hamilton a student and a widower with three children, died. The names of all twenty-two are listed on the walls of the north staircase of the College Building. One other student, John Fraser, also died of the flu.

Classes did not begin until January of 1919 and, somehow a full year’s work was crammed into three months. The situation was made worse because, even though those who had enlisted in their last year of university were automatically given their degrees and the others were given one year’s credit, many veterans were returning to take up their studies, while others wanted to enter university for the first time.

In addition, the university agreed to provide vocational training for disabled veterans. Between 1916 and 1921 courses were offered to about 1,000 veterans in farm motors and machinery, gas tractors, motor mechanics, machine shop practice, and various aspects of what were known as animal and field husbandry.

All of the extra work, along with the unhappiness of the professors who had returned from war with their salaries, pensions and eligibility for sabbatical, along with the push of some scientists for enlarged facilities contributed to a serious challenge to Walter Murray's authority by several faculty members that began in the spring of 1919. In the end, four professors were fired and Murray suffered a nervous breakdown.<sup>14</sup>

The students who returned from war were different. They refused to put up with the childish initiation ceremonies which were the tradition of the U of S. They refused to follow all the rules laid down to control student behaviour. And they did not accept the pious words being uttered by so many politicians, clerics and university officials about the glorious, noble sacrifice that had saved the world. John Cameron, the editor of *the Sheaf* quoted earlier wrote in the final issue of the 1918-19 academic year:

...the average man who went overseas from our University...has seen quite enough of war. He recognizes the waste, the futility, the absolute idiocy

of the whole performance; and is quite of the opinion that there is something wrong with our boasted civilization when it allows nations to pursue a method of settling their quarrels, that would not be tolerated for a moment in the settlement of the differences arising between smaller units of our body politic.<sup>15</sup>

The veterans were almost all gone from the U of S by 1922 and the old rules and practices were once again imposed. There were other changes at the U of S, brought in large part by World War I, that lasted much longer.

What was the major effect of World War I on the University of Saskatchewan? In a sentence, it changed the U of S from an isolated outpost of nineteenth-century British culture to a Canadian university which emphasized applied science, professional education and involvement in the lives of the people of Saskatchewan; and in doing so opened the way to

Memorial Gates at the University of Saskatchewan, October 1955

S-B 3401



a university education to the increasingly ethnically diverse population of Saskatchewan.

The University of Saskatchewan had been founded with the intention that it should serve the inhabitants of Saskatchewan. Both Walter Murray and Premier Scott called it “The People’s University.” The U of S was the only university in Canada which had colleges of Arts and Science and Agriculture on the same campus. It was meant to serve the province in all the ways that were necessary to develop the economy and to provide every type of post secondary education. But in the years from the start of classes in 1909 until the end of World War I in 1918, the emphasis was overwhelmingly on teaching students who had roots in the British Isles the traditional subjects taught in English universities. The curriculum was dominated by history, literature, ancient and modern languages, and philosophy, along with a bit of economics and one class in psychology – taught by a philosopher. There were some classes in chemistry and mathematics, and a sprinkling of physics and biology. However, before 1919 only ten Bachelor of Science degrees were awarded, compared to 180 Bachelor of Arts degrees.

In the College of Agriculture most of the emphasis was on teaching practical farming in a two year certificate course. The first degree in agriculture was awarded in 1916 and it was not until 1921 that more than a few of them were awarded in a year. The College of Law was slowly beginning to develop and there were a few students taking civil engineering, and a few pharmacy students in a one year certificate course, but that was it for the professional colleges.

Immediately after World War I there was a significantly greater demand for science classes and for classes leading to a professional degree, as well as a greater interest in applied research on the part of government officials.

Within a few years colleges of Law, Pharmacy and Accounting were established, as well as programs that eventually developed into colleges of Medicine and so-called Domestic Science.<sup>16</sup> The heads of the Physics and Chemistry departments capitalized on government and student interest with the result that most available capital funds went toward the construction of a separate building for each. The physicists and chemists were then able to leverage

significant sums of money to equip their buildings and hire more faculty. This opened the way to the preeminence of these two sciences at the U of S for many years. In fact each of the departments functioned almost as a separate college. The immediate replacement of the Engineering Building after its destruction by fire in 1925 soaked up the rest of the capital funds. Biologists, mathematicians, historians, linguists, economists and political scientists would have to wait another thirty years to get decent accommodations, the chance to expand and facilities for research – from labs to libraries. As for the other social scientists – they were not welcome at the U of S until after World War II; in the case of some disciplines, long after.

Walter Murray, though a philosopher by training, encouraged the emphasis on the sciences and professional schools after World War I because he had always wanted a university that had a monopoly of all post-secondary education in Saskatchewan, and he wanted this university to provide everything necessary for the growth of prosperity in the province. From time to time he said that he regretted that other disciplines had to suffer, but he did nothing to alleviate the situation.

In a speech he delivered in 1922 Walter Murray described what he thought was the product of the post World War I University of Saskatchewan:

The Canadian one sees developing is not a man of genius, nor is he gifted with the imagination of the poet or the insight of the scientist; but he is an efficient man of excellent judgement and good, practical sense; and we have found that he has great capacity for endurance and tenacity and...a fair amount of modesty and lack of self-consciousness.<sup>17</sup>

In passing one must note that, despite Murray’s use of the noun “man” and masculine pronouns in this speech, as of 1922 a significant number of the graduates of the U of S were women, including two of Murray’s three daughters, and very few of these women studied science.

Whether or not the students of the U of S ever became what Murray predicted they would be, by the 1930s

they certainly had a different picture of war than had the students of 1914.

In 1934 Walter Murray wrote:

The students of today differ greatly from those of 1914. They know what war means. Many have very decided opinions about the futility and the brutality of war. In 1914 it was the adventure, mayhap a glorious adventure. In 1934 it is a horrid menace not only to vanquished and victors but to helpless women and children. The students of today are not dominated by fear but by hatred of war.<sup>18</sup>

There would be another war between 1939 to 1945 and another memorial was built for those who died in it – The Memorial Union Building – which joined the two memorials of World War I. World War II would bring changes to the U of S that were at least as significant as those brought by World War I, but that subject merits a separate article.

### Endnotes

1 The major sources for this article are the records of the University of Saskatchewan (especially those of the Registrar, the Controller and the Alumni Offices, the correspondence of the first president of the university, Walter Murray, and the student newspaper, *the Sheaf* (all found in the University Archives) and the records of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, found in the National Archives in Ottawa. Of the records in the National Archives, only the online attestation papers have been used. Among other records which should be used by anyone wishing to carry out a complete study of the topic are those of the British forces, especially those of the RAF and its predecessor the Royal Flying Corps. These are available in the Public Record Office in London. The information that I gathered from the above sources was entered into a database that I designed specifically for this project. It is now online on the University Archives website – [www.usask.ca/archives](http://www.usask.ca/archives). Details about the design and contents of this database are available in the archives.

2 The reason for the omission seems to be that the list for Memorial Gates was based on a sloppy reading of a 1928 report from the Assistant Director of

Records of the Canadian Army that lists all but two of those who died in its first pages and lists the deaths of the other two further on, in the midst of all the other veterans.

3 The papers of four individuals were not yet online, seventeen men could not be identified with the information available. While those who joined the RFC/RAF directly are not included among the 273, those students who were drafted during the last year of the war and quickly transferred to the RAF are included because they filled out attestation papers before they were discharged on condition that they immediately joined the RAF. The students who joined U.S. forces were Eugene Follens (Medical Corps), Orlo Jeffries, William Masters, Frederick Streib, and William Waind. Of the other two, G.W. Green was most probably a staff member and C.A. Burris probably was. Follens and Waind had graduated before enlistment and Streib did so after the war.

4 According to A.S. Morton, Heal left for England to enlist within two weeks of the declaration of war. He adds, “two or three individuals made their way to Britain at once.” University of Saskatchewan Archives, Morton Papers, Morton Ms., p. 162. On the walls of the College Building Heathcote is listed as a member of the Grenadier Guards.

5 As for their chests – when expanded they ranged from 29 ½” to 43” with a median of 36 ½”. The amount of expansion ranged from 1” to 7”, with a median of 3”. For whatever reason, those who enlisted as officers were not measured. Therefore, data regarding height and width exists for only 250 of the 273 U of S recruits with attestation papers.

6 There is an entry in the minutes of the U of S Board of Governors for February 28, 1918 noting that President Murray “explained the circumstances of Professor Brehaut’s case,” whereupon the Board accepted Brehaut’s resignation. The Board then empowered the president to withdraw the money Brehaut had contributed to the university pension fund and “to hand over all or part of the sum to his [Brehaut’s] relatives any time deemed wise to do so.”

7 *The Greystone*, 1928.

8 One veteran is listed as living in Munich Germany, but this must have been a mistake since he was the person mentioned above who was killed in action in October 1918.

9 Proclamation of president, staff and students, November 1914.

10 *Reginald Bateman, Teacher and Scholar*



(London, 1922), pp. 130-1, 137.

11 "A Preachment by Padre" *the Sheaf*, 1916, pp. 71-2.

12 *The Sheaf*, 1919, p. 268.

13 Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2005), p. 193.

14 Michael Hayden, *Seeking a Balance, the University of Saskatchewan, 1907-1982* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983), pp. 78-116.

15 *The Sheaf*, 1919, pp. 267-8.

16 Hayden, *Seeking a Balance*, pp. 125-33.

17 "Saskatchewan University and the European War," *United Services Journal*, 1922, p. 22.

18 Murray to *the Canada Home Journal*, Jan. 29, 1934.

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## **Called to Duty: Medical and Nursing Care at Saskatoon and Moose Jaw during the Northwest Rebellion in 1885**

By Elizabeth Domm

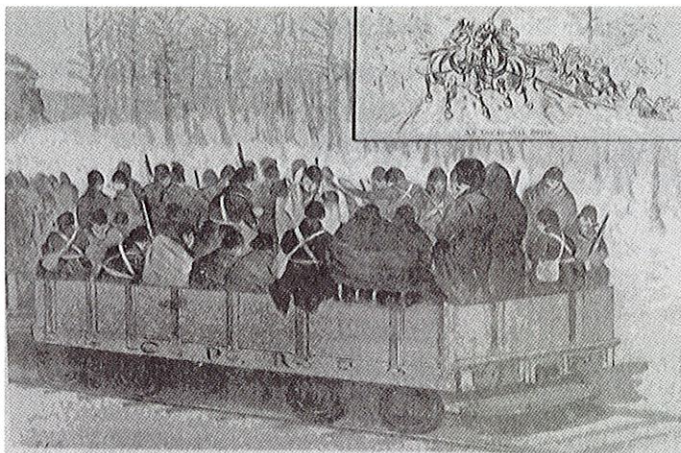
### **Introduction**

The North-West Rebellion of 1885 was one of the first military episodes in Canadian history after Confederation. In what would later become Saskatchewan, some of the Métis and First Nations people rebelled against the Canadian government. The focus of this paper is the story of the medical and nursing care given by those who were called to duty to care for the wounded and ill in the spring of 1885, around Swift Current, Moose Jaw and Saskatoon.

### **Selection of Medical and Nursing Personnel and Supplies**

Unsettled spring weather in March, April, and May, 1885 caused difficulties in moving troops and supplies to the area of the uprising, around Batoche in central Saskatchewan. The army needed provision for medical and nursing care, which was hastily arranged, after the troops had left for the front. Dr. Darby Bergin, Surgeon General reported in 1886 (as quoted by Hugh MacDermot)

When on the first of April... [1885]  
I undertook the organization of a Medical Staff Corps, I was not blind to the difficulties of the situation. There was no fixed Departmental Medical Staff, no Field Hospital or Ambulance Services, no organized Corps of Nurses, no fixed method or recognizing such societies as the St. John's Hospital Aid Society, the Red Cross.... Added to these the hurried levy, the necessarily scanty equipment of many of the men consequent to this, the severity of the weather, the difficulties of transport, the exposure of the Troops to the frost and snow in open cars, the long distances to be traversed between the finished and unfinished portions of the railway, ...the Major-General Commanding having already left Winnipeg for the



69 "Cold Comfort in a Flat Car," *The Illustrated War News*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 18 April 1885. 10th Royal Grenadiers in open railway cars en route to the North-West. Though perhaps somewhat overdramatized, this and the following drawing do indicate the considerable hardships that the troops suffered. (Public Archives Canada, C-7683.)



70 "'A' Battery in the Touchwood Hills — Stuck in a Snow-Bank," *The Illustrated War News*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 18 April 1885. (Public Archives Canada, C-11537.)

Canadian Pictorial Illustrated War News, Volume 1, Number 3, 18 April 1885.

Public Archives Canada, C-7683 and C-11537.

front with a portion of the troops – all conspired to render the task one of unusual difficulty.<sup>1</sup>

At this time, there was no infrastructure for the health care needs of the Dominion military people arriving for the rebellion in the North-West Territories. People at this time cared for their own wounds and ills, with the help of a doctor, if there was one available in the vicinity or from the North West Mounted Police (NWMP). Some of the NWMP forts had a doctor and a hospital for members, and often a medical officer was sent on marches with the NWMP.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Bergin was asked to establish a medical corps to care for casualties from the rebellion. Dr. Bergin sent telegrams requesting supplies of hospital cots, mattresses, instruments and equipment such as basins and utensils to companies in the United States and Canada, and organized the delivery of equipment through Winnipeg. He contacted Dr. Thomas Roddick, a physician working at the Montreal General Hospital, to be Chief of Medical Staff in the Field and selected several physicians and surgeons to go to the battlefield to care for casualties.<sup>3</sup> Dr. Bergin publicly put out a call for nurses to volunteer for duty at the front and asked medical students from Toronto and Montreal

to give first aid and be stretcher-bearers at the scene of fighting. It was thought the medical students would have some familiarity with first aid from their classes. Nurses and medical students volunteered enthusiastically to serve with the army.<sup>4</sup> The public was asked to contribute dressings and bandages through church groups, and the St. John's Hospital Aid Societies and the Red Cross Corps were created to be sent west.<sup>5</sup> Two field hospitals, each having six officers were formed, and each regiment had its own independent medical officer, with great variations in skill and equipment.<sup>6</sup>

Although many nurses volunteered, General Middleton, General Laurie (in charge of the Commissariat for the expedition), Deputy Surgeon General Thomas Roddick of the North-West Territories, and Dr. James Bell, Surgeon Major in charge of the base hospitals, wanted only "trained nurses" perhaps due to the influence of Florence Nightingale and the experience with the care and treatment of wounded soldiers in the Crimean War.<sup>7</sup> In Canada, there was a Nightingale nurses' training school in St. Catherine's, Ontario, and there were several in the United States.<sup>8</sup>

The message was telegraphed “No volunteer nurses. If you can send an organized body under a trained head, they will be welcome.”<sup>9</sup> Mother Hannah Grier Coome was asked to volunteer by the Anglican Synod in Toronto, because she had some nurse’s training in the operating rooms and wards at Trinity Hospital, New York. She agreed to take charge of the base hospital at Moose Jaw, taking with her two postulants and one novice of the Anglican Order of St. John the Divine in Toronto and three volunteer graduate nurses from Bellevue Hospital in New York.<sup>10</sup> Mother Hannah and the women embarked on their journey to the frontier in mid April, 1885 from Toronto, crossing the Great Lakes by boat then continuing by train. Their journey took six weeks from the time they accepted the call to duty until their arrival on May 30, 1885 in Moose Jaw. Mother Hannah recorded in her Memoirs that on the journey across Lake Superior she cut off her long dark hair and dropped it overboard. She reasoned that if the care of her hair was proving difficult at that time, what would happen when they reached what they thought of as “the wilderness”?<sup>11</sup> Mother Hannah and her party were sent by ship across the Great Lakes, then to Winnipeg, then by train to Moose Jaw.

### **Travel and the Establishment of a Field Hospital in Swift Current**

Dr. Thomas Roddick, young Dr. Campbell Douglas and several stretcher-bearers left Montreal April 7 to travel to Winnipeg via Chicago and Minneapolis by train, then on to Swift Current. The train was equipped with a specially outfitted caboose, sleeping car, and baggage car.<sup>12</sup> These three cars of the train were pulled to a railway siding in Swift Current on April 16, 1885 to be Number One Field Hospital as ordered by Major General Middleton. Dr. Roddick approved the cars for a field hospital when they first arrived because there was no upholstery on the berths in the sleeping car or caboose (which would help with cleaning), it was heated by steam, and there was a washroom. Dr. Roddick had strong ideas regarding the necessity to use carbolic acid to reduce infections to wounds in surgery, and the importance of keeping wounds clean to prevent infection. He had visited and worked with Dr. Joseph Lister in Scotland where he saw the results of spraying the area in the operating room with carbolic acid during surgery.<sup>13</sup> Dr. Roddick required that the areas where people had surgery, or were cared for when

they had wounds, must be cleaned rigorously to prevent infections.

At this time there were no houses available close to the railway in Swift Current, so the surgeons, dressers and hospital corps were accommodated on the Hospital Train.<sup>14</sup> The railcars became mired down after a month of use in prairie spring weather including snow, rain, and mud. Purveyor General, Dr. Sullivan condemned the cars before they could be used as a field hospital, describing the train as “old dirty, dilapidated cars deeply embedded in the mud... close to the railway latrine” the smells of which hung on the air surrounding the area.<sup>15</sup> The intention to use the railcars as the Number One Field Hospital at Swift Current was abandoned after the wear and tear and weather caused them to deteriorate.

**Care of the Wounded from the Fish Creek Battle**  
General Middleton’s main column of soldiers marched north from the railway at Troy towards Batoche. The army was surprised by Métis combatants at Fish Creek, April 24, 1885, and engaged in battle. Dr. Orton, Brigade Surgeon noted the medical care was provided on the field and behind the lines by medical corps.<sup>16</sup> After the fighting, on the evening of April 24, the weather turned from heavy rain to wind, hail and snow. Doctors and soldiers trained in first aid tended the wounded from the Dominion force in tents, and the Métis withdrew toward Batoche.<sup>17</sup> Most of the injuries sustained were from gunshot wounds to arms and shoulders, but some combatants suffered compound fractures and amputated limbs. Major Boulton reported the rebels had the advantage of good cover and tactical position for the battle with the result that the Dominion Force (of about 300 combatants) counted 42 wounded and 10 deaths among their members.<sup>18</sup>

The Dominion force remained in the Fish Creek area for a week to recoup and wait for supplies, and then Dr. Orton accompanied 35 wounded men to Saskatoon in wagons. Canvas awnings were constructed over the wagons to shelter the wounded men from the elements for the 42-mile, two-day journey.<sup>19</sup>

### **Efforts to Provide Medical Care and Support to the Troops**

Dr. Roddick documented attempts to get medical support to the army, although he was hampered by



Picture of Sister Hannah Grier Coome, 1884.

Hannah G. Coome, *A Memoir of the life and work of Hannah Grier Coome: Mother-Foundress of the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1933), 91.

having left Montreal after the troops, and stopping to establish a field hospital.<sup>20</sup> One of the greatest challenges in providing medical care to the troops was to get qualified surgeons to the battalions that were already on the move.<sup>21</sup> As the troops were advancing north from the railway towards Batoche on April 23, Dr. Roddick sent Dr. Bell and a medical party from Swift Current up the South Saskatchewan River to Saskatoon on the Steamer *Northcote* to meet and travel with General Middleton's troops. Dr. Roddick received a telegram from General Middleton informing him that there had been 50 casualties in the Fish Creek Battle on April 24 and that the *Northcote*

was caught on sandbars in the Saskatchewan River delaying the medical party and supplies.<sup>22</sup> Dr. Douglas left Swift Current April 28, 1885 and traveled alone by buckboard, walking and paddling his foldable one man canoe via the South Saskatchewan River to Saskatoon. He was concerned about being seen on the river and being attacked by First Nations people, but arrived safely May 3, 1885, the same day the wounded from the Battle of Fish Creek arrived in Saskatoon.<sup>23</sup> Dr. Roddick left Moose Jaw for Saskatoon April 30, traveling on the Moose Jaw trail by horse and wagons, with a surgeon and four dressers, surgical supplies, instruments, dressings and stretchers, also arriving on

May 3. Drs. Douglas and Roddick were surprised to see each other, but immediately set to work tending the arriving sick and injured from Fish Creek.<sup>24</sup>

### **Base Hospital at Saskatoon**

The wounded men arriving in Saskatoon were placed in the school and billeted in some of the 20 private homes of the community, but it soon became necessary to commandeer the largest houses on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River for the wounded and establish a field hospital at Saskatoon, as ordered by General Middleton.<sup>25</sup> The wounded included many enlisted men with gunshot wounds, amputations and one other civilian that Dr. Roddick brought to the field hospital that was closest to the fighting.<sup>26</sup>

Although it was necessary to provide medical and surgical care to the wounded in Saskatoon, it was apparent that the doctors assigned to the regiments and the stretcher-bearers were needed with the troops. Dr. Orton and his medical team were sent back to be with General Middleton's troops soon after the wounded were accompanied to Saskatoon.<sup>27</sup> On May 7, 1885, Dr. Roddick summoned a trained nurse from Winnipeg, the closest major hospital, to help care for the wounded in Saskatoon. Nurse L. Miller arrived May 12, and immediately set to work organizing the nursing care of the wounded.<sup>28</sup> Nurse Miller was a graduate from the Montreal General Hospital and was working as the head nurse in the Winnipeg General Hospital at the time.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Battle of Batoche and the Continued Need for Care**

The Battle at Batoche ended on May 12, resulting in the defeat of the rebels and the provisional government. On May 14, 1885, 27 wounded men were moved to the base hospital in Saskatoon by the steamer *Northcote* which had earlier been stuck on a sandbar, but was now available to move men and supplies.<sup>30</sup> The commandeered houses that were serving as the base hospital were reported to be crowded with 80 men, most were wounded, but also some men had become ill from various diseases. The wounded and ill were cared for by two doctors (Doctors Bell and Douglas), Nurse Miller and four dressers. The only recorded drawback was that the cots were of inferior quality or defective, and were subsequently discarded.<sup>31</sup> Dr. Orton reported the

soldiers' health had been influenced by poor clothing for the weather conditions, and the scarcity of water to drink or wash in. Most of the troops had not bathed for almost two months, wearing the same clothes the whole time and sleeping on the ground at night, which may have contributed to illness or disease.<sup>32</sup> On May 23, 1885 Dr Roddick wrote:

“Two nurses, and assistant and a helper, arrived today by trail and were at once put on duty under the superintendence of nurse Miller. The latter had hitherto been most indefatigable in her attendance of the wounded. In fact, much of the success which attended the treatment of our wounded at Saskatoon was undoubtedly due to the skill, kindness and untiring devotion of nurse Miller. Nurses Elking and Hamilton are likewise deserving of praise for their unremitting attention to duty.”<sup>33</sup>

Nurses Elkin and Parsons, and Miss Hamilton, an assistant, arrived from Winnipeg after traveling by train to Troy then by a horse drawn democrat. This journey took three days, and the nurses endured bites from sand flies and mosquitoes day and night. Nurse Parsons gave her reminiscences to a reporter from the *Winnipeg Tribune* about her time in the Saskatoon base hospital.<sup>34</sup> Nurse Parsons recalled the wounded were from both the army and the opposing force. Nurses assisted with dressing changes and medical treatment of the wounded, carried out physician's orders, and monitored patients' progress. She stated nurses did not have time for much other than caring for the patients. They did not wear nurses' uniforms but plain print dresses with small tea aprons and a Red Cross band on one arm. Women from Winnipeg sent clean used linen, blankets, sheets and nightshirts to Saskatoon for the men who were wounded. The nurses made and rolled bandages from the clean linen ripped into strips and squares. The nurses slept on cots in tents by the river when they had time off duty. Nurse Parsons reported the nurses did not see the fighting, only the results.

By May 21, 1885, some convalescents were well enough to travel from Saskatoon to the base hospital which was situated in Moose Jaw after the closure of the Number One Field Hospital in Swift Current. Dr.



Photograph of the Moose Hotel, built in 1883 in Moose Jaw Saskatchewan.

Archive Department, Moose Jaw Public Library, Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan.

Laurie and Dr. Sullivan requisitioned the Moose Hotel for this purpose.<sup>35</sup> The wounded were transported on the steamer *Northcote* (once again) to the elbow in the South Saskatchewan River where they were loaded into nine wagons and taken overland through the spring mud and ruts to Moose Jaw arriving May 26, 1885. Fellow soldiers and convalescents cared for the wounded on the voyage under the supervision of Dr. Douglas. Following the move, Dr. Douglas reported "I would suggest that no serious cases of wounds be sent by this route, the journey overland in unsuitable vehicles being too trying."<sup>36</sup> Dr. Roddick organized food, lodging and care for the arriving wounded until Mother Hannah and the nurses arrived May 30, 1885, after their long trip by steam ship across the Great Lakes, from Owen Sound to Fort William, then by rail to Moose Jaw.

The Moose Hotel was cleared out to the walls, which Mother Hannah described as being covered by tar paper with slats holding it in place, and decorated with no smoking signs.<sup>37</sup> It was a long narrow two-storied building, with the ground floor partitioned off into an office to be used as an apothecary, a large room for 10 beds, kitchen, and storerooms. Upstairs, there were 10 small rooms suitable for two beds each. Privies

and cesspools were erected outside at the back. Water was kept in barrels hauled to the back of the building by the kitchen door, and wastes were hauled away through the same door. Mother Hannah recorded there were about 40 "sick and wounded men on cots" in the field hospital.<sup>38</sup> Dr. Roddick reported "Their arrival was most opportune as some of the men were much in need of skilled nursing."<sup>39</sup> The women were met at the train station by and General Laurie, escorted to the Moose Hotel, and by that evening Mother Hannah, the one novice, two postulants, and three nurses had arranged the field hospital to suit.

The nurses watched over wounded men and those who were ill from the military force twenty-four hours a day in the field hospital. The first night in Moose Jaw, those nurses that were not on duty retired to their cottage billet where they were dismayed to see the walls and ceiling of their sleeping area crawling with red "creatures" (possibly bugs). Although it was late and they were very tired, they were afraid to retire, in case the creatures crawled all over them, so they sat up all night in chairs with their skirts wrapped firmly around their legs. The creatures were reported the next day and dispatched.<sup>40</sup>

It soon became apparent to Mother Hannah, who visited each patient every day, that the crowded quarters for the sick and wounded in the Moose Hotel would not enhance healing and convalescence. She did not like to keep the wounded indoors all the time (for the wounded men were not always sick)<sup>41</sup>, and believed those that were able to get up or be moved would benefit from fresh air and sunlight, cleanliness and good food. Initially, all food was prepared on a stove in the kitchen of the house, and the sick and wounded either ate in the kitchen or were fed in bed. The odors of cooking and close habitation got quite overwhelming at times, which was another reason to have the men that were well enough encouraged to move outside if they could during the day.

Dr. Roddick and Dr. Laurie arranged for a recreation tent, cook shop and marquee for convalescents to be erected on a grassy area adjoining the hospital at Mother Hannah's request. Dining tables were set up under the marquee and the trees, and some cots

with mattresses and pillows were placed outside for the wounded to lounge upon during the day. Women from Toronto sent donations that pleased the men convalescing from their injuries, including magazines, books, newspapers, chess and cribbage boards, cards, pipes and tobacco. Women from Portage la Prairie, Manitoba sent fruit, cakes and fresh eggs, which added variety to the food served to the men. Mother Hannah encouraged the men who were not sick to be outside after the bandages were changed, getting fresh air and exercise and aiding their recovery.<sup>42</sup>

Mother Hannah recorded in her memoirs that members of Sitting Bull's Sioux band from Montana were camped close to the field hospital on the other side of the Moose Jaw Creek.<sup>43</sup> Several members of the band came to the field hospital for treatment of various ills, and some of the women were employed to clean at the field hospital. She wrote that Black Bull, Sitting Bull's Brother was the leader of the band, and he drew a fine picture of a buffalo to thank her for care given to band members at the field hospital.

Picture taken by Mrs. J. Bellamy, and included in Mother Hannah's Memoirs, 1933. Dr. Roddick is on the far left of the picture next to Mother Hannah, the novice, and two postulants in front of the field hospital at Moose Jaw. The three nurses from the Bellevue Hospital in New York are to the right of the doorway, with some of the wounded and soldiers in Moose Jaw in June, 1885.



Throughout June, wounded and convalescents from Saskatoon arrived at the Moose Jaw field hospital. Gradually the number of patients decreased as they became well enough to be discharged and sent back home. On July 3, 1885, the Saskatoon field hospital was evacuated and 17 wounded were transported to the Winnipeg General Hospital by way of a barge named *Sir John A. MacDonald* towed by the steamer *Alberta*.<sup>44</sup> The barge was quite luxurious, by the standards at the time as it had cabins for two doctors, four nurses, three dressers and a female servant. Another barge with “two milk cows, fresh meat, vegetables and comforts for the wounded” followed. The wounded men were transferred the 1100 miles by water barge and steamers and claimed the water trip was “more comfortable than the short overland trip from the hospital to the barge”.<sup>45</sup> This may have been the reason the barge was used, to spare the wounded the discomfort of an overland trip.

Dr. Roddick received reports that there were Métis people who had been wounded in the battles at Fish Creek and Batoche who were hiding in the bush. He and Dr. Boyd set out on horseback alone to help those in need of medical care. He provided what medical care he could upon finding ill and wounded Métis with the help of the priest at Batoche and family members at Fish Creek. He left bandages and dressing supplies with the priest for their continuing care when he left the area.<sup>46</sup>

Early in July, Mother Hannah, the sisters and the nurses accompanied the one remaining wounded man to the Winnipeg General Hospital, and then returned to Toronto. Prior to their departure from Moose Jaw they were invited to dine with General Laurie in honour of their service. After dining, General Laurie accompanied them to the train station. Men lined the road to the train station to express their gratitude for the care they had received from the nurses. Mother Hannah looked back fondly on the time spent in the west at the field hospital and was frequently stopped by people who said they remembered her from the Moose Jaw field hospital. Once, she met a man in Toronto with a grizzled beard, still suffering from the effects of injuries, who reminded her that she had cared for him in the field hospital “Remember me? I was the one in the cot by the door to the kitchen.”<sup>47</sup> The Canadian Government awarded Mother Hannah

the medal for those who served in the North-West Rebellion of 1885 for her work in the field hospital.

### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Tricia Marck and Dr. Pauline Paul, Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta for their support and encouragement in the preparation of this paper, and Mr. Kenneth Aitken, Prairie History Librarian, Regina Public Library for his assistance in locating resources. Thank you to the reviewers for your comments and to Jason Zorbas for his suggestions to improve this article.

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# People and Places

## Reluctant Homesteader: A French Settler's Story Part One: A Parting of the Ways

by Jocelyne Scott

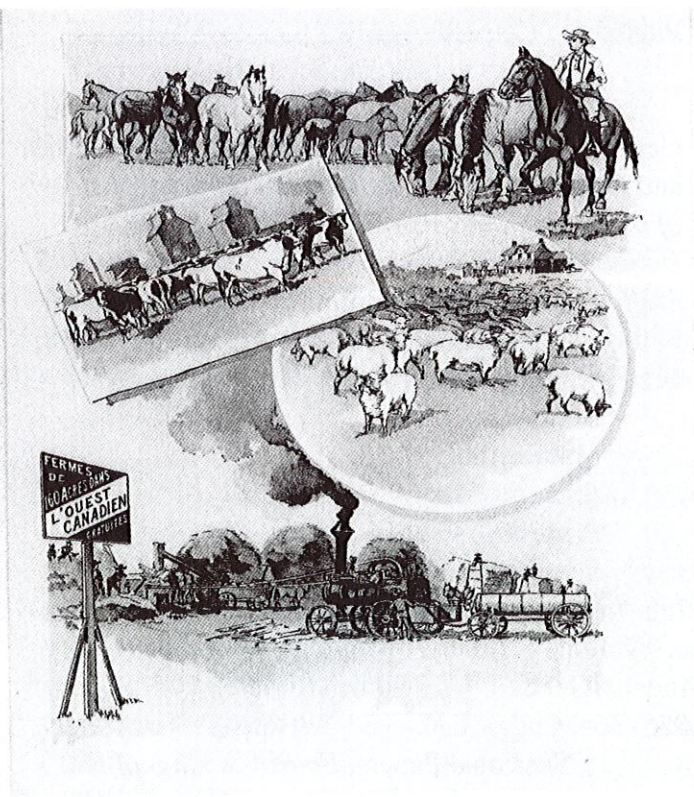
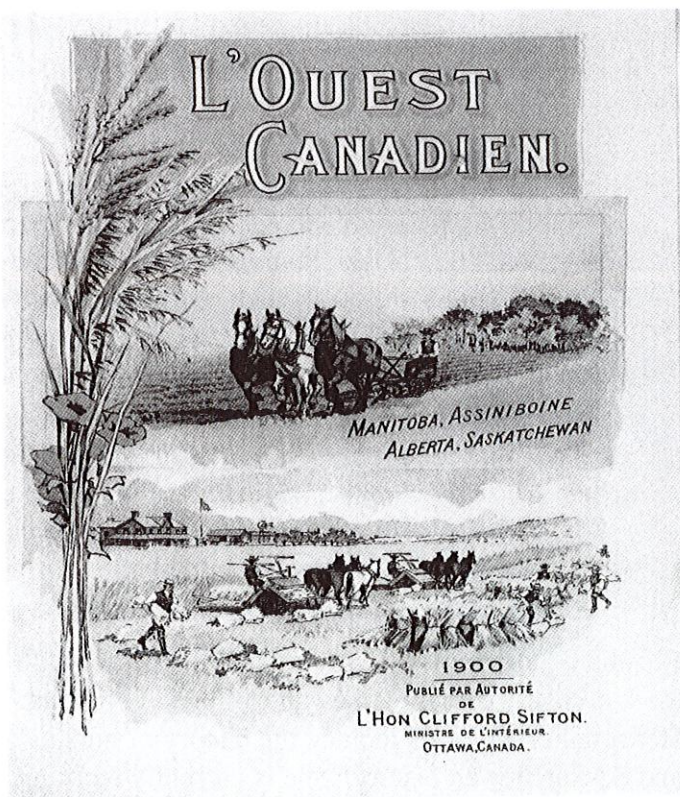
“...*Je suis on peut dire le seul qui se soit tiré de tous ceux que le Père Le Floch a emmené avec lui, mais aussi je l'ai lâché*”. (...Out of all the colonists that Father Le Floch brought with him, it seems that I am the only one who has made good - well, that's because I dropped him).(1)

Thus wrote Victor Colvez to his friends in France from his new home in western Canada. In the bitter cold of a January morning in 1905, Victor was mulling over the trip he and his family had undertaken from the city of Rennes in Brittany. The trip had been difficult and had taken twice as long as promised, but at last he was on his way : “...*J'arriverai, coûte que coûte...*” (I'll make it, whatever the cost), he had vowed.

Victor's letter does not reveal what prompted him to leave Rennes, where he worked as a baker. An obvious reason could have been his hope for better economic opportunities. His five children would likely have poor prospects in Brittany: in the early nineteen hundreds this region was so depressed economically that many of its people had to seek work in factories and as household servants in other parts of France. But an enigmatic remark at the end of his letter suggests other possibilities: he asks his friends to take no notice of rumours about him that might be circulating in his home community . The only people who were accurately informed were “...our parents and yourselves, to whom I have written directly”. It seems that Victor had decided to cut off relationships with most of his previous acquaintances. (2)

Whatever the reason for leaving, it was compelling enough to support Victor's decision: *partir*, leave, emigrate, as was the solution of the day. But where? At that time the French government was busy recruiting colonists for Algeria, while the Canadian government was encouraging immigrants to settle on the Prairies.(3) Victor turned towards Canada.

Societe Historique de Saint-Boniface



Front and back covers of immigration pamphlet issued by the Canadian Government(Ottawa, 1900)

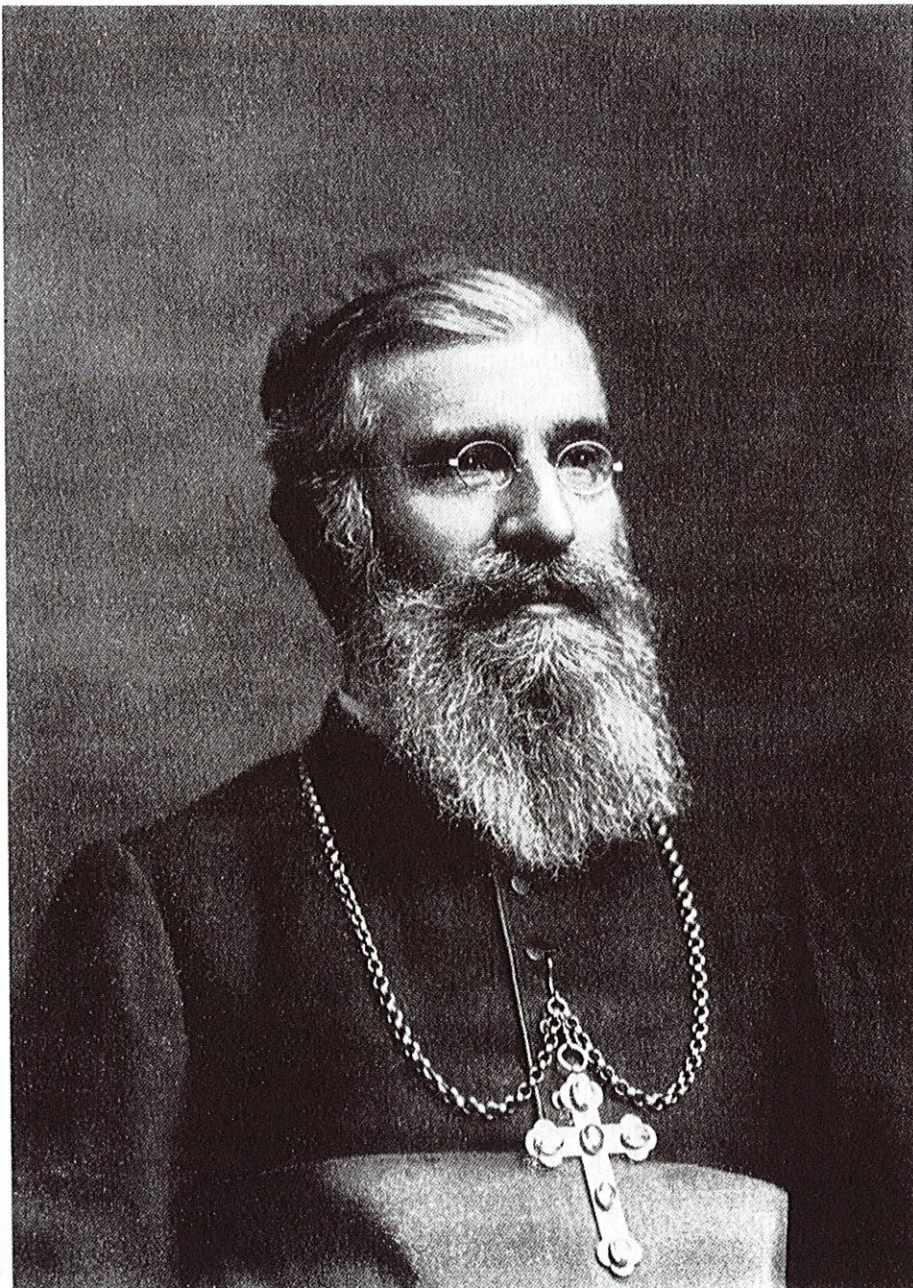
Victor probably first learned of opportunities in western Canada through the Roman Catholic Church and the local press, specifically *l'Ouest-Éclair*, a daily paper first established in 1899. Enter abbé Paul Le Floc'h, a priest from Guingamp in the parish of Magoar in north-west Brittany. The town of Guingamp was located within easy reach of Rennes and of a number of seaports along the Atlantic coast. It was thus well placed for the project Father Le Floc'h had been planning and now intended to carry out.

Father le Floc'h was one of a number of French priests who hoped to escape the secularianism of the

Societe Historique de Saint-Boniface

republican France by moving to Canada to set up Catholic communities. There they would be free to conduct their own affairs; in particular, they would be able to establish their own schools. Accordingly, some of these *missionnaires colonisateurs* (colonizer-missionaries) had taken it upon themselves, without financial support from the Canadian government, to conduct recruitment trips in Europe.

One of the most assiduous recruiters was abbé Jean-Isidore Gaire, who had been making regular trips between France and Canada since 1897. In 1902 he persuaded twenty-one Bretons to follow him



Portrait of Father Albert Pascal, who encouraged Father le Floc'h and his French colonists to settle in and around Prince Albert in 1904. Father Albert was ordained Bishop of the Prince Albert Diocese in 1907.

to Manitoba.(4) During a single three-month trip in many different regions of France, he held fifty-two public meetings, some of them lasting up to two hours, and answered some six hundred letters. “*Tenez pour certain*”, he wrote to Mgr. Langevin, the Archbishop of Saint-Boniface in Manitoba, “*qu’il viendra deux milliers de Français et plus dans les plaines canadiennes, cet été*” (You can be certain that two thousand Frenchmen, and more, will arrive on the Canadian Prairies this summer). In 1904 alone, the year of Victor Colvez’ own arrival, Father Gaire accompanied sixteen hundred French and Belgian colonists to Canada. Driven by his dream to create another “New France” on the Canadian prairies, he carried out eight recruitment trips in Europe between 1897 and 1906. He hoped, by this means, to increase the Catholic population in Canada to over seventy-five million. Father Gaire had in fact visited Guingamp in 1901, and it may well have been this visit that became a source of inspiration to abbé Paul LeFloc’h.(5)

Following Father Gaire’s example, Father Le Floc’h soon began to conduct colonization trips of his own: on April 4, 1903, he wrote an open letter to his fellow-Bretons in *l’Ouest-Éclair*. In it he described how the Canadian government was offering new settlers a grant of sixty-five hectares (160 acres) of land on which could be grown all the crops that farmers were already used to raising in France. The list was a generous one: wheat, barley, oats, peas, buckwheat, beans, maize, potatoes, turnips, flax, apples, plums, as well as other familiar agricultural products such as hay, honey, butter, cheese and so on. Settlers who did not wish to clear forested land could choose to settle on the prairies instead:

Here there are no trees to uproot,  
no rocks to dig out of the ground;  
it is the easiest thing to transform  
the prairie into cultivated fields, and  
communication links are readily  
established. All that a poverty-stricken  
arriving colonist needs to do is work  
for a few years on his own plot of land  
in order to find himself at the head of a  
sizeable farming concern.(6)

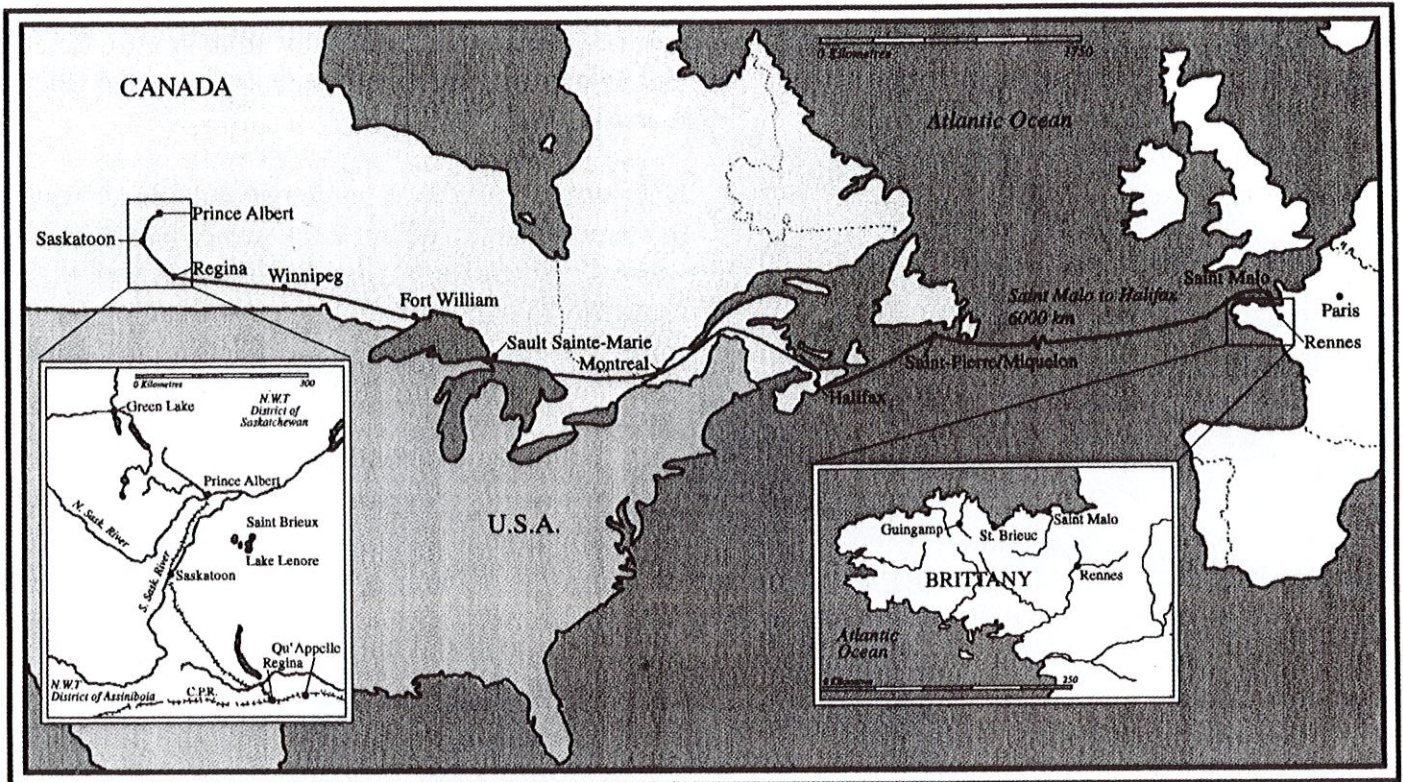
A tempting description, indeed! These promising prairie lands were to be found not only in the province of Manitoba but also in the vast expanses of the

North-West Territories, the Districts of Assiniboia, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Father Le Floc’h ended his letter with a statement of his own reasons for emigrating to Canada: he was leaving from St. Malo on April 29, 1903 to “... rescue the Christians of Saskatchewan” and was willing to help anyone from Brittany who was interested in joining him in establishing a colony of French Catholics, in order to “...*faire reculer les Protestants qui envahissent ce pays*” (...rout the Protestants who are invading that country).(7)

Father Le Floc’h’s colonizing agenda was fuelled by his determination to build his own church and congregation in Canada. In a spirit of indignation and protest, he and a number of his fellow priests decided that emigration would enable them to resist, or at least avoid a series of strict laws that France’s liberal government was enacting between 1901 and 1905 to ensure the separation of Church and State. In particular, the government wished to curb what it saw as the Church’s undue financial and political influence. It was alleged that conservative Catholic clergy were spreading monarchist, anti-republican views through their schools and such periodicals as *La Croix*. To the clergy, the most threatening of the new secularization measures were the State’s withdrawal of funds to the clergy and to religious institutions, its takeover of church property and its closure of any religious institution that did not meet strict conditions. Religion was no longer to be taught in schools, nor would young seminarists be exempt from military service. Some congregations in France had already been closed down and their members dispersed.(8)

True to his word, Father Le Floc’h set off for Canada on April 29, 1903, making his way by ship from St. Malo to Halifax, and thence by train to Montreal, Sault Ste. Marie, Fort William, Winnipeg, Regina, then to Prince Albert via the Qu’Appelle / Long Lake route. In Prince Albert he met Bishop Albert Pascal, who was encouraging colonization by French Catholics in his area. He was also able to benefit from the experience of another colonizer-missionary: Father Maisonneuve had already established a small mission at Flett’s Springs, southwest of present-day Melfort and willingly introduced him to some of the areas that had been surveyed and set aside for homesteaders.(9)



Victor Colvez' itinerary from Rennes to Prince Albert

Map by Jocelyne Scott and Karen Scott

In a follow-up letter to *l'Ouest-Eclair* on June 29, 1903, Father Le Floc'h, with the benefit of his fifteen-day, on-site exploratory trip in Saskatchewan, had toned down the boosterism of his first letter. His message to potential colonists was now more cautionary: "In order to tell the whole truth and to avoid misleading future colonists, I must admit to them that what you need in order to succeed in Canada is, first and foremost, willingness and perseverance."<sup>(10)</sup>

The land that he had selected near Vermilion Lake, today called Houghton Lake and located north of Humbolt, was very promising, he stated. Its fertile soil offered potential for mixed farming (cattle and field crops), it had ready access to good water, and it was close to the railway. Father Le Floc'h had a message for two categories of immigrants. The first category comprised those most likely to establish themselves quickly as small farmers -- those arriving in Canada with at least four thousand francs in savings, which in 1903 were worth about 772 Canadian dollars.<sup>(11)</sup> For a male immigrant who met this requirement, Father Le Floc'h laid out a plan: next April he leaves France without his family, builds a small house in Canada, buys a few cattle and begins to seed his fields. Come August of the same year, his family follows him to

assist in harvesting the crops. If the family includes a son aged at least eighteen years, father and son establish their homesteads right next to each other, to the advantage of both. However, Father Le Floc'h warned, even these relatively well-heeled immigrants must be prepared to work at least as hard as they had in France.<sup>(12)</sup>

Father Le Floc'h recognized that relatively few Canada-bound colonists had any savings, whether they came from Brittany or elsewhere. Most of them were young people without means - unable even to pay for their journey across the Atlantic. To suggest that they might become rich within ten years was a cruel joke. Thus, for this second category of immigrants Father Le Floc'h proposed a different plan, which he claimed had been followed successfully by the first settlers he had brought to Canada. A colonist without means needed to find employment for at least three years in order to accumulate enough savings to establish a homestead. Typical earnings were likely to be some one hundred and twenty francs per month, with winter work guaranteed. After building a small nest-egg (about twelve hundred francs or 232 dollars) in the first year, the next step was to sow a bit of wheat in the second year. Thus, bit by bit, colonists would

soon become well established on their own sixty-five hectares of land.

Their lot is thus not to be sneered at: instead of wilting in the big factories of France, here they breathe fresh air, they never work on Sundays, [and] they never give themselves over to alcohol since there is no longer any opportunity to do so.(13)

Not to be forgotten in his Ouest-Éclair letter was Father Le Floe'h's own agenda, namely, to establish a church at the heart of the new French colony. His plan was to build it close to the railway station and to call it the Church of Saint-Yves; in addition he would make sure that even the most distant of his new parishioners lived within only eight or nine miles of the settlement.(14)

In a direct appeal to his fellow Bretons he exhorted them to hurry: "Le pays est au pillage..." (the country is being plundered), he wrote. Hordes of immigrants were pouring onto the prairies from England, Ireland, Sweden, Hungary, Galicia, Roumania, Germany and other countries:

Only the Bretons are staying put, in spite of the fact that over here they are reputed to be the best farmers. I am offering you my services. Write to me at L'évêché du Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada. From there I will make my way to the colony, 120 miles away from here, near Vermilion Lake, to assign the plot that you have requested. Once again, we must hurry lest strangers get ahead of us.(15)

It was now early in 1904, and Father Le Floe'h was back in Brittany on another recruiting tour. The French-speaking dioceses in Brittany included Dol, Nantes, Rennes, Saint-Malo and Saint-Brieuc. Father Le Floe'h might have combed some of these, delivering lectures and perhaps exhibiting some of the immigration pamphlets designed by the Canadian government and by the Canadian Pacific railway. Much of this material had been translated into a number of European languages, including French. In addition, some of Father Le Floe'h's fellow priests, for example Jean-Baptiste Morin and J-B Proulx, had

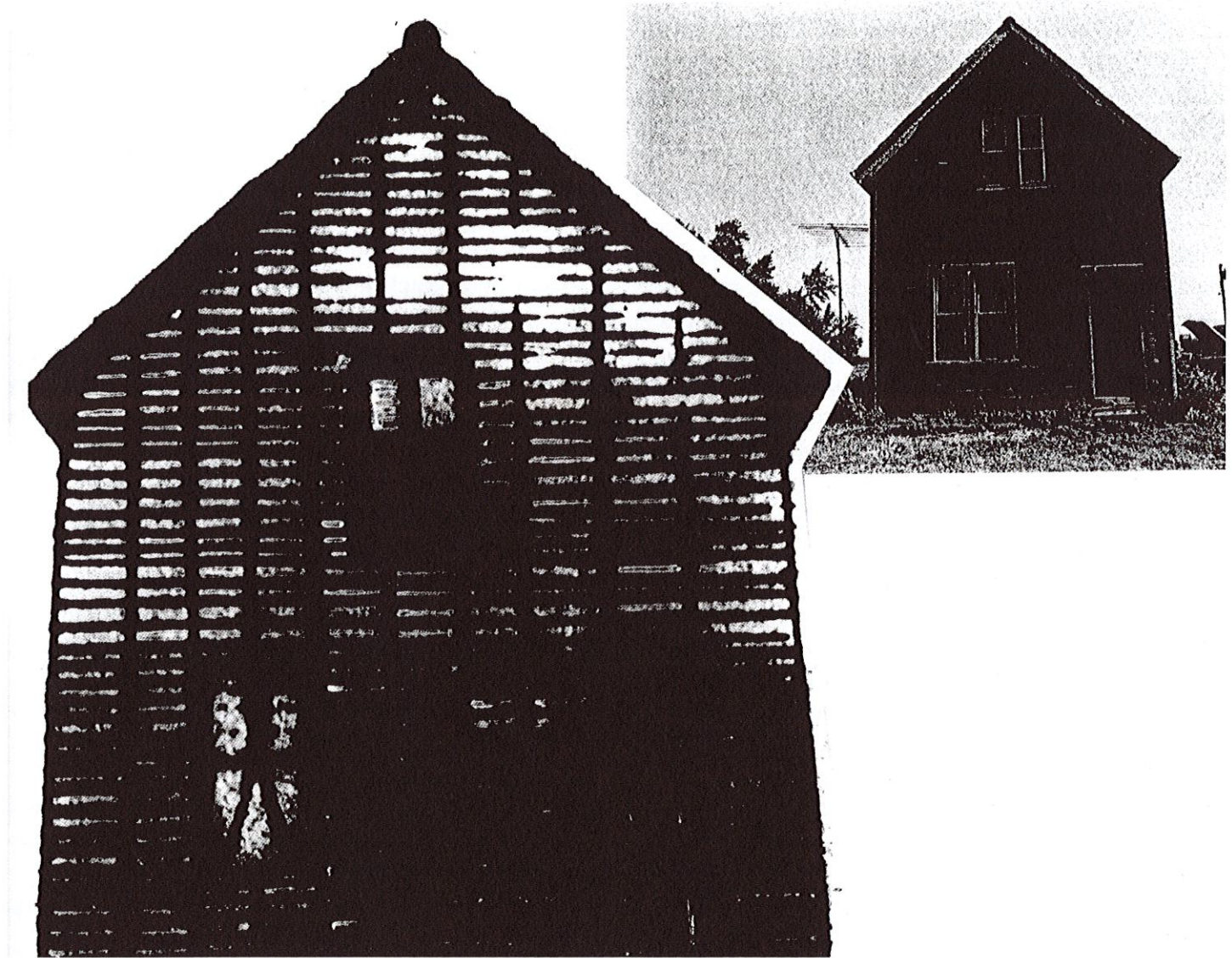
written their own pamphlets in the hope of attracting French-speaking settlers not just from France, Belgium and Switzerland but also from Quebec and the United States.(16)

Now Victor Colvez was no farmer: did Canada want to recruit the likes of him, a city man, a baker? He was over forty years old and had a wife as well as five children who needed to be housed, fed and sent to school. He must have wondered whether the Canadian government, and indeed the Church itself, were going to accept his application, given that both were demanding able-bodied farmers. In spite of these doubts, however, Victor decided to chance it, and he duly signed up with Father Le Floe'h.

The 3081-tonne steamer Le Malou set out from Marseille in the south of France, on her maiden voyage. On April 1, 1904 she picked up passengers in Saint Malo, on the coast of Brittany. Abbé Le Floe'h, a cabin-class passenger, was listed as destined for Prince Albert. Most of the 183 steerage passengers were described as farmers, with a sprinkling of other trades: butcher, carpenter, printer. Victor Colvez, his wife (first name not listed) and their children Léonie, Victor, Maria, Henri and Yvonne were collectively described as "farmers" and their destination, Prince Albert. Léonie, Victor Jr. and Henri were listed as "adults" although Léonie, the eldest, was only fifteen years old. Maria and Yvonne were described as "children between 1 and 4".(17)

As Denys Bergot, one of Victor's fellow immigrants, later described, conditions on the Malou had not been easy for the steerage passengers.(18) They were crowded into spartan quarters lined with bunks but without tables or benches. Food was served on the floor in large metal bowls from which the passengers, in groups of ten, helped themselves. In addition to Father Le Floe'h's small group, twelve hundred fishermen had boarded ship at St. Malo, bound for the Newfoundland cod fisheries. Some of the fishermen were rowdy and foul-mouthed, and at night the metal food bowls clattered across the floor as the boat bucked and heaved. Stormy weather alternated with thick fog which slowed the ship's progress. On arrival at St. Pierre-Miquelon on April 15, 1904, the fishermen disembarked to make their way to the cod fisheries, but the ship was held up by sea ice for a further six days.

House built in 1904 by Victor Colvez in Prince Albert,  
compared with a similar typical early farm house with side-hall plan



National Archives of Canada, Microfilm F-1580

When the Malou docked in Halifax on April 23, the immigrants boarded the train which was to take them westwards. They reached Qu'Appelle on April 29 and were forced to stop at Lumsden for twelve long days, waiting for the flooded Qu'Appelle River to subside. Some of the passengers made the most of this opportunity to hunt small game. Another unwelcome surprise awaited them some ten miles out of Saskatoon, where the bridge across the South Saskatchewan River had been swept away. They crossed the river by boat.

Finally arriving in Prince Albert on a cold, rainy day, Father Le Floe'h's colonists presented a sorry picture:

they were hungry, exhausted and utterly discouraged. Bishop Albert Pascal put them up for one week at the Mission while they recovered their spirits and made plans for the next and final lap of their journey: a gruelling cross-country trip - not to Vermilion Lake, as Father Le Floe'h had specified in his June letter to Ouest-Eclair in 1903 - but further north to Lake Lenore, some eighty kilometres south-east of Prince Albert, along muddy tracks through the bush. Thus did Father Le Floe'h set out to found what he hoped would soon become the new community of Saint-Brieuc-de-la-Saskatchewan.(19)

"So this is the promised land"... some of the colonists must have thought. Cold, muddy, remote and oh, so

bleak! It is at this point that Victor and a number of others decided to give up on Father Le Floc'h and let him proceed without them to Lake Lenore. According to Victor, only six or seven of the families that had started out from St Malo accompanied Father Le Floc'h on this last leg of their journey. In his January 1905 letter to his friends in France he made no mention of the hardships and delays the family had endured in the course of their trip from Saint Malo. But he had certainly had plenty of time to reconsider this whole colonization project. On arrival in Prince Albert, he wrote, he really did not feel that he was capable of starting a homestead. He had no illusions about how difficult it would be to start from scratch. For one thing, he didn't have enough money. He also had doubts whether *défricher la brousse* (clearing the bush) was the life he wanted for his children; surely there were other, more promising options. In Victor's view, Father Le Floc'h had not spent enough time in Canada and really didn't know what he was leading his colonists into. He had brought with him young families who were penniless, and he was in no position to support them financially because he himself was not well off. As a result, in Victor's opinion, most of the colonists who had gone on to Lake Lenore had been plunged into the deepest poverty. Some of Father Le Floc'h's young followers felt that they had been deceived: none of them knew any English, and they had quickly found out that knowledge of this language was essential if they were to make a decent living in western Canada. His companions were now on a war footing: "...quand il n'y a plus de foin dans le ratelier les chevaux ruent..." (...when the hay-rack is empty the horses kick out...) Victor had some blunt advice for his friends in France. If they were thinking of immigrating to western Canada they would need five thousand francs, or else a trade to enable them to earn a living. If they did not have one or the other, he warned, "...ne venez pas, car ici pas plus qu'ailleurs on ne fait rien avec rien..." (...don't come, for here, as elsewhere, you get nothing for nothing...).(20)

Having cast aside the homesteading option, Victor now had to consider an alternative plan: build a small house, get a job and start saving money. Since Victor had brought his wife and children with him instead of leaving them in France, adequate housing was essential, and he proceeded to buy a small plot of land in Prince Albert, on which he built a simple wood-frame house typical of those built by other settlers

there. It was a one-and-one-half-storey gable-roofed house measuring 5.33 x 6.65 metres or sixteen by twenty feet. In the photograph he sent with his letter, some of the details of the front of the house can still be discerned: a slightly raised wooden walkway led up to the front door which was placed off-centre, suggesting that the house was built on what G.E. Mills has called a "side-hall plan", that is, the staircase leading to the upper floor was placed "...along the side wall immediately inside the hallway." Typically, according to Mills, such a house might have "...one or two rooms on each floor and a dugout cellar reached by a trapdoor in the kitchen floor". (21)

Only two small windows are visible in what remains of Victor's photograph: one small curtained window on the ground floor, and a second window peeking out from under the eaves on the first floor. Houses of this type usually had additional windows along the sides. Around the back of the house was a grove of trees, Victor wrote, and the whole plot of land was surrounded by a fence. He apologized for the steeply pointed look of the house: the photographer, an (unnamed) corporal with the North West Mounted Police, had taken the shot from a low viewpoint, looking upwards, and some distortion in perspective had resulted.(22)

One wonders why a NWMP corporal would photograph the Colvez house. Possibly as a supportive gesture: the Mounties were committed to helping settlers cope with the administrative and practical details of settlement (23), and it was with the NWMP in Prince Albert that Victor had found his first job. As a cook, Victor explained to his friends, he earned one hundred and twenty-five French francs or twenty-five dollars per month - slightly more than the salary that Father Le Floc'h had specified in his June 1903 letter to l'Ouest-Eclair.

It was a good start, but it lasted only a few months, for his life suddenly took on a promising turn. In December 1904, Victor embarked on a journey to Green Lake, some 300 kilometres north of Prince Albert.(24) "...it seems that I am the only one who has made good..." he had written to his friends. His self-congratulatory remark is understandable: the former city baker and former cook had been hired as manager of a fur trade post newly established in Green Lake by the French company Revillon Frères. A mere



six months after his arrival in Canada's Northwest he had succeeded in landing a job that would bring in almost double the salary he was earning with the NWMP. Full of enthusiasm and hope, he was now about to face his first experience of a northern Canadian winter.

(Continued in Part 2: "Rookie Fur Trader").

### ENDNOTES

(1) All translations from the French were made by the author.

(2) Victor Colvez to friends in France (undelivered letter), 19 January 1905. Revillon Frères MG 28 III 97, Manuscript Division, National Archives of Canada. Microfilm F-1580.

(3) "Un récit historique d'après les documents découverts aux Archives d'Ille-et-Vilaine", in particular "Migrations bretonnes: contextes et repères historiques", and "La réaction des populations dans le contexte de la politique de laïcisation de 1902 à 1905", Archives Départementales d'Ille-et-Vilaine (ADIV) 6 - M 691. Website <http://pharouest.ac-rennes.fr>.

(4) J. Gaire, prêtre à Mgr. Langevin, OMI, *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, 1(1), (1902): 20-21. The Editor titled Jean Gaire's letter "Un missionnaire actif".

For the role of colonizer priests, see Donatien Frémont, "Un apôtre de la colonisation française dans l'Ouest canadien: l'abbé Jean Gaire" *Mémoires de la Société royale du Canada / Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, XLV (3e série), (juin 1951): 9-14.

See also Jean Le Bihan, "Enquête sur une famille bretonne émigrée au Canada (1903-1920)". *Prairie Forum*, 22(1), (Spring 1997): 75.

(5) Jean Gaire to Mgr. Langevin, OMI, Archbishop of Saint-Boniface, 28 février 1904. *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, 3(7), (1904): 90-92.

For abbé Jean Gaire's visit to Guingamp, see Jean Gaire to Mgr. Langevin, OMI, Archbishop of Saint-Boniface, 4 novembre 1901, *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, 1(1), (1902): 20.

According to Robert Painchaud, the colonizer missionaries' major contribution to French Catholic immigration on the Prairies occurred from the 1890's to about 1906, with relatively little after 1907. Robert Painchaud, *Un rêve français dans le peuplement de la Prairie. Saint-Boniface, Manitoba: Éditions des Plaines*, (1986). See especially Ch. 5: "L'Église et les immigrants franco-catholiques d'Europe": 165-202.

(6) "...Là, point d'arbres à déraciner, point de rochers à extirper, la transformation de la prairie en champs cultivés y est des plus faciles, et les chemins de communication s'y établissent aisément. Il suffit de quelques années de travail au colon arrivé pauvre, sur son lot, pour se voir à la tête d'une exploitation considérable..." P. Le Floch to his compatriots, *Ouest-Eclair*, samedi 4 avril 1903. The Editor titled Father Le Floch's letter "Les Bretons au Canada. Etre propriétaire au Canada vaut mieux que domestique en Seine-et-Oise - Prochain départ de Saint Malo". (Bretons in Canada. Better to be an owner in Canada than a domestic servant in Seine-et-Oise. Leaving soon from Saint Malo). Archives Départementales d'Ille-et-Vilaine (ADIV) 6 - M 691. Website <http://pharouest.ac-rennes.fr/>

(7) "...je vais au secours des chrétiens de la Saskatchewan..." (Ibid. as endnote 6).

(8) Indeed Father Le Floch had been deprived of his own congregation by government fiat, allegedly for using Breton as the language of instruction in school. See Albert Pascal, OMI, "Vicariat de Saskatchewan: Rapport au Chapitre Général de 1904", *Mission de la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 43 (1905): 306.

Concerning the tough laws relating to laïcité see "La séparation de l'Eglise et de l'Etat" and "Emile Combes", in Hachette Multimédia 2001, Website <http://fr.encyclopedia.yahoo.com/> See also A. Seydoux, "Le concordat de 1802 et ses conséquences". Website <http://www.cliosoft.fr/>

"Migrations bretonnes: contextes et repères historiques". Archives Départementales d'Ille-et-Vilaine (ADIV) (ibid. as endnote 3). "Les missionnaires et colons français et belges", Musée Virtuel Francophone de la Saskatchewan. Website <http://www.societehist.org/>

(9) See Denys Bergot, *Réminiscences d'un pionnier: Jubilé d'argent, St.-Brieux, 1904-1929*. (1929). Saskatchewan Archives. Microfilm R-2.70. An adapted excerpt is to be found as "Un voyage difficile de Saint-Malo à Saint-Brieux".

<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/fransaskois/communaute/brieux/bril.htm/>

(10) "...comme je tiens à leur dire toute la vérité et pour éviter toute illusion aux futures colons, je leur avouerai qu'il faut avant tout, pour réussir au Canada, de la bonne volonté et de la persévérance." P. LeFloch to l'Ouest-Eclair, 29 juin 1903. The editor titled Father LeFloch's letter "La Bretagne au Canada. Une

lettre de M. Le Floch. Bons conseils aux intéressés - Succès certain à condition de travailler autant qu'en France". (Brittany in Canada. A letter from Mr. Le Floch. Good advice for anyone interested. Success is certain provided you work as hard as you would in France). Archives Départementales d'Ille-et-Vilaine (ADIV) 6 - M 691. Website <http://pharouest.ac-rennes.fr/>

(11) For dollar equivalents of French francs in 1903, see Peace River Crossing Journals B325 / a / 1, fo.18, Hudson's Bay Company Archives.

(12) P. Le Floch, *ibid.* as endnote 10.

(13) "...Leur sort n'est donc pas à dédaigner. Au lieu de s'étioler dans les grandes usines de France ils respirent ici le grand air, ne travaillent jamais le dimanche, ne se livrent point à la boisson, parce que l'occasion n'existe plus..." P. Le Floch, *ibid.* as endnote 10.

(14) P. Le Floch, *ibid.* as endnote 10.

(15) "...Les Bretons seuls ne bougent pas, alors qu'ils ont ici la renommée d'être les meilleurs cultivateurs. Je me mets à votre disposition. Vous m'écrirez à l'évêché du Prince-Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada. De là, je me rendrai à la colonie à 120 milles d'ici, auprès du lac Vermilion, pour vous assigner le lot que vous aurez demandé. Encore une fois, hâtons nous, si nous ne voulons pas que les étrangers nous devancent." P. Le Floch, *ibid.* as endnote 10.

(16) For immigration propaganda in French, see for example *L'Ouest Canadien: Province du Manitoba et Territoires du Nord-Ouest* (Assiniboine, Alberta, Saskatchewan). Ottawa: publié par autorité de L'Hon. Clifford Sifton, Ministre de l'Intérieur, (1900).

See also Thomas Alfred Bernier, *Le Manitoba; champ d'immigration*. Ottawa, (1897). Both these publications are illustrated, and *L'Ouest Canadien's* cover shows bright, attractive farm scenes, in full colour.

For material written by colonizer-missionaries see Abbé Jean-Baptiste Morin's four brochures: *Renseignements sur le Nord-Ouest* (1891); *La Vallée de la Saskatchewan* (1893); *Le Nord-Ouest canadien et ses ressources agricoles* (1894); and *La terre promise aux Canadiens-Français* (1897).

See also abbé J-B. Proulx, *Le guide du colon français au Canada*. Ministère de l'Agriculture, (1886). For French-speaking dioceses in Brittany, see website [CultureBreizh>Patrimoine>Drapeau](http://culturebreizh.free.fr/bretagne) <http://culturebreizh.free.fr/bretagne>

(17) Ships' Passenger Lists, Halifax 1881-1922,

National Archives of Canada, Microfilm T 498 (March 19, 1904 to December 30, 1904).

(18) Denys Bergot, *ibid.* as endnote (9). Also an adaptation titled "Superstition?" in *Le Musée Virtuel Francophone de la Saskatchewan*. Website <http://www.societehist.org/>

(19) Denys Bergot, *ibid.* as endnotes (9), (18).

For the names chosen by Father LeFloch for his new colony and its chapel, see Albert Pascal, OMI, "Vicariat de Saskatchewan: Rapport au Chapitre Général de 1904", *Mission de la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 43 (1905): 291, 306.

(20) Victor Colvez, *ibid.* as endnote (2).

See also: R. Douglas Francis, *Images of the West - Changing perceptions of the Prairies 1690-1960*. (Saskatoon Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989): 107-123. According to Douglas, this disillusionment was widespread: settlers who arrived on the prairies did not find the idyllic life that had been promised by immigration propaganda. It was a place of loneliness and suffering.

(21) Victor Colvez, *ibid.* as endnote (2).

For illustrations of these early settlers' dwellings, see G.E. Mills, *Buying wood and building farms: marketing lumber and farm building designs on the Canadian Prairies, 1880-1920*. Environment Canada, National Historic Sites, Parks Service: Studies in Archaeology, Architecture and History. (Ottawa: Minister of Supplies and Services, 1991). The quotes are from p. 127 and p. 43 respectively. See also C.E.C. (Sask), "House plan wanted" and the illustrated response to this request, *Farmer's Advocate and Home Journal*, 46 (1910): 392. The illustration shows a plan for a wood frame house 16 x 24 feet, i.e. slightly larger than the one built by Victor Colvez; the plan indicates how the rooms, both downstairs and up, might be arranged.

(22) Victor Colvez, *ibid.* as endnote (2).

(23) Carl Betke, "Pioneers and police on the Canadian Prairies, 1885-1914", in William M. Baker (Ed.), *The Mounted Police and Prairie Society 1879-1919*. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 1998: 209-229.

(24) Victor Colvez, *ibid.* as endnote (2).

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## **Reluctant Homesteader: A French Settler's Story Part Two: Rookie Fur Trader**

by Jocelyne Scott

"I am very popular with the natives and I do a fair amount of business. The director is very pleased with my first efforts" (1).

On the seventeenth of December 1904 Victor Colvez set out from Prince Albert, N.W.T. with high expectations. Victor, a former baker from the city of Rennes in Brittany, had on his arrival in Canada found work as a cook with the North West Mounted Police. Now, he hardly dared to believe his luck: he had just landed a job as manager of a newly established fur trade post in Green Lake, situated some two hundred miles northwest of Prince Albert. He would be working for the Paris company Revillon Frères. In the long letter he wrote to friends in France in January 1905 he described his initiation into the life of a fur trader and his first month on the job.

When he had heard that Monsieur Delavault, District Manager for Revillon Frères in Prince Albert, was looking for *un homme énergique* to set up a fur trade post in Green Lake, he had applied right away and was quickly hired. The hiring process had been very informal. To his surprise he was not asked for qualifications: no papers, no special training, none of the hoops he would have been expected to jump through, back in France:

..."over here, this is what they ask a man before they hire him: can you do this, can you do that, if yes then you are hired right away. They don't ask for a certificate of competence nor for references as they would in France" (2).

Yes, he certainly considered himself *un homme énergique*; furthermore he was absolutely determined to succeed, and this surely was just as essential: "...I said to myself: I must succeed and I will, whatever the cost" (3). The pay was good, much better than what he had earned as a cook with the North West Mounted Police detachment in Prince Albert. As a cook he had been glad to earn \$25 per month, but he had kept an

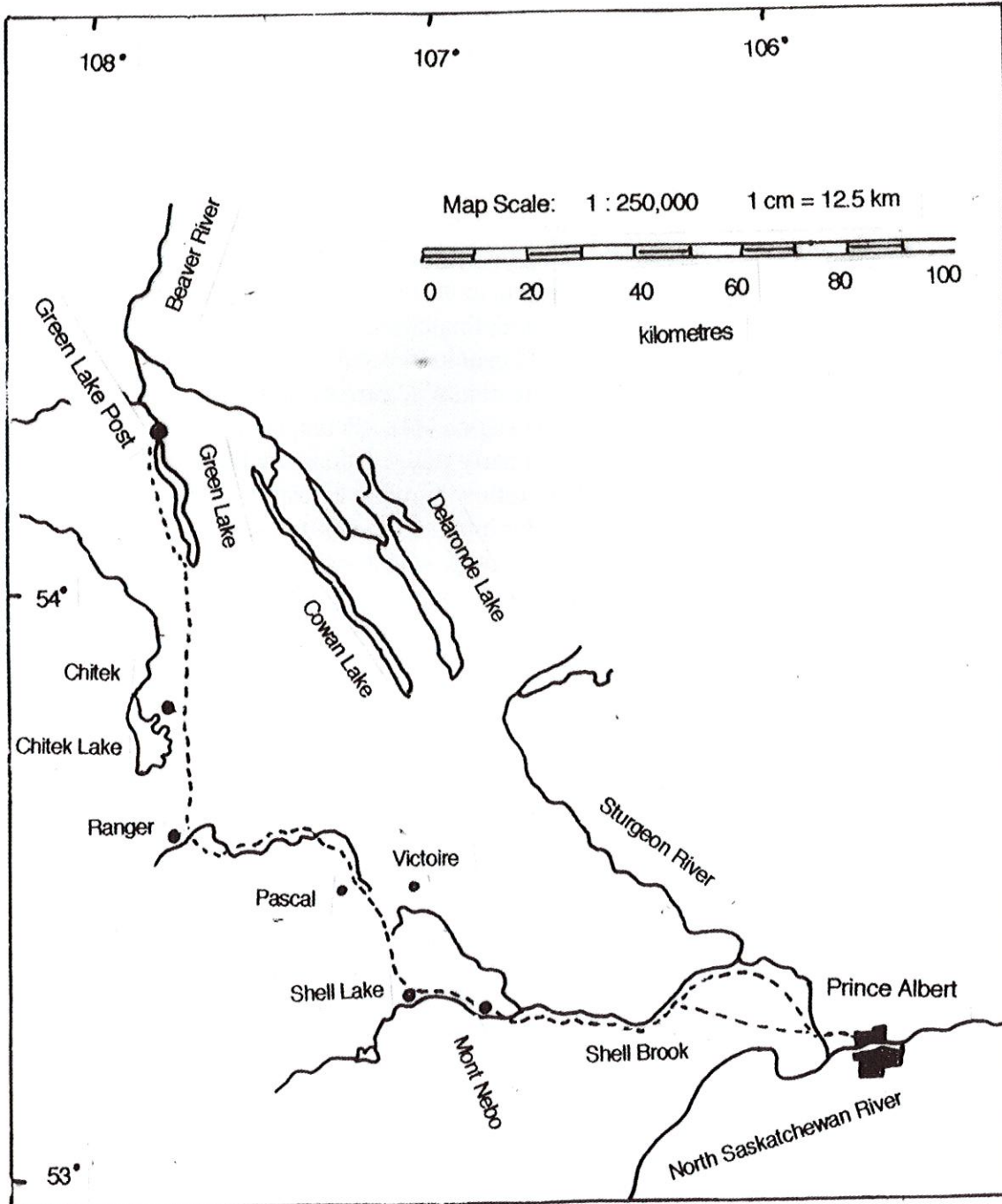
eye open for something more permanent and better paid - after all, he was already forty-three years old and had a wife and five children to support. Now, as a fur trade post manager, his starting salary was to be \$45, plus a \$15 food allowance, and the possibility of a raise.

Victor was accompanied by his fourteen-year old son Victor junior, his new boss Monsieur Delavault and a Metis horse-team driver. He had taken his eldest son along on this trip to introduce him to the fur-trading life, and to encourage him to learn English and Cree. Through this informal apprenticeship he hoped his son would acquire the skills and knowledge that would enable him to ..."earn a good salary with any company in the region" (4). Perhaps it occurred to him, as the small party trudged along the trail, that his son might later follow him into a position with Revillon Frères. Not for him the life of a farmer trying to scratch a living out of a patch of bush, even in this new country that had been billed as full of promise.

In his conversations with Monsieur Delavault, Victor would no doubt have gleaned some information about Revillon Frères. The Revillon family had been in the fur-buying and fur fashion business since 1723. Its head office was in Paris, with subsidiary offices in London and New York. In 1899, in a bid to gain direct access to raw furs rather than buying them in the auction rooms of London, New York or Leipzig, Revillon had established an office in Quebec, later moving it to Montreal. In that same year the Company built its first small warehouse in Edmonton. From these two Canadian strongholds, one in the East and one in the West, Revillon was now conducting a campaign to establish its own fur trade posts all over northern Canada.

By 1904 Revillon had already set up five posts along the north shore of the St. Lawrence River, two in Labrador, and two in James Bay (5). All these posts were under the supervision of Revillon's Montreal office. The Company was mobilizing resources to establish its presence at the mouth of all the major rivers draining into James Bay (6). At the same time, several posts had been set up in the North West and were being supervised from Revillon's office and supply depot in Edmonton (7). In a determined move against its chief competitor the Hudson's Bay Company, Revillon's intention was now to set up

Map showing the Prince Albert to Green Lake Trail, c. 1900



Map by Jocelyne Scott and Karen , 2006 based on references in End Note 9

a string of new posts all along the Churchill River system. Under the name Revillon Brothers Limited, the company established a new fur trade district based in Prince Albert, strategically situated on the North Saskatchewan River. In 1904 the Prince Albert District already boasted two fur trade posts, one at Ile-à-la-Crosse and one at La Ronge, with a small outpost at Montreal Lake. Two new posts were about to be set up, one at Green Lake and one at Pelican Narrows.

At Green Lake the post was currently manned by one Louis Morin, a Metis man referred to by Revillons as “second-in-command”, but the company considered that the post was in need of a post manager (8).

It was in this context that the new post manager Victor Colvez and his small party had struck out along the Prince Albert to Green Lake Trail. The trail ran west for about fifty miles, along the Shell Brook, to a spot near the present village of Mont Nebo. There it joined

the Fort Carlton to Green Lake Trail running north west. According to Brehaut this part of the trail "... passed on the west side of Sandy Lake to a present town named Pascal, then turned west to Ranger and turned north east of Chitek Lake to Green Lake". The trail then followed the west shore of the lake to reach the Hudson's Bay Company's Green Lake Post at its northern end. From there the trail connected with the Beaver River running north to Île-à-la-Crosse (9).

According to Victor's estimate, Green Lake post was situated some 300 kilometres or 200 miles north of Prince Albert. As he describes it, the first four days that the small party spent on the trail from had been challenging. It was sometimes difficult to make any headway over the rough tracks through bush and muskeg. The horses found the going tough: from time to time Victor and his companions had to break trail and lead the team through deep snow. The ice that covered the lakes and rivers was still patchy and they often had to call a halt to chop at the ice with their axes to test its depth and strength (10).

Victor and his party reckoned on something like a daily twelve-hour run: they walked all day and part of the night - "...*en marchant pour ainsi dire jour et nuit...*" before they reached the next isolated Metis cabin along the way. When they reached a cabin, Victor explained to his friends, they entered unannounced: no need to stand on ceremony nor even to knock on the door, you just walked in. Grateful for a bit of warmth and a chance to rest, Victor looked about him for somewhere to sit. Surprise: there were no chairs. No cupboards either. The scant furniture consisted of trunks and boxes in which clothing and household items were stored. At bedtime, no beds: blankets and fur coverings were hauled out of trunks and everyone slept on the floor. Victor wondered why the women in these Metis families looked at him so blankly and refused to answer him when he tried to speak to them, and why the children scuttled shyly into corners like so many little mice. Victor concluded that his status as stranger required him to address his comments or questions to the men of the house and in particular to whoever appeared to be the head of the household (11).

It is clear from his letter that Victor wished to learn as quickly as possible how to get along with Metis and Indian trappers. He must be willing to travel under

the same tough conditions as he was experiencing for the first time on this trip. The language problem would also have to be addressed: on his arrival he had soon found out that English was the language in which business was conducted, and his English was still quite rudimentary, although his son was picking it up quickly.

Victor had gathered some basic information on the local people and their way of life. As trappers, the men in the family would set off for days or weeks on end to hunt and to set their traps, taking minimal supplies with them. Food supplies might include a small tea kettle, fish to feed the sled-dogs, and the ingredients used to make bannock. As a former baker he took an interest in bannock, which he described to his friends as "...a flat-bread made out of water, flour, pork-fat and a bit of bacon" (12). After setting their traps, the men would either return home for a while or stay in the bush. The trappers' sleds were usually pulled by a train of four dogs, which were favoured over horses because they could cope better with low temperatures and difficult field conditions. On his return to the trapline, the trapper would empty his traps, skin the animals he had caught, and dry the furs, which would then be taken to the post. "Furs constitute the local currency", Victor stated [*"La fourrure est la monnaie courante du pays"*].

Since Victor's friends did not know what he meant by the term "Metis" he ventured an explanation, reflecting some of the ideas he had picked up since his arrival some eight months previously. The Metis, descendants of white men and Indian women, shared much the same hunting and trapping lifestyle as the Indians but were considered "more civilized". He characterized both Metis and Indians as "indolent and undemonstrative" (13). In spite of this unflattering picture, these were the people he would need to get along with in order to succeed as fur trade post manager - a far cry from his past as a baker.

After a difficult fifth day, Victor estimated that they were still ninety miles away from their destination. Tonight promised to test his mettle as a fur trader: since there were no more Metis cabins along the way the party would have to camp in the bush. ..."*camper à la belle étoile...*". He woke up next morning at seven o'clock and staggered to his feet, his limbs numb and stiff in the cold. Monsieur Delavault and



On the trail: baking bannock over a fire

the Metis guide were just getting ready to light a fire for breakfast. If it hadn't been for these two, he wrote, he would have frozen then and there, unable to do a thing: "...I was completely wiped out by the cold even though I had taken precautions and was [fully] dressed"(14). At that moment Victor's thoughts might well have drifted back to his previous job as cook with the NWMP in a warm, fragrant kitchen. Monsieur Delavault pulled a small flask of whiskey out of his pocket ("...a kind of cognac..." Victor explained to his friends), but when Delavault tried to pour a tot of whiskey for Victor, who was in obvious need of a quick warm-up, the whiskey had frozen solid. The temperature overnight had fallen to minus fifty degrees Celsius (15).

On December the 22nd, their sixth and last day on the road, the party reached Green Lake and was able to enjoy the simple comforts offered by the Roman Catholic mission. It was only then that Victor realized he had frozen the tips of his ears. He reminded himself of some extra ingredients he might need in order to succeed in his new job: *un homme énergique*, yes; determination, yes - along with a generous dollop of

courage and stoicism stirred in for good measure: "I mustn't flinch, I mustn't be afraid of hardship" (16).

How well was Victor prepared for his life as a fur trader? At first, trading with the Indians had sounded straightforward enough. He knew in broad outline what the life of the northern trapper involved. As for himself as fur trade post manager, all he needed to do was wait for the trappers to bring in their furs, in exchange for which he would give out trade goods, "... *les nécessités de la vie*", which might include flour, lard, axes, knives, guns, ammunition, trapping equipment, clothing, fabric yardage (17).

Victor appears to have possessed at least some of the qualities and competencies of a "good trader" listed by Hugh McKay Ross in his memoir (18). As Victor stated in his letter, he was getting along well with his native customers, and he was trying to learn Cree - "a definite asset" according to Hugh McKay Ross. As a baker in France he would presumably have acquired some basic accounting skills, which might or might not be adequate in his new position. As Hugh McKay Ross puts it: "The books must always be in balance

and show a profit" (19). In addition, if Victor were to be a "good trader" he would need to make sure that buildings at the Revillon post were kept in good repair, and that the store was clean, inviting and well stocked with trade goods. Since Victor had been hired on the spot and had received no training as a fur trader, he would have lacked some of the other required skills and knowledge: how to buy and grade fur, how to choose appropriate trade goods, how to issue and collect debt, and - a delicate decision - when to withhold debt. Victor would have had to learn on the job, making mistakes along the way. During the trip from Prince Albert to Green Lake he had already learned his first painful lesson in winter survival: how to dress properly: no more frozen ears.

Apart from these practical aspects of the fur trading life, one wonders how well he had been prepared for the unexpected, for surprises and complications. He was not likely to get a warm welcome from other fur traders in and around Green Lake, and he would have to cope with "the competition" in its many forms. For one thing, the Hudson's Bay Company had held a post in Green Lake since 1799 - over one hundred years. (20). Furthermore, the post was now being managed by one Angus McKay, who had joined the Hudson's Bay Company as Apprentice Clerk as far back as 1877 - a fur trader with twenty-seven years of experience in the North (21). Victor would somehow have to persuade the trappers to come to him, the raw newcomer, rather than to the long-established Hudson's Bay Company with whom they had traded for years. Also to be reckoned with was the notorious free trader Paul De La Ronde, described in a Hudson's Bay Company Inspection Report as "...our most persistent opponent...who with his sons and relatives reaches almost every camp tributary to Green Lake... He gives more trouble than all the petty traders in this section" (22). Victor was going to have to struggle to get his fair share of the furs, given that the influential De La Ronde family had already spread its branches all over the area.

Victor's boss, Monsieur Delavault, was almost as new to Canada and the fur trade as Victor was himself, and could not contribute much in the way of practical strategies or support, especially as he was six days' travel away from Green Lake, possibly more in the summer when the ice had melted and overland travel became even more difficult. Thus was Victor left high

and dry at his new post, with little or no training, supervision or ongoing practical support from his new employer.

In Green Lake the months went by. Victor received supplies for the new Revillon post by horse team from Prince Albert every two weeks. Along with the freight, Victor might get a letter from his wife, who had remained in Prince Albert along with his four other children. The one big disadvantage of this job was that he missed his family, but he was pleased that at least they were well provided for in the little house he had built in Prince Albert when he had first arrived there ("...they live a life of leisure" he wrote). To his friends in France he gave his new address: "Green Lake, N.W.T. Saskatchewan, via Queenstown", and explained to them what "N.W.T." stood for. Postal services would be slow, he warned them: a letter from France sent to him directly at his Green Lake address would take all of two months to reach him (23).

Victor's new life was a lonely one, and he was glad of the missionary's company. The missionary had been raised in a small town near Valence, in the Département de la Drôme, France. Without mentioning his name, Victor described the missionary as "*un bon vieux*" with whom he spent time discussing France, the country from which they had both emigrated, and who provided Victor with support in adjusting to his new life in Green Lake "He could not possibly be kinder, and has helped me a lot in getting used to my new life, which otherwise isn't exactly cheerful" (24).

While Victor mentions only some of the conversations he had with Father Teston (nostalgic talks about the French homeland they had both abandoned), in tackling the demands of a fur trader's life he could not have hoped for a more practical or well-informed mentor. Father Teston was familiar with the Indians and Metis in and around Green Lake and farther afield, including Ile-à-la-Crosse. He spoke Cree and was a highly competent hunter and fisherman. He knew the ins and outs of travel by horse, dog-team and canoe. He knew fur-bearing animals and had even raised his own foxes for a while.

By the time Victor arrived in Green Lake in 1904, Father Jules Teston had been posted at the Saint Julien mission for fourteen years. Far from being *vieux* he

was actually only forty-nine years old, though perhaps his beard made him appear older. Born in France in 1856, he had made his way to North America when he was barely 19 years old. After completing his studies for the priesthood in Ottawa and Ville LaSalle he travelled west as far as Saint-Albert in what was then part of the North West Territories. In Saint-Albert he was ordained as priest in 1883 by Monseigneur Grandin. He was now ready to serve in various communities scattered across north-western Canada: his first posting was in Frog Lake, then Le Goff, Cumberland House, Ile-à-la-Crosse and finally Green Lake, where he was to spend thirty-three consecutive years, 1890 to 1923. Like most of his fellow priests in the North, Father Teston had turned his hand to whatever tasks and services needed doing: in addition to his pastoral duties he taught school for ten years, held the Post Office for fourteen, and presided as Justice of the Peace for five years (25).

Victor did not anticipate that his budding friendship with Father Teston would be short-lived. In his

January letter, he had written to his friends that he expected to take a vacation in July or August. He planned to go back to Prince Albert to give away his eldest daughter in marriage; the girl was fifteen and a half years old and was to marry a young man named Hubert, who had emigrated from Paris. Perhaps this was very same Hubert who was currently employed as warehouse keeper with Revillons in Prince Albert(26).

Travelling back to Prince Albert in summer, without the benefit of a frozen winter trail over lakes and rivers, would take even longer than had Victor's first trip into Green Lake. The first leg of the trip, by boat or canoe from the north to the south end of Green Lake, would have been easy enough, but then Victor would have had to struggle through mosquito-ridden muskeg, through the tangle of roots and boulders in the forests, across rivers that had no bridges and had to be forded - first Big River and then the Shell Brook - and then the final slog through the sandhills west of Prince Albert (27).



Portrait of Father Jules, at Saint Julien Mission, Green Lake, who helped settle into his new job fur trader

Saskatchewan Archives Board SB 1137



If Victor did indeed travel to Prince Albert, that July in 1905, he would have been surprised to come upon a major upheaval at the Revillon office: the place had been invaded and turned upside down by a bustling group of strangers. Victor was about to witness a thorough makeover of the Revillon office. Theodore Revillon Junior, head of Revillon's Edmonton office, had made a dramatic entry that summer to reorganize the company's Prince Albert District. Over the past several months Victor's supervisor Delavault had been caught in a crossfire between Revillon's Montreal and Edmonton offices. He was now being raked over the coals for poor book-keeping practices and managerial incompetence: all except one of the posts in his District had done poorly over the 1904-1905 season. Green Lake post was among the poor performers - not surprising, since the post was very new and since Victor himself had been given little or no training in how to run it. Theodore Revillon replaced Delavault with a new District Manager and summarily dismissed a number of post personnel, including the unfortunate Victor, who was fired before he had spent even one year in Green Lake (28).

#### ENDNOTES

1 Letter from Victor Colvez to friends in France, dated Green Lake, N.W. T., 19 January 1905. National Archives of Canada, *Archives Revillon*, Microfilm F-1580. "*Je suis très bien vu des sauvages et je fais pas mal d'affaires. Le directeur est très content de mes débuts...*"

2 As 1. "*...par ici, voilà ce que l'on demande à un homme lorsqu'on l'engage: Etes vous capable de faire ceci ou cela, si oui vous entrez immédiatement on ne vous demande point de brevet de capacité ni des références comme en France*".

3 As 1. "*...je me suis dit il faut que j'arrive et j'arriverai, coûte que coûte*".

4 As 1. "*...gagner de beaux appointements dans n'importe quelle maison de la contrée*".

5 Marcel Sexé, *Histoire d'une Famille & d'une Industrie Pendant Deux Siècles, 1723-1923*. Paris: Librairie Plon, 1923, pp. 60, 66, 68-69.

6 Marcel Sexé, *Histoire d'une Famille & d'une Industrie Pendant Deux Siècles, 1723-1923*. Paris: Librairie Plon, 1923, 66.

7 Marcel Sexé, *Histoire d'une Famille & d'une Industrie Pendant Deux Siècles, 1723-1923*. Paris: Librairie Plon, 1923, pp. 85, 86.

8 Notes on Prince Albert District by Théodore Revillon, dated Winnipeg, 22 November 1904. National Archives of Canada, *Archives Revillon*, Microfilm F-1580.

9 Harry Baker Brehaut "The Red River cart and trails: the fur trade", *Manitoba Historical Society Transactions*, Series III, No. 28, 1971-1972 season, pp. .

Saskatchewan Archives Board, A1170, *Saskatchewan Historical Trails, Surveys and Mapping Branch, Canada Mines and Technical Surveys* 1963.

J. H. Richards and K.I. Fung, eds., *Atlas of Saskatchewan*, Saskatchewan Department of Geography, University of Saskatchewan, 1969.

Hudson's Bay Company Archives B. 89/e/17 Ile-à-la-Crosse Report 1894, "Sketch map of English River District and Outposts - also Winter Trading Stations and Indian Trading Lodges".

10 Letter from Victor Colvez to friends in France, dated Green Lake, N.W. T., 19 January 1905. National Archives of Canada, *Archives Revillon*, Microfilm F-1580.

11 As 10.

12 As 10. "*...une galette fabriquée avec de l'eau, de la farine, de la graisse de porc et un peu de lard*".

13 As 10.

14 As 10. "*...j'étais complètement anéanti par le froid et cependant, je vous assure, j'avais pris mes précautions et j'étais vêtu*".

15 As 10. "*...il ne faut pas avoir la frousse, il ne faut pas craindre sa peine*".

- 16 As 10. 1968, vol. XV, 2: 8-12.
- 17 As 10. 28 Notes on Prince Albert District by Théodore Revillon, dated Winnipeg, 22 November 1904. National Archives of Canada, *Archives Revillon*, Microfilm F-1580.
- 18 Hugh Mc Kay Ross, *The Manager's Tale*, Winnipeg, Manitoba: Watson & Dwyer Publishing Ltd., 1989, p. 115.
- 19 Hugh McKay Ross, *The Manager's Tale*, Winnipeg, Manitoba: Watson & Dwyer Publishing Ltd., 1989, p. 115.
- 20 Hudson's Bay Company Archives: Post Histories. Green Lake, (English River), B. 84.
- 21 Hugh McKay Ross, *The manager's tale*. Winnipeg, Manitoba: Watson & Dwyer Publishing Ltd., 1989 pp. 130-131.
- 22 Hudson's Bay Company Archives B84/e/7, Green Lake Inspection Report 1900-1901.
- 23 Letter from Victor Colvez to friends in France, dated Green Lake, N.W. T., 19 January 1905. National Archives of Canada, *Archives Revillon*, Microfilm F-1580.
- 24 As 23. "...*Il est on ne peut plus aimable, ceci m'a beaucoup aidé à m'habituer à ma nouvelle vie, qui n'a rien sans cela de bien gaie.*"
- 25 Saskatchewan Archives Board, Accession No. R85-270, Collection No. R-E2131. "Green Lake: Roman Catholic Pastors".
- Saskatchewan Archives Board R-85-270 - E 2131. "Le R.P. Jules Teston, o.m.i. meurt à Saint-Albert, à l'âge de 99 ans", *La Survivance*, 25 juillet 1955, No. 35.
- "70 ans de sacerdoce", *L'Ami du Foyer*, vol. 49, No.3, Nov. 1953: 15-16.
- 26 Letter from Victor Colvez to friends in France, dated Green Lake, N.W. T., 19 January 1905. National Archives of Canada, *Archives Revillon*, Microfilm F-1580.
- 27 Fortescue McKay, "Family life at a northern post - circa nineteen hundred", *North*, March-April
- Jocelyne Scott, B.Sc., M.A., is an independent researcher currently interested in the history of French settlement in the Prairie Provinces. In particular she is researching the early years of the French fur trade company Revillon Freres.

# Book Review

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## **The Jazz Province: The Story of Jazz in Saskatchewan Ken Mitchell**

For starters, it is important to declare a flagrant conflict of interest. My late father, Alan Vanstone, is included -- and praised -- in Ken Mitchell's book: *The Jazz Province: The Story of Jazz in Saskatchewan*. A photograph of Dad's group, circa 1958, appears on Page 71. So does a laudatory quote from one of his favourite musical colleagues, Jim Moffat. "A phenomenal musician," Moffat told Mitchell when asked about my father. "An architect by trade, but Al was probably the best all-around piano player in town." Honestly, how can I not love this book?

However, to the extent that it is possible, I have attempted to suspend personal biases when appraising the book. When writing reviews, one of the questions I always ask is: "What did I learn by reading this book?" If the book is an eye-opener, a complimentary review is assured. Mitchell passed that test with flying colours. His book even taught me something about my father -- a subject with which I thought I was entirely familiar. Don McSherry told the widely acclaimed author about his experiences with the Alan Vanstone Orchestra, which used to be a fixture at the Hotel Saskatchewan. "At the end of the gig, Alan would suggest the Alan Vanstone Trio take over," McSherry said. "So the three of us -- myself, Claude Duperreault, and Alan -- would head for The Attic for a wondrous swinging session."

Oh, to have been there ... The Attic was actually in the basement of an office building at 2060 Broad Street. The classic smoky jazz club closed in 1961 -- three years before my arrival. I do not remember Dad talking about The Attic. However, Mitchell's engrossing book includes myriad references to a club which is believed to be the site of guitar legend Lenny Breau's first public performance. Mitchell also writes about at least three visits Louis Armstrong paid to Saskatchewan in the 1950s. The well-illustrated book includes a photo of Armstrong which was taken when he appeared in Melville in 1957. The ticket stub is also shown.

Being that the project was commissioned by the Regina Jazz Society, much of the focus is on musicians from that area - such as Moffat, Ken Jefferson, Paul Perry, Herbie Spanier, Bob Moyer, Pat Steel, Dr. Ed Lewis, Peter Dyksman and Brent Ghiglione. Another nice touch is the inclusion of a chapter which explores the bright future of jazz in Saskatchewan. Dione Taylor, Jon McCaslin and FDQ (a quintet led by Derek Friesen and Sean Delsnider) are deservedly mentioned. The history of the Saskatchewan Jazz Festival is also chronicled in depth. Included is a complete list of all the artists to have appeared at the festival, which was founded in Saskatoon in 1987.

Although Saskatchewan is not renowned as a jazz mecca, the contents of Mitchell's book lead the reader to the conclusion that the musical genre does have a presence in this province. Mitchell's book should have a presence on the shelf of any jazz lover.

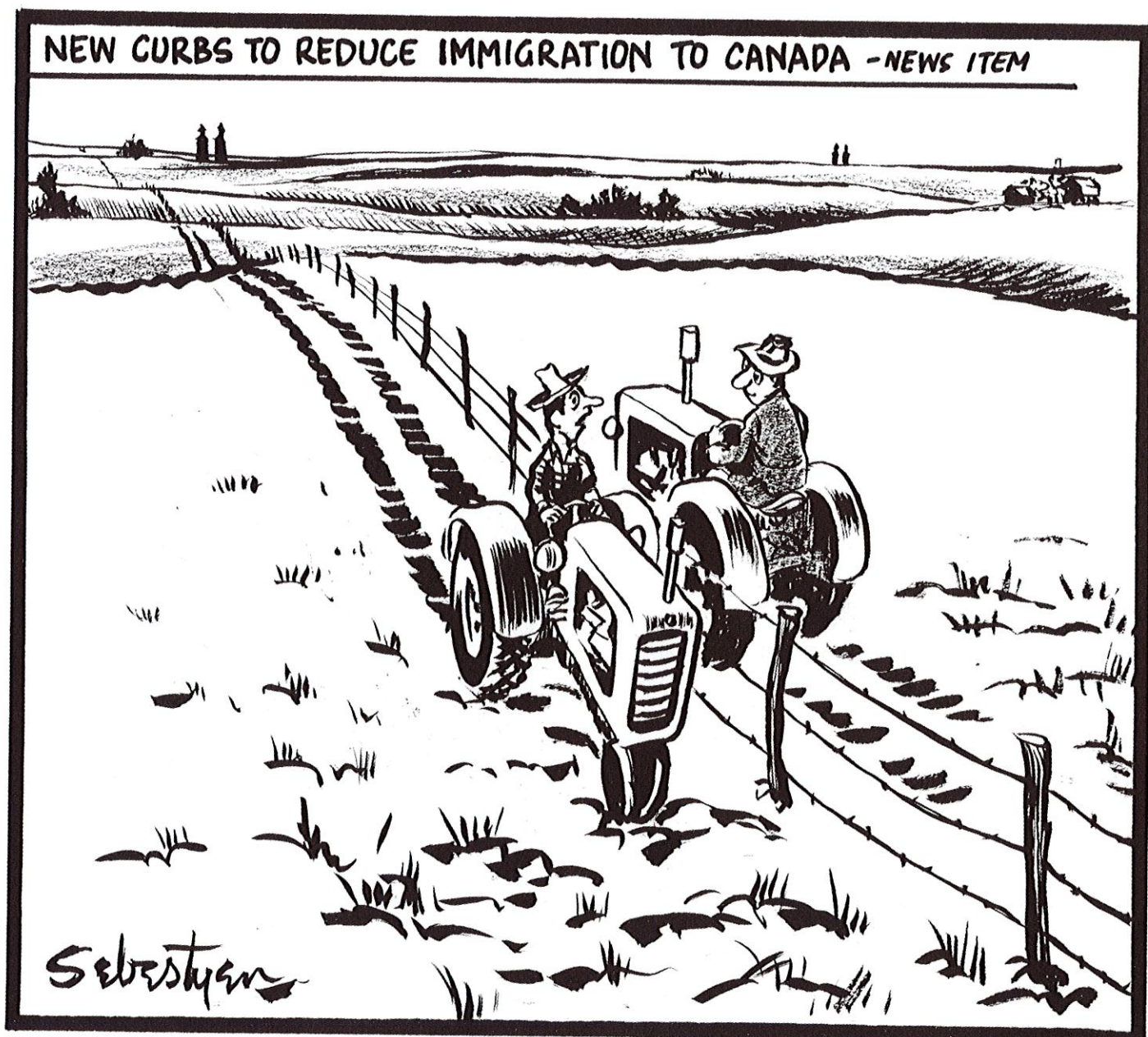
By Rob Vanstone



ken mitchell

# The Editorial Cartoons of Edmond A. Sebestyen

Saskatchewan History is pleased to continue featuring the editorial cartoons of Edmond A. Sebestyen. Mr. Sebestyen was a long time contributor to the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*. Now retired, he donated his records to the Saskatchewan Archives Board where they remain for the benefit of anyone who wants to read them. Enjoy this issue's selection!



SAB F379

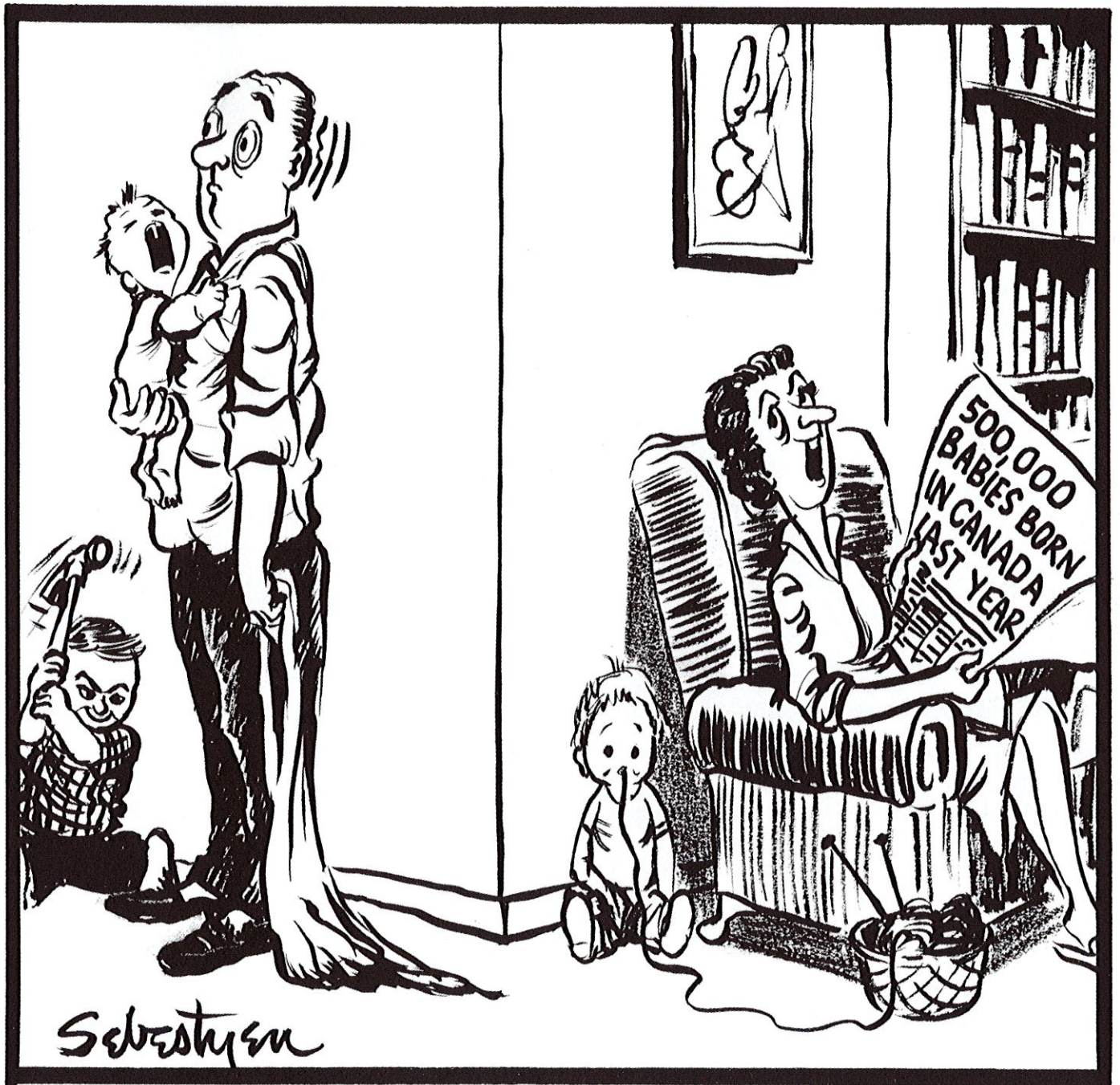
“Maybe they figure the country’s overcrowded?”



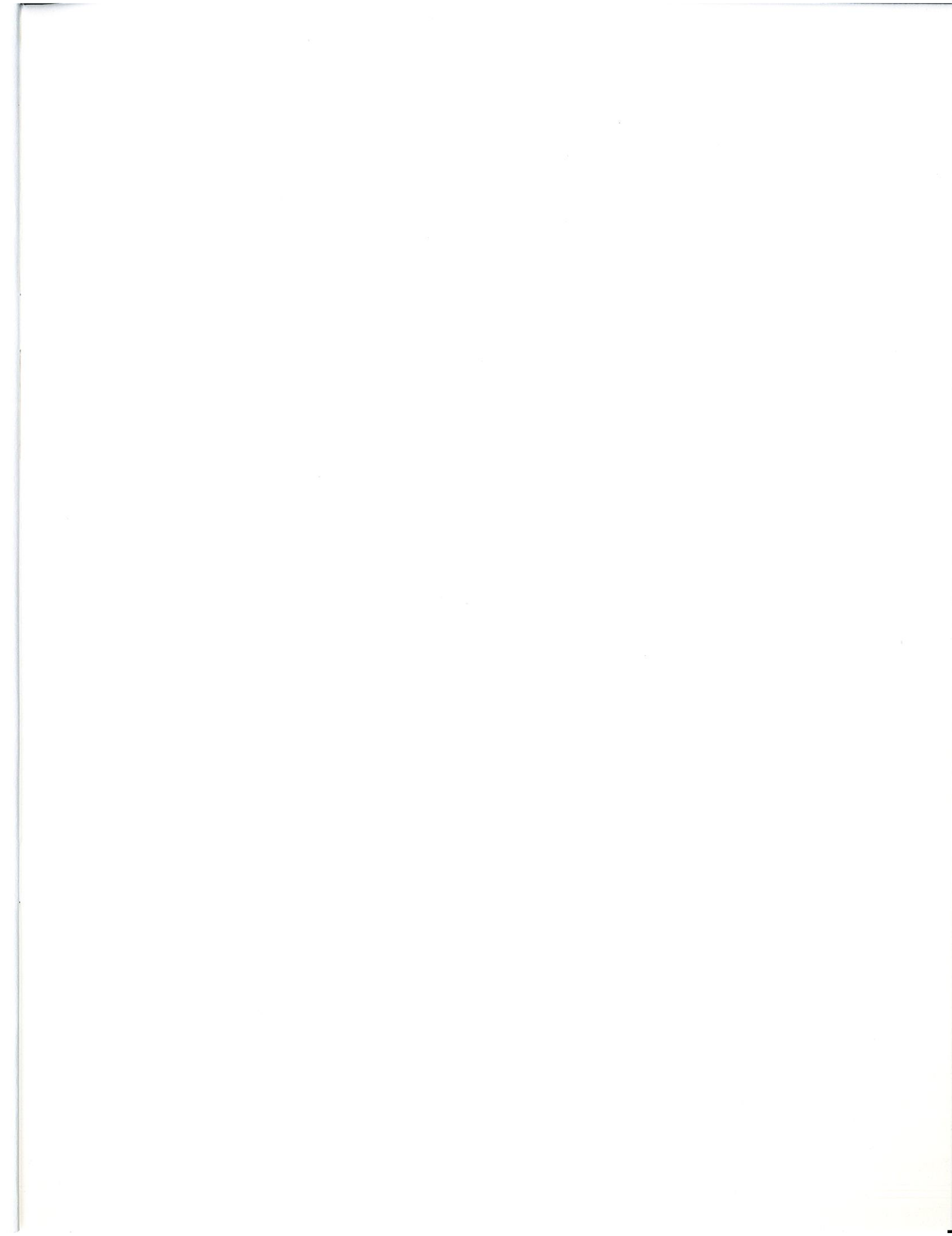
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“Some of us neighbours thought we’d drop over and welcome you home!”

“... and this should be another good year too dear.”



SAB F379



# Saskatchewan

## History

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Michael Hayden

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Elizabeth Domm

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**Reluctant Homesteader: A French Settler's Story  
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Jocelyne Scott

**Reluctant Homesteader: A French Settler Story  
Part Two: Rookie Fur Trader**

Jocelyne Scott

**The Editorial Cartoons of Edmund A. Sebestyen**



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