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**On Wascana's Banks: Progress, Harmony and Diversity in Throne Speeches of the
North-West Territories and Saskatchewan, 1877-2007**

The Regina Little Theatre Beginnings to 1933: People, Productions, Influence and Longevity

"Their Knowledge is deplorable..."

Tuberculosis and the Nursing Profession in Saskatchewan, 1920s-1940s

A Review of the Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site in Abernethy, Saskatchewan

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Cover Photo: The executive, medical and nursing staff at Fort San in the summer of 1919 (Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-A14899)

Articles

On Wascana's Banks: Progress, Harmony and Diversity in Throne Speeches of the North-West Territories and Saskatchewan, 1877-2007

By Alex MacDonald

*The house is crammed: tier beyond tier they grin
And gape at the show, while cheerful ranks
Of legislators assemble to begin
Their annual session on Wascana's banks.'*

Throne speeches constitute a particular genre of political discourse with distinctive features such as the recognition of notable persons and events, high praise for the province and its people, deep concern for the province and its people, expressions of hope for the future and formulaic prayers for the province, the country and the sovereign. Constituting a parallel genre is the opposition response to speeches from the throne, which invariably accuses them of saying little or nothing about the real problems of the day or of being no more than political posturing. A sub-genre, perhaps, is editorial columns and cartoons which tend, on the whole, not to be impressed with throne speeches either. However, the premise of this article is that looking at throne speeches over a span of time can provide a useful perspective on provincial history. Over the course of 130 years of throne speeches, from 1877-1904 in the North-West Territories and from 1905-2007 in the province of Saskatchewan, a great deal has changed, as would be expected. Some themes have remained constant, notably the belief in and hope for progress which speeches of the present share with

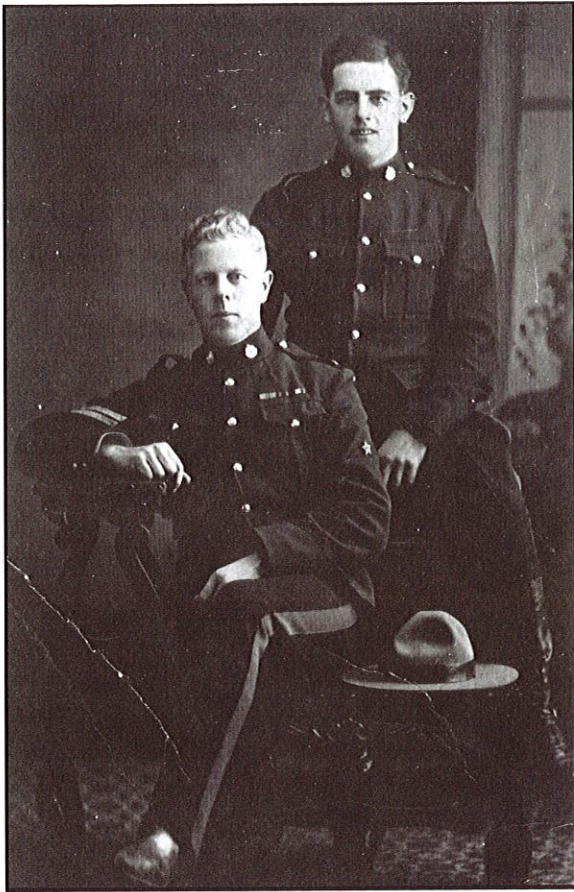
speeches of the Victorian age. As well, throne speeches over the years embrace harmony as a value and as a goal, yet they also embrace diversity. In the economic sphere this can mean finding the right balance between central planning and private enterprise. In the cultural sphere this can mean articulating how to be unified as a people yet maintain distinct identities as individuals and cultures. Throne speeches of the North-West Territories and Saskatchewan reflect the attempt in each decade to manage these tensions and find the way forward.

Territorial Days: 1877-1905

The Territorial Council, 1877-87, consisting of the Lieutenant Governor David Laird and three members, held its first meeting in March of 1877. Over the next ten years the meeting place moved from Fort Livingstone/Swan River (near present day Pelly, Saskatchewan), to Battleford and then to Regina in 1883 and some elected

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EDITOR'S NOTE: References to the throne speeches have been included in the text rather than as footnotes to help readers keep a chronological sense of the speeches' evolution. They appear in brackets after the sentences.



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Two members of the North West Mounted Police. The NWMP were praised in the 1887 Territorial throne speech.

members were added to the initial appointees. The world portrayed by these speeches is a familiar one in some ways but there are also reminders of how much things have changed. For example, there was a comment in the 1885 speech that “probably” the “last spike of the transcontinental railway is being driven today” — a statement which seems curious in this present day world of instantaneous communication about important events (1885.9).

Issues before the Council included immigration, agricultural progress, infectious diseases, civil marriages, railways and schools (public, Protestant and Catholic). There was considerable emphasis on law and order issues, such as control of liquor smuggling and prevention of intentionally set prairie fires. The North-West Mounted Police were praised for their effectiveness and there was pride that there had not been “a single case of horse stealing” (1887.8).

The status of Indians in the North-West as depicted in the throne speeches was notable. The first speech of 1877, only a page long, said that steps needed to be considered to protect the Buffalo from

“wanton destruction” as Indians and others relied upon it for support. Extinction of the animal should be prevented—and here the modern environmentalist might wince—“at least, until stock raising and agriculture can be introduced to take the place which the Buffalo has supplied for generations” (1877.6). These words demonstrate an apparent concern for the Indian way of life, yet also were very clear that the nomadic life of the prairie hunter is in process of being swept away. The speech of July 1884 noted that the Indians were more contented than they had been and were making “gratifying” progress in agriculture. There is occasionally some excitement until new arrivals from the plains “recognize the fact that they must settle down and work to make a living” (1884.9). The implication that these Indians were like unruly children was continued in the next year’s comments on the Riel Rebellion: although there had to be resort to arms to deal with the Indians who “set authority at naught,” those Indians questioned could give no reason for their actions “beyond that of being the tools of designing men seeking their own ends, irrespective of any good to the Indian, thus showing that the Country has been acting up to its part of the agreement made with the original owners of the soil” (1885.8). Only a year later the speech reported that there “never was a time when the Indians were more contented...or better disposed towards their White Brethren” (1886.9). This harmony was endangered in 1887, apparently because a settler used firearms against the Indians. That year’s speech warned of the “grave danger” for settlers of taking the law into their own hands and urged due process, lest the “imprudent action of a single individual” should “easily bring on a series of murderous outrages.” The settlers needed to recognize that the Indians were fellow-subjects of the Queen, with the same “rights and liabilities as other men” (1887.7-8). Notwithstanding this sentiment it is obvious enough that the harmony of the community was felt to depend upon eradication of Indian culture, expressed in “ostentatious contempt for the traditional rights and natural prejudices of the primitive occupants of the new land.”¹

The throne speeches of the Territorial Legislature, 1888-1904, chronicle an exciting period in the development of the West. Calgary was the first city in the Territories (1894.11); at this time Edmonton still lacked a bridge across the river (1895.17), perhaps because it was not on the C.P.R. mainline. There were references to provision for the insane (1894.11, 1896.13), to collecting vital statistics (1888.10), to

the search for water (1899.14) and concern about the ravages of gophers (1890.9). One of the major themes of the speeches of this period was law and order. A case in point was prairie fires, mentioned in six separate speeches between 1888 and 1896. The language has a strong moral flavour because the prairie fires are described as an "evil" which seriously affects farmers (1888.10) and those who start prairie fires as "parties guilty of criminal carelessness" needing to be "brought to justice" (1889.9). Notices about the Ordinance were circulated by the North-West Mounted Police (1890.10). However, dry seasons led to an increase and in the northern country "the Indians are becoming very careless in the matter of extinguishing their camp fires when traveling" (1894.10). This is one of only two references to the Indian population in the 1888-1904 speeches, the other being a positive reference in the 1888 speech to Indian contributions to agricultural exhibitions. It is clear from subsequent mention of prairie fires that C.P.R. locomotives and settlers were also responsible (1895.16, 1896.13).

The other law and order issue with a high profile in these speeches was the control of trade in liquor. Although "legislation cannot be expected to make men honest, sober or wise" says one speech realistically (1888.11), the question of Temperance was raised in six speeches between 1888 and 1898, with the object of preserving the "order and morality" of the Territories (1891.13). This was a narrower and some might say more practical focus than the wider aim of the Victorian temperance movement which promised at its grandest a wholesale social rejuvenation.² As is clear from repeated statements on the liquor issue, and as was clear at the time of the Riel Rebellion, these throne speeches set a very high value on social order. Success in maintaining it is attributed by one speech to the "efforts of the clergy of all denominations," to "other civilizing influences" and to "wise administration of the law" (1894.10).

Two areas repeatedly mentioned in the speeches as evidence of progress are education and agriculture. Statistics about the number of schools were cited as "a fair index to the country's welfare" (1895.14).³ Despite the utopian flavour of the claim that agricultural lands only awaited "the toil and labour of the Immigrant to become smiling fields of wheat" (1891.12), the speeches were not all golden country rhetoric; they did recognize years of lower yields, drought and noxious weeds (1894.8-9, 14). There was also a recognition even in these early years that the economic base had to

expand beyond wheat: "Diversified farming, and what is termed the production of concentrated commodities [dairy, eggs], are rapidly commending themselves to thoughtful agriculturalists" (1895.12). There was one reference in these years to "wonderful discoveries of mineral wealth" (1897.8) which anticipated the much later diversification of the Saskatchewan economy into other resources.

Government had a vital role to play in management of what the 1894 speech calls "the confederated commonwealth" (1894.15). The phrase could well be translated as diversified harmony, a recognition of the tension between centralist and decentralist impulses. For example, when it was observed that school houses lacked flags, "either Canadian or Imperial," it is suggested that the flags from the Territorial Exhibition be raised over the schools as the "national emblem" (1895.18). However, the establishment of an Executive Council and a "completely responsible system of Government" was a step away from centralized control by Ottawa, a step toward autonomy, while the creation of "Public Departments" was a centralizing move with respect to the Territories themselves (1897.8). Relations with the federal government in Ottawa were a major concern in the last few years of speeches of the Territorial period, in particular the concern of the Territories about "the great disproportion existing between the means at command and the ever-growing necessities of the rapidly increasing population," leading to "impossible financial conditions" (1900.8). For several years the speeches reported that there had been no response to the petition for provincial status, although in 1904 the federal government did provide more money (1901.8, 1902.8, 1903.14, 1904.8).

A major theme in the political and economic history of Saskatchewan has been the relationship of diversified private enterprise and centralized public enterprise; in this Territorial period there was an interesting anticipation in the form of a proposal for government hail insurance (1901.8). Establishing a public enterprise to take the place of many private enterprises was a major theme in radical literature of the period such as the "gas and water Socialism" of the *Fabian Essays* (1889). In territorial days the scattered population and sheer size of the land, described by a constituent of Mr. Greeley of Maple Creek as an immense area where "the hand of man has never set its foot,"⁴ would lend support to the idea of a public system.



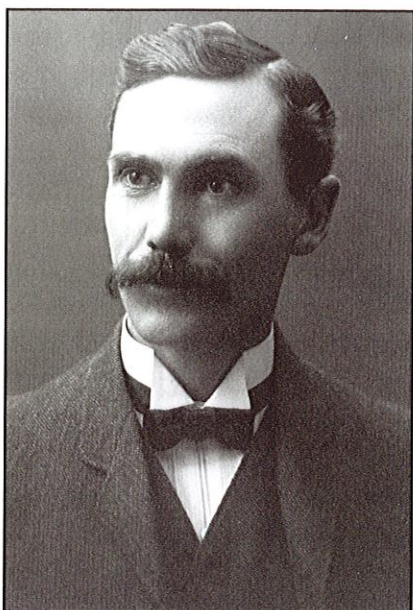
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Editorial Cartoon from the Regina Morning Leader, November 15th, 1912, depicting MLAs as bees returning to the hive.

Building the Wheat Province: 1905-44

Speeches of the early years of the Walter Scott administration, 1905-16, shared in the boom mentality of the period, with hopes for progress “which can hardly be estimated” and hopes for “indefinite expansion” (1906.11). Development of the province’s resources seemed “assured” in light of homestead entries which “exceed the record of any former year” (1908.11) and confident expectations that the population would rival Ontario and Québec (Jan 1912.8).⁵ Public enterprise became a reality with a Hail Insurance program (1907.9, 1912.9) deemed after one year to be a “success”

(1913.11). “Public ownership and operation” of grain elevators, highlighted in several speeches (1908.11, 1909.9, 1910.10), took the form of the Saskatchewan Co-operative Elevator Company which had forty-four elevators by the beginning of 1912 (Jan 1912.8). That the Company might bring “relief and assistance” to an ever-increasing number suggested some early sense of social program and farm safety net (Nov 1912.14). On another front, negotiations were concluded with the Bell Telephone Company so that “long distance telephones within the Province are now exclusively owned and operated by the Government” (1909.8).



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Saskatchewan's First Premier, Thomas Walter Scott

A wartime liquor prohibition with respect to bars and clubs was proposed as an economy measure but based on temperance and public ownership:

My Government believes that the cause of temperance will be better served by taking such residue of the traffic wholly out of private hands. The measure to be submitted to you, therefore, will provide for the taking over by the Government of all the existing wholesale business, such places to be conducted by the Government through an independent Commission, and to be called Saskatchewan Dispensaries. (1915.10)

National sentiment and patriotism was strong, yet there was unhappiness because ownership of natural resources remained with the federal government (1907.8, Jan 1912.8, Nov 1912.14). It was noted that equal suffrage would be granted to women “the moment that satisfactory evidence were presented of the women of the Province desiring it” (1916.11). The vote was granted to women but not to Saskatchewan’s Indians and indeed there was no mention of Indian people in the speeches, from 1906-16.

The speeches of the next decade, during the administrations of William M. Martin (1916-22) and Charles A. Dunning (1922-26), reflected clearly the tensions of harmony and diversity as Saskatchewan strived to build the Wheat Province. The fundamental struggles with nature’s challenges of rust, hail and drought (Jan 1919.9, 1920.7, 1921.11) were matched

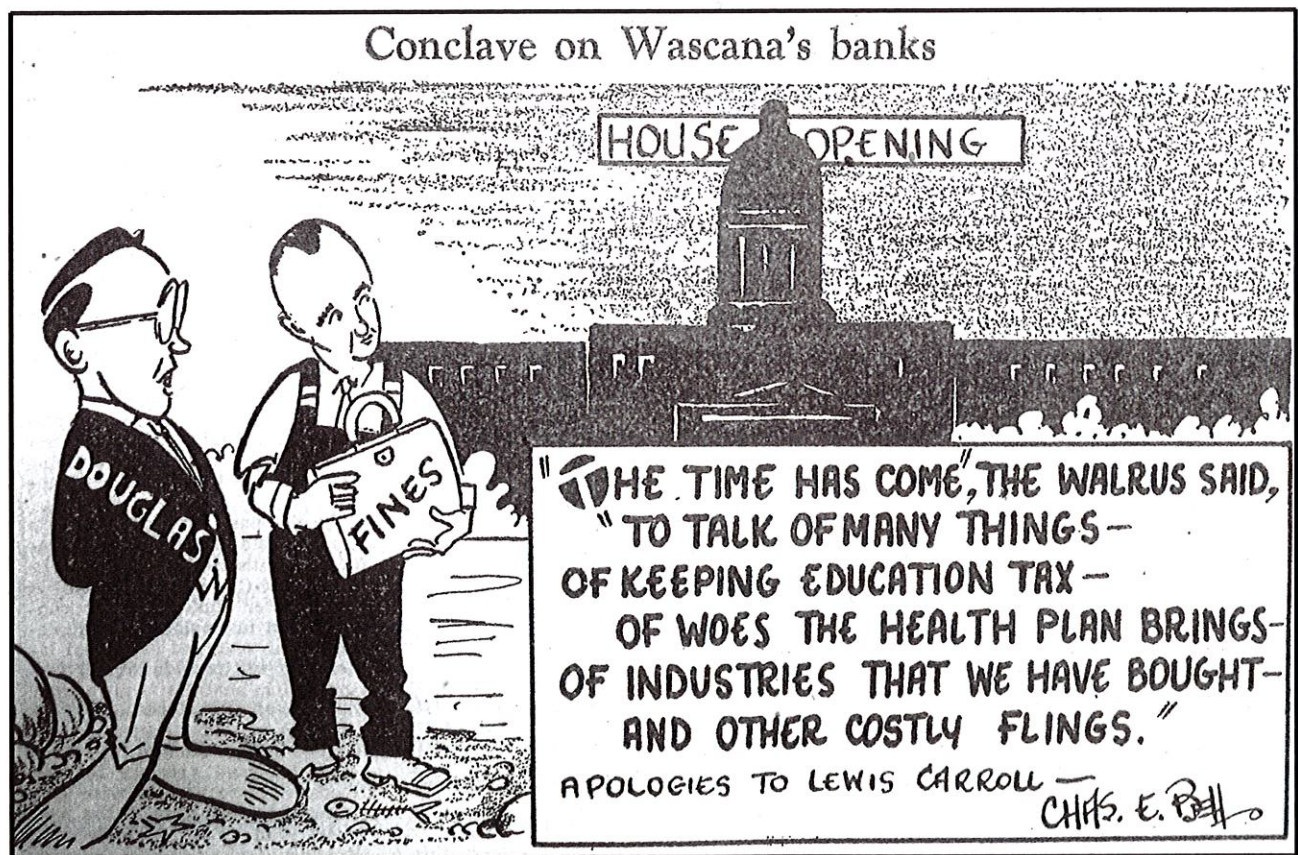
with concerns about the marketing and transportation of farm products (1921.12). A victory in securing lower railway rates was undermined by an increase in lake shipping charges (1923.8). In one year with two throne speeches the first was positive about freight rates (Jan 1924.8) while the second spoke of taking the Railway Commission to court and expressed anger about Senate blockage of Saskatchewan railway construction (Nov 1924.8). This same year “interest and sympathy” was expressed for the idea of a “co-operative wheat pool without governmental assistance or control” to help meet the gap between input costs and low returns which was acknowledged to be a world problem (Jan 1924.8). The tension between Saskatchewan and federal institutions on these serious economic issues followed immediately upon the end of World War I, when national and imperial feelings ran strong (1918.8), a mixture of national pride and regional dissatisfaction, which of course remains a characteristic of the Canadian federation today.⁶ A high-profile issue of these years, illustrating the volatility of public opinion, was prohibition. It was reported that “a large majority” had voted in favour of “provincial prohibition” in the referendum of 1916 and the government would implement the “wishes of the people” (Jan 1917.10). The issue remained controversial; it was announced that new measures would be brought on the important question of Temperance (1919.9), and a year later that “no liquor will be imported legally into the Province excepting for medicinal, sacramental and scientific purposes” (1920.8). However, several years later the public divisions on the issue were acknowledged in the throne speech and prohibition was rescinded following a new plebiscite (Jan 1924.9, Nov 1924.9).⁷

A dramatic midnight non-confidence vote in September of 1929 was the hinge between the administration of James G. Gardiner (1926-29) and that of J.T.M. Anderson (1929-34).⁸ The throne speeches of these years reflected that in economic matters, opportunity and necessity often trumped ideology, as the harmony of a centralized economy contested with the diversity of a private enterprise economy. In the case of the Gardiner administration government-owned elevators were “privatized” in the sense of being sold to the producer-owned Saskatchewan Pool Elevators Limited (1927.8); at the same time the government’s policy of expansion in power generation (Dec 1928.8) included the purchase of a briquette coal plant to encourage the industry.⁹ In the case of Anderson’s regime, a coalition government with Progressives and

Independents, it was remarkable how this nominally Conservative administration engaged in public construction projects as a vehicle for Depression relief (1932.10), in writing down debts and taxes (1933.8), in direct relief to keep an estimated 180,000 people on their farms rather than drifting into cities (1934.8), in a public reforestation program deemed “much more satisfactory than leaving the matter to private effort” and an “energetic programme” of fruit growing on government farms (1934.9). In the field of education the first Anderson government speech embraced the goal of social harmony by claiming the province’s schools were now “non-sectarian” (1931.8); the reality was more controversial—policies such as requiring nuns not to wear crucifixes reminded many of parallels between the government’s stance and policies of the Ku Klux Klan.¹⁰ Both these governments continued with the building of a modern administrative state, with civil service pensions and child care acts (1927), policing and school acts (Jan 1928), a Royal Commission on grain (Dec 1928), an upgraded school curriculum to promote health and social welfare (1932.9) and “the supplying

of adequate medical, hospital, dental, nursing and drug services to the people” (Feb 1934.11).¹¹

The throne speeches of the Patterson administration (1936-44) dealt primarily with two great issues: the Depression and the War. With respect to the Depression it is notable that a private enterprise government, committed ideologically to the diversity of individual economic effort, nevertheless advanced programs of a co-operative and public enterprise nature. The speech of 1937 reflected the dichotomy, reporting that the direct relief of previous years had been replaced by a program of “work and wages.” At the same time it spoke of correcting the “errors of early settlement” by resettling those on marginal Southern lands into the North (1937.10), mixing the private enterprise tone of work for wages with a typical public enterprise strategy. However, the severity of Depression conditions necessitated greater government intervention; the disaster of 1937 involved virtually the entire province, resulting in relief measures for “approximately one-half of Saskatchewan’s total population” (1938.8). It was not surprising that such a catastrophe led to inquiries



Editorial Cartoon from the Regina Leader-Post, January 30th, 1947.

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into the province's economic structure, leading in turn to introduction of an "Industrial Development Board, the aim and object of which will be the development of industries in addition to agriculture" (1939.12). Crop conditions improved during the War years but the lesson about the need for diversity was not forgotten; for example, it was hoped that wartime demand for foods beyond wheat would lead in the post-War period to putting Saskatchewan agriculture "on a sounder basis" (1943.9). The apparent need for public and collective measures was reflected in this period in throne speech language about credit unions (1937.11), co-operative creameries (1939.13, 1941.9), voluntary co-operative Hospital Benefit Associations (1938.9), free cancer treatment and a federally sponsored national health insurance plan (Feb 1944.10). The dialectical tension of harmony and diversity was also evident in the language dealing with government beyond the province. For example, the Crown was vital for binding together the "various units of our great Commonwealth" and yet it was of "prime importance that a method for amending the Constitution within Canada be provided" (1936.8). Or, there was an effort to harmonize the impact of the federal and provincial governments upon the Indian population of the North, the first mention of Indians since the 1880s (1939.12), yet there was continuing disagreement about powers of legislation and taxation at the two levels (1936.8-9, 1941.8, 1942.10, Feb 1944.9).¹²

Experiment in Social Democracy: 1944-81

With the Fall of 1944, and the administration of T.C. Douglas, there came a dramatic new voice in the throne speeches, not in the typical throne speech prose but in the content. It was a voice from the left, offering a coherent ideological vision for the province which contrasted noticeably from the seemingly more ad hoc response to events of earlier speeches. The vision in the speeches of 1944 and 1945 was that of the Regina Manifesto, the foundational document of the C.C.F. Party from the Regina convention of 1933 (the Party actually began in Calgary a year earlier). In the C.C.F. vision government would be "sufficient in scope to meet the needs of the postwar society," it would provide "at least a minimum degree of economic security for the rural and urban working people," it would "endow a greater measure of social welfare" on the needy, and it would recognize the "increasing importance of social enterprise in the economic life of the community" (1944.10). The language was evolutionary but there was no doubt that

a virtual revolution was the intent. "The day is past," said the speech, when it can be left to "the forces of private enterprise exclusively to develop the resources of the community and to organize its business activity. The modern economy is a complex one that demands control and direction if disaster and chaos are to be averted." The first step was to be the establishment of an economic advisory committee to advise on establishing "a planned type of economy for the Province" (Oct 1944.11). Other steps were to follow, such as taking over public utilities which were now being operated by private interests to the detriment of the people, taking steps toward "socialized health services," and providing for the Government to enter the insurance business. Following the 1944 speech from the throne "76 bills were passed, touching almost every area of life in the province."¹³ The idealistic tone of this new departure was represented best by a passage in the 1945 speech which asserted that a "new principle has been written into the social service policy of Saskatchewan—the principle that these services may be claimed as a right and not measured out as a matter of charity" (1945.11). Such language echoed the sentiments of the utopian society described in Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, a book that was influential on Saskatchewan socialism.¹⁴ The fact that this new government represented a significant change was reflected in press comments. In response to the proposal for a centralized, planned economy the *Leader-Post* objected that this was the "basic philosophy of authoritarianism."¹⁵ Some months later the paper reported the objection of businessmen towards proposed legislation to reduce hours of work: "while attempting to make a Utopia of Saskatchewan" the proposed legislation would "curb establishment of new industries and increase unemployment."¹⁶

Given the intention of the new C.C.F. administration to play a major, activist role in the social and economic life of the province, it was no surprise that the speeches of these years covered a tremendous variety of topics, from relations with the British government (the C.C.F. was in favour of bringing constitutional control to Canada, as spelled out in the Regina Manifesto), to social programs, to provisions for resource and industrial development. However, two points undoubtedly stand out. One is the astonishingly rapid growth of public enterprise through crown corporations of various kinds, from industrial fields such as ceramics and brick-making to public utilities in transportation, insurance, telephones and power. The speeches from 1946 to 1953 record the dramatic growth

of the Saskatchewan Power Commission as it expanded, became the Saskatchewan Power Corporation, registered revenue surpluses (1947.10, 1948.11) and embarked on a major program of rural electrification, announcing in the 1953 speech its intention of moving from 12,000 electrified farms to 40,000 (1953.11). In 1951, a year after the Saskatchewan Government Telephone Corporation recorded its greatest ever expansion, amendments to the Rural Electrification Act were promised to allow the Power Corporation to make loans to farmers unable to pay their share of the construction costs. The editorial commentator of the *Leader-Post*, in an article titled "Socialism standing still," noted that in Manitoba electrification was entirely subsidized to the farmer whereas this plan was to "meet the proponents of subsidization halfway by helping finance farm electrification through loans."¹⁷ Although in this way the ideal was modified by the reality it was still true that the overall program of rural electrification was a huge accomplishment and perhaps it is one of the many ironies of politics that the C.C.F., later N.D.P., was to lose much of its rural support.

Another huge accomplishment of these years was the hospitalization program which came into effect at the beginning of 1947. Households paid an annual premium for hospital coverage and the throne speeches recorded expansion of the program to the North (1948.8) and increases in the numbers benefited to more than 150,000 by 1949 (1949.9). The crusading spirit which was evident in the Regina Manifesto and in these first years of governance was reflected in the description of the Saskatchewan Hospital Services Plan as a "successful humanitarian undertaking," and in the intention to pursue a "comprehensive National Health Insurance Plan with the least possible delay" (1953.11). There is indeed a utopian undertone to this: to overcome some of the "natural hazards and uncertainties" was a goal not only for agriculture (1950.6) but for all of life in building what the Regina Manifesto called a "planned, socialized, economic order."

A major theme of the speeches of 1954-64, the administrations of Douglas and Woodrow S. Lloyd, was the need for diversification of agriculture and the economy as a whole. In this era of growth there was a 100% increase in oil and gas (1956.7) and a doubling of uranium production (1957.9); there was the search for a variety of other resources, including helium gas, and there was work which led to the "largest and most significant single development in the industrial history" of Saskatchewan—the Esterhazy potash mine (1963.6).

A long list of achievements signaled progress: the rural electrification program which was reported in the speeches for over a decade (eg 1962.8), the extension and modernization of the province's telephone and later television system (1960.7), development of highways to include "more than three thousand miles" of "dust free surface" (1963.7), building of the South Saskatchewan River Dam which was finally agreed between Ottawa and Regina (1959.6), cultural and educational infrastructure such as the Museum of Natural History (1956.9), the College of Medicine (1957.10) and the Regina Campus of the University of Saskatchewan (1961.12). However, there were some signs, such as the "piece-meal abandonment of railway lines" (1963.8) and the trend to larger farms and rural depopulation, which suggested the decline and the dismantling of traditional patterns.¹⁸

It is ironic that the most famous shift to a harmonized provincial system was also the most controversial. The success of the Hospital Services Plan, described as a "model for other jurisdictions to emulate" (1956.8) led eventually to the announcement of a "province-wide, universal, contributory medical care program" (1960.7). An advisory committee was established and the "prepaid medical care program" was promised for 1962 (Feb 1961.12). Controversy swirled around the idea, including claims that Liberal health legislation of 1944 was sufficient and that there could hardly be a less opportune time to proceed with "a grandiose, compulsory medical care plan."¹⁹ The second session of 1961 dealt with the legislation for the plan (Oct 1961.6), which became a reality despite the controversy, including disagreement between the government and doctors (1964.8-9). Increased provincial revenues in 1964 allowed a reduction in personal premiums for Medical Care and Hospitalization (1964.7). Also a notable move towards harmonization was the construction of schools for all children, Indians and whites together, in Northern communities (1957.11). Various programs for both Metis and Treaty Indians, such as educational upgrading and the extension of rural electrification to reserves were other changes noted (1963.9), as well as the promise of "full citizenship rights" (1958.9) and confirmation of the right to "vote in provincial elections" (1960.9).²⁰

If the general tendency of the CCF/NDP years was toward the harmony of public enterprise then the W. Ross Thatcher administration (1964-71) represented generally an ideological swing to the diversity of private enterprise. These speeches, shorter



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Wilbert Ross Thatcher, Premier of Saskatchewan, 1964-1971.

and given in “terse terms,”²¹ emphasized “private and responsible enterprise” (1966.5). However, there are anomalies such as assistance for the “establishment of a pulp manufacturing plant at Prince Albert” (1966.7). Like its CCF/NDP predecessor this government was also concerned with diversification of the provincial economy—“the widening of our economic base” (1968.9)—and at times this trumped the ideological consistency of private or public enterprise, for example in providing industrial incentive cash grants to “meet competition from other provinces” (1969.7). However, the private enterprise ideology of this administration was reflected by the fact that of the seven speeches given between 1965 and 1970, two were simply brief introductions for special sessions to legislate workers back to work. The first bill “to ensure the continuation of certain essential services” (Sept 1966.5) was in response to a strike by gas workers of the Saskatchewan Power Corporation.²² The second instance was legislation of construction workers back to work lest the strike “seriously endanger and jeopardize the provincial economy” (June 1970.5). Bill 2, as it was commonly known, by this time covered workers in gas, electricity, water and hospitals.²³ Other controversial approaches of the Thatcher government included utilization fees on medicare and the promise to scrutinize educational expenditures. Diversity on the social front was represented by changes to the School Act to give “our citizens of Indian ancestry a greater voice in the administration of the schools their children

attend” (1968.9) and there was the establishment of a new provincial government Department for Indian and Metis affairs (1969.8). Also a reflection of the new social thinking was a change from institutional to “community-based” programs for mental health as well as family visits and vocational training as aspects of corrections policy (1969.6,9). Another aspect of 60’s social change was the emphasis on youth, reflected in the provision for student members of the University of Saskatchewan Senate and in lowering the age of legal adulthood from twenty-one to nineteen years (Feb 1970. 6,8). The proclamation of Saskatchewan’s flag in 1969 paralleled many assertions of national and cultural identity which were characteristic of the sixties around the world.²⁴

After the hiatus of the Liberal administration the experiment in social democracy continued in the NDP premiership of Allan Blakeney. It was heralded by the announcement of legislation “abolishing all deterrent fees in the field of health care” (1971.8) and legislation restoring free collective bargaining by “quick repeal of the Essential Services Emergency Act” (1971.9). A further health-care measure was the abolition of medical and hospital premiums (Nov 1973.9). Other social legislation during the mandate included the Family Income Plan which was the “first program of its kind in North America” (1974.8), affirmative action for women in employment (1975.11), and the transfer of “more than one hundred thousand acres of land” to settle Indian treaty land claims (Feb 1979.13). The announcement of legislation to bring about centralized provincial collective bargaining for teachers (Jan 1973.7) prompted the *Leader-Post* editorial writer to suggest that the “ultimate objective is state control” and that it would be interesting to observe the government’s “parliamentary technique to put across step-by-step progression into the socialist version of paradise.”²⁵ However, earthly paradises require resources and a serpent in this provincial Eden, restricting resources, was deemed to be the federal government. Failure of Ottawa to act on Saskatchewan and Western economic concerns resulted in “disillusionment and anger” (Nov 1973.6); there was “increasing concern” because of Ottawa’s resource policy and because the federal budget “penalizes Saskatchewan more than any other province” (1974.6); there was deep concern about federal funding for “medicare and post-secondary education” (Nov 1976.6) and the resources policy led to “resentment against the federal government” (1977.5). Some more positive notes began to sound with the constitutional

Photograph S-B 4874 incorrectly identified as a portrait of Wilbert Ross Thatcher, Premier of Saskatchewan, 1964-1971. The correct caption is "*James G. Gardiner, Premier of Saskatchewan, 1926-29, 1934-35.*"

discussions of the late 70s, such as the province's aim of preserving "a diversity of regional cultures within a strong, united Canada," which would require among other things a "fair return of natural resources" (Feb 1979.10). The final speech of the Blakeney years reports the "historic agreement on the Constitution" which was at last reached, including the principle of equalization; however, the speech immediately went on to report "alarming signs" of federal cutbacks to health and education (1981.5-7), so the correct balance of harmony and diversity was far from realized.

Building the social democratic economy of the 1970s revealed a similar dichotomy between the centralist and the de-centralist. On the centralist side were announcements of crown corporations "to participate in exploration for oil and gas," providing for control of these resources and to provide computer services (Jan 1973.6,8). A major piece of this strategy was legislation "to acquire the assets of some or all of the producing potash mines in the Province" (1975.9)²⁶ but it proceeded in a more usual way with Sask Tel's provision of phone service for "rural telephone companies which vote for the voluntary transfer of their assets to the Corporation" (1976.8). The Saskatchewan Mining Development Corporation would assure a "public presence to monitor and control events at each stage of mining development" (Nov 1979.8). Yet, in addition to this harmonized economic infrastructure the speeches of the late 70s reflected that the government saw itself, of necessity, as a "player" in the global marketplace. It was cited as a good thing that "Saskatchewan's businesses and industries have expanded and diversified at an unprecedented rate during the decade" (Nov 1979.10). Although committed to "orderly development" it was a good thing that "major growth is slated" for potash (1980.10), and, at the beginning of the 80s, it was a good thing that Saskatchewan was "entering an era of growth," for this would "strengthen its efforts to assist businesses to improve their marketing and management capabilities" (1981.10). All of this suggested a government committed to the diversity of private sector business development as well as the harmonized centralist economy, a dance which required fancy footwork to maintain equilibrium.²⁷

Saskatchewan in a Globalizing World: 1982-2007²⁸

The first speech of the Devine administration took the theme of harmony and diversity for its keynote: "we have always held as complementary the traditional values of independence and cooperation." However it was clear

that government was to be reconceived to allow greater scope for "individual initiative" (1982.9). The repeal of the petroleum fuel tax, an election promise, was a sign of shift from the government to the individual pocketbook (1982.10). A key word was balance, repeated a number of times in speeches of the early eighties. For example, crown corporations would continue to "play a key role" (March 1983.7) but the balance would be moved back toward the private enterprise end of the spectrum, through such measures as clearing regulatory obstacles, removing performance bonds for small contractors (March 1983.8), or changing the royalty tax structure for oil (1984.6). There was major support for the family farm, such as the "operating loan guarantee program" (1984.6), support which the *Leader-Post* writes is "much-needed."²⁹ The next speech called the farm loan program the "largest single financial infusion into the Saskatchewan farm economy by any Saskatchewan government in history" (March 1986.6), which exemplified both the importance of individual farm businesses and the power of central government to shape the economy. The protection of individuals was also represented by the commencement of the Saskatchewan Pension Plan which offered "for the first time in Canadian history retirement income security to part time workers, homemakers and employees of small businesses who would otherwise have no access to a pension plan with a matched contribution" (Dec 1986.14).

Although the speeches of most decades include some reference to world conditions, in the speeches of the eighties this became an urgent theme. The higher commodity prices of the seventies began to decline in 1981 and "by 1986 they were at a low point" (Dec 1986.11). The widespread economic recession made more pressing the perennial need to diversify agriculture and the provincial economy as a whole (Dec 1986.12). One way to find development capital was the proposal to allow Saskatchewan residents to buy equity participation in Sask Power and Sask Oil (Mar 1986.11); as this strategy expanded it was characterized as "public participation" by the government (1989.12) and "privatization" by opponents.³⁰ The global theme continued with the recognition that "it is no longer possible for any country to achieve long-term growth and prosperity by isolating itself from events beyond its borders" (1988.6), and with celebration of the "historic signing of the Canada-USA Free Trade Agreement" (1989.11). The final speech of the Devine administration began with reference to the demolition

of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet bloc and to massive agricultural subsidy programs in many countries which had been Saskatchewan's customers. This led to an unusual moment of throne speech hyperbole: "In short, the world has declared economic war on Saskatchewan" (1990.6) *The Leader-Post* described this as "a fair measure of ego-centricity"³¹ and it certainly suggested an embattled mentality and the need for new strategic direction. The centerpiece of this final speech was not so much a strategy but a process, a process to be called Consensus Saskatchewan which would involve a committee of one hundred who would take account of public consultations "to make recommendations on how best to take Saskatchewan through the next decade and into the next century" (1990.6); there was even a utopian note to the idea that the new plan "will be a blueprint to take us through this decade of change and to lay the foundations for a new century—Blueprint 2000" (1990.14). Notwithstanding that consultation was almost always sensible, critics and the electorate were not persuaded about this one.³²

A major theme of throne speeches of the Romanow administration was rejuvenation of the provincial economy. The immediate cause cited was the large accumulated debt from the previous government. "A community that lives beyond its means will not long prosper," says the second speech—"People want government to get their financial house in order" (1992.5). Even after balanced budgets had been restored there was reference to the debt as a "bitter inheritance," requiring the third largest expenditure ("wasted") in the provincial budget (1998.11). In addition to the debt problem was the problem of the agriculture sector, including the protection of Saskatchewan's farmers from "global commodity price wars" (1992.8). One strategy was the perennial refrain of diversification of agriculture and of the economy in general, to replace the old economy of unprocessed resources with a new, diversified and value-added economy which would give a "fighting chance to ride out boom and bust cycles—at last" (March 1999.5). But the headlining strategy in speech after speech was "jobs and growth" as the "first priority" (1996.2). This provoked comments from several directions about the "fiscal conservatism" and right-leaning of this social democratic government.³³ The Premier characterized the approach as "cautious, careful, progressive... We're trying to get a balanced approach which involves debt management, enhancement of programs and, when we can do it, tax reduction."³⁴ However, when the 1999

election returned a coalition government the reduction of personal income taxes became a throne speech promise (Dec 1999.4). Fiscal relations with Ottawa continued as a theme in the speeches of this decade, producing in one instance a classic piece of throne speech understatement: "My government will vigorously assist the federal government to rediscover its responsibilities towards Canada's national transportation system" (1998.10). Other strategies included the first issue of Saskatchewan Savings Bonds and promise of a strong role for crown corporations in a "prosperous, mixed economy" (1996.3).

On the program side poverty and health care were significant priorities. The cost of children's growing up on "the outskirts of hope is too high," said the second speech metaphorically (1992.10).³⁵ The changing idea of welfare — from handout to stimulus — was reflected in the notion that "jobs are the best way to address child poverty, and to enable people to escape welfare" (1997.5). With respect to welfare it was suggested that "Our watchword, in this area as in all others, is balance" (1998.4); this echoed frequent allusions to balance in speeches of the very different Conservative administration of the 1980s, and it suggested that governments on both sides of the traditional right-left divide found themselves coping with the new global economic realities. The idea of encouraging self-reliance was also evident in comments about Northern Dialogue to build partnerships with Northern and Aboriginal communities, "to open the doors to full participation in our economy, and to realize the vast untapped economic potential these women and men represent" (March 1999.4). In the late 19th century throne speeches Aboriginal people were spoken of as children and colonized others; relatively few references in the mid 20th century implied Aboriginals were a social problem needing to be fixed; in the late 1990s, the rhetoric was that Aboriginals were an economic resource for the province. In the program area of health care the challenge for the government in these years, quoting Buckminster Fuller, was to "learn to do more with less" (1992.9), which was an interesting hint that the speechwriter is recognizing some limits to growth as the definition of progress. These speeches referred to the proud legacy of medicare from the Douglas-Lloyd governments but saw the need now "to rebuild our entire health care system" (1993.9). In the first instance this meant a replacement of over 400 different health boards with 32 regional administrations (1995.7, March 1999.8), and beyond this an improvement of

quality and efficiency with a wide variety of measures, including strengthened regional hospitals, a provincial health information network and the articulation of “clear, measurable, achievable, regularly monitored and regularly reported goals” (Dec 1999.10). A major policy issue for the system was the role of private sector health facilities; the government promised to manage this vigilantly to “prevent the development of a two-tier health system” (1996.7) and maintain the “publicly administered single-payer system.”³⁶ The last speech of the Romanow administration was in context of the NDP and Liberal coalition government of with the Saskatchewan Party as opposition and there was an interesting departure from typical throne speech circumlocution: the people told us, it said, “to stop shouting at each other and past each other, and to work together” (Dec 1999.13).³⁷

The final speeches considered here, 2001 to 2007, are the speeches of the Lorne Calvert NDP administration and the first speech of the Brad Wall Saskatchewan Party administration. Diversity remains a central theme both economically and culturally, as a value which crosses party lines. The 2007 speech announced Enterprise Saskatchewan as the public-private economic partnership to replace the “top-down, government-driven economic schemes of the past” (2007.4), yet five years earlier the NDP administration stated that “economic growth in Saskatchewan will continue to be led by the private sector and private investment,” with government as a “catalyst” (2002.5). In other words, the core economic strategy was a mixed economy of private, co-operative and public elements, a strategy of economic diversity which was pursued by both parties, although ideological differences of left and right remained in terms of emphasis in areas such as labour legislation. On the program side both administrations were committed in these speeches to maintaining and improving the quality of education, health-care and care for the environment.

Cultural diversity is another theme which transcends party lines. The speech of 2006 included a paragraph in French about reinvigorating relationships with the Fransaskois community (2006.5) and this was the first use of Canada’s other official language in 130 years of throne speeches. The same speech opened with the Cree word for welcome (2006.1) and the 2007 speech promised that instruction in the history and content of treaties would become a mandatory part of the school curriculum (2007.12). While there were important differences of emphasis these common themes suggest

a Saskatchewan more aware of its cultural diversity than in the past. It is true that the motto of Saskatchewan is “from many peoples, strength,” which suggests many tributaries joining to form a single great river. The post-modern awareness of 2008 is much more about an interwoven network of streams which retain their own courses and directions as they flow through, and nourish, the shared land.³⁸ As well as the confirmation of cultural diversity there is repeated confirmation in throne speeches over the years of the wisdom of agricultural and general economic diversity. From territorial days to the twenty-first century a recurring theme in the speeches is tension with Ottawa about both fiscal and constitutional arrangements. It is arguable that the more mature sense of provincial identity expressed in recent years supports both distinct provincial positions on individual issues and, paradoxically, a stronger sense of national harmony.

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Endnotes

- 1 Norman Fergus Black, *History of Saskatchewan and the Old North West*, (Regina: North West Historical Company, 1913), 206. The throne speeches of the middle 1880s by Lieutenant Governor Edgar Dewdney were characterized by Brian Titley as defences of John A. MacDonald's national policy and grudging recognitions that democracy in the form of a full-elected Council was inevitable, as well as reflections of the contentious issue of whether brewing should be allowed in the Territories, 81-100. Titley characterized the "Dewdney solution" to the Indian problem as—"marginalization with a touch of forced labour (that is, work for rations) dressed up in the language of a *mission civilisatrice*," viii-ix.
- 2 Only a few years earlier the Temperance Colonization Society had founded Saskatoon on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River, as a colony to further the "temperance ideal" that people could live "forever free from the influence of alcohol." See Don Kerr & Stan Hanson, *Saskatoon: The First Half Century*, (Edmonton: New West Press, 1982), 1.
- 3 Education was not without controversy, as suggested by "agitation adverse to sectarian schools" (Black 418), by the opinion that those without children should not have to pay for schools, referred to in a letter from John H. Francis in the *Regina Leader* (28 October 1897) 1, or by the Doukhobor fear that public schools might be a danger to their religion--"Doukhobor Schools" *The Leader* (30 March 1899) 1.
- 4 "Debate on the Address," *The Regina Leader* (5 October 1904) 1.
- 5 The new provincial identity was symbolized by the new Legislative Building. The first sitting here was in January of 1912, followed in November by another characterized by "pomp and circumstance and red tape which every British-born subject thoroughly appreciates and takes pride in, no matter how democratic he, and particularly she, may be in other matters." Each year, continues Isabel G. Armstrong in a women's column in the newspaper, becomes "more of a millinery event"--"The Opening Of The Legislature From A Woman's Standpoint," *The Leader* (15 Nov 1912) 9. With respect to the boom itself newspaper ads of the day were interesting. An ad for the Young Realty & Brokerage Co. of Regina proposes boldly "Population 100,000. Watch us 'Get there!'" *The Regina Morning Leader* (23 Nov 1909) 7. During this period many ads ran for city developments such as the industrial suburb of Factoria in Saskatoon and the proposed Roman Catholic community of Maplecrest in Regina. The throne speech of 1913 noted "financial contraction" in the world's "money centres" (1913.9) and soon the War brought an end to the boom.
- 6 Openings of the Legislature in these years reflected a division between imperial trappings and local simplicity. One year the opening is attended by "more than usual ceremony"—"Guns to Belch Forth Salute..." *The Regina Morning Leader* (25 Jan 1917) 9, while another year the lack of pomp signifies Canada's "most democratic province," *The Morning Leader* (4 Nov 1920) 9. On the democratic side, and certainly an increase in political diversity, was the election of Sarah K. Ramsland, Saskatchewan's first woman MLA--"First Woman M.L.A. In Saskatchewan Takes Seat In Legislature" *The Regina Leader* (28 Nov 1919) 9.
- 7 The measures of 1919 were to strengthen the Saskatchewan Temperance Act which was proving ineffectual against "rumrunners" and the makers of "home-brew" (Brennan 77). A sign of the times was an address by the Rev. P.I. Thacker at the Fourteenth Avenue Methodist Church on "The Liquor Question—What Does Saskatchewan Want?"--"Rev. P.I. Thacker Discusses Liquor Question Sunday," *The Regina Morning Leader* (29 Nov 1919) 1.
- 8 *The Regina Leader* (6 Sept 1929) 1.
- 9 *The Regina Leader* (4 Dec 1928) 1.
- 10 Patrick Kyba, "Ku Klux Klan," in the *Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan* (Regina: Canadian Great Plains Research Centre, 2005), 509-10.
- 11 The measures of these years toward building a public infrastructure were not ideologically consistent in the direction of state socialism, such as is reflected in the "Regina Manifesto" of 1933, but were more responses to the stockmarket crash and the Depression and reflections of ideas in the air such as the American "New Deal." An example of this ideological inconsistency is the mix of what today would be considered regressive racial and religious ideas with a progressive social agenda in the Anderson government, see Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, (Calgary: Fifth House Ltd., 2005), 304. Anderson provides an interesting example of the contrary position to the broad movement toward cultural diversity; his 1918 book on *The Education of the New-Canadian* suggests that immigrants need to be weaned away from the habits and customs of their native lands if they are ever to become "true Canadian citizens, imbued with the highest Anglo-Saxon ideals," 8-9. One example of translation of this policy into action was legislation to prohibit the teaching of Grade 1 in French. At the same time, it is difficult to apply today's more sophisticated ideas about race and culture to a time nearly a century ago. Anderson tells the story of an immigrant girl taken advantage of because of her limited knowledge of English, 220-221, and it might have seemed self-evident that an English policy would unite the province. The Klan apparently approved of the policy but so did "most of the public at large," Patrick Kyba "J.T.M. Anderson, 1929-1934" in *Saskatchewan Premiers of the Twentieth Century*, (ed.) Gordon L. Barhart, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2004), 125.
- 12 A controversial issue involving relations between Regina and Ottawa was debt adjustment, meaning government intervention to write down private debts. The 1937 speech refers to a Privy Council decision about the "forcible writing down of debts," noting that the ultimate authority belongs to the federal government and this settled the "much-debated question" (1937.9). The total crop failure of 1937 led to a large agricultural debt for seed in 1938 and this was not "adjusted" for a number of years (Feb 1944.9). The difficult issue of the extent to which private rights should be over-ridden to achieve public harmony was a concern for the Gardiner, Anderson and Patterson governments. See Beth Bilson, "William Patterson"

- in *Saskatchewan Premiers of the Twentieth Century* (ed.) Gordon L. Barnhart (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2004), 144-45.
- 13 Thomas H. McLeod & Ian McLeod, "T.C. Douglas, 1944-61) in *Saskatchewan Premiers of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Gordon Barnhart. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2004, 180.
 - 14 In *Looking Backward* the title of every citizen to an equal share of the nation's wealth is his or her humanity, 98. Bellamy's impact on the CCF was noted in Lipset, 100. Other influences were the "gas and water" socialism of the Fabians, the American New Deal, and the Saskatchewan tradition of agrarian radicalism as reflected in the *Grain Growers' Guide* edited by E.A. Partridge or the co-operative experimentation and writings of Ed and Will Paynter.
 - 15 "The Throne Speech" (20 October 1944) 11. The emphasis on a planned economy led to vocal protests against CCF "social engineering," including a suggestion in the 1947 throne speech debate "that the Department of Education was secretly compiling files on every person in the province," Waiser 349-50.
 - 16 "New labor legislation may hinder industry" *The Regina Leader-Post* (14 February 1945) 3.
 - 17 "Socialism standing still" *The Regina Leader-Post* (2 February 1951) 15.
 - 18 "A disquieting appraisal," *The Regina Leader-Post* (11 February 1954) 19. See the Introduction to David Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan: Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers and Fur Sharks*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), xvii-xx for a description of another dismantling of traditional patterns, in the policy of assimilation adopted by the CCF in Northern Saskatchewan, which paralleled the actions of governments in other jurisdictions during that era.
 - 19 "Up to the legislators," *The Regina Leader-Post* (12 October 1961) 25.
 - 20 A corollary to the CCF-NDP idea of centralized government, deriving from the principles of the "Regina Manifesto," was the idea that government should be professional rather than amateur. The so-called "Saskatchewan mafia" of ex-CCF civil servants who distinguished themselves elsewhere is well known. In keeping with this view the throne speech of 1963 noted the proposal to establish the "Saskatchewan Public Administration Foundation devoted to research studies and special training projects in fields relating to all levels of the public service" (1963.9). The Foundation, which lasted for several years before it was cancelled by the subsequent administration, was an anticipation of administration and governance programs in the universities, including recent manifestations such as the Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy now amalgamated with the Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy.
 - 21 *The Regina Leader-Post* (4 February 1965)1. The "terse" throne speech prose was reflected, more substantively, in appointment of a small Cabinet of 13 members. Dale Eisler, "Ross Thatcher, 1964-1971" in *Saskatchewan Premiers of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Gordon Barnhart. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2004, 254.
 - 22 There were demonstrations against the measure and *The Regina Leader-Post* said it would be better to leave the bill on the shelf, although editorially it supported the right of individuals to work. "Leave it on the shelf" (8 September 1966) 21.
 - 23 The Deputy-Premier was quoted as saying the government would not tolerate a teachers' strike lasting "more than a few days, but he did not say whether Bill 2 would be used." "Special session starts Monday," *The Regina Leader-Post* (27 June 1970) 13.
 - 24 Although Thatcher historian Dale Eisler acknowledges the fiscal conservatism and authoritarianism of style in Thatcher, he also argued that Thatcher was a visionary rather than merely an anomalous blip between two socialist administrations, a visionary in terms of the need for private sector economic development, the need for limits on government costs, and the need for full integration of aboriginal people, Dale Eisler, "Ross Thatcher, 1964-1971," in *Saskatchewan Premiers of the Twentieth Century*, (ed.) Gordon Barnhart, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2004), 268. This policy of assimilation failed, as the direction of things by 1970 was Indian and Metis self-government, Dennis Gruending, "Allan Blakeney, 1971-1982" in *Saskatchewan Premiers of the Twentieth Century*, (ed.) Gordon Barnhart, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2004), 293.
 - 25 "Ultimate objective is state control" *Regina Leader-Post* (27 January 1973) 21. Dennis Gruending identifies Blakeney's stance as akin to the social democracy of the "Winnipeg Declaration" of 1956, and its support for a mixed public and private economy, than to the full-blown socialist nationalization of the "Regina Manifesto," 279. It was an interesting point, because the "Winnipeg Declaration," although it sees a role for private enterprise, still describes capitalism as "basically immoral."
 - 26 In an article on the topic the *Regina Leader-Post* uses the term "socialization" whereas the editorial in the same issue is entitled "Nationalization: a difficult word." The paper does not condemn the proposed takeover but only urges caution (13 November 1975) 33.
 - 27 *The Regina Leader-Post* quotes John Richards, Saskatoon independent MLA and Waffle spokesperson, as saying that he would not dignify the Throne Speech by attaching the name "socialist" to it. As far as he and the Wafflers were concerned it was the speech of a "right-wing government" (27 January 1973) 3. The following year Richards, in debate on the Throne Speech, suggested that potash be sold to developing countries at cost and that government should pay more attention to small native wood-producing co-ops in the north--"Steuart says speech promises 'nothing'", *The Leader-Post* (29 November 1974) 1. Of course, this reflected a critical difference between middle-of-the-road social democracy, or left to middling, and the more radical socialist position which substitutes values of local sustainability for economic growth in the global marketplace.
 - 28 An alternative historical division was offered by de Vlieger: 1905-29 as a period of Liberal Party dominance, 1929-44 as a transitional period largely because of the political rise of the CCF, and 1944-2004 as a long period of swings between the "left" represented by the CCF/NDP and the "right" represented by other parties. Dan De Vlieger, "Political History of Saskatchewan" in *The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2005), 700-03.

Endotes continued on page 39.

People and Places

The Regina Little Theatre Beginnings to 1933: People, Productions, Influence and Longevity

By Ian McWilliams

The Regina Little Theatre (RLT) is recognised as the oldest continually-producing Little Theatre group in Canada.¹ Drawing heavily on the Records of the Regina Little Theatre Society [RRLTS] held at the Saskatchewan Archives, this article explores the period leading up to the RLT's foundation in 1926, through to the start of the Saskatchewan Drama Festivals and the Dominion Drama Festivals of 1933-34. The beginnings of the RLT may have more of an air of the social-club than an artistic movement but such social beginnings created a theatre society of great longevity and influence. The RLT contributed substantially to amateur theatre development in the city, province, and nation. This study of the beginnings of the RLT – its people, planning, productions, and influences – hopes to provide some insight as to why and how RLT began and what drove it to continue.

Background: *The Little Theatre Movement*

The Little Theatre Movement, or the “art theatre” as it is also known, is a movement that arose in Europe as an artistic reaction to the commercial theatre system. In theory, a Little Theatre would be a group of amateurs aspiring to produce more satisfying dramatic art than could be produced under the financial restraints of the commercial theatre system. The ponderous, yet tellingly specific, subtitle to Sheldon Cheyney's 1917 treatise on the Art Theatre explains: *The Art Theatre: A Discussion of its Ideals, in Organisation and its Promise as a Corrective for Present Evils in the Commercial Theatre*. Cheyney defines the “Ideals of

Art Theatre” almost exclusively as being in opposition to commercial theatre. According to Cheyney, defining characteristics of Art Theatre is almost impossible, “Call it spiritual unity, rhythm, style – what you will – there is unmistakably an earmark of higher art upon it.”² Commercial theatres could offer the same plays with better settings and professional actors, but still produce less satisfying work, for “the true art theatre will, of course, have better acting and stronger plays than any seen in the commercial theatres today.”³

The RLT founders, such as Walter T. Read, were keen to identify with Sir Barry Jackson of the British Drama League. Read was kind enough to credit Jackson with creating the Little Theatre Movement.⁴ Jackson had founded the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1913 and was indentified in Regina's Little Theatre press-releases as being a forerunner of the non-commercial theatre movement.⁵

As early as 1913, Little Theatres were being established in Canada. The Ottawa Little Theatre was the earliest, established in 1913. Hart House Theatre in

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Toronto started in 1919. The 1920s saw the founding of more Little Theatre-based organizations, e.g. the Vancouver Little Theatre (1921) and the Cercle Molière in St-Boniface (1925).⁶ On the prairies the Winnipeg Little Theatre was organised in 1921⁷ and the Saskatoon Little Theatre was established on November 20, 1922.⁸

Walter Read was also aware of the Little Theatre movement in the United States. His RLT Society records include an article by Montrose J. Moses reviewing the progress of the Little Theatre Movement in America. Moses argued that Little Theatres in America were, “symptoms of that dissatisfaction which the American people are showing because the commercial theatre is not giving them what they want.”⁹ The movement was spreading in large urban centres as well as “in the villages of the Western Plains. Prairie houses seem as fond of Tchekoff, the Russian playwright, as they are of the memory of Buffalo Bill.”¹⁰ Community support was needed to raise artistic standards, claimed Moses, as he rallied potential members of the movement asking, “Is there a Little Theatre in your town? For if there isn’t, and you really desire one, it is the simplest matter to start one, provided the start is sincere and is planned, not in self-interest, but for the good of the community that will support it.”¹¹

It appears Read took Moses’ call to heart. The Organizational Announcement of the RLT cited the noblest of artistic visions, “The objects of the Society are the development of the spoken drama, the training and instruction of amateurs in the art of drama and in its technical branches and the production of plays.”¹² Possible personal social advancement was also insinuated with the statement, offering members the chance to hobnob with influential Reginaans.¹³

Population boom and need for entertainment

The population growth in Regina, and the rest of Saskatchewan, in the early twentieth century was astounding. Between 1901 and 1931, Regina’s population grew from 2,249 to 54,209. Saskatchewan’s population grew by over tenfold during the same period (from 91,000 in 1901 to 922,000 in 1931).¹⁴ By the mid 1920s, Regina’s population was approximately 40,000. The 1925 Henderson’s Directory listed the following as the city’s amusements: two theatres, with a third theatre soon to be built; four movie houses; some of the nearby lakes; and several fraternal organisations. Regina was also the Headquarters of Military District Number 12 which “adds much to the business and social life of the city.”¹⁵ The military also provided a steady supply of

members and leaders of the RLT, especially during the Theatre’s first decade.

Regina had already established a tradition of military and garrison drama by the 1920s. The NWMP were producing amateur theatre in the late 1880s using the barracks-hall to stage mostly musical and light dramatic shows. The NWMP minstrel show was popular enough to inspire competition from local merchant James Hambley, owner of the general store. Hambley began staging a rival show in town.¹⁶

Creating entertainment locally is a necessary and proud tradition in Regina. Before professional performers toured the prairies regularly, both amateur and professional arts flourished in early Regina. By 1886, Regina had a small theatre nestled snugly above the jail.¹⁷ Performers needed fortitude on this stage, however, as “actors often had to compete with the prisoners’ singing.”¹⁸ John S. Dennis founded the Regina Musical and Dramatic Society in 1899. The Society’s yearly light opera presentations began with a well-received production of *Pirates of Penzance*. In 1905, the Regina Philharmonic Society staged *The Yeomen of the Guard* with a cast of 50, 10 musicians, costumes and scenery.¹⁹ The Regina Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1908. The first Saskatchewan Music Festival was held in Regina in 1909. 1910 saw the building of the Regina Theatre, a well-appointed 1,000-seat theatre that housed shows making their way through the North American Touring Circuit.²⁰

Amateur dramatic activity existed in Regina in the 1910s. In 1914, the newly-formed Regina Amateur Dramatic Society produced *Lady Frederick*, by Sommerset Maugham, and Sastro’s *The Walls of Jericho*. The Regina Amateurs were also imports, of sorts, as the group was made up of “several fairly new immigrants from Britain.”²¹ That this dramatic society, and others, were largely made up of British-Canadians is not very surprising, as over 54% of Saskatchewan’s population in this decade identified as being of British origin.²²

Until the 1920s, touring shows and stock companies were part of the dramatic life of western Canada. Professional theatre in the region sharply declined in the 1920s, becoming almost non-existent by the 1930s. This decline was part of a larger downward trend of touring theatre companies across western Canada and the United States. The Canadian prairies were impacted more than other regions despite E. Ross Stuart’s observation that “none of the factors usually blamed for the demise of professional theatre in the

1920s was unique to the prairies.”²³ The distinction between theatre in the rest of Canada and the prairies during this era was that “most Prairie professional theatre was toured in from outside the region.”²⁴ Film and radio soon dominated where theatre troupes used to perform. Film and radio were cheaper to distribute and cheaper for audiences to consume. The Depression would eventually make touring almost impossible for professional theatre producers who would be unable to earn enough money to put a show on the road in a region where not enough people could afford to pay to see it. Eventually, the only shows touring the prairie region were proven Broadway hits stopping only in major cities. Even then, the quality of shows soon declined to the point of alienating audiences.²⁵

Vaudeville circuits offered variety, but little of what Little Theatre believers would deem substantial drama. A 1920 programme from the Regina Theatre (operated by Groves-Walker Co. Ltd. and part of the famed Walker touring circuit) advertised three shows daily (Monday through Wednesday) of “Pantages Unequalled Vaudeville program” including “the latest and best short moving pictures.” Between pictures, the Theatre Concert Orchestra played, directed by W. Leon Ames. Renowned “lady juggler” Selma Braatz & Co. juggled. Comedic and musical sketches by Rubini & Rosa in *Musical Melange*, Mr. & Mrs. Melbourne in *On the Sleeping Porch*, Chody, Dot & Midge in *Rhyme and Reason* led up to comedian Billy Broad. The finale was a scene entitled *Rolling Along* featuring “Girls – Comedy – Music.”²⁶

Perhaps the most profound impact professional touring companies had on Regina theatre-goers, some of whom would form the RLT, may have been frustration. Frustratingly poor-quality shows offering only the lightest of theatrical fluff inspired prairie theatre buffs to become theatre-makers. By the time the RLT was founded in 1926, it was one of several amateur dramatic groups active in Regina.²⁷ Stuart argued that it was up to such inspired-amateurs (in the form of Little, Amateur, and Educational Theatres) to “hold the fort” of theatre production on the prairies, for it was over three decades until any substantial form of professional theatre would return to the region.²⁸

Holders of the Fort: Regina Amateur Theatre

G. A. Palmer was an active member in the Regina amateur theatre scene in the 1920s and 30s. Though his true passion seemed to be drama, Palmer worked for

the Provincial Highways Department.²⁹ Palmer wrote poetry, drama, short stories, and criticism.³⁰ Palmer was a member of the RLT in the 1930s, but he is most identified with the Regina Community Players.

The Regina Community Players began in 1922 at the Regina Public Library. J. C. Honeyman, librarian, started meetings called “Literary Nights at the Library.” Palmer was recruited to lead drama readings and discussions. The group soon evolved into performances because, as Palmer claims, “In the year 1922 there was no active dramatic company in Regina.”³¹ The group gave public readings and performed scenes in various venues around Regina, e.g. St. Mary’s Church and the City Hall Auditorium. The first public production of the Community Players occurred on January 23, 1924, at the Normal School Auditorium. Much preparation and practice went into the show; the sets, lighting, and costumes were all arranged by local volunteers.³² The group produced a wide range of plays, from classical to contemporary. They even performed plays for radio broadcast between 1933 and 1934. The Regina Community Players aspired to “develop dramatic art in the city and encourage a taste for the reading and reciting of the best plays by the best dramatists, and to rehearse and present such plays that are within the scope of the members of the company.”³³

The Community Players shared traits of the then-popular Little Theatre Movement, specifically the objectives and volunteer nature of the group. Walter Read would later praise the Community Players as being “the real forerunners of the Little Theatre Society, and in a smaller way operated along genuine Little Theatre lines.”³⁴ However, any forerunning was inadvertent on the part of Palmer. Palmer made his surprise clear in his retelling of his first awareness of the possibility of a Little Theatre in Regina:

In this year, 1926, *Lady Windermere’s Fan* was in rehearsal when Walter Read and others thought the community would be better served and local ambitions gratified if a “Little Theatre” in name was established. I gave them my prompt book and they put on this play as the starter to their idea. Here G.A.P. retired.³⁵

Palmer came back to the RLT in 1931 as a director and study-group leader. The Regina Community Players continued producing some plays, including entries in the Dominion Drama Festivals (Saskatchewan Division) in 1933 and 1934, until Palmer again retired from amateur drama in 1934.³⁶

The Regina Little Theatre Society

Palmer's Windermere-Surprise was set in motion during a meeting in the office of Read, Smith & Co., Cornwall Street, on May 21, 1926. At 8:00 p.m., Read convened the "Meeting of Provisional Committee of Regina Little Theatre Society."³⁷ Present were: Captain G. R. Chetwynd, H. E. Jones, A. Hall, A. J. Haggett, G. Meldrum, and W. T. Read who chaired and acted as secretary. Read laid out two objectives for the evening, "First: to decide if the formation of a new Dramatic Society was in the interests of the City and feasible; Second: to discuss the main objectives and course such Society should take if formed."³⁸ As the first point was agreed upon, discussion moved to objective two. It was decided that moving the fledgling society forward required careful planning and specific membership:

The best interests of the Society could only be advanced through a system of extending invitations to desirable persons to join, and that due consideration ought to be given to the following points among others before the issue of invitations:

1. Is the person sincerely interested in dramatic art and literature in general?
2. Is he (or she) likely to work in harmony with the other Members, place the welfare of the Society before all personal ambition and loyalty to management?³⁹

Management was considered the provisional executive, i.e. those present. It appears that planning rehearsal and performance space was not yet a top priority, as the executive was comfortable suggesting the "Normal School, or failing that, the Regina Theatre or some such place."⁴⁰ Gathering performers and patrons seemed to be the most urgent priority for the new executive, as they "considered a list of prospective players who should be approached and the list was divided among the Members for their individual attention. A list of patrons was also drawn up and divided in a similar manner."⁴¹ This restrictive approach to membership differed from the membership of the Community Players, which presented the more open invitation, "Anyone wishing to gain experience in the histrionic art may enrol without fee at the meetings held in the public library each Wednesday evening."⁴²

Read and Chetwynd are most often identified as the guiding forces behind the initial launch of the RLT. Before 1926, Walter T. Read was active in several Regina amateur companies. Regina Community Player's Programme for the April 23, 1925, production of *The Twelfth Night* (Directed by G. A. Palmer) listed

Walter Read as the prompter. His name was carefully underlined in pencil.⁴³ Read was also involved as the Hon. Secretary of the St. Paul's Players. He was listed in the program for their third annual performance in 1925 of the play, *Are You a Mason?*, at St. Paul's Parish Church. The St. Paul's Players program lists several other future active members of the RLT: President E.A. Matthews, Stage Manager Fred Fitton, and Mrs. Middleton.⁴⁴

By profession, Walter T. Read was an accountant. His firm of Read, Smith, and Co. practiced on Cornwall Street.⁴⁵ His business partner, F. H. H. Smith, was also active in the RLT, serving as treasurer for the first two seasons, and acting in various productions in the early years of the company.⁴⁶ Read and Smith, however, did not limit their social involvement to theatrics. A clipped newspaper notice from 1927 reminded, "That Read, Smith, & Co., the firm that spend the winter in Little Theatre activities, all blossom forth in cricket regalia in the springtime."⁴⁷ Read helped to found the RLT, for which he served as president, secretary, librarian, actor, and director through the first decade of the company's existence. Read would also figure in the formation of the Saskatchewan Drama League and the National Dominion Drama Festival.⁴⁸

Captain Chetwynd continued the tradition of military involvement in Regina's amateur theatre. Born 1884 in Blackheath, Kent, Chetwynd enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force September 1, 1914, listing engineering as his trade.⁴⁹ Chetwynd was serving as an engineering officer for Military District No. 12.⁵⁰ Chetwynd had previous Little Theatre experience in Winnipeg and he and his wife were both founding RLT members. Though the Chetwynds were only with the RLT for its first season, Captain Chetwynd had a major impact on the company. He directed RLT productions and taught RLT members about acting, staging, set construction, lighting, and more.⁵¹

The First General Meeting of the RLT was held in the Kitchener Hotel, at 8:30 p.m. June 7, 1926. Nine ladies and eleven gentlemen adopted the constitution of the RLT Society, elected officers, and formed the Committee for Accommodation. This committee was charged with securing performance and rehearsal space.⁵² Constitutionally, RLT officers were to be elected for one-year terms, and the bylaws stated that no person could hold the same executive committee office for more than 2 consecutive years.⁵³ "Captain Chetwynd, M.C., D.C.M." was the only nomination advanced to be the RLT Director. Read was elected

secretary. The first president of the RLT was “Lt. Col. F. B. Ware, D.S.O.”⁵⁴

The RLT constitution, written by Read and approved (with further input) by the preliminary executive, named the objectives of the society as being, “the promotion, encouragement, study, and public performance of Drama; the study of stagecraft in all its phases; and the general study of Literature; the cultivation and extension of closer relationships with all groups interested in Dramatic Art in the city.”⁵⁵ These objectives were similar to some of the founding principles of the Winnipeg Little Theatre (WLT). However, RLT stopped short of some of the WLT’s stated principles in several ways. WLT more clearly articulated the Little-Theatre-ideal of offering plays not usually produced by the commercial theatre system. More importantly, WLT included unambiguous commitments to developing Canadian playwrights as a means of fostering a Canadian national theatre, or “To lay the foundation for such a Canadian Theatre as will offer to Canadian playwrights the possibility of national recognition, and to Canadian Players the possibility of acquiring and practicing their art in their own country, and under the direction and control of their own countrymen.”⁵⁶ Combine this less-than-vigorous adherence to the ideals of Art Theatre with specific, even restrictive, membership qualifications, and the RLT starts to look more like a social club than a branch of an Art Theatre movement.

During the above-mentioned May 21 RLT Provisional Committee meeting, Read et. al. noted the need for “extending invitations to desirable persons to join” given “due consideration” to the quality of applicant.⁵⁷ In the RLT Constitution, the Application section infers further exclusivity, clarifying that, “The applicant must be proposed by a member of the Society in good standing. The application shall be considered by the Executive, whose decision shall be final. The question of complaint as to the conduct of any member shall be dealt with by the Executive Committee, who shall have full power to deal there-with.”⁵⁸ Reginans fortunate enough to be proposed as a member of the Society, and pass the screening processes of the executive, were sent an invitation to join the Society in September, 1926. Invitation took the form of the *Organisational Announcement* and stated that, “your name having been given to the executive as one interested in the drama, you are cordially invited to join the Society.”⁵⁹ The announcement also outlined the objectives of the RLT, and assured potential members that “The Society has

been assured of the support of a large number of the influential citizens of Regina, several of whom have consented to become patron members.” The patrons were sought as much for their ability to raise the profile of the RLT as for their love of theatre itself. These first patron members included Norman Mackenzie, Esq, K.C.; Hon S. J. Latta; Venerable Archdeacon Davidson M. A.; Hon J. A. Cross, K.C.; G. H. Barr, Esq, K. C.; F. N. Darke, Esq.; Burford Hooke, Esq.; Major George Whitmore; and W. H. Duncan, Esq.⁶⁰ A two-dollar membership fee assured *exclusive* access, as “The majority of the productions will be presented at the club evenings at which the public will not be admitted.”⁶¹ Fees were also needed to ensure the quality of staging, since “cost of production will be very heavy and no pains or expense, within the means of the Society, will be spared, to obtain the fullest effect the modern stage can produce, the results are necessarily governed by the support which is accorded by the members.”⁶² This membership system would prove troublesome before the first season was over.

RLT’s founding, organization, and early publicity campaigns were strategically well structured. Perhaps not coincidentally in 1925, the Dallas Little Theatre’s Oliver Hinsdell wrote a book named *Making the Little Theatre Pay*. The book was a detailed how-to manual providing guidance on the successful creation and management of a Little Theatre Company. Hinsdell provided strategies regarding such aspects of successful Little Theatre management as organization, book-keeping, and advertising campaigns. RLT’s organizational structure appears to have followed, for the most part, the structure laid out by Hinsdell. The RLT’s press-campaigns also closely resemble Hinsdell’s prescribed pre-show press strategies.⁶³

The First Season, Plays and Membership Drives

The executive committee had a busy summer in 1926. By the September 7 Executive Meeting, rehearsal and performance space-scouts reported that the Regina Normal School Auditorium was thought most suitable for members-only performance nights. It was agreed that the school would be approached to secure the space. E. A. Matthews offered that Success Business College was available for rehearsals. Chetwynd presented his anticipated requirements for the upcoming RLT’s inaugural productions and estimated the “Total initial requirements or production covering the first performance, \$300.00.”⁶⁴

Regina newspapers seemed eager to support the new society. On September 18th, the *Daily Post* ran an article titled, "Regina Has Joined the Little Theatre Movement."⁶⁵ The article emphasizes the experience of the producers. The active membership drive is also mentioned with the familiar enticement, "The Regina Little Theatre Society commences with the support of a great many of Regina's leading citizens, both from a moral and financial standpoint."⁶⁶ Two days later, even stronger praise followed for the leaders of the RLT committed to utilizing the "latent talent of this [theatrical] nature in the city and it is the aim of those associated with the Little Theatre movement, a movement which has been a conspicuous success in numerous Canadian and American cities, to bring it out on a scale not yet undertaken in Regina" because, above all, "The community as a whole should be the gainer by it."⁶⁷

By November 5, 1926, Ware and Chetwynd had secured Regina College Gymnasium for performances and the Normal School Auditorium was relegated to back-up performance space status. Members were not as plentiful as the executive had hoped. Chetwynd suggested that members be sent letters explaining the present position of the society, including application forms for members to give to new potential members.⁶⁸ Just what was the present position of the society is never explained, but an undated newspaper clipping among the press coverage leading up to the RLT's first production in late November noted that the RLT could claim 160 members and were seeking 500 members.⁶⁹ Taking into account the two-dollar per member fee, they might have been \$680 short of their hoped for first-year budget.

The RLT's first production was approaching at the end of November 1926. The society presented two one-act plays, *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals* by Sir James Barrie and *The Singing Soul* by a Mrs. Henry Bachus. These shows were the first of five members-only nights of the season. One public performance was planned for February. The executive, in an increasingly urgent membership drive, reminded the public that involvement in members-only nights could lead to roles in public performances, as "Talent discovered



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Regina College, where the Regina Little Theatre found permanent space in 1926.

and experience gained in the private productions will be utilized in the performances open to the public."⁷⁰ One week before the first performances (on November 22), the RLT executive decided to admit more people to their first show. Read "advanced his opinion that the system adopted of increasing membership was futile" and tickets should be printed for the public to purchase for this one performance. Others objected to this plan, "on the grounds that it would be breaking faith with the present members." Smith instead advanced, "[t]hat each of the present members be granted the privilege of inviting two guests to be present at the first performance and that letters be sent out immediately advising them of this, together with the date of the performance and enclosing two tickets." Extension of privilege was an acceptable compromise.⁷¹

A sizable audience for the first show seemed more secure and communal interest continued to grow. The *Daily Post* "Women's Activities" page gave a detailed account of the preparations of the RLT leading up to their first show. The members workshop on the top floor of the Sherwood Building was described as, "Something like the socialist's dream of a state in which everybody works, doing the work for which he is best fitted, is the plan on which the Regina Little Theatre Society is organised."⁷² The reporter provides a detailed account of the elaborate sets under construction, including furniture, set-pieces, and modern stage-lighting, "An up-to-date set of footlights, with three circuits, for three different colours, has already been completed, as well as powerful lamps to be used with coloured shades

for producing artistic lighting effects so important in creating 'atmosphere.'"⁷³ The decorations on set pieces for the Chinese fantasy, *The Singing Soul*, were praised for their authenticity, "The writing is authentic, as if the characters were furnished by a Chinaman."⁷⁴

Reviews of the inaugural performance were kind, e.g., "Little Theatre Society Plays Well Received" and "Many Attend First Offering of Season in College Gymnasium."⁷⁵ The scenery, acting, direction and staging were credited with being "presented with a high degree of perfection."⁷⁶ The performances were even better than some expected, being "More than fulfilling all that had been hoped of them, and giving rich promise of dramatic good things throughout the season."⁷⁷

The executive were pleased with the reception, but still determined to increase membership. A new membership drive was instituted with society members dispatched to speak to Service clubs regarding the "Aims and objectives of 'Little Theatre.'"⁷⁸ The drive appears to have worked. Approximately 350 members took in the RLT's next performance, days before Christmas 1926. The three one-act shows received even more positive reviews. Again, Asian-settings and staging effects were a big hit with the audience, as "When the curtain went up ... and a group of merchants in picturesque Oriental Dress, a gasp of astonishment went up from the audience. It was almost incredible that such results could be achieved by members of the society, and the scenic and lighting effects throughout the play were remarkable."⁷⁹ Read, the director of the play *The Florist Shop*, seemed eager to counteract a perceived slight. The original review does not appear in his records, but a correction does:

by a regrettable error (the omission of the word "not" which was intended to be in the sentence and was originally written, the report appearing yesterday morning stated that the setting was superior to the acting. The remainder of the article gave the actors credit for a fine performance and that the praise was offset by the closing sentence was entirely due to the error.⁸⁰

The RLT's fortunes continued to rise in 1927. In January, the RLT executive made what they viewed as an important ally when they officially affiliated with the British Drama League. A *Regina Post* article provided an extensive list of activities in which the League engaged in order to further the development of British drama groups. While the article made no specific reference as to what practical assistance the League would provide the RLT, the affiliation was viewed as a positive step.⁸¹

RLT now boasted 425 members and the first public presentation was approaching.⁸² *Officer 666* would be performed at the Grand Theatre on February 28 and March 1 of 1927. The Lange Players, a professional company, was performing at the Grand Theatre during this time, but for the Monday and Tuesday nights of the RLT performance, they moved to Yorkton for the two days of the RLT shows.⁸³ Members of the public would be able to purchase tickets to *Officer 666* for one dollar each.⁸⁴ Chetwynd received a 100 dollar budget for the show. Advertising (exclusive of programs) was budgeted for another 100 dollars. As the programs were to be self-supporting, a salesman was employed, on a percentage-basis, to sell advertizing space in the programs for the show.⁸⁵ The show itself was another success. Reviews noted that the "melodramatic farce" played to large audiences. Chetwynd was again credited with ably directing the RLT actors in the "most ambitious play in which its members have appeared."⁸⁶ After *Officer 666*, the RLT Treasurer reported to the executive a profit of \$150 on public production, with approximately \$250 in the bank; "This was considered extremely satisfactory."⁸⁷ Aside from the small matter of an injury during rehearsal to a Captain Rowan, the first public performance was a success.⁸⁸

The last member's night of performance was scheduled for March, and the executive were confident enough to attempt further extension of the social reach of the RLT. A special "second night" for performances was agreed upon. The audience of this second night would be an invited assembly of "Members of Cabinet, the City Council, the Board of Trade, the Staff of the College, the Ministerial Association and the five service clubs."⁸⁹

The first season of the RLT closed with performances of three one-act plays entitled, *The Yellow Triangle*, *Figureheads*, and *The Dickey Bird*.⁹⁰ The *Post* proclaimed the shows as being the "Season's Best Bill for Little Theatre."⁹¹ The settings of *Figureheads* were apparently breathtaking, as "gasps of admiration were heard when the curtain arose on the palace of the beautiful princess, who reclined while her golden hair was being combed."⁹² One month later, the plays were again performed for an invited audience of "well over four hundred."⁹³ The audience included Regina elites as follows:

Lt.-Governor Newlands and Mrs. Newlands,
Premier and Mrs. James G. Gardiner and
the members of the cabinet and their ladies;
Mayor and Mrs. McAra and the members

of the council and their ladies, General and Mrs. D.M. Ormond, and embers of the board of trade, the local council of women, the Ministerial Association, the Canadian Legion, and the Rotary, Kinsmen, Kiwanis, Gyro, and Probus clubs.⁹⁴

The audience was reportedly appreciative, and guests “made an opportunity of expressing to Mr. Chetwynd their pleasure over the progress made by the members of the society during the year.”⁹⁵ Chetwynd received congratulations for both his RLT work and his recent promotion.

Chetwynd’s promotion cost the RLT one of its founding-members. The Chetwynds were moving to Halifax.⁹⁶ Much of the technical success of the RLT was credited to Chetwynd, as was his work toward the preparations for the RLT’s future: “The properties, stage effects, electrical devices, and the scenery were largely the work of Capt. Chetwynd, and he had spent many hours instructing other members of the society in stage technique so that they could carry on next season.”⁹⁷ So, with gifts of a sterling silver cake tray for the Captain and bouquet of irises for Mrs. Chetwynd, the Chetwynds exited the RLT story.⁹⁸

Despite the loss of the Chetwynds, the RLT executive seem satisfied with season one. The First Annual Report boasted that the first season of plays utilised 99 characters using 84 different RLT members. The Regina College Stage and Auditorium of the Gymnasium “have been placed at our disposal for the presentation of our plays.” Rehearsal space was secured at Success Business College, and the workshop (and set storage) was housed in the Sherwood Building.⁹⁹ At the end of season one, the executive was aware of the need for more members and the challenging financial situation; the Finance Committee sought to raise \$500 for the next season’s shows. The submission of an unnamed local playwright’s manuscript for consideration is also noted. Read, the RLT librarian, took the play to review, but no further mention of the manuscript could be found.¹⁰⁰

Enthusiasm over the success of the RLT’s second-season opening night reached giddy proportions in the newspaper reviews, e.g., “The main floor and balcony of the Regina College Gymnasium were filled by an audience keen to see if the home players had made advancement since last season and happy to do its share towards making the performances take on a burnished coloring.”¹⁰¹ Good will and support continued into the season’s second show, the first public show of the season.



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Cast on stage for a Lyric Light Opera production by the Regina Little Theatre of Mary England.

This first public production of the RLT 1927-28 season was the much-anticipated *Lady Windermere’s Fan* at the Regina Theatre. Advertisements promised, “a brilliant cast of local performers special scenery and lighting effects” at various prices, as “Good Seats at \$1.00, other at 50c, 75c.”¹⁰² Reviews spoke to the success of the production, “given a satisfying and artistic interpretation by a large cast of principals and supers, expertly directed by E.A. Matthews with the assistance of C.E. Gregory, and embellishment by three handsome sets.”¹⁰³

The choice of script was also credited as being “Considerably better suited to Little Theatre Study than the melodramatic farce of last season.”¹⁰⁴ Vague reference to the interrupted Community Player’s rehearsals of *Windermere* was present, as it was noted that the play had been, “Promised for the last two or three years for the local speaking stage by home talent.”¹⁰⁵ Averted tragedy also brought admiration when, during a scene, “a cigarette set a small blaze in action on the table cover. Quick and deft siphoning from the nearest bottle of fizz extinguished the flames almost before the

audience had time to get nervous.”¹⁰⁶ By not burning down the theatre, the actors brought down the house.

Charity and festivities highlighted the rest of the 1926-27 season. RLT produced three plays for the benefit of the Leader-Post Cheer Fund on Boxing Day 1927.¹⁰⁷ A celebration for the end of the season was also in the works, even if the guest list needed vetting. A Fancy dress ball for members-only was scheduled for the Hotel Saskatchewan in April. Each member was permitted to invite one guest, provided that “the name of each guest thus invited ... be first submitted to the Committee for approval.”¹⁰⁸ The Ball proved to be a financial-loss.¹⁰⁹

The February Member’s only night was a coming-out party of sorts for Irene M. Rooke. A preseason newspaper story in the summer of 1927 noted the accomplishment of “Mrs. Geo. C. Rooke” who took a six-week stagecraft course at Hart House Theatre at the University of Toronto. Irene Rooke would teach acting at the RLT acting-courses, direct plays, serve on the RLT executive in various positions, and become RLT President in 1936.¹¹⁰ Her first full-length play as a director was *The Romancers* by Edmund Rostand. The show was members-only and advance press warned that its membership was almost full “now only a few vacancies remain.”¹¹¹ An undated review of *Romancers* labelled the show an experimental exception to the usual one-act playbill for member’s nights. Reviews of Rooke’s direction were positive, if patronizing, e.g., “*The Romancers* as acted by Mrs. Rooke’s little company certainly is worthy of a repeat.”¹¹² “Little company” seems an inaccurate description of a play that includes a cast of six main roles, four swordsmen (and associated sword-fighting), a minimum of twelve extras, as well as musicians – all of whom appear onstage at various points of the action.¹¹³

The RLT’s 1928-29 season added other new experiences and successes for the Society. The RLT’s first play by a Canadian author was performed in May 1928. It was *The Death Of Pierrot* by Harry Green, directed by M. Clements.¹¹⁴ The most significant event of the 1928-29 season was the RLT’s move to Darke Hall. Then-RLT president Col. Gregory exuberantly referred to Darke Hall as being the “finest little theatre in all the Dominion, and possibly the continent.”¹¹⁵

The RLT staged three one-act plays at Darke Hall (then known as the Music and Arts Building) on Thursday, January 24, 1929.¹¹⁶ The larger stage space and increased seating capacity, approximately 1000 seats, worked to the advantage of company, as the *Post*

noted, “Splendid Production of Play by Little Theatre Performers: Regina Amateurs Give First Entertainment in Their New Home” before the “audience that taxed the seating capacity of the new Music and Arts Building.”¹¹⁷

Before the start of the 1929-30 season, the RLT advertised that the previous season’s membership was 480. 800 members were sought for 1929-30. The RLT published their first overt and public commitment to the development of a Canadian Theatre:

The Canadian people, enthusiastic about advancing trade and other things linked up with material progress, have perhaps not been so eager in advancing the arts and general cultural life, although there have been some conspicuous instances of encouragement in this direction. The drama is something that the Canadian people should not neglect, and the Regina Little Theatre Society is one of those organisations that not only portrays and encourages dramatic art but which by their existence may be the forerunners of something a growing number of Canadians would like to see – a Canadian drama. Establishment of this would help in the development of a greater and richer Canadian spirit.¹¹⁸

The words were encouraging, even if the number of Canadian plays did not significantly rise in the RLT’s repertoire.

In October 1929 the man credited by Read with starting the Little Theatre movement, Sir Barry Jackson, visited Regina. Jackson was lecturing his way across Canada under the auspices of the National Council of Education.¹¹⁹ Jackson spoke to several groups about the importance of the non-commercial movement. During his speech at the at Normal School, Jackson stressed that the Little Theatre was about performing plays not usually performed under the commercial system. When asked what he could offer as far as “advice to members of the Little Theatre of Regina, Sir Barry voiced the opinion that staging and scenery were of lesser importance.”¹²⁰ It is unclear whether the RLT executive took this as guidance or criticism. Jackson closed with a hope for a Canadian drama festival with recognition for best production and best original (Canadian) production.¹²¹

The RLT season of plays continued, under the presidency of Judge A.G. Farrell, with performances drawing strong crowds and steady praise. The December Public performance (now running three nights) of

the comedy *All-of-a-Sudden-Peggy* drew superlative reviews: "Too much praise can hardly be given, to the splendid settings for the scenes and the unusually effective costume."¹²² Though public performances were at the Grand Theatre, club nights continued at Darke Hall.

The early years of the Depression draw no specific mention of hard economic times in the RLT records. Perhaps a clue as to the changing times in Regina lies in the RLT's decision at the start of the 1930-31 season to open all plays to the public.¹²³ This relaxation of exclusivity could be a result of the RLT trying to maintain a sizable audience. It could also be the RLT's way of trying to fill the gap left by the near-cessation of touring professional groups by this time on the prairies.

This fifth season also marked the return of George Palmer to directing for the Regina Amateur stage. On February 17, 1931, he directed the RLT's *Skin Game* at Darke Hall. The advance press for the show named this play "the most ambitious amateur play to be ever presented in Regina."¹²⁴ Seventeen of the most experienced members of the society made up the cast. A thirty-piece orchestra provided the score, and audiences were given the following warning:

one of the most dramatic scenes ever presented on the Darke Hall stage will be witnessed in the auction scene which takes place during the unfolding of *The Skin Game*. The scene shows how far people will go to get ahead of their fellow men, and how little they gain from their acts.¹²⁵

The play, boiled down to simplest form, is about money woes, class wars, and two enemies whose children fall in love.¹²⁶ Reviews for the acting and direction were positive, and even advanced the theory that this production "might be taken as a direct challenge to those who plea for better plays."¹²⁷

Walter Read was elected president for the 1930-31 season and continued as president into the fall of 1931, by which time RLT was facing another monetary crisis. In a letter to members dated November 28 1931, Read launched the RLT's most urgent appeal for funding. He wrote:

For various reasons, the opening membership campaign did not bring the results hoped for, and to carry on it is essential that we obtain further members. Our financial requirements are somewhat heavier this year, due to the purchase of new scenery and equipment and we cannot go on unless

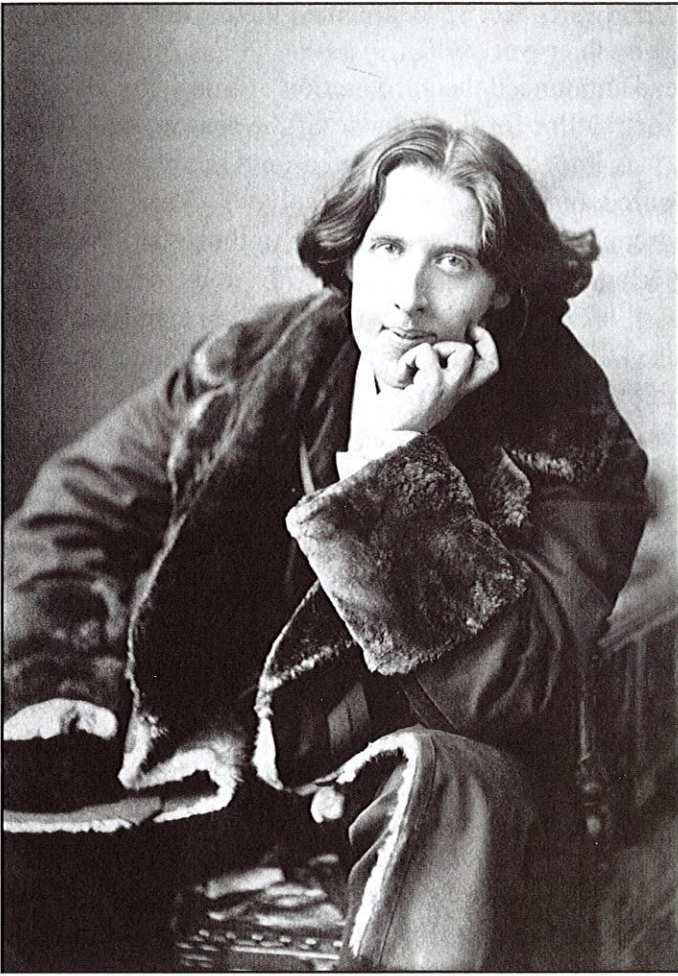
we collect \$300.00 within the next two or three weeks."¹²⁸

Read announced the introduction of a new-member rate of one dollar for the balance of the season, adding "If, as it is hoped, several hundred new members are thus secured, our problems will be solved." Read expressed regret as this might seem unfair to those who paid full price and had supported the RLT from its inception. As possible compensation to such founding members, Read raised the possibility of free admission to the upcoming public performance.

The reason for new scenery is unexplained in Read's records. Palmer's scrapbook includes an undated newspaper clipping, pasted near a ticket for the RLT's 1931 production of *The Romantic Age*, that might explain the situation. The clipping is a story of the National Cartage and Storage Building fire. Damage was estimated at \$40,000 to \$45,000 and "Scenery and property of the Regina Little Theatre Society were stored in a room on the main floor, just west of the stairs, and suffered heavy damage."¹²⁹ The RLT rallied, however, and continued producing the rest of the season.

Had the RLT folded in 1931, even for a few months, it would have forfeited its title as the longest-running continually-producing English-speaking amateur theatre company in Canada. But the community rallied, and the shows continued. A full slate of plays were presented in the 1931-32 season. The December 22nd, 1931, performance of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* was billed as the first production of Wilde in the city. It was intended as a members-only night, but was opened to the public "due to public interest."¹³⁰ Public interest may very well have been keen; the opportunity to sell extra tickets to a show would also have been welcome to the RLT as it rebuilt its coffers.

RLT seasons continued and the amateur dramatics scene in Saskatchewan kept gaining strength. In 1933, Saskatchewan held a Saskatchewan Drama Festival.¹³¹ The RLT held their own elimination-festival of 17 plays to determine the best plays to submit to the festival. The RLT was one of five Regina theatre groups which entered the Festival, Saskatoon sent two groups, and North Battleford's Literary and Dramatic Club was also represented.¹³² One of two entries of the Saskatoon Little Theatre Society, Sir James Barrie's *Twelve Pound Look* starring J.S. Woodward, won the Saskatchewan festival and was sent to the first DDF in Ottawa in 1934.¹³³ The second Saskatoon Little Theatre play, *First and Last* tied for second place with



Courtesy of the Editor

The writer and playwright Oscar Wilde. The Regina Little Theatre's production of The Importance of Being Earnest was the first of Wilde's plays to be performed in Regina.

a George Palmer-directed Regina Community Players' production of *Outward Bound*.¹³⁴

With so many Saskatchewan amateur theatre practitioners gathered in Regina, a meeting was held that founded the Saskatchewan Drama League. Prior to the meeting, Walter T. Read had prepared a constitution for the fledgling organization. Read's constitution advanced such purposes for the league as the encouragement of Saskatchewan playwrights, the development of actors and artists, the support of regional festivals in the province, and the making available of theatrical literature to league members.¹³⁵ James Sinclair expressed the hope that the Saskatchewan Drama League would play a part in bringing about a Canadian National Theatre, even if he described it, in melodramatically-dire metaphor, as being, "at the moment, a limping barefoot urchin."¹³⁶

Saskatchewan's amateur dramatic festivals grew as the Dominion Drama Festival (DDF) was getting organised in Ottawa. Lord Bessborough organised the first DDF at the Ottawa Little Theatre in 1934. By this time, the Saskatchewan Drama League had already

put into place a series of festivals and a system of adjudication for large and smaller communities. Read had devised a system of adjudicating festival plays that was eventually adopted across western Canada.¹³⁷ Saskatchewan was the only Provincial Drama League to hold Class B festivals for smaller, rural centres. When Bessborough's DDF was finally organised, both Saskatchewan and Alberta simply merged existing festival systems with the DDF.¹³⁸ The first ever DDF was won by a Winnipeg entry, a play called *Born to be Hanged*.¹³⁹

The Dominion Drama Festival is often held up as a major motivator of Canadian Amateur Drama. Iris Winston in her history of the Ottawa Little Theatre (the home of the National DDF until 1938) claims that, "the trip to the theatrical Mecca became the highlight of the year for drama groups across the country."¹⁴⁰ But it is, perhaps, hard for theatre historians writing from Ottawa outward to acknowledge the impact of prairie amateur theatre on the Dominion Drama Festival. Tensions between amateur theatre groups in central Canada and western groups existed. Plays that won western regional festivals were not always the plays invited to Ottawa.¹⁴¹ At least one example exists of the Festival being out of reach for some groups. In February 1936, the RLT executive declined an invitation to the DDF because the \$325 needed to send their play *Bathsheba of Saarema* to Ottawa was unavailable and could not be raised.

This failure must not have been too demoralising as the RLT kept producing theatre through the depression and through the war. Persistence and a desire to fill an artistic and social hole seem to have been the major driving forces behind the RLT's longevity. During the period covered by this paper, the influences of the RLT, and its members, on amateur drama in Regina, Saskatchewan, and the rest of western Canada (and perhaps the Dominion) are significant. Such influences range from the national-level work, such as Walter Read's work with Drama Festivals, to more local (but no less significant) influences. Take as one example Miss Grace Tinning, RLT regular, who also served as a director at the Qu'Appelle Diocesan School.¹⁴²

The RLT began with more of an air of social-club-exclusivity than wild-eyed artistic-passion. Perhaps many of the founders' desires for exclusivity served the Little Theatre Movement best in Regina. This fledgling movement needed people with the time and money to spend on their hobby, or calling, of theatre. Without such support, the RLT could have folded numerous times in its early seasons. The RLT grew into the role

of guardian and promoter of theatre as an art form after the commercial system abandoned substantial theatre production in Regina, and the prairies in general. Community support was strong and sustained, even through drought, Depression, and World War Two. The RLT was meeting the artistic needs of many Regina citizens, and it still is. Perhaps these are the reasons Regina Little Theatre became the oldest continually-producing (English-speaking) Little Theatre group in Canada.

Endnotes

- 1 E Ross Stuart, *The History of Prairie Theatre: The Development of Theatre in Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan 1833-1982*, (Toronto: Simon and Pierre, 1984), 95. Some qualifications apply. Stuart identifies the RLT as “the oldest continually producing English-speaking theatre group in Canada.” Lyn Goldman qualifies further, noting that “Regina Little Theatre (RLT) is the oldest continuously producing English-language theatre in western Canada.” – Lyn Goldman, (2005), “Regina Little Theatre,” In *The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan*, [Online], http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/regina_little_theatre.html, [March 12, 2008].
- 2 Sheldon Cheney, *The Art Theatre: A Discussion of its Ideals, in Organisation and its Promise as a Corrective for Present Evils in the Commercial Theatre*, (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1917 – Republished by Scholarly Press: St. Clair Shores, Michigan 1970), 56-57.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 *Regina Little Theatre Society in Retrospect 1926-1931 Together with Some Information of Forthcoming Activities*, Records of the Regina Little Theatre Society [RRLTS], R-135 I.9, Saskatchewan Archives Board [SAB].
- 5 *Leader 23/10/29*, clipping in *Regina Little Theatre Society: Scrap Book of Society's Productions and Activities 1926-1931 – This is compiled by and is the property of W.T. Read*, Scrapbook 4/7, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 6 David Gardiner (2008), “Little Theatre Movement,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Historica Foundation of Canada, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/PrinterFriendly.cfm?Params=A1ARTA0004721>, [March 12, 2008].
- 7 Stuart, *The History of Prairie Theatre*, 90.
- 8 Stuart, *The History of Prairie Theatre*, 98. Saskatoon Little Theatre did not hold a public performance until 1927.
- 9 Moses, Montrose J (1926), “The Little Theatre: A Record of Progress,” *The American Review of Reviews*, 59, in *Regina Little Theatre Society: Scrap Book of Society's Productions and Activities 1926-1931 – This is compiled by and is the property of W.T. Read*, Scrapbook 4/7, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid, 62.
- 12 *Organizational Announcement*, RRLTS, R-135 I.6, SAB.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, (Calgary: Fifth House, 2005), 499.
- 15 Henderson’s Directory: Regina 1925, (Winnipeg: Henderson’s Directory Ltd.), 1925, 43.
- 16 Stuart, *The History of Prairie Theatre*, 35.
- 17 Felicia Hardison Londré and Daniel J. Watermeier, *The History of North American Theater: the United States, Canada, and Mexico: from Pre-Columbian Times to the Present*, (New York: Continuum, 1999), 253.
- 18 Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* 158.
- 19 Stuart, *The History of Prairie Theatre*, 35.
- 20 Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* 158.
- 21 Stuart, *The History of Prairie Theatre*, 35.
- 22 Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 502.
- 23 Stuart, *The History of Prairie Theatre*, 77.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 *Regina Theatre Program: 1920*, Scrapbook 3/7, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 27 *Regina Little Theatre Society in Retrospect 1926-1931*, RRLTS, R-135 I.9, SAB.
- 28 Stuart, *The History of Prairie Theatre*, 78. Chautauqua shows were also prevalent and an important part of the entertainment life of prairie residents through the 1920s. These groups also suffered a decline and disappearance in the 1930s (Stuart 83). I’ve chosen to set any Chautauqua discussion aside for this project as, arguably, the Chautauqua shows most profound effects were on rural audiences.
- 29 *Regina Henderson’s Directory 1925*, 348.
- 30 *Letter to G. A. Palmer from University of Saskatchewan Extension Division*, Personal Scrapbook of Mr. George Palmer Record of Drama Activities from 1923 (Handwritten Title: Press Clippings & Particulars of Persons Plays & Performances 1923 to...), Scrapbooks, RRLTS. R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 31 *Record of the Regina Community Players*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 “Community Players Aim to Develop Dramatic Art,” *Regina Daily Post*, Saturday, October 13, 1923 – in *Personal Scrapbook of Mr. George Palmer*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 34 Walter T. Read, *Clipping from “Musical Life” January 1933*, found in *Personal Scrapbook of Mr. George Palmer and Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 35 “A Short History of the Regina Community Players,” *Personal Scrapbook of Mr. George Palmer*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 36 They would take second place in the 1933 Drama Festival in Regina.
- 37 *Minutes of Meeting of Provisional Committee of “Regina Little Theatre Society” Held at the office of Read, Smith & Co. Cornwall Street, Regina, Sask. 21 May 1926, 8 p.m.* Minutes of Executive Meetings, RRLTS, SAB, R-135 I.5b (folder 1/4), SAB.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid.

- 42 "Community Players Aim to Develop Dramatic Art," *Regina Daily Post*, Saturday, October 13, 1923, Regina Community Players Programs, *Personal Scrapbook of Mr. George Palmer*; R-135 I.10, SAB. Later, a membership fee was introduced, but the open-to-all position was maintained.
- 43 *Programs Scrapbook* 3/7, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 44 Ibid. - The show ran from April 30 through to May 2 with a Saturday matinee.
- 45 *Regina Henderson's Directory 1925*, 362.
- 46 *Annual General Meetings Regina Little Theatre, April 20th, 1928 – May 25th, 1969, With Some Lapses*, RRLTS, R-135 I.5a, SAB.
- 47 *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook* 4/7, R-135 I.10, SAB..
- 48 Stuart, *The History of Prairie Theatre*, 116-117.
- 49 G.R Chetwynd Attestation Paper (1917) 020273a&b, Archives Canada, Available: <http://data2.archives.ca/cefi/ren2/020273a.gif> [06/03/2008].
- 50 *Regina Henderson's Directory 1925*, 208.
- 51 Stuart, *The History of Prairie Theatre*, 96-97.
- 52 Minutes of Executive Meetings, RRLTS, R-135 I.5b (folder 1/4), SAB.
- 53 *Drama League Constitution ca.1926*, RRLTS, R-135 I.2, SAB, 4.
- 54 "Regina has joined the Little Theatre Movement." *Regina Daily Post* 18-9-26 found in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook* 4/7, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 55 *Drama League Constitution ca. 1926*, RRLTS, R-135 I.2, SAB.
- 56 "Founding Principles," *Winnipeg Little Theatre season 1927-28 Program and Little Theatre Gossip in Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook* 4/7, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 57 "Minutes of Meeting of Provisional Committee... 21 May 1926, 8 p.m.," Minutes of Executive Meetings, RRLTS, R-135 I.5b (folder 1/4), SAB.
- 58 *Drama League Constitution ca. 1926*, RRLTS, R-135 I.2, SAB.
- 59 *Organizational Announcement*, RRLTS, R-135 I.6, SAB.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Oliver Hindsell, *Making the Little Theatre Pay: A Practical Handbook by Oliver Hindsell Managing Director of The Dallas Little Theatre*, (New York: Samuel French, 1925), 10, 18, 23, 32, 35, 53; and RRLTS, R-135, SAB.
- 64 Minutes of Executive Meeting, Sept 7, 1926 – 8 pm., R-135 I.5b (folder 1/4), SAB.
- 65 "Regina has joined the Little Theatre Movement." *Regina Daily Post* 18-9-26, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook* 4/7, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 *Regina Daily Post*, Monday September 20, 1926, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook* 4/7, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 68 Minutes of Executive Meeting, Friday, Nov. 5, 1926 – 5:15 p.m., RRLTS, R-135 I.5b (folder 1/4), SAB.
- 69 *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook* 4/7, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 70 *Regina Daily Post* 20, 11, 1926: *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook* 4/7, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 71 Executive Meeting Minutes, Monday, Nov. 22, 1926 – 5:15 pm, R-135 I.5b (folder 1/4), SAB.
- 72 "Co-operation Basic of Little Theatre Society," *Regina Daily Post* 26,11,26, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook* 4/7, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 "Little Theatre Society Plays Well Received," *Morning Leader* 30-11-26, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook* 4/7, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 76 Ibid.
- 77 "Little Theatre Plays are Much Enjoyed," *Regina Daily Post* 29-11-26, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook* 4/7, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 78 *Minutes of Executive Meetings* Executive meeting, Friday, Dec 10, 1926 – 5:15 pm. Visits of Chetwynd to Rotary coverage in *Leader* 13/12/26. Matthews to Gyros coverage in *Post* 15/12/26, reported in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook* 4/7, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 "Florist Shop Well Acted," *Leader* 23/12/26, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook* 4/7, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 81 "Affiliation made with Drama League," *Post* 7/1/27, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook* 4/7, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 82 "Little Theatre Now Has Many Members," *Post* 13-1-27, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook* 4/7, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 83 Grand Theatre Program Week February 21-26 No. 25, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook* 4/7, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 84 Executive Meeting Minutes, 10 Jan. 27, 1927 – 5:15 p.m., RRLTS, R-135 I.5b (folder 1/4), SAB.
- 85 Executive Meeting Minutes, 14 Feb 14, 1927 – 5:15 p.m., RRLTS, R-135 I.5b (folder 1/4), SAB.
- 86 "Officer 666 Proves Show of Some Merit: Melodramatic Farce is Presented to Large First Night Audience at Grand" *Leader* 29/2/27, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook* 4/7, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 87 Executive Meeting Minutes Thursday, 10 March 1927, RRLTS, R-135 I.5b (folder 1/4), SAB.
- 88 "Captain Rowan's Accident," Executive Meeting Minutes, 6 June 1927, R-135 I.5b (folder 1/4), SAB. "Mr. E. A. Matthews submitted bill of Dr. Leech for \$5.00 for attendance on Captain Rowan as a result of an accident which occurred at a rehearsal of Officer 666. It was unanimously resolved that this bill be paid."
- 89 Executive Meeting Minutes, Thursday, 10 March 1927, RRLTS, R-135 I.5b (folder 1/4), SAB.
- 90 *Regina Little Theatre Society in Retrospect 1926-1931*. RRLTS, R-135 I.9. SAB..
- 91 "Season's Best Bill for Little Theatre: Three Plays Given Wednesday Evening Are Very Successful" *Post* 31/3/27, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook* 4/7, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 92 Ibid.

- 93 "Presentations Made at Last Little Theatre Performance: Capt and Mrs. G. R. Chetwynd Honored; Three Plays Well Staged," Women's Activities, *Post* 22/04/27, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 94 "Present Plays to Guest Audience: Productions Given by Little Theatre Society Highly Appreciated," *Leader* 23/04/27, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 95 Ibid.
- 96 "Presentation to Chetwynd's Made at Play: Best Turnout of Season Experienced at Final Little Theatre Society Performance," *Leader* 22/04/27, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 97 Ibid.
- 98 "Presentations Made at Last Little Theatre Performance: Capt and Mrs. G. R. Chetwynd Honored; Three Plays Well Staged" Women's Activities, *Post* 22/04/27, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 99 *First Annual Report* April 6, 1927, in RRLTS, R-135 I.5b (folder 1/4), SAB.
- 100 Executive Meeting Minutes, 6 June 1927, RRLTS, R-135 I.5b (folder 1/4), SAB.
- 101 Reviews: "Season 1927-29 Production 1, 22 Oct. 1927," in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 102 "Public Production – Lady Windermere's Fan – 12&15th December 1927," in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 103 Ibid.
- 104 Ibid.
- 105 Ibid.
- 106 Ibid.
- 107 Executive Meeting Minutes, 14 Dec. 1927, RRLTS, R-135 I.5b (folder 1/4), SAB.
- 108 Executive Meeting Minutes, 24 Mar. 1928, RRLTS, R-135 I.5b (folder 1/4), SAB.
- 109 Executive Meeting Minutes, 9 Feb. 1929, RRLTS, R-135 I.5b (folder 1/4), SAB.
- 110 *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 111 "Edmund Rostand's 'Romancers' Is Next Little Theatre Play: Three-Act Production to be Undertaken with Mrs. G. C. Rooke directing," Interests, Cooking and Fashion Section, *Post* – Sat. 18 Feb. 1928, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 112 *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 113 Ibid.
- 114 *Program May 8th 1928 (inc. April program)*, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 115 *Post* 25/1/29, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 116 *Program 24 Jan. 1929*, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB. The plays were *The Camberley Triangle* by A.A. Milne, directed by Margaret Middleton; *The Bishop's Candlesticks*, Adapted from *Les Miserables* and directed by Lt. Col. C.E. Gregory; and *St. Martin's Summer* by Cosmo Hamilton, directed by Irene M. Rooke.
- 117 *Post* 28/1/29, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 118 *Daily Post* Friday, Sept 20, 1929, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 119 *Leader* 23/10/29, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 120 *Leader* October 25th in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 121 Ibid.
- 122 Public Performance at Grand Theatre 10, 11, 12 Dec. review in *Leader-Post* 11 Dec 1930, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 123 *Fifth Season Program, Wednesday October 29th 1930, "The Circle" written by Summerset Maughan*, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 124 Ibid.
- 125 Undated clipping in advance of the Feb 17th, 1931 performance, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 126 *Leader* 16/2/31, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 127 *Post* 18/2/31, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 128 Letter dated November 28th, 1931, in *Regina Little Theatre Society Scrapbook 4/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 129 Personal Scrapbook of Mr. George Palmer, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 130 *Leader Post* 11/12/31, in "Regina Little Theatre Society: Scrap Book of Society's Productions and Activities 1931 –," *Scrapbook 2/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 131 Executive Meeting Minutes, R-135 I.5b (folder 1/4), SAB; and *Scrapbook 2/7*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 132 Festival 1933 Programs, News-Clippings, and Adjudication Sheets, *Personal Scrapbook of Mr. George Palmer*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 133 Ibid.
- 134 Ibid.
- 135 James M. Sinclair, (April 1933), "The Drama Festival" *Musical Notes, Personal Scrapbook of Mr. George Palmer*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 136 Ibid.
- 137 Stuart, *The History of Prairie Theatre*, 118.
- 138 Ibid., 116.
- 139 *Personal Scrapbook of Mr. George Palmer*, RRLTS, R-135 I.10, SAB.
- 140 Winston, 32
- 141 Stuart, *The History of Prairie Theatre*, 121
- 142 Program Qu'Appelle Diocesan School, Jan 28th, 1928, *The Twig of Thorn* "A Play of the Irish Famine in Two Acts, by Marie J. Warren Dir. Miss Grace Tinning, in RRLTS, *Programs c. 1933-1963*, RRLTS, R-135 I.7 (2 of 4 folders), SAB.

“Their Knowledge is deplorable...”

Tuberculosis and the Nursing Profession in Saskatchewan, 1920s-1940s

By Sandra Bassendowski

The winter of 1820 was a bleak one for John Keats. His courtship of Fanny Brawne was no closer to resolution than it had been for the rest of the year and a half that he had known her. His prospects for providing an acceptable income to support her-based he hoped on sales of his poetry-proved perpetually elusive. As if that were not enough, a fatigue had sunk into his bones that he seemed unable to conquer. Then, on a chilly evening in February, Keats ventured out into the snowy air atop a coach. On returning home, he felt strangely giddy, and he was seized with a fever that forced him to bed. As he lay in the dark of his room, his thin frame was wracked with a cough, and he became aware of the taste of blood. Keats summoned a companion to his bedside and in the flickering light he examined the red stain his cough had left on his pillow. ‘I know the color of that blood’, he said solemnly, ‘it’s arterial blood... that blood is my death warrant. I must die’.¹

The disease Keats identified that night was tuberculosis (TB), widely known in that time as consumption. He died shortly after the peak of a European pandemic that killed a quarter of the English population. The public did not consider consumption a disease, much less an infectious one. Rather, it was commonly thought that individuals with consumption had some underlying condition of body or soul that made their fate inevitable. In Keat’s era, it was fashionable to be consumptive. The alabaster skin, the fever-flushed cheeks, and the displayed handkerchief were marks of dignity and refinement.² The romantic images of tuberculosis largely disappeared by the end

of the 19th century, dispelled by the advent of science. Robert Koch and others put forward the germ theory and the theory that illness was associated with poverty, inadequate nutrition, and individuals living in crowded, unsanitary dwellings.³

Tuberculosis was Canada’s leading cause of death at the turn of the century, with a mortality rate in 1900 of about 200 per 100,000 population. By 1944 mortality was reduced to about 20 per 100,000.⁴ By the 1960s, tuberculosis was considered not only controlled but almost eradicated.⁵ In the 1970s and 1980s public health officials regarded TB as a disease of the past and overconfident governments gutted programs just as rising poverty, homelessness, and travel paved the way for a new surge of TB.

Nurses at Risk

Historically, tuberculosis has always had severe implications for nursing, the most important of which is that nurses were at an increased risk for becoming infected with TB. A nurse’s risk of infection was proportionate to the amount of exposure that he or she had with patients or coworkers who have active TB.⁶ A study conducted in the 1930s showed that while 28% of nursing students were infected at the start of their training, that 100% were infected at graduation 3 years later.⁷ However, the study’s authors suggest that the high infection rates reflected the fact that nursing students in that era were in contact with large number of patients with active, communicable TB. The students were also recruited from the most susceptible age group

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in the communities, that of 20-24 year old females. Nurses today have not experienced anything near those rates of infection, not because they are less susceptible to TB than their predecessors but because they do not encounter as many infected patients. However, in a 2004 study by Bennestam, Strandmark, and Diwan, the authors found that "...all participants expressed doubts about the nurses knowledge of TB. They doubted the diagnosis and mentioned several cases in which the nurses had misdiagnosed TB."⁸

Reaction or Reality?

In a report written in 1937 by Dr. R.T. Washburn, chair of the Committee on Research to the Canadian Hospital Council in Ottawa, the author quotes a medical superintendent of a reputable sanatorium, who speaking of nurses affiliated with his institution stated, "They have no idea of protecting themselves from infection nor of preventing the spread of the disease; their knowledge is deplorable...If the entire nursing profession really understood the problems of tuberculosis and acted intelligently they could be a considerable asset in the prevention of the spread of the disease."⁹

This is a strong statement against the education, knowledge, and practice of nurses. Professors of Nursing Glennis Zilm and Ethel Warbinek state that in "...Canadian schools of nursing at the close of the 1800s the generally accepted maxim was that at least one student nurse from every class would die from tuberculosis."¹⁰ The authors provide additional information about nursing students, "Even in the 1920s, when it was known that TB was a preventable communicable disease, at least one student nurse in every class was likely to get the disease and spend a year or more in a sanatorium".¹¹

The review and analysis for this article was conducted with primary and secondary sources related to nursing and tuberculosis care in Saskatchewan, particularly at Fort San during the 1920s to 1940s. Primary sources of information included curriculum guides for nursing education, minutes and notes from educational associations and institutions, and accounts from individuals involved in nursing at Fort San. Secondary sources included information from periodicals, newspapers, books, and newsletters such as *The Valley Echo*. *The Valley Echo* was originally called *The Sanatorium Journal* and included articles on tuberculosis and the sanatorium, as well as humorous essays and advisements. *The Valley Echo* was published from 1923-1961 and contains compositions and

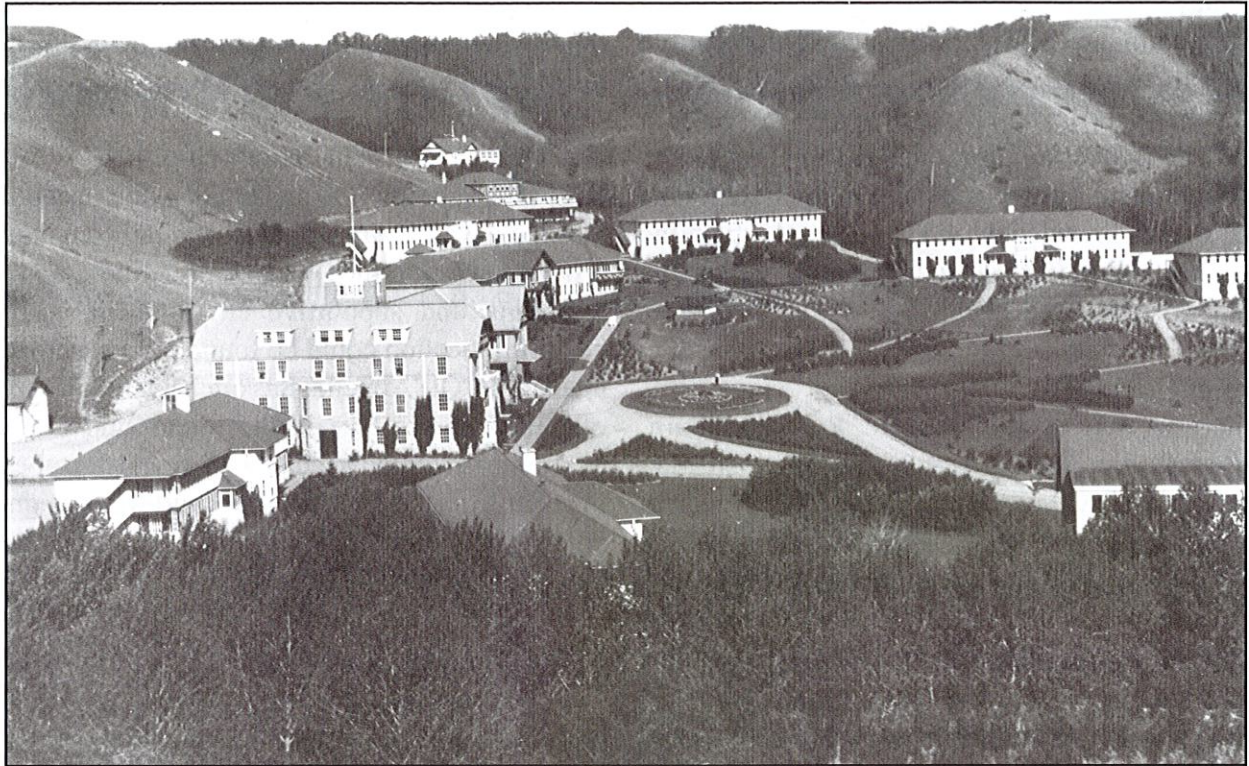
cartoons from patients, nurses, and physicians regarding a variety of items such as sanatorium highlights, health reports, activities, poems, cartoons, and stories of life in the 'San.'

The Fort Qu'Appelle Sanatorium

The sanatoria or TB hospitals were established in Saskatchewan as a means to isolate infected individuals, protect their families and communities, and provide a healing and supportive environment.¹² No more beautiful location could be found for a sanatorium than that at Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan. The semicircle of hills with the lake in the foreground provided the environment for individuals suffering from tuberculosis. Fort San consisted of 230 acres and was designed to be completely self-sufficient, with a powerhouse, stable, piggeries, poultry farm, and garden.¹³

The Sanatorium at Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan was scheduled to open on October 10, 1917 but according to Dr. Ferguson, who worked at the San for 31 years, a week before the opening there were no beds, kitchens, heat, nor water. By February 1918, all the seventy beds were occupied. On opening day, the staff consisted of Matron E.N. Fraser, Dr. Ferguson, an accountant, two ward nurses, a cook, two maids, and a fireman. There was no ceremony at the opening as all staff members were busy with getting the patients settled in the institution.¹⁴

About two years after the opening of the sanatorium, Dr Ferguson stated, "When we think of the future of this institution we do not think of its building and equipment, but rather of an idea, a force, a group of associations, and locality with its hopeful tradition, glowing with prestige and confidence in the cure of the disease."¹⁵ He went to say that "...we want it to have the atmosphere of a home - a home where those who have fallen ill with the disease may come to rest and receive the encouragement and direction necessary to win a hard fight, and a home to which they may afterwards return to be built up, should they become run down, or be deprived of their resistance through an acute illness or other misfortune."¹⁶ The sanatorium expanded in numbers and buildings. As space became available, the patient population increased and correspondingly so did the staff numbers. On August 15, 1919, Miss Mary Montgomery replaced Miss Fraser as Matron due to ill health. At the end of 1919 there were 14 nurses employed at Fort San.¹ Loyalty and enthusiasm characterized the sanatorium nurses and certainly the patients at Fort San recognized these characteristics



A view of the Sanatorium at Fort Qu'Appelle.

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of the nurses through the many poems, stories, and anecdotes that were written about nurses and published in *The Valley Echo*. However, loyalty and enthusiasm did little to ward off the perils of tuberculosis.

In 1919, a young nurse named Bessie Sterlling arrived at the Fort Qu'Appelle sanatorium and joined the staff of the Saskatchewan Anti-Tuberculosis League. She was described as attractive, likeable, and very popular with patients and staff. She was remembered as the nurse who wore the sheepskin coat. She went from pavilion to pavilion during the bitterly cold winter. On March 9, 1920, she was admitted as a patient to the infirmary. From August 1 to September 14 she ran a temperature ranging to 106°F. Bessie was so sick that her family was called and the medical staff believed that there was no hope for recovery. After being in a coma for several days, she opened her eyes and asked "Am I going to die?" She recovered but it was the start of what was to become a serious health issue for nurses of those years.¹⁹

1920-1930

By 1920, the number of working women had virtually doubled since the turn of the century so that the women represented more than one-fifth of the total working

population. The Flapper Revolution provided an age of unheard freedom for women, hard-won from the First World War. Women proved they could take the place of men on countless fronts when the latter went to war. The overall mood of *The Valley Echo* during the 1920s was light-hearted and jovial. The articles lacked sophistication in writing style but it is obvious that the patients in the San enjoyed the fun made of staff and other patients. Although there are some serious articles, for the most part, only one or two articles per issue are written by the in-house physician. The articles written by nurses tend to be a reflection of their working or leisure activities.

By mid-1920s, large numbers of Saskatchewan nurses were being diagnosed with tuberculosis and admitted to the sanatorium for recovery. The number of nurses and nurses-in-training who were diagnosed with tuberculosis and admitted to the sanatorium became a serious concern for schools of nursing and for staff at Fort San. The incidence of tuberculosis among nurses-in-training, who were exposed to more infection, was five times that among females in ordinary life in the same age group, and some health care professionals suggested that the problem was one of infection or infection aggravated by occupational strain.²⁰

1930-1939

With the collapse of the economy in 1929, the youthful spirits of the flappers disappeared and new models for working women emerged. Idealism and self-sacrifice were the foundations of nursing and the professional leaders called for high ideals and demanded rigorous self-discipline for its students and practitioners.²¹ In Saskatchewan, the years of 1930-1939 are remembered as the Dirty Thirties and the economic depression was extremely severe. An atmosphere of anxiety and gloom spread throughout the province as residents endured years of drought and consequent crop failure. Depression, debt, relief, and grasshoppers were common throughout these years. Unemployment was rampant, and the nurses who provided private duty nursing found it almost impossible to support themselves. The nurses at Fort San had a somewhat easier time as they had a steady job and were able to maintain a sense of independence but what they were not prepared for was their susceptibility to TB.

The incidence of infection among nurses-in-training in general hospitals during the period 1930 to 1933 was 12.7% per thousand. This incidence was 12 times the incidence of TB morbidity in the general population which was 1 per thousand. It was 8 times the incidence found among more than 3,000 normal school students - mostly female and of the same age group.²²

It should now be pointed out most forcibly that the pupil nurses are being selected from the most susceptible age group in the community. It is known to all tuberculosis workers that the

female age group between 20-24 years have an incidence of breakdown from tuberculosis approximately double that found among males of the same age group and also double that found among females ten years older. Probably one of the simplest suggestions would be to increase the entry age to twenty-five years, which would have the same effect as increasing resistance.²³

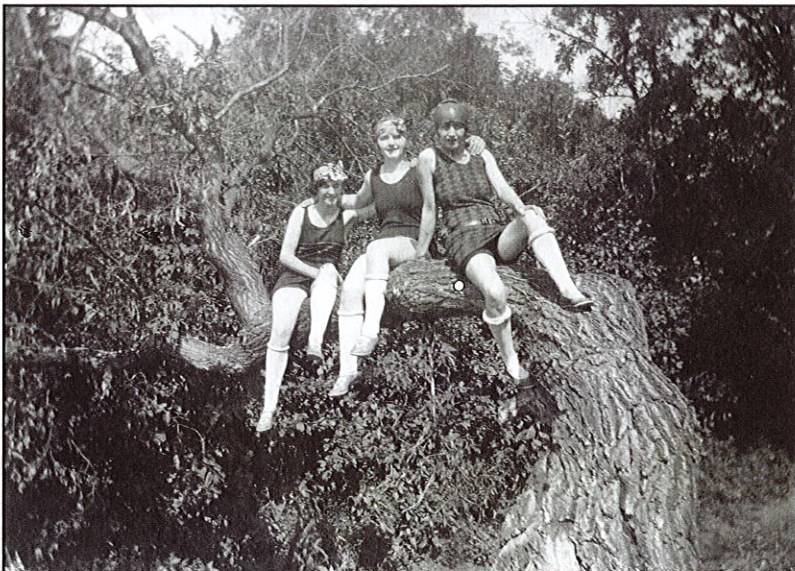
A poem written by a patient, Margaret Williams, in *The Valley Echo* in March 1931 reflects what student nurses may have been feeling when they were diagnosed with tuberculosis:

Tuberculosis

I don't mind measles,
I don't mind mumps,
At least I'd have rashes,
Or least I'd have bumps.
But I hate tuberculosis
'cause there's nothing new to see.
When I take off my pyjamas
There's only just me!

Dr. Ferguson also suggested that the failure to prevent tuberculosis in hospitals required earlier and better instruction in sanitary technique, more convenient facilities for hand washing, sterilization of dishes, and faster identification of spreaders among hospital patients. He suggested that "it may appear to be an admission of weakness on the part of hospitals that they cannot protect the infected nurses-in-training from tuberculosis. The difficulty arises from the fact that the nurse may be exposed in many cases early in her training, and before a protective technique can be acquired."²⁴

In Saskatchewan, on November 3, 1933, there were 38 nurses and nurses-in-training under treatment in the sanatorium. These young women came from large and small hospitals around the province, and irrespective of whether or not the hospital had a TB ward. The proportion of nurses sick from TB was much higher than the proportion sick from this disease among those nurses employed in the sanatoriums. This information was presented to the Saskatchewan Hospital Association (SHA) in November 1933 and the group decided that protective techniques were to be used by the nurses in handling of and caring for patients with TB. A recommendation was made that all probationers be examined before



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Nurses taking a break from work and enjoying some leisure activity.

being admitted to nursing programs and that periodic X-rays and examinations be done to them.²⁵

Dr. Washburn believed that the problem of tuberculosis in the nursing profession was the result of two main categories. He suggested the student nurses had inadequate early training about the disease and methods of protection and patients were not being identified as having tuberculosis when first admitted to the hospital. He provided the following example:

Let us take for example the probationer. A girl enters the training school with little or no knowledge of infections and protective measures and in two to three weeks she is making patients' beds on the wards. How can she possibly have the knowledge to properly care for herself and have cultivated her powers of observation in order to recognize breaches of techniques, against which it is presumed the patient has been warned by more experienced nurses. More thought might be given to 'the knowledge of communicable diseases techniques' by training executives, in setting out the course of instruction during the probationary period preparatory to the nurses coming in contact with patients. In fact, by an adjustment of the curriculum, I feel that a year's successful instruction of the curriculum can be given in the classrooms before a nurse enters the wards.²⁶

As safeguards for the protection of nurses-in-training, several suggestions were given to administrators of hospitals and training schools. The entire hospital staff was to be examined for spreaders of TB; all probationers were to have a chest x-ray; the teaching of the technique necessary for the care of infectious diseases in the infectious wards was to be given to the probationers immediately when they came to the hospital to train and just as soon as they had received the theoretical training they were to be placed on the infectious wards so that they could have the opportunity to apply knowledge and learn from the beginning how to protect themselves and others from infections. In addition, wash basins were to be placed in conveniently located places so nurses could keep their hands clean; persons suffering from colds, influenza, or other diseases were to have their dishes sterilized; there was to be a review of the living conditions of the nurses-in-training with a recommendation for shorter hours of work and better nutrition as part of the hospital's responsibility; nurses-

in-training were to avoid faddy dieting and to avoid dissipating their reserves by frequent nights out as this might predispose them to TB.²⁷

By 1937, most of the articles in *The Valley Echo* were written by physicians and had taken on a very serious and theoretical perspective. The majority of the journal entries during the mid-1930s are related to articles on TB (treatment, prevention, follow-up) and the light-hearted mood of the previous years is not evident. Perhaps some other factors were in effect - as time passed, many patients went home only to return and be readmitted to the San. Other patients stayed year after year waiting for that clear x-ray and the doctor's word that it was time to go home. Patients formed friendships only to have these friends die from complications. The *Valley Echo* issues tend to include photos of patients in solariums, in the kitchen, and in their rooms.

The effect of the depression in the province was a general theme of the *Valley Echo*. Nutrition is mentioned as a factor in the treatment of TB but it is also recognized that good food and sanitation is difficult to obtain in the rural areas. Towards the end of the 1930s, the issues of the journal included posters of nurses encouraging men to sign up for the war effort and to sign up for the fight against TB. The issues from 1940-41 are very serious in nature, with a section on news from the war front. The nurses who stayed in the province during the war were required to meet the demands for increased institutional services despite the shortages of both workers and equipment.

The longer the San was open, the more evident it became to patients that TB was not an easy enemy to overcome. The majority of patients came from farming backgrounds and the family left behind on the farm was struggling not to lose the farm given the failing economy. It was estimated that two of three members of the farm population were destitute.²⁸ Both the internal and external world had an effect on the writings of the patients.

Educational Issues Related to Tuberculosis Nursing

What about the education of the nurses and nurses-in-training during 1920s-1940s? What was the situation at provincial and national levels? The 1922 Report of the Saskatchewan Anti-tuberculosis Commission contains a section related to post-graduate course for nurses. "The present system of training nurses in general hospitals does not appear to be fair either to the nurses or those who are suffering with tuberculosis, as in the

average hospital as now operated, and that are now training nurses, little or no knowledge of tuberculosis is acquired except in so far as it affects hopeless cases.”²⁹ The report continues with the statement that it would appear advisable to require all nurses to spend a certain portion of their training time in attending this disease. As a follow-up to discussion on the knowledge of nurses about tuberculosis, a motion was passed at the 1922 Annual Convention of the Canadian Nurses Association of Trained Nurses regarding the system of training nurses in general hospitals. A recommendation read as follows: “For all of the training schools of Canada, that three months special training in tuberculosis, the care of tubercular patients, and the prevention of the spread of the disease, be given where possible by all training schools before graduation of the students.”³⁰

An article in the January/February 1929 issue of *The Canadian Nurse* provides a summary of reports regarding Nursing in Communicable Diseases (including TB, venereal diseases, and skin diseases) and indicated that the minimum number of hours for this course should be 10 with a maximum of 50 and recommended 20-30.³¹ During that same year, the Canadian Medical Association and the Canadian Nurses Association commissioned Dr. G. Weir to carry out a study on what constituted desirable standards of nursing education.³² When the study was published in 1932, Weir identified the chief problems confronting Canadian nursing education as economic, pedagogical, and sociological in nature.³³ Nursing leaders of the time debated who should organize the schools, which group should administer and finance them, and what system of nursing education would best meet the needs of the public. Despite internal problems, the nursing leaders managed to produce reports of consequence and put forward proposals aimed at instituting changes to the overall structure of nursing education.³⁴

Weir indicated that there were fifteen schools of nursing in Saskatchewan as of December 30, 1930. All schools offered essentially an apprentice-like training program with the schools being hospital controlled and financed. Four schools of nursing were attached to hospitals with fewer than forty-nine beds and this situation was seen as a major deterrent to the provision of a sound educational program. More than 50% of the hospitals exploited the student nurse in the interests of the hospital and to control costs, hospital administrators were reluctant to hire full-time instructors.³⁵

In 1931, the Nursing Education Section of the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association

(SRNA) attempted to improve educational standards by recommending that theoretical instruction be given at a central point in the province. Its members proposed that the minimum age for entrance to nursing be nineteen and that there be uniformity of textbook selection.³⁶ Two years later, the Canadian Nurses Association expressed concerns regarding the quality of nursing education and urged that more attention be paid to the qualifications of the instructors. It was recommended that no hospital conduct a school of nursing unless it was prepared to offer professional education.³⁷

Weir argued that a fundamental cause of the lack of real success in the training of student nurses was not only the faulty and largely indiscriminate selection of students, but also the open-door examination standards that led to relatively low percentage of failures, and the fact that fully fifty percent of the student personnel did not know how to study effectively.³⁸ He proceeded by saying that “...the alleged educational methods manifest in certain of the training schools visited by the Survey were about as near an approach to pedagogical travesty as human ingenuity could well devise.”³⁹ “A number of the training schools in Canada today are still narrow in their educational aims. They continue to live in the decadent atmosphere of apprenticeship - the imparting of mechanical nursing skills in a mechanical fashion with a few largely unrelated ‘lectures’ thrown in - and have failed to respond to the broader conception of twentieth century education. Any real science of education and the most approved practices of teaching are excluded from their classrooms.”⁴⁰ He questioned if nineteenth century methods of instruction could be applicable in a rapidly-moving twentieth century world. Weir believed that the teaching and learning philosophy in nursing schools existed somewhere between apprenticeship and scientific positions and resulted in confused aims. “In fact, from every point of view it would appear that the altogether too prevalent practice of attempting to ‘educate’ student nurses by overworking them or making them primarily economic assets to the hospital is a relic of a darker age and unworthy of the name of education.”⁴¹

A medical superintendent of a large tuberculosis sanatorium was interviewed for the survey and stated that all nurses-in-training should have a thorough chest examination, an X-ray, and a sedimentation test. He stressed the fact that no nurse should be allowed to care for a known tuberculosis patient in a general hospital unless she previously had special training in tuberculosis cases. Unfortunately, nurses were caring

for patients without special training and disastrous results were occurring to the health of the nurse.⁴² “Student nurses working in tuberculosis sanatoriums are probably trained to protect themselves against disease more effectively than those nurses who have not had the advantages of sanatorium training, or its equivalent, and who nevertheless nurse tubercular patients.”⁴³

Another interviewee, a medical superintendent in one of the large hospitals in Canada, stated, “Regarding nurses’ education, as it is carried on to-day, I feel that hospitals are equipping nurses for private duty work not as institutional nurses.”⁴⁴ Nearly 57 percent of the institutional nurses in Canada responded to a survey question that more theory, relatively to the amount of practice, would have largely increased their efficiency as nurses.⁴⁵ “In every properly constructed curriculum, whether academic or professional, so-called basic courses, or constants, are required of all students for the obvious reason that the latter need a foundation for intelligent understanding of their work and an educational instrument to facilitate their future development.”⁴⁶

A 1934 document from the International Council of Nurses entitled “The Educational Programme for the Schools of Nursing” was prepared by Isabel Stewart.⁴⁷ It included a diagram that illustrated the general functions and relationships of the different parts of the suggested programme. The sections on top represented the reservoirs or service subjects which feed their content into the central section. All sections were closely related. Much of the educational value of nursing programs depended on the proper balance of the elements and their effective coordination. Stewart stated that more emphasis needed to be placed on certain diseases which were especially important in public health – for example TB, venereal disease, cancer, and mental diseases.

In the fall of 1932, six members of the National Curriculum Committee of the CNA met to discuss the results from the “Survey of Nursing Education in Canada.” They discussed the revisions that were needed in the system of nursing education and agreed to a more detailed study of administrative and teaching problems in schools of nursing. Using the findings as a basis, two questionnaires were prepared and distributed to various groups and individuals. In order to accomplish the aims of nursing education, the recommendations focused on the importance of selecting well-qualified faculty to improve instruction provided to students, the need to teach the fundamental sciences in greater depth, and the

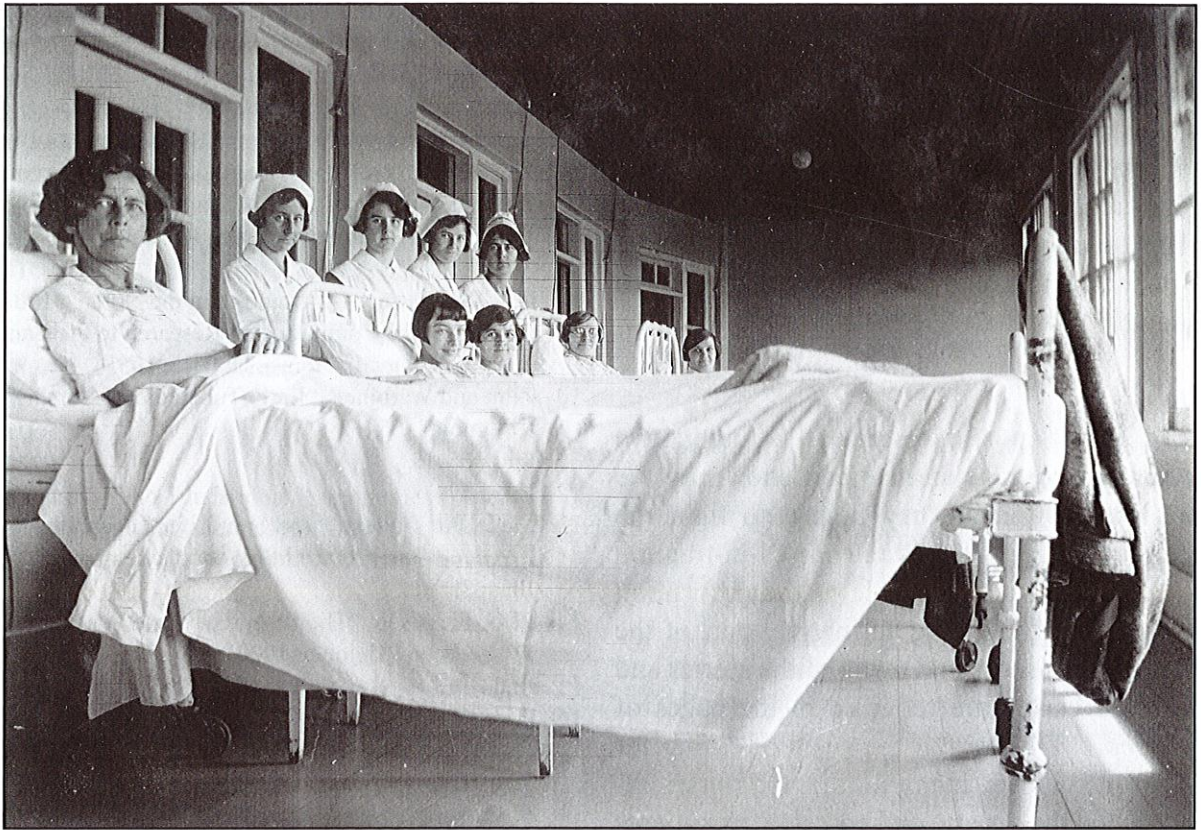
importance of providing better supervision of clinical experiences. The Committee also commented on the need for better planning within the nursing program and that more opportunities should be given to students to develop initiative and resourcefulness in order to adjust to new and changing clinical environments.⁴⁸

It was the responsibility of the schools to see that the students received an improved education as frequently the demands of the hospital’s nursing service conflicted with the nursing education program objectives. Courses were to be arranged so no nurse-in-training cared for a patient until the school management was convinced that every student had sufficient knowledge of communicable diseases and the dangers associated in order to properly guard against diseases.⁴⁹

While attempts were being made at the national level to upgrade the standards of nursing education, in Saskatchewan the SRNA concluded that the Patterson government was undermining standards by altering regulation governing schools of nursing. The government reduced the number of beds a hospital was required to have to operate a school of nursing from seventy to thirty.⁵⁰ In 1936, the SRNA Nursing Education Section proposed changes to the Minister of Public Health and referred to the Weir Report and the recommendation in the report about a hospital having more than 75 beds to run a school.⁵¹ Fortunately, nothing of significance resulted from the change in regulations to adversely affect nursing education as small hospitals did not take advantage of the change in regulations.

In 1938, there were 10 training schools for nurses in Saskatchewan. From these schools, 194 nurses graduated during that year and 674 pupil nurses were in training.⁵² That same year, the SRNA implemented a new provincial nursing curriculum to replace the one in use since 1920. Schools of nursing were notified of the upcoming changes in 1936, but it was not until March 1938 that the SRNA Council approved the new curriculum. It called for an increase in the preclinical weeks of training, a minimum number of hours per week for student nurses, and the submission of a grade 12 certificate by students who wished to qualify for registration in the SRNA upon completion of their program. A comparison with the old curriculum revealed an increase in theory and nursing principles and additional of several courses such as psychiatry, psychology, chemistry, tuberculosis, and public health.⁵³

Minutes of the Annual meeting for the SRNA Nursing Education Section held on Thursday April



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Nurses and patients at Fort San. Many nurses, unfortunately, would also become patients.

21, 1938 in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan outlined the following passage:⁵⁴

The matter of revising the minimum requirements for schools of nursing in nursing was discussed and the following motions were adopted in regard to minimum number of hours for different courses:

Anatomy and Physiology- minimum of 75 hours

Bacteriology- minimum of 80 hours

History of Nursing – minimum of 15 hours

Ethics/ Professional Adjustments- minimum of 20 hours

Psychology and Mental Hygiene – minimum of 20 hours

Personal hygiene- minimum of 12 hours

At the 1939 Annual Convention of the Saskatchewan Hospital Association, a nurse from the sanatorium spoke about the nursing of tuberculosis patients in a general hospital. She commented about the definite hazard in the nursing of tuberculosis patients and especially for the non-infected nurse. “It is, essential that the nurse have at her disposal everything that is necessary to protect her. This means she must be taught isolation technique. The instructor should, together with the teaching the

procedures, give the student an understanding of the value of rest, food, and fresh air, the responsibility which the patient as well as herself should take for the prevention of the spread of the disease.”⁵⁵

In the nursing of tuberculosis patients, the protection of the nurse is of major importance. This protection is afforded by early discovery of undeclared cases, efficient techniques, teaching the fundamentals of tuberculosis and precautions which help to reduce the incidence and provide the routine tuberculin test. Dr. Ferguson (1939) also spoke at the 1939 Convention regarding the seriousness of the problem of nurses becoming ill from tuberculosis:

I would like to see the vaccination of nurses. The fact that tuberculosis is such an infectious disease is well known, and there are 35 nurses in Saskatchewan under treatment. During the last nine years, we have treated 93 student nurses and 88 graduates; altogether we have admitted enough hospital employees in this province to more than fill the Saskatoon San – 206 altogether. I think that this should be enough to convince you that this disease is rather serious among nurses, and is ten times greater than among girls in other professions.⁵⁶

In 1942, as a war measure, the age of entry in Saskatchewan schools of nursing was lowered from nineteen to eighteen years of age.⁵⁷ In 1943, CNA conducted a survey of nursing education as part of the federal government's National Health Survey. It concluded that schools of nursing had a dual responsibility to uphold: providing adequate nursing care to the patients and sound educational opportunities for the students.⁵⁸

Conclusion

The story of Fort San is a testament to innovative healthcare and the courage and support shown by the people of Saskatchewan as they helped to fight the twentieth century plague. Nurses and nurses-in-training played an extremely important role in the prevention and control of TB. They were an integral part of the struggle against the disease and many of the stories and accounts of their caring are reflected in the pages of *The Valley Echo*. Throughout the years of caring for patients with tuberculosis, many nurses and nurses-in-training contracted the disease and ended up as patients in the sanatoriums.

Dedicated efforts were made by hospitals and schools of nursing to address the cause of the high rates tuberculosis in nurses and nurses-in-training. Nurses and physicians reviewed national and provincial curricula, responded to surveys, and spoke out on what they believed were the causes of the tuberculosis in the nursing profession. In 1937, the problem was believed to have two main categories: first, inadequate early training of the students in the knowledge of tuberculosis and protection from the disease and, second, the need for spotting unrecognized patients with tuberculosis when first admitted to a hospital or other institution. What is not known, however, is how many of the nurses who contracted tuberculosis, had thoughts similar to those of John Keats, 'I know the color of that blood, 'it's arterial blood... that blood is my death warrant. I must die'.⁵⁹

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- 58 Ibid.,44
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Endnotes from "On Wascana's Banks: Progress, Harmony and Diversity in Throne Speeches of the North-West Territories and Saskatchewan, 1877-2007" continued from page 15.

- 29 "Throne speech offers hope for farmers." The Regina *Leader-Post* (30 November 1984) A6.
- 30 "Romanow slams privatization plan." The Regina *Leader-Post* (9 March 1989) A4.
- 31 "Little but 'Consensus' in speech from throne." The Regina *Leader-Post* (20 March 1990) A10.
- 32 According to one persuasive analysis the turning point for the Devine Government was the proposed privatization of SaskEnergy in 1989, which generated widespread opposition and signaled the coming end for an administration which had allowed a massive debt to accumulate. James L. Pitsula, "Grant Devine, 1982-91" in *Saskatchewan Premiers of the Twentieth Century*, (ed.) Gordon Barnhart, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2004), 333,346.
- 33 Dale Eisler, "Romanow uses a 'liberal' approach," The Regina *Leader-Post* (8 Feb 1994) A7.
- 34 Bonny Braden, "Tax relief down on list of Romanow's priorities," The Regina *Leader-Post* (7 Mar 1997) 1.
- 35 Ron Petrie's "A guide to what the throne speech really means" elaborates "That's right—the outskirts of Hope, B.C. In a trailer park. And dad didn't find work there, either." The Regina *Leader-Post* (28 April 1992) A3.
- 36 Health Minister Eric Cline, quoted in Dale Eisler, "Private health care may play larger role," The Regina *Leader-Post* (1 Mar 1996) A10.
- 37 Gregory Marchildon's analysis suggests the importance of complexity, nuance and balance in Romanow policy. For the provincial economy he saw an appropriate mix of public ownership with healthy private and co-operative sectors as the ideal, while on the national constitutional level he believed in "the delicate balance between a strong, central government... and the legitimate, regional aspirations of a province," 362. The "legacy" of the 90s was moving the province from "chronic deficit budgeting to annual surpluses, 368, but the cost was that social agenda items like welfare reform and the revamping of medicare had to proceed more slowly than would otherwise have been the case. Gregory Marchildon, "Roy Romanow, 1991-2001" in *Saskatchewan Premiers of the Twentieth Century*, (ed.) Gordon Barnhart, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2004), 386-87.
- 38 Those readers who might object to a metaphorical conclusion are reminded that metaphorical flights are a time-honoured throne speech tradition. Murray Mandryk says it would be nice one day to write that "no metaphors were tortured in the writing of this throne speech" but that day has not arrived yet. "NDP throne speech sticks to ancient script," The Regina *Leader-Post* (19 Nov 04). Bill Waiser's history traces the theme of cultural diversity in Saskatchewan, from concerns about non-British immigration in the first decade, to anti-immigrant rhetoric of the 1920s and the Ku Klux Klan episode, to more recent evidence of the acceptance of cultural diversity as a positive value. Waiser, 60, 244-53, 486-87.

A Review of the Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site, Abernethy, Saskatchewan.

By Bruce Dawson

The name of the site, Motherwell Homestead, conjures up romantic images of a small wood or sod house set upon the open prairie. The drive to the site, located approximately 100 km north-east of Saskatchewan's capital city Regina, does not dissuade one from this image as the highway takes one past century-old farms and small agricultural communities. The last few kilometres down a good grid road forces one to slow down to a pace somewhat closer to that experienced by W. R. Motherwell when he travelled this same road four generations ago. However, this is where image clashes with reality. Rather than a small shack on an open field, one is confronted with a 2 ½-storey Italianate-style stone estate house and a large stone and timber barn set on 3.59 ha (approx 9 acres) of landscaped grounds.

Named Lanark Place, these impressive buildings and grounds appear like an oasis on the prairie. They were designed to have exactly this effect. By using architectural and grounds designs based on the established farms of his native Ontario, William Richard (W.R.) Motherwell intended for his farm site to project both an image of success as well as a particular scientific approach towards farming. In doing so, Motherwell was part of a movement amongst ex-Ontarians in western Canada whose second and third generation homes reflected Ontario designs blended with western materials and forms. Motherwell's approach to agriculture and the architectural design of the house, barn and grounds, are two reasons why the site was commemorated by the National Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 1966. The other major themes for Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site focus on the political and agricultural career of Motherwell.

Today, the name Motherwell is scarcely known outside academia or amongst those who live in buildings or on streets named in his honour. However, a century

ago, he was well known as an innovative agriculturalist, a leader of the early-20th century agrarian revolt in western Canada, and, after 1905, as the first Minister of Agriculture for the province of Saskatchewan. Later, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, he would serve eight years as the federal Minister of Agriculture. His actions led to new farming techniques, the formation of the Territorial Grain Grower's Association, precursor to the Saskatchewan Grain Grower's Association and the National Farmer's Union, and the introduction of several laws and government programs which continue to benefit Canadian farmers.

Entry to the site is gained through a modern, non-descript visitor reception centre located at the south side of the grounds. Inside, site visitors will find friendly park staff at the reception desk and equally friendly staff at the Friends of the Motherwell Homestead ready to sell souvenirs or a snack from their kiosk. What visitors will not find is an orientation or interpretive display. While the site map handed out by the park staff is informative, those visitors who learn best by being able to engage with text, visual and artefact displays and the overarching stories typically found in an orientation gallery will certainly miss this resource.

Motherwell Homestead reflects Parks Canada's long history of undertaking extensive and authentic restorations of its historic sites. Shortly after designation

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as a National Historic Site, the property was acquired by Parks Canada. Research and restoration of the barn, house and grounds initiated in the late 1970's culminated with the opening of the site to the public in 1983. Restored to a circa 1912 appearance, the site is interpreted according to the four quadrants which Motherwell introduced as part of his site design in the early 19th century: the dugout, the garden, the house and the barn.

While the dugout and the garden are passively interpreted, the barn and the house areas are the focus of the living history program. Visitors to the house are greeted at the kitchen entrance by a costumed guide and led through the house. The well-informed guides provide visitors with third person commentary on many aspects of life at the Motherwell residence, including the daily tasks performed by the servants, the affairs and daily activities of both Mr. and Mrs. Motherwell, the furnishings and set up of the various rooms and the differences in accommodations and work spaces between the family and the servants and hired hands who lived in the house. On occasion, lucky visitors can sample fresh baked cookies as part of their visit. That several of the artifacts in the house are original to the Motherwell family adds to the authenticity of the experience.

The Barn area is the heart of the living history program at the site. Several hectares of land are farmed using horse power and chickens, sheep and other barnyard animals are cared for as part of the interpretive program. On certain days, threshing activities and a steam traction engine demonstration are undertaken. At other times, first person skits featuring topics of the day, such as votes for women and the debates of horsepower vs. machines, are undertaken on the barn steps.

While Motherwell Homestead is not the only historic site in Saskatchewan to focus on the theme of agriculture, it is the only one with on-going live animal and large scale historic farming program. Consequently, the site has gained a reputation for being the place to engage with these past agricultural technologies.¹ This distinction is not lost on the site administration and every effort is being made to promote and enhance this element of the living history program. Site Manager Flo Miller would like to see even more done, with gas powered tractor demonstrations being introduced. However, while gasoline power fits within the broad theme of agricultural practice during Motherwell's life (he passed away in 1943), such programming would

conflict with the pre-World War One restoration at the site.

This conflict touches on what is perhaps the major interpretive challenge for the site. The site receives approximately 10,000 visitors, composed largely of school groups and older visitors who are interested in the farming technology and life during the "pioneer" period. Consequently, the interest in "typical" homesteading experiences is high, as is seeing farm animals and tractors, hearing stories of how settlers arrived and overcame the challenges of farming in the west, and watching guides in century-old costumes talk about Victorian ways of life. These stories are somewhat detached from that of Motherwell, whose story is that of a white, upper-middle class politician who was also a farmer. While his legacy is important within the history of Saskatchewan and Canada, as the major focus of an interpretive program, Motherwell's story represents a theme in history that is somewhat out of vogue both with national agencies who tell stories and with audiences who listen to them. Reflecting these changing community values, the vision for the Historic Site has shifted during the past 27 years to also envision the site functioning as a significant portal into Saskatchewan's farming heritage.² However, the buildings and grounds of the site were initially restored to tell a much more focussed story related to Motherwell and his agricultural activities. With the interpretive tools at the site largely restricted to the restored elements of the site and the guided and living history programs of the staff, and limited funds available for additional interpretive resources, conveying both the traditional and emerging stories at the site is challenging. As an example of this challenge, Miller discussed her interest in getting a working replica stove installed in the house. This would enable the staff to incorporate baking as part of the public programming rather than, as is done presently, completing the food preparation on a contemporary stove in the staff area of the building. In doing so, the site's impressive living history program, currently focussed on the Barn quadrant, could be more fully incorporated into the interpretation of the house. However, Miller acknowledged that this activity would likely result in the original stove needing to be displaced for the replica, an action that conflicts with the original set up and concept of the site.

Despite these challenges, Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site does an excellent job of providing visitors with a snap shot of agricultural and political life during the settlement boom in western

Canada prior to World War One. Characteristic of sites operated by Parks Canada, the building and grounds restorations are well done and provide excellent insight into the architectural designs and furnishings in vogue with some rural, upper middle-class farmers in western Canada during the period. The site also reflects Parks Canada's penchant for innovative and informative interpretive programming, highlighted by the dynamic living history program. In this programming, the site has found what marketing experts would call its 'distinct competitive advantage.' In a province where, for decades, the license plates contained the statement "the wheat province", being renowned for providing visitors with an interactive learning experience focussed on farming is a good thing.

The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Saskatchewan

Endnotes

- 1 Parks Canada, "Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site of Canada 2005 Visitor Survey", Parks Canada Social Science Unit, Western and Northern Service Centre, 2005.
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Letter from the Editor

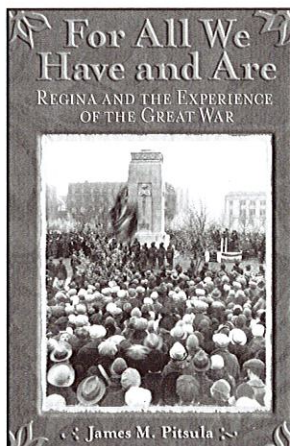
Medicine, throne speeches, parks and theatres. Four different topics that, on the surface, appear to have little in common, yet they are all linked by the desire of someone to peel away the covers and take a closer look. It is one of the wonderful things about history that its appeal is so wide and encompassing that such divergent topics can all be covered in a single issue of an historical journal (in this case the one you are holding). History can also be incredibly personal, both in the sense of exploring one's own past or pursuing an area of personal interest. Indeed, for most historians it is a passion to explore a specific area that fuels them. In fact, many people who are not professionally trained historians find themselves in pursuit of an historical passion. Thus, we find a situation where an English professor (Alex Macdonald), a professor of Nursing (Sandra Bassendowski), an actor and doctoral student (Ian McWilliams) and a government employee (Bruce Dawson) all contributed articles to this issue. It is a testament, I think, to the amazing connections that the discipline of history inspires. I hope you enjoy the the fruits of their inspiration.

Jason Zorbas

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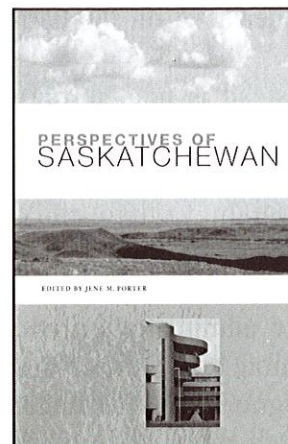
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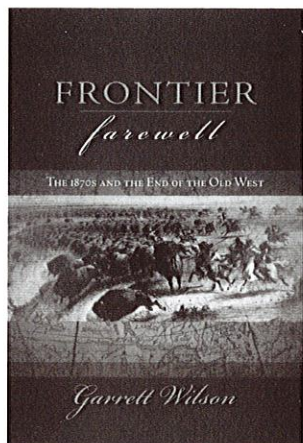
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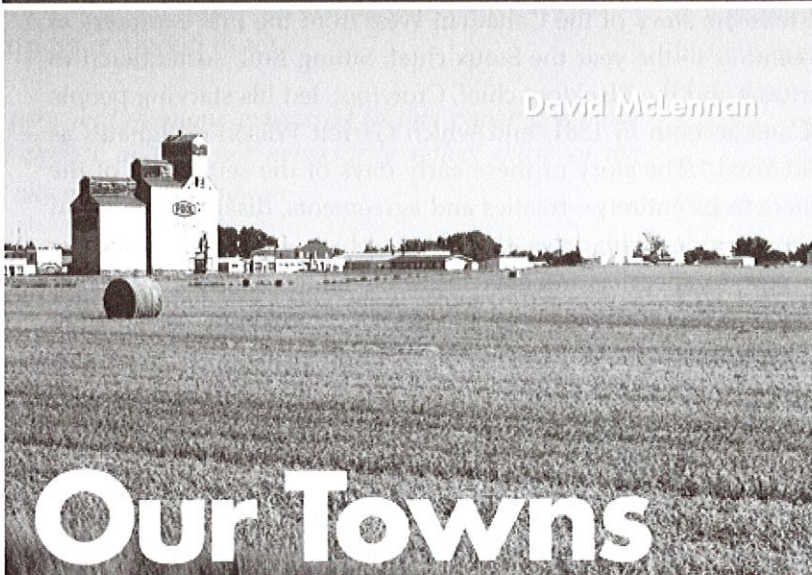
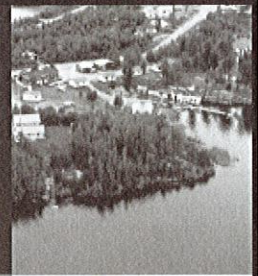
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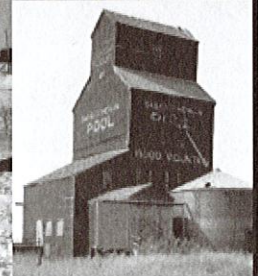
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