

Saskatchewan History

Volume 61
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Spring 2009



Dominion Lands' policy, Drought and Saskatchewan's 'Better Farming' Commission, 1920

**Indigenous Paradigms, Rankean Conventions and the Quest for a Post-Colonial Saskatchewan History.
A Brief Review of Selected Local Indigenous Written Scholarship**

The Life of Peter P. Verigin

"It's a Secret, But..." The Early Journalism of Gladys Arnold

The Saskatchewan Archives Board

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

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Saskatchewan Archives Board
3 Campus Drive, University of Saskatchewan
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info.saskatoon@archives.gov.sk.ca

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Cover Photo: Gladys Arnold lying in a field at Tanlay, Bourgogne, France in August 1937. (University of Regina Archives and Special Collections, 2007-42, Gladys Arnold Photographs.)

News and Notes

Saskatchewan's Archives Week 2009

From February 2 through 8, 2009, archival institutions throughout Saskatchewan celebrated Archives Week. In partnership with other members of the Saskatchewan Council for Archives and Archivists, the Saskatchewan Archives Board was actively involved in coordinating a number of events intended to promote public awareness and use of the rich resources available in archives in Saskatchewan.

At similar events held at the main branch of the public libraries in both Saskatoon and Regina on February 3, 2009, celebrity readers read from original archival documents found in collections of various provincial archival repositories. The presenters included: Nettie Wiebe, John Cross, Ruth Horlick, David Carpenter, Ken Mitchell, Jacqui Shumiatcher, Jeff "Redbeard" Corbett, Dr. Vianne Timmons, Angel Blair, and Will Chabun. In addition, Annette Campagne and Pamela Haig Bartley gave musical performances of Saskatchewan-related works. Highlights included a reading of the hilarious and quirky minutes of the Saskatoon Literary and Reading Club, stories about summer touring by a Greystone Theatre troupe, "useful" information for the use of women students in residence at Regina College and stirring correspondence between activist Sophia Dixon and author Wallace Stegner.

On February 5, "A Night at the Roxy" in Saskatoon offered an evening of education and entertainment featuring short films from archives in Saskatchewan, with commentary by historian Bill Waiser. The audience followed a British film crew in 1957 as it traveled from Regina to the new boom-town of Uranium City; learned about cream grading in 1923 with "Mr. Sweet Cream" and "Mr. Lumpy Sour;" saw rare footage of the construction of the Broadway Bridge in the 1930s, enjoyed a locally-produced film about Louis Riel, and more.

On February 6, "A Night in Paradise" was an educational and entertaining event, presented in partnership with Paradise Cinemas, which also featured short films from archives in Saskatchewan, with commentary by historian Jim Pitsula. The audience visited Canora in the 1940s, learned about Saskatchewan's fight against tuberculosis through one of Saskatchewan's earliest "talkies",



At Saskatoon's "Spotlight on the Past" celebrity reader event, Pamela Haig Bartley performing a song about Saskatoon, while Nettie Wiebe looks on.

Photographer: Lucas A. Sather

A Night In



Archives Week Film Night

Friday, February 6th, 2009, 7:00pm

Regina's Paradise Cinemas

1011 Devonshire Drive

witnessed the Second World War through the eyes of a Regina woman, and more.

To wrap up the week, on Sunday, February 9, various archives in Saskatoon came together to host the Archives Pavilion at the Saskatoon Heritage Festival. Around 2600 people enjoyed the Festival, many of whom visited the Pavilion which boasted “one stop shopping” for all archives-related questions.

Letter from the Editor

Recently I have had reason to ponder the concept of a “mistake.” In terms of history, people very often look back and attempt to justify a mistake as necessary or they decide that a given course of action, which was accepted as proper at the time, was in fact a mistake. So often the mistake is in the eye of the beholder. Yet, to steal from Freud, sometimes a mistake is just that, a mistake, something that was done incorrectly. In the last issue of *Saskatchewan History* such a mistake was made when on page 10, a picture of James Gardiner appeared with the caption “William Ross Thatcher” below it. The caption was correct but the picture was not and this particular mistake was noted by a great

many of you. I was gratified to discover so many immediately caught it and to (at least partially) rectify the error I have included a picture of Thatcher below.

On a completely unrelated note, this is my last issue as editor of *Saskatchewan History*. It has been six years since I first took over and I have thoroughly enjoyed my time as editor. It is, however, time for me to move on and open the doors for someone new to come in and take the reins. Before I go, I would like to thank all the staff members of the Saskatchewan Archives Board who rendered assistance to me over the years in preparing and publishing the issue. In particular, the members of the Saskatoon Office deserve special thanks. I would also be remiss if I did not mention Nadine Charabin. Nadine consistently went above and beyond in her efforts to make each issue better and I shudder to think of what the experience of being editor would have been like if she had not been there, time and time again, to help out.

I like to think that this issue, in many ways, reflects one of the key ideas that I tried to implement as editor, publishing articles which covered a great diversity of topics and areas. I hope you enjoy it.

Jason Zorbas



William Ross Thatcher, Premier of Saskatchewan, 1964-1971

Saskatchewan Archives Board (R-B7198-1)

Articles

“Dominion Lands” policy, Drought and Saskatchewan’s ‘Better Farming’ Commission, 1920

By Carl Anderson

Introduction

“The story of Saskatchewan agriculture,” wrote one commentator in 1959, “...is best described in terms of man’s transformation of and adaptation to, his environment.”¹ Few would disagree that the development of the Saskatchewan prairies into “Canada’s Bread Basket” in the early twentieth century owed much to the toil of a generation of tough and determined pioneers. But one can hardly conclude that they achieved this with little more than plows and a spirit of “rugged individualism.” Most of the province’s southern grain belt lies within Canada’s portion of North America’s Great Plains—a vast expanse of semiarid and drought-prone land also known as the Palliser Triangle. Grain farming in the region proved to be a risky business that depended on the use of scientific soil and water conservation methods for its success, and a large amount of land in the area turned out to be unfit for cereal agriculture—especially in the “Dry Belt” of southeastern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan. As the legendary Palliser Triangle drought of the 1930s demonstrated so clearly, cultivation methods in vogue at the time had caused extensive soil erosion, while the lack of moisture withered vegetable gardens and hay and forage crops for livestock, making it hard for farmers and ranchers to subsist. A great many farmers unluckily situated on inferior wheat growing land even abandoned their holdings to the wind and the weeds, creating a whole new set of problems. It was evident that only the senior governments could provide the leadership to develop a system of agriculture and natural resource use appropriate for the Palliser Triangle.

Parliament’s passage of the *Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act* in 1935 is perhaps the best known

instance of this type of public intervention in the prairie agricultural economy. The Act laid the basis for a new federal agency that became known as the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA). As James H. Gray has explained in detail in *Men Against the Desert*, the PFRA’s program of activities (which included the promotion of tillage methods to control soil drifting; sponsorship of dugout and stock watering dam construction on farms and ranches; and reclamation of poor grain growing land through community pasture and farmer relocation initiatives) were indeed effective in stabilizing production and income levels on Palliser Triangle farms over the long term. These activities have generally been understood as an effort by the Canadian government to redress oversights in “Dominion Lands” policy that it had made in earlier decades.²

However, this proactive public policy did not form in an ideological vacuum. A closer look suggests that the process of rehabilitating prairie agriculture began earlier than 1935 and the Saskatchewan government also played a major role in determining the necessary adjustments. Ottawa’s haphazard opening of the entire Palliser Triangle area to agricultural settlement in 1908, along with a series of droughts over the next decade, resulted in severe hardships for settlers and an intolerable farm relief burden for the Saskatchewan government. It soon became apparent that the continual provision of relief in the area was a symptom of a more serious illness, and in 1920 the Province responded by creating the “Better Farming”

Carl Anderson is currently employed as a policy analyst with Saskatchewan’s Ministry of Energy and Resources. In 2008 he completed a Master’s thesis in prairie agricultural rehabilitation policy history at the University of Regina.

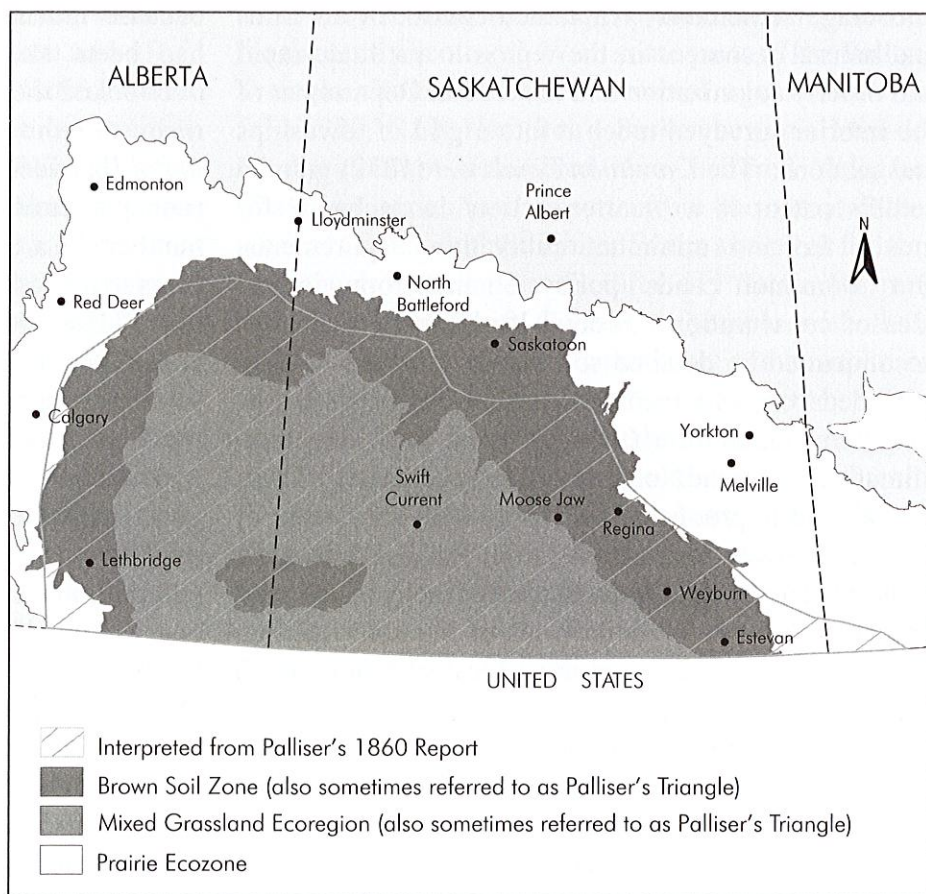
Commission. The recommendations of its final report (released in March 1921) identified long term directions for: research on soils, climate and dry farming methods; agricultural education policies; and scientific use of land and water resources in Saskatchewan's part of the Palliser Triangle. These recommendations are significant for two reasons. First, they called attention to 'solutions' that provincial officials were already aware of, and had begun to promote. Second, federal and provincial efforts to implement them in the 1920s would leave an enduring legacy.

Background to the Better Farming Commission

By the end of the First World War, Saskatchewan's agricultural policymakers had been compelled to focus serious attention on one of the province's newest settled—but least understood—agricultural regions:

a region now known as the Dry Mixed Grassland Ecozone. It is situated atop the Missouri Coteau plateau (the region extending west of a line joining Weyburn, Moose Jaw and North Battleford to the Rocky Mountain foothills) and has a semiarid climate, normally receiving 13.8 inches of precipitation per year (by contrast, average annual precipitation in the sub-humid Aspen Parkland to the north and east is 17 inches).³ The region constitutes the heart of the Palliser Triangle, named for British explorer John Palliser who in the late 1850s described a roughly triangular tract of land covering present day southeastern Alberta, southern Saskatchewan and southwestern Manitoba as too dry for cereal agriculture. At the core of this area is the so-called "Dry Belt."⁴ It lies in the Rocky Mountains' rain shadow and is routinely subjected to warm and dry Chinook winds. It typically gets no more than 10 or 11 inches of precipitation annually, and as a result its topsoil has a relatively low humus content.

The agricultural potential of the "semiarid plains" is tied to at least three other factors. Surface water resources (i.e. lakes, sloughs, rivers and streams) in this area are relatively scarce, especially during a dry spell. A variety of soil types—including an extensive amount of sandy loam—can also be found there; as a



Palliser's Triangle

Courtesy of the Canadian Great Plains Research Centre. Used with permission.

rule, sandy loam soils retain less moisture and give lower crop yields than heavier-textured soils and generally cannot be cultivated without blowing away in drier years.⁵ As well, the region's nearly treeless topography is undulating; such terrain can result in excessive runoff of an already deficient rainfall, and its soils tend to be thin and/or stony. Such conditions result in a relatively high proportion of "submarginal" wheat growing land—that is, "land on which no farmer, however skillful, can support a decent standard of living."⁶ The Dry Mixed Grassland is ideal stock raising country: its many coulees provide shelter; its hardy short-grasses make nutritious fodder; and the Chinooks moderate winter's impact. It is also important to note that submarginal wheat growing land will yield plentiful grain harvests in years of above average precipitation.⁷ But such conditions are the exception, not the norm. In reality, Canada's southern plains are prone to frequent, serious drought.⁸

Alas, the Canadian government made little effort to appreciate these distinctions when it opened the interior plains of the Northwest to agricultural settlement in the late nineteenth century. Because the region was expected to become a wheat growing empire, Ottawa downplayed Palliser's warnings to

encourage settlement. It retained control of all lands and natural resources in the region to facilitate rapid and orderly colonization and the federal Department of the Interior surveyed much of it into a grid of townships and sections. The *Dominion Lands Act* (1872) granted settlers patent to a 'quarter-section' in exchange for a \$10 fee and minimum cultivation requirements. But "Dominion Lands" policy left little room for the idea of conservation. Federal land surveys were not accompanied by detailed soil studies that would have excluded from settlement those areas unfit for profitable, long term cultivation (though, to be fair, long term climatic data for the Northwest did not yet exist).⁹ There was also little proof that the 'checkerboard' system of land tenure was well suited to the Palliser Triangle's ecology. Time would show that topography usually did not coincide with the boundaries of a quarter-section. In regions where there was great local variation in soil productivity, limited areas of good land were often split among several quarter-sections in such a way that none of them would ever be profitable farms. As well, it did not always allow for a fair distribution of surface water supplies to farmers and ranchers, nor did it give them easy access to extra pasture to maintain their livestock during dry years. In addition, soil cultivation methods suitable for the region's semiarid climate had not yet been developed.

The Canadian government, however, was not concerned about such matters. In truth, the settler was expected to bear the main burden of adapting to local conditions. He was responsible for choosing his own land, and he had only himself to blame if he found that it was unfit for cultivation using the costliest of all methods: the process of trial and error. At the time Saskatchewan became a province, agricultural settlement was focused mainly in the Aspen Parkland and in the Palliser Triangle's outer fringes. The plains west of the Missouri Coteau were thought to be too dry for cultivation at this point; early federal policy toward the area favoured ranching rather than grain growing. However, Frank Oliver—Minister of the Interior from 1905 to 1911—actively curtailed the size and duration of new federal grazing leases in the area to sustain the flow of immigration to western Canada. In 1908 he amended the *Dominion Lands Act* to allow homesteading in the semiarid plains; settlers in the region could now 'pre-empt' land in an adjoining odd-numbered quarter-section for a \$10 registration fee and a purchase price of \$3 per acre.¹⁰ It was felt that a 320-acre farm might compensate for the area's soil deficiencies.¹¹ But

because much of the prairies' best homestead lands had been taken by this point, land-hungry settlers overlooked the region's aridity. The result was a land rush. Southwestern Saskatchewan's population rose *tenfold* between 1901 and 1916, from 17,692 to 178,200 (one quarter of the province's population) and the total number and area of farms grew from 2,436 and 927,512 acres to 37,954 and 13,913,603 acres, respectively.¹²

Homesteaders in the semiarid plains would experience both success and failure in a measure seldom, if ever seen elsewhere on the prairies during the Settlement Era. The region received adequate precipitation in 1909, 1911, 1912 and 1913. In 1915, good moisture conditions throughout Saskatchewan over the preceding winter resulted in a bumper crop of 174 million bushels with an average yield of 25 bushels per acre—half the total wheat crop of Canada.¹³ The South-Central, South-Western and West-Central Crop Districts together produced 42 per cent of the province's famous harvest that year; in fact, yields on many farms in those districts reached 40-50 bushels per acre!¹⁴ A sharp jump in wheat prices during the First World War accompanied this good fortune, helping scores of settlers to get established and prove up their homesteads.¹⁵ Many of them decided to put up their newly acquired land as security to obtain credit for further expansion in land, buildings and machinery; from 1916 to 1919, wheat acreage in the southwest increased by 80 per cent. The demand for land in the region was so strong that Ottawa began to open up grazing lease land previously deemed unfit for cultivation for homesteading.¹⁶

However, drought was a constant companion; 1907, 1908, 1910 and 1914 were dry years.¹⁷ The 1914 crop failure was so bad that many settlers did not even get back the seed they had sown, while the failure of feed grain and hay crops also left them unable to nourish their work horses (essential to plant a crop) much less feed other livestock. Complicating matters was the fact that most of the region's settlers had come from the relatively humid climates of Europe, the American Midwest and eastern Canada and had no experience with agriculture in a semiarid region. Because settlers were wards of the federal government until they had proved up their homesteads, they could expect to receive seed grain and feed relief in times of distress to help them to carry on (this was charged as a lien against their quarter-section of land to be paid before the patent was issued). The burden of providing relief fell to the municipalities (and ultimately the provincial government) once the settler fulfilled his homesteading duties. At first,

federal and provincial officials—unfamiliar with the Palliser Triangle's ecological peculiarities and afraid of scaring away existing and potential settlers—were quick to dismiss the crop failures as freak occurrences. But drought returned to the area in 1917 and again in 1918. By the latter year, wheat production in the southwestern Crop Districts had fallen to 34 per cent of their 1915 totals.¹⁸ Unluckily, the drought continued into 1919. That year the crop failure area engulfed an estimated 150 Rural Municipalities (RMs) and twenty Local Improvement Districts (LIDs)—the largest yet seen in Saskatchewan.¹⁹ With most of the homestead land in this area now in private hands, the RMs were in charge of relief.²⁰ However, many of them were already on the edge of bankruptcy due to tax delinquency by this point, and they had little choice but to look to the provincial government for help.

In July 1919, Saskatchewan's Liberal Premier W.M. Martin had publicly reassured the province that his government was "fully alive" to the problem and would "...leave no stone unturned to grapple with it."²¹ And indeed it did. It arranged with lumber and mining companies to advance fares to drought area farmers interested in winter work and encouraged the railways to hire them for branch line construction in an effort to help them get off the relief rolls and earn a living.²² To avert the mass starvation of many thousands of livestock in the southwest, the Province also reached an agreement with Ottawa and the railways to purchase fodder in areas that had a surplus (amounting to an incredible 11,000 carloads by May 1920) and shipped it to drought-area farmers free of charge.²³ These relief expenditures soon took their toll on provincial finances. By 1920, the Province had guaranteed nearly \$2.8 million in bank loans to RMs to enable them to supply relief and had spent \$499,000 on direct relief for LIDs.²⁴ This, along with the Province's share of freight on feed, comprised nearly 35 per cent of gross provincial revenues that year.²⁵ It was obvious that if the drought continued much longer the Province could very well go bankrupt providing direct relief and relief loan guarantees.

Saskatchewan's political leaders could ill afford to ignore the situation. The tens of thousands of despondent farmers in the drought area were also voters, and the Saskatchewan Liberal party had ruled the province continuously since 1905 by paying close attention to farm interests.²⁶ Certain questions loomed large. Had Ottawa's policy of unrestricted settlement on the semiarid plains been such a good idea? Was

there such a thing as an appropriate farming method for the area's ecology? Were some parts of the Palliser Triangle altogether unfit for cereal agriculture? In July 1920, C.M. Hamilton—Saskatchewan's Minister of Agriculture—assembled two hundred delegates (featuring agricultural experts from the Great Plains areas of Canada and the United States as well as farmers from the drought area) at the three-day "Better Farming Conference" at Swift Current to grapple with these issues. Its most significant outcome was a resolution urging the Province to make "a detailed study of the situation" to find out what might be done to improve upon those methods of farming and settlement already in use in southwestern Saskatchewan.²⁷ The Martin government was quick to respond, and the *Royal Commission of Inquiry into Farming Conditions*—popularly known as the Better Farming Commission (BFC)—was formally established on 23 August 1920.

The Better Farming Commission in Action

The BFC was comprised of: Chairman W.J. Rutherford, Dean of the Saskatchewan College of Agriculture (SCA); Secretary F.H. Auld, Saskatchewan's Deputy Minister of Agriculture; John Bracken, President of the Manitoba College of Agriculture and a former professor of field husbandry in the SCA; H.O. Powell, Manager of the Weyburn Security Bank; and two farmers from the drought area, Neil McTaggart and George Spence, also the M.L.A. for Notukeu. It met at the Saskatchewan legislature the day after it was formed to hammer out a program of investigation. Its avowed purpose was to "ascertain the facts of the situation with a view to determining what developments would be in the best interests of the country as a whole," and it defined its official area of study as that region west of a line joining North Portal and Elbow and south of the South Saskatchewan River.²⁸ The help of other experts was apparently required, for three "subcommittees" featuring other faculty members of the SCA were created to carry out the investigative work. The BFC was also given the power to hold public hearings, and it soon announced dates for sittings in 12 communities in southwestern Saskatchewan once the subcommittees had completed their investigations.²⁹

From the outset, the commissioners had to look one fact squarely in the eye: the extension of the wheat growing frontier into the semiarid plains had been accomplished only with difficulty. The region's soils had been brought into production through the use of farm implements like the chilled steel plow and the disc



John Bracken, circa 1909. Bracken felt strongly that farmers in the inner Palliser Triangle's better soil areas would benefit from: a) the development of new tillage methods; and b) the availability of more scientific data on the region's ecology. As Premier of Manitoba in 1934, Bracken would advocate federally-funded promotion of known soil and water conservation methods on drought stricken farms throughout the prairie "Dust Bowl."
Saskatchewan Archives Board (R-B44629)

harrow and through certain dry farming techniques. Since the late 1880s, the Canadian government—through its Dominion Experimental Farms Service (DEFS) facility at Indian Head—had researched summerfallowing (which involved plowing up alternating sections of land in May followed by repeated harrowing over the rest of the year to clear it of vegetation) as a means of helping prairie farmland to 'store up' rainfall for next year's crop. Popular theories to explain why summerfallowing worked had also emerged. As South Dakota professor and farmer H.W. Campbell famously argued, the heat and wind drew moisture out of the soil through capillary action. He advocated packing the earth to increase subsoil moisture and the regular cultivation of a surface 'dust mulch' comprised of soil particles "ranging from the size of a pin head to that of a walnut" to slow down evaporation.³⁰ The Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture had

actively promoted summerfallowing as well as the "Campbell method" as 'fail-safe' methods of growing grain.

However, the severity, extent and frequency of the crop failures in the southwest over the preceding decade had shown that there was no such thing as a 'fail-safe' dry farming method. Although such techniques did help to reduce the risk of a total crop failure in a single drought year, they could conserve moisture *only if* moisture existed, and during a series of dry years they were incapable of producing a profitable crop. The intense cultivation required of these dry farming methods (i.e. the creation of a fine surface dust mulch) also produced ideal conditions for erosion by the wind. An official of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association (SGGA) local for Bickleigh (40 km southwest of Rosetown) complained to F.H. Auld in a 1918 letter that

The farmers of this locality have in the past pinned their faith to two pet hobbies of the Dept. of Agriculture: summerfallow and its attendant dry farming methods...Both good so far as they go, but both at times falling short of expectations, and much in need of thoughtful revision...It may indeed be humiliating to know that the grain crops in a great wheat producing country like Sask. are liable in any season to be dried out, hailed or frozen, but the fact remains, and it is better to admit the fact and face the situation squarely, rather than endeavor to camouflage it as has been done, it is amply proven in this locality and we doubt not in others, that the best known methods of agriculture will fail to bring results some years.³¹

The commissioners also looked upon the dependence of the southwestern farmers on wheat monoculture with some concern. In truth, Saskatchewan's agricultural leaders had long warned farmers of the dangers of "putting all their eggs in one basket." The highly variable nature of world wheat prices appeared to support such a contention; the robust European markets that had driven prairie agricultural expansion during the First World War had begun to shrink by the time the BFC was created; between 1919 and 1920, the average price of a bushel

of wheat in Canada had fallen from \$2.37 to \$1.62—a decrease of nearly one-third.³² The only “safe” system of agriculture, they argued, was one in which livestock comprised a central part. W.J. Rutherford held this view. An expert in animal science, Rutherford had served as Saskatchewan’s Deputy Minister of Agriculture in 1908 and 1909 before becoming Dean of the SCA in 1910—a position he would hold until his death in 1930.³³ As he told one audience in 1909,

a farmer who has his farm well stocked with livestock, has an insurance against crop losses. He will at all times have animals of some sort or other to sell, for which he will be able to realize at least a fair cash remuneration, and then too, this farmer has a means of utilizing many of the bi-products [sic] of his farm that would otherwise go to waste and he can in the form of mutton, pork, wool, milk, or work, market these bi-products so as to effect an economic gain to himself and the community.³⁴

Rutherford’s assessment was really little more than a tired cliché. It is important to note that the postwar recession had also wreaked havoc with livestock markets (cattle prices had fallen by 55 per cent from 1918 to 1924), rendering moot the argument that mixed farming provided “an insurance against crop losses.”³⁵ And the commissioners could not deny certain realities about agriculture in the Palliser Triangle. Put simply, the growing of wheat was (and would long remain) the region’s dominant economic activity because it was well adapted to a semiarid climate. Its deep roots allowed it to withstand drought better than other cereals, and the heat produced harder, higher quality wheat kernels. As well, wheat growing yielded larger and faster returns than dairying or stock raising and did not demand the mixed farm’s array of buildings, corrals and fences, wells and windmills, haying equipment and breeding stock—important considerations when men and money were scarce. And of course, the homestead system and the network of grain elevators and railways in the region had been built upon the production of wheat for sale on international markets. At the time of the 1921 federal Census, field crops (mainly wheat and its support crop, oats) made up 88 per cent of the value of all agricultural products sold in Saskatchewan’s four southwestern Census Districts, whereas livestock sold live or in processed form comprised just three and nine per cent, respectively.³⁶

However, stock raising was not promoted solely for economic reasons. The diversified farm was

thought to be a ‘better’ farm, plain and simple. Indeed, if a farmer lost his main cash crop in a drought (and the income upon which he relied to purchase groceries and other items for his family), he might be able to produce at least a portion of his food supplies on his own farm and—ideally—eventually become less of a relief burden to the municipality. Possibly influenced by the “Country Life” ideology prevalent in North America in the early twentieth century, Saskatchewan’s agricultural leaders viewed farming as no mere business, but as a way of life.³⁷ To enhance the appeal and stability of rural life throughout the province, they spent considerable energies promoting what was called “Better Farming” (i.e. utilizing the land more efficiently, employing state of the art techniques to produce greater yields and improved quality in both grain and livestock). The Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture continued and elaborated upon traditional education extension policies; it gave grants to agricultural societies and various stock breeding associations; distributed ‘how-to’ bulletins on such topics as farm horticulture, stock raising and dairying; and supplied lecturers to Farmers’ Institutes to discuss the latest trends in field and animal husbandry.³⁸ Settlers could even obtain trees and shrubs from the Department of the Interior to provide fruit, shelter and beautification for their farms.³⁹

And stock raising evidently did persist as an integral part of farm life in the Palliser Triangle. As Canadian prairie historian Paul Voisey has explained, “it provided many settlers with a comforting link to home and tradition” even when practiced “in a token manner.”⁴⁰ Most settlers in the region had come from areas where mixed farming was common practice, and they often did raise their own meat, eggs and milk on their prairie homesteads for subsistence and sold the surplus to neighbours.⁴¹ And they were indeed keeping plenty of livestock at the time of the BFC: the 1921 Census counted about 420,000 head of cattle, sheep and swine and two million poultry in addition to some 325,000 horses on the 32,502 farms in the four southwestern Census Districts.⁴² Though a large number of the cattle (perhaps 40 per cent) were on ranches, at least three-quarters of all farms in those districts reported cattle and poultry and half reported swine.⁴³

But these settlers were all too aware of the challenges associated with maintaining their livestock during a drought. They often either had to accept relief feed to carry their animals through the winter or sell them in poor condition at a loss, further depressing market prices. The shortage of feed and finances had

in fact left many unable to hold on to their animals; an analysis of livestock statistics in the southwestern Crop Districts indicates a 22 per cent drop in the total number of cattle, sheep, swine and poultry between 1918 and 1920.⁴⁴ Still, Saskatchewan's Livestock Commissioner affirmed in his 1920 annual report that many southwestern farmers "bear evidence that in numerous cases their cattle and hogs carried them over and supplied them with the necessities of life which they could not have secured from any system of grain farming during the past three years."⁴⁵ The BFC faced a difficult problem indeed: it had to recommend a means of increasing local feed production to make it possible for these farmers to keep their livestock that was at the same time in step with an economy that had become geared toward wheat production.

For the first step, a "Subcommittee on Drifting Soils" was created to study the problems of crop production in a semiarid climate and to suggest possible remedies. Its personnel—including Roy Hansen and Manley Champlin, professors of soils and field husbandry in the SCA and S.H. Vigor, the provincial Field Crops Commissioner—chose to advocate the views of their colleague John Bracken (its main contribution to the BFC report was really a long quotation from Bracken's recently published book *Dry Farming in Western Canada*). An authority on soil science and dry farming, Bracken had written many bulletins and pamphlets on crop production in western Canada since joining the SCA in 1910.⁴⁶ "The 'dust mulch,'" wrote Bracken "has no place in the agriculture of any dry country where high winds prevail." He outlined certain tillage methods for soil drifting control that had gradually found acceptance elsewhere on the Great Plains, chiefly in the United States. One of these entailed the use of special cultivators that left the topsoil in a lumpy (as opposed to a powdery) state to prevent it from blowing away in the wind. Another involved plowing fields into alternating strips of fallow and crop that were laid out at right angles to the prevailing winds so as to prevent cumulative erosion.⁴⁷

But the commissioners were particularly impressed with another dry farming technique gaining popularity at the time. Bracken indicated that the worst soil erosion often occurred not during the summer, but in the spring before the crop had germinated or in the winter if the snow cover was light. The "chief and most permanent means" of mitigating this threat, he contended, was to restore fiber and nutrients to these soils by planting "cover crops" on otherwise

bare summerfallow as "summerfallow substitutes."⁴⁸ Sowing grains such as wheat, oats and especially winter rye in the fall could help anchor the topsoil during the winter. He also suggested growing fodder crops such as alfalfa, sweet clover, corn and sunflowers in rotation with wheat during the summer to leave behind protective stubble for the rest of the year. To be sure, these crops' cash value paled in comparison with wheat's, but they had the potential to provide the added benefit of a forage supplement for cattle, hogs, poultry and other livestock. Bracken's advice on "summerfallow substitutes" was really based on the results of two decades of intensive research conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture's Office of Dry Land Agriculture.⁴⁹ While growing cover crops appeared to defeat summerfallowing's main purpose on the Great Plains (namely moisture conservation), they had been selected for their drought-resistance and their efficient use of soil moisture (corn was best in this regard). Farmers in Kansas, Nebraska and North and South Dakota had been practicing it successfully by this time (in fact, Manley Champlin had taught in the South Dakota Agricultural College before joining the SCA in 1920 and was fully acquainted with it).⁵⁰

The BFC report was not unreserved in its enthusiasm for the "summerfallow substitute" system. In fact, it was hesitant to recommend it as a "complete solution" due to the fact that the appropriate cover crops had so far "never been given a comprehensive trial in the south-western districts."⁵¹ As Bracken solemnly told the Better Farming Conference, both agricultural scientists and farmers in the province faced the problem of placing agriculture "on a scientific foundation."⁵² In a time when moisture availability as a factor in grain growing on the semiarid plains was becoming more appreciated, long term precipitation records existed for just three localities in Saskatchewan's portion of the Palliser Triangle.⁵³ What is more, the fledgling SCA (established in 1909) was scarcely in a position to offer definite policy advice on crop production in the area. Bracken told one audience in 1917 that the SCA had conducted "hundreds of experiments" on grain and forage crops and tillage methods over the past six years, but he stressed that the work "[did] not answer the problems of other soils and other climatic zones of the province."⁵⁴

"The principal thing needed," affirmed the BFC report emphatically "is MORE LOCAL KNOWLEDGE," and it urged the senior governments to gather more data on climate, crop production and

cultivation methods on the semiarid plains.⁵⁵ Its very first recommendation was for the Dominion Meteorological Service (Canada's main weather reporting agency) to collect more precipitation records in southwestern Saskatchewan to enable resident farmers and agricultural scientists "to know exactly the climatic conditions under which they are labouring."⁵⁶ Interestingly, in April 1920 Ottawa had announced that it would create a new experimental farm at Swift Current.⁵⁷ But because Saskatchewan now had its own agricultural college—and because it was desirable for education and research to be closely entwined to ensure the best possible instruction—the report also recommended that the SCA be empowered to set up a series of "substations" in the area to help it to be better informed of the region's agricultural capabilities. These substations were to be big enough to conduct field husbandry and "balanced farming" experiments. In order to do these effectively, the report advised that they be located at "convenient centres" and "with due reference to climatic and soil conditions."⁵⁸

Still, Palliser Triangle farmers were in urgent need of any available information that might help them solve their agricultural problems. Aggravating matters was the fact that the "one-size-fits-all" approach to agricultural education had been tried and found wanting. The province had expanded its education extension programs in an effort to reach settlers pouring into the pre-emption area. In 1914, for example, the Department of Agriculture and the major railways introduced "Better Farming Trains" to visit towns along major rail lines; these featured instructors of the SCA and included soil tillage and crop rotation lecture and exhibit cars; livestock cars; dairy and poultry lecture cars; machinery and model farmstead exhibit cars; and horticulture and household science cars. Such initiatives had their shortcomings, however. The Better Farming Trains—though popular—could only contact a fraction of the farm population and visited southwestern Saskatchewan just three times between 1914 and 1920.⁵⁹ And even if they did attend the lectures and view the exhibits, farmers often did not have the time, money or inclination to apply what they had learned in their particular localities



Charles M. Hamilton, Saskatchewan's Minister of Agriculture in 1920
Saskatchewan Archives Board (R-B431-2)

by carrying out systematic tests. The secretary of the Joint Committee of the Grain Growers' Associations of South Cypress illustrated this reality in a July 1920 letter to C.M. Hamilton.

...Mixed farming, which with Stock, fodder crops and tame hay, and a possible income from several sources seems to promise the solution of this very difficult problem, is, unfortunately, hopelessly out of the reach of most of us who in the past ten years have exhausted our never too plentiful resources experimenting, groping as it were in the dark for the proper methods, only to find so varied have been the seasons, that the suitable tillage for one year has been the mistake of the next.⁶⁰



Francis Hedley Auld (seen here circa 1930) served as Saskatchewan's Deputy Minister of Agriculture from 1916 to 1946. Auld played an important role in organizing the Better Farming Conference and the Better Farming Commission. He would also oversee his department's efforts to implement certain of the Commission's recommendations during the 1920s, laying crucial foundations for the PFRA's rehabilitation activities in the Palliser Triangle after 1935

Saskatchewan Archives Board, (R-A3597)

The BFC commissioners then pondered the question: how to help? In keeping with the *laissez faire* political culture of the day, Saskatchewan's education extension programs were intended to encourage individual enterprise, not to force farmers to farm in a certain way. But ownership of farmland was now in the hands of tens of thousands of people spread over an area of great variation in soil productivity. This suggested the need for a system of education extension that showed farmers the way to farm more effectively *on their own land*. According to the BFC report, this might involve recruiting "specially trained men" to do "cooperative experiments" with farmers in southwestern Saskatchewan.⁶¹ In the United States, "county agents" had already proven highly effective in enlisting the cooperation of large numbers of farmers in solving

localized agricultural problems.⁶² In response to the crop failure of 1914, the Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture had actually hired four "Agricultural Representatives" to serve southwestern Saskatchewan, and one of their main functions was to organize 25-acre "demonstration fields" of cover crops on private farms (similar programs were already operating in North Dakota and Minnesota);⁶³ financial institutions helped supply the necessary seed for this work.⁶⁴ The Agricultural Representatives had made an encouraging start to their work, though it all but ceased after three of the four men enlisted for overseas service in 1916.⁶⁵ Still, the BFC was anxious to study the progress of parallel initiatives south of the border, and it sent a "Subcommittee on Investigation and Extension" (comprised of John Bracken, C.M. Hamilton and H.O. Powell) to visit agricultural colleges and research stations in North Dakota and Minnesota to observe their methods of experimentation and the functioning of their county agent programs. Sure enough, the BFC recommended that Agricultural Representatives be reintroduced.⁶⁶

Through its public hearings, the BFC tried to get more information direct from farmers in the drought area on crop production and stock raising. Thirty to fifty farmers attended each of these meetings; though many of them were under the impression that they were to receive rather than to give dry farming advice and the commissioners thus ended up with more questions than answers.⁶⁷ Twenty-seven of these questions were reprinted in the BFC report "to furnish some idea of what the farmers' problems are and the efforts they are making to solve them and to obtain help in solving them."⁶⁸ As well, the report exhorted its readers to do anything that would "aid in making the farm more homelike and comfortable," and it contained information on summerfallow substitute crops; varieties of livestock to consume them; building silos to store up reserves of fodder and seed for use in future years; and planting gardens and trees for windbreaks. "When more experimental work is done locally," affirmed the report, "the results will indicate whether any improvement can be made in the proposed system. But in the meantime it is submitted by your Commission as the safest and best plan to follow."⁶⁹

However, the BFC realized that the introduction of new dry farming methods and education extension programs in southwestern Saskatchewan were not in themselves a complete solution to the problem. Growing cover crops might help ease feed shortages in the winter. But most livestock still needed access to grazing land in the summer, and it had become apparent that the half-section farm provided for in the *Dominion Lands Act* amendment of 1908 could not simultaneously provide enough pasture and land for the production of winter feed in addition to a cash crop of wheat. At the time of the 1921 Census, the typical southwestern Saskatchewan farm occupied 406 acres, 176 acres of which were “unimproved” and consisted almost entirely of natural pasture. Where a farmer was using horse power for fieldwork and had even a few head of livestock, such an area of grazing land was undersized and soon eaten bare; indeed, the minimum acreage required to provide pasture and feed for a horse or cow for one year on the semiarid plains ranged from 30 acres in an average year to as much 120 acres in a drought year!⁷⁰ But by this time, farmers in the area generally found it difficult to find more land on which to graze stock. Prior to the War, nearly every grain growing district in the province had at least some rough or uncultivated land nearby for anyone to use as pasture. However, all but the worst homestead land in southwestern Saskatchewan had been taken up by 1920, and most farmers found themselves surrounded by other farms.⁷¹ And even if they could buy land from their neighbours, the war-driven prosperity had caused a sharp rise in land prices in the southwest.⁷²

Ranchers were also seeking new sources of grass. Southwestern Saskatchewan was the heart of the province’s range cattle industry, containing about three quarters (2.3 million acres) of its total area of federal grazing leases in 1920.⁷³ By this point, however, a few large corporations controlled much of this acreage.⁷⁴ Like farmers, the smaller ranchers left behind in the region resented that large companies were tying up so much land and wanted a more equitable distribution of grazing land. At a June 1920 meeting, the Saskatchewan Stock Growers’ Association (SSGA) passed a resolution asking the federal and Saskatchewan governments to survey the “the rough and sandy hill lands of the Province” to make them available “for the raising of stock by the farmers and stockmen of Saskatchewan.” The Better Farming Conference passed a similar motion.⁷⁵

The BFC therefore dispatched a “Subcommittee on Grazing Lands” (consisting of George Spence and Professor A.M. Shaw of the SCA) to do exactly this. A spokesman for the ranching community—Jack Byers, a stockman and president of the SSGA—was included probably because of pressure from the ranching industry.⁷⁶ The Department of the Interior was also persuaded to send its Commissioner of Dominion Lands, J.W. Greenway, to serve on the subcommittee so that Ottawa would have, in F.H. Auld’s words, “...advice and information regarding local conditions and the viewpoint of the settlers themselves.”⁷⁷ In September 1920, the Subcommittee on Grazing Lands issued questionnaires to “a considerable number” of farmers and ranchers in the southwest inquiring (among other things) whether a “community pasture” might help rectify the summer pasture shortage. As indicated in the subcommittee’s final report to the BFC, the respondents “almost invariably” agreed that it would.⁷⁸

Community pastures were not a new idea. The Métis—like the French habitants under the seigniorial system in Québec—had established ‘strip farms’ with frontage along certain prairie rivers; the strips ran far back and were combined in grazing commons.⁷⁹ Stock raisers in a region about 70 km north of Swift Current had also been using an area of three townships of Crown land as a public pasture. However, the commissioners knew that an effective community pasture required more than land; not only were fences and corrals needed, competent advice and supervision for the grazing, breeding and marketing of the pasture’s cattle were also necessary. The BFC report suggested that these pastures might emulate the “Live Stock Associations” that the Forestry Branch of the Department of the Interior had introduced in 1911 to allow stock raisers to graze cattle in forest reserves: these were founded on a constitution provided by the Branch and managed by cooperatives in exchange for a grazing fee per head of stock.⁸⁰ By providing supplementary grazing, it was also hoped that community pastures might keep farms in the better grain growing areas at about half a section in size, since fewer farm units in an RM translated into a higher per capita tax burden and/or a decline in municipal services.⁸¹ Because federal grazing leases then constituted the most readily available source of land for community pastures, the BFC report recommended:

That the Department of the Interior be asked when considering applications for renewals of grazing permits on Crown lands in Saskatchewan, to give preference in future to

applications from resident farmers organised [sic] on a community or co-operative plan under The Agricultural Cooperative Associations Act, or on a plan similar to that now employed for the management of grazing upon forest reserves.⁸²

The BFC also touched on problems relating to variations in water availability that the *Dominion Lands Act* had not taken into account. “A water supply,” affirmed the BFC report “makes stock raising and dairying possible, and where these are possible, farming may be so diversified as to make one very largely independent except in years of complete failure....”⁸³ Those who settled in the inner Palliser Triangle area were usually forced to dig deep wells to access water, though these often produced poor quality and/or insufficient supplies for household and agricultural use.⁸⁴ In such cases, a dugout or a small dam on an existing water course was also used to trap whatever moisture fell from the sky; indeed, southwestern Saskatchewan’s rolling topography provided numerous sites for such projects. Because constructing these was costly for an individual, the provincial government did provide at least some assistance. In 1888, the Territorial government had begun renting well boring equipment to help settlers find water, marking the start of an extensive water supply development program that included bonuses to private operators of well drilling outfits, the drilling of public wells and the construction of dugouts and small dams to create community storage reservoirs.⁸⁵ The Saskatchewan government continued this work after 1905, but it was eager to shift much of it to the municipalities and the private sector as soon as possible.⁸⁶ Because farmers and ranchers were in charge of developing water supplies on their own property, readers of the BFC report were simply told to obtain pamphlets on the construction of small reservoirs from the Department of the Interior and the provincial Department of Highways.⁸⁷

The BFC report also mentioned large-scale irrigation as a means of alleviating the impact of recurring drought, but without much enthusiasm. Prospects for commercial irrigation in southwestern Saskatchewan—like that which had been practiced in southern Alberta since the 1880s to grow large acreages of marketable crops—were relatively limited.⁸⁸ Unlike the latter, the former is served by only one large river: the South Saskatchewan. But the valley it flows through is too far below the surrounding plains, and the cost of elevating the water by gravity canals or pumps for irrigation had

long been seen as prohibitive. However, the various creeks and streams radiating from Wood Mountain and the Cypress Hills provided many opportunities for small flood irrigation schemes in adjoining lowlands; these offered possibilities for irrigation ranging from an acre or two for vegetable gardens and orchards up to several hundred acres for the production of hay and other feed for livestock. Ranchers and farmers had recognized this as early as the 1890s, and by the First World War some 64,000 acres in the southwest were irrigated.⁸⁹ Such projects had the potential to at least reduce the need to import large quantities of livestock feed and other relief into the Palliser Triangle during a drought.

Since control of all natural resources rested in the federal government’s hands, it alone was responsible for conducting the research to determine where it was desirable to have irrigation. In 1894, Parliament had passed the *Northwest Irrigation Act* to regulate the use of water for irrigation purposes, and the Irrigation Branch of the Department of the Interior was set up to measure stream flow and runoff to ensure that water grants were not issued in excess of supply and to define the rates so that future conflicting claims might be easily adjusted.⁹⁰ In response to the growing demand for irrigation water on the prairies, the Reclamation Service of the Department of the Interior was created in 1917 to determine the most suitable areas for irrigation and to find the best means of developing them.⁹¹ It began new surveys of irrigable areas in southern Alberta, designed reservoirs and canal systems to serve them, and estimated their cost.⁹² Early in 1920 it began similar studies in Saskatchewan’s Battle Creek and Frenchman River valleys, and the Better Farming Conference urged that these be completed “as rapidly as possible.”⁹³

However, it was not possible for all farmers in southwestern Saskatchewan to succeed where they were. A large number of them, in fact, were situated on submarginal wheat growing land, and the provincial Department of Agriculture received many letters from them illustrating their plight. “Any man of ordinary intelligence who has been on the job here since 1917,” wrote one Great Sand Hills-area farmer “knows what this country is and knows that it will never do for farming.”⁹⁴ A spokesman for one group of destitute farmers near Senate (south of the Cypress Hills) wrote to Premier W.M. Martin indicating that they were “all willing to pay in full” their relief debts to the government if some arrangement could be found to transfer persons “who are at present located on land

that is useless to maintain them to land more suitable for general farming purposes to enable them to retrieve their former position....”⁹⁵ Indeed, abandoned farms were already in evidence in certain areas, and some warned of further abandonments if definite action was not taken soon.⁹⁶ One Maple Creek-area farmer told F.H. Auld in a letter that he knew of “many settlers” still wanting to take up land in his district

and that conditions will be new to them, and if information could be given them before they make a false start it might be the means of averting a tragedy. I fail to see what benefit it can be to Canada to place people where there is no hope for them to succeed. This land must be good for some kind of farming and if people can be guided at the start it may prevent their ruin.⁹⁷

Writing in the *Agriculture Report* for 1920, Auld affirmed that many farmers “could not have continued” without relief aid from the provincial government, but he admitted that “there is little doubt that in some cases the assistance was the means of continuing in impossible surroundings some who cannot be expected to succeed in their present locations.”⁹⁸ Certain localized areas of western and southwestern Saskatchewan had actually become good-for-nothing wastelands as a result of cultivation, especially areas of light and sandy soils. For example, the SGGA local at Tessier (100 km southwest of Saskatoon) wrote to the provincial Department of Agriculture in June 1920 stating that 70,000 acres of cropland in that area had been ruined on account of soil drifting. The phenomenon was also acute in the Mortlach district west of Moose Jaw.⁹⁹ In some areas, the topsoil was so badly eroded that nothing but the heavy clay hardpan remained. These were aptly named “burnouts” because they were uncultivable.¹⁰⁰

The BFC’s Subcommittees on Drifting Soils and Grazing Lands had visited these and other areas to gather the essential facts, but they were at a loss to recommend what to do with them. Certainly, it was desirable to return such land to the use for which nature intended—namely the grazing of livestock. But few scientific experiments with drought-resistant grasses to restore the “prairie wool” had been undertaken by this time, though some abandoned parcels of land in the southwest were apparently already going back to grass all on their own.¹⁰¹ The federal government had meanwhile done nothing to prevent any remaining tracts of submarginal wheat growing land from being homesteaded. In fact, it had reserved the right not to renew any grazing lease if it was needed for settlement,

and ranchers watched sadly as “sodbusters” continued to plow up thousands of acres of once good grazing land. The BFC therefore recommended that the Department of the Interior call a definite end to homesteading in all of southern Saskatchewan—defined as that area south of the Canadian National Railways (CNR) mainline between Kamsack and Lloydminster—and that any remaining Crown land in that area be made available for grazing.¹⁰²

The BFC report also argued that “to abandon [submarginal wheat growing] lands would be the first step toward finding a way to use them....”¹⁰³ It thus recommended that the *Dominion Lands Act* be amended to allow those who had obviously settled on inferior land in the south to file for a free second homestead elsewhere. By this point, most of the remaining Crown land fit for settlement in Saskatchewan was located north of the CNR mainline. Based on evidence submitted at the BFC’s public hearings, the commissioners did not expect that a large number of farmers would be interested in moving; “[o]nly in a few cases” recalled C.M. Hamilton in 1921, “...was the request made that permission be secured to abandon their homesteads and move to some other portion of the province.”¹⁰⁴ In truth, they had little idea how much submarginal land there was in the southwest; the Subcommittees on Drifting Soils and Grazing Lands had only visited small parts of the region in their investigations, and the BFC report made the overly hopeful assertion that perhaps “fifteen per cent or more” of its land area was inferior.¹⁰⁵ Scientific studies completed in the 1940s and 1950s would show that about 44 per cent of all land in the area is submarginal. During the great drought of the 1930s, farmers situated on these soils would experience the worst crop failures in the Palliser Triangle, and tens of thousands of them would abandon their farms *en masse*.

Nevertheless, the BFC did address the issue of what to do with submarginal wheat growing land that had been (or would be) abandoned. “It seems,” noted the BFC report optimistically, “...that some of this class of land if of sufficient extent may some time be utilized as community pastures when it ceases to be used for grain growing.”¹⁰⁶ But the province did not have the authority to seize it and withdraw it from cultivation (though RMs could acquire title to privately-owned land through non-payment of taxes and relief advances). In fact, municipal regulations then in effect promoted the abuse of grazing land. Uncultivated land was taxed at the same rate as improved farmland, leading many to

grow wheat on it if good precipitation or grain prices were expected in the hope of getting a higher return from it. Petitions from the SSGA had led the Saskatchewan government to appoint an investigative commission in 1915 to deal with this and other issues. This influenced the passage of legislation in 1916 setting \$2 per acre as the maximum annual municipal tax rate for federal grazing leases.¹⁰⁷ Still, federal grazing leases (like cropland) were taxed on a per-acre basis, not by their productive capacity. "... [A] rate of taxation consistent with the producing value of the land," noted the BFC report "should be an encouragement to use such land for the purpose to which it is best adapted."¹⁰⁸ Financial institutions no doubt agreed with this appraisal, since solid data on the fertility of their clients' land could help make their lending policies more efficient.

The first prerequisite for legislation that could effectively govern land utilization was a "classification of land," and a scientific soil survey was seen as the fundamental starting point. In North America, large-scale soil surveys had first gotten underway in the United States in 1899. Under the direction of the United States Bureau of Soils, state agricultural colleges and experiment stations began to gather information on soil texture and humus content to classify soils and their relative productivity, chemically analyze soils to ascertain their suitability for different crops, determine the topography of the land and to learn the uses to which the land was put (some states such as Illinois had done this work independently). Within twenty years, such surveys had covered 25 per cent of the nation's land area.¹⁰⁹ In 1920, the state of Michigan—in possession of large acreages of deforested, idle and tax-delinquent land in its northern counties at the time—had begun laying the groundwork for a pioneering "land economic survey" that would commence two years later; it examined the history of agricultural production; land tenure, property values, population data and transportation facilities to determine the most profitable use of the land. Wisconsin initiated a similar study at about the same time.¹¹⁰

Such work had gotten off to a slower start north of the border. Unlike the United States, Canada did not have a federal "Bureau of Soils." Soil surveys were deemed a provincial undertaking mainly because only the provincial agricultural colleges had enough staff with the necessary training. The Ontario Agricultural College conducted Canada's first major soil survey in southern Ontario from 1914 to 1920, and the Manitoba and Alberta Agricultural Colleges had initiated more

limited soil surveys in the southern areas of those provinces in 1917 and 1920, respectively.¹¹¹ The SCA's Soils Department had opened in January 1920 and had only taken soil samples at sixteen sites in Saskatchewan by the time of the Better Farming Conference.¹¹² Due to the relatively limited experience with soil survey and land classification work in Canada, the BFC's Subcommittee on Investigation and Extension visited state agricultural institutions in Illinois and Wisconsin to study their investigative methods.¹¹³ The commissioners eventually wanted to see a "land economic survey" completed in Saskatchewan, but they knew that a soil survey was the first step.¹¹⁴ They recommended that the SCA begin such work in southwestern Saskatchewan and extend it throughout the province. Two types of soil surveys were known at the time: a "reconnaissance" survey and a "detailed" survey; the former was a quick scan of the land to outline regions of similar topography and soil type, while the latter involved soil testing, classification and mapping and was used where intensive agriculture was practiced. Since extensive agriculture was the norm on the Canadian prairies, the BFC report advocated a hybrid of the two surveys that would be "fairly rapid, fairly cheap and yet sufficiently detailed to be useful to the farmer, county agent and investigator alike."¹¹⁵ Because this soil survey would cover Crown lands within the province (thus benefiting Ottawa also), the report insisted that the Saskatchewan and federal governments share its cost equally.

Conclusion

What conclusions can be made about the BFC report? On the one hand, it is clear that the BFC commissioners were putting a stamp of approval on a plan to which the Saskatchewan government was already committed. The recommendations for growing summerfallow substitute crops to halt soil erosion and to provide a forage supplement; the introduction of Agricultural Representatives to aid in experimentation with these crops at the local level; the creation of cooperative community pastures to provide more summer pasture; and the development of farm and ranch water supplies and small scale irrigation were all aimed at helping farmers and stock raisers on the semiarid plains to become more self-sustaining by enabling them to maintain their livestock in dry years. Such policies were in line with commitment of Saskatchewan's agricultural leaders to promote "Better Farming," and the commissioners could refer to precedents both in Saskatchewan and in other jurisdictions for guidance.

The report's proposals for the ending of homesteading in Palliser Triangle; the provision of second homesteads for settlers on submarginal wheat growing land on better land elsewhere; and soil surveys of the province complemented these recommendations; if settlers on inferior lands in the drought area were assisted to leave, they would no longer be a relief burden to southwestern RMs in drought years, while the best and worst grain growing lands would be clearly outlined and eventually be removed from cultivation.

The recommendations of the BFC report would also leave an important legacy. Indeed, the BFC is unique because it was the first royal commission to assess long term prospects for agriculture and settlement in the Palliser Triangle (Alberta's corresponding study was not completed until 1922, and its recommendations closely resembled the BFC's).¹¹⁶ Though extensive detail cannot be provided here, provincial and federal efforts to implement the BFC's recommendations during the 1920s did lay critical foundations for PFRA activities after 1935. As the historian for the Swift Current Experimental Station (completed in 1921) has noted, the 27 questions on crop production and stock raising in the BFC report "were actually recommendations presented to formulate, in part, the program for research" at the new facility (for financial reasons the substations of the SCA were never set up).¹¹⁷ A decade of testing had shown that growing summerfallow substitutes to control soil drifting and provide feed for livestock (as had been practiced elsewhere on the Great Plains) was impractical. Due to the Canadian prairies' relatively short growing season, such crops did not fare as well as they did further south. In areas where evaporation exceeded precipitation, the practice was also incapable of carrying over as much moisture for the next year as carefully worked clean fallow.¹¹⁸ The Swift Current Station studied cultivation methods to prevent soil drifting. The use of the plow and the disc harrow in summerfallowing had virtually ceased by 1932 and were replaced by the one-way plow, the moldboard plow, the duck-foot cultivator and the rod weeder. These implements destroyed weeds while leaving the soil surface in a ridged, lumpy condition with other 'trash' or protective cover intact. The 'trash' farming technique would be instrumental in the PFRA's efforts to control soil drifting in Saskatchewan's drought-stricken southern grain belt after 1935.¹¹⁹

Notable developments regarding artificial farm and ranch water supplies appear to have been made during the 1920s. In keeping with the wishes of the

Better Farming Conference, the Department of the Interior continued its studies of irrigation possibilities in the Battle Creek and Frenchman River areas of southwestern Saskatchewan and by 1922 had located reservoir sites and irrigation canals and estimated the costs of constructing them, conducted soil alkalinity studies and prepared topographic maps.¹²⁰ However, the return of good rainfall by the mid-1920s dulled farmers' enthusiasm for such projects. It would not be until the Dirty Thirties that Palliser Triangle farmers generally came to appreciate the value of a water supply that could withstand a series of dry years. The PFRA could build on these precedents.

For its part, the Saskatchewan government created the Saskatchewan Soil Survey in 1922. Despite limited budgets and manpower, it covered the entire province south of Prince Albert with scientific soil surveys by 1931, and by 1933 soil survey reports for nine areas in the province (eight of these in the Palliser Triangle) had been published.¹²¹ These could provide at least an idea of where submarginal wheat growing lands were located; in 1936, the PFRA sponsored economic land classification studies in the semiarid plains that by 1952 had definitely outlined those areas that were best adapted for grain growing, ranching or a combination of the two. In 1922, the Province had also negotiated with Ottawa to stop homesteading in the semiarid plains, and it influenced an amendment to the *Dominion Lands Act* in 1923 to allow settlers on poor wheat growing land to acquire a free second homestead on better land elsewhere in the province. Hundreds of settlers would take advantage of this provision during the 1920s. The PFRA would continue the work of farmer relocation in the region.

PFRA-sponsored activities built on the BFC's recommendations in other ways. PFRA officials—like the BFC commissioners a decade and half earlier—understood that the most effective way to encourage mass adoption of new dry farming techniques was to put the spotlight on the farmer to help him to adapt, either individually or through local group action. In 1922, the Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture had introduced five Agricultural Representatives to serve several LIDs in the province's southwest, though limited finances and the return of good wheat growing conditions in the mid-1920s soon quelled public enthusiasm for the program. However, PFRA organizers would build on this idea to tackle severe soil drifting in parts of the Palliser Triangle. Agricultural Improvement Associations (one of the PFRA's signature programs)

proved to be highly effective in promoting the adoption of soil and water conservation methods among drought area farmers, but they operated under the supervision of experts (much like the Agricultural Representatives) employed directly by the DEFS. As well, following a 1937 amendment to the *Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act* to include land utilization and resettlement, community pastures were reintroduced in the Palliser Triangle as a means of keeping submarginal wheat growing land out of cultivation permanently and providing added grazing (the vast majority of these would be located in southwestern Saskatchewan). Though these pastures were federally controlled, it was the Saskatchewan government's experience with community pastures during the 1920s that inspired James G. Gardiner, the federal Minister of Agriculture at the time, to institute the program and Ottawa worked closely with provincial authorities to acquire the necessary land.

Endnotes

- 1 Charles Schwartz, *The Search for Stability* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1959), 6.
- 2 In 1957, for example, Saskatchewan political economist V.C. Fowke affirmed that the PFRA "has worked for twenty years with tremendous energy and enthusiasm, its efforts in substantial part devoted to correcting the mistakes of the homestead period" [V.C. Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), 285-86].
- 3 Lynden Penner, "Missouri Coteau" in *The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2005), 620. D.F. Acton, et al., *The Ecoregions of Saskatchewan* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1998).
- 4 Jack R. Villimow, "The Nature and Origin of the Canadian Dry Belt" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* Vol. 46, No. 2 (June 1956), 212-13.
- 5 Soil 'texture' refers to the amount of clay, silt and sand particles found in a particular soil. These range from clay, in which clay particles dominate to coarse sands which contain very little clay. In between are the loamy soils that are mixtures of clay, silt and sand particles. Soil textures in southwestern Saskatchewan include heavy clay, silty clay, clay loam, loam and sandy loam [H.C. Moss, *History of the Saskatchewan Soil Survey, 1921-1959* (University of Saskatchewan: Saskatchewan Institute of Pedology, 1983), 2].
- 6 Alberta, *A Report on the Rehabilitation of the Dry Areas of Alberta and Crop Insurance* (Edmonton: King's Printer, 1936), 9.
- 7 Unknown to prairie soil scientists and farmers until the 1950s, levels of nitrogen in plant-available form (nitrate nitrogen) on summerfallow land were much greater than on land that was cropped. While this was the case in all soil zones, the amounts accumulated during the fallow year were much higher in the black and grey (i.e. wooded) soil regions to the north. These soils had greater amounts of organic matter and nitrogen and hence more capacity for release of nitrate nitrogen than the dark brown or brown soils. If summerfallowed, nitrogen levels on brown soils are sufficient for growing crops, and scanty annual rainfall prevents lime and other essential minerals from leaching deep into the subsoil beyond the reach of plant roots. Hence, plant food is readily available, provided that enough moisture is received to dissolve it into usable form [W.J. Carlyle, "The Decline of Summerfallow on the Canadian Prairies" *The Canadian Geographer* Vol. 41, No.3 (1997), 271; Ibid., 19].
- 8 Tree-ring analyses have shown that subnormal precipitation has been common to the region over the past 300 years. [David J. Sauchyn, et al. "Aridity on the Canadian Plains" *Geographie physique et Quaternaire* Vol. 56, Nos. 2-3 (2002), 252, 255].
- 9 W.A. Mackintosh, *Prairie Settlement: The Geographical Setting* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1934), 205.
- 10 *Statutes of Canada*, 1908, 7-8 Edw. VII, c. 20; A.S Morton and Chester Martin, *History of Prairie Settlement and "Dominion Lands" Policy* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1938), 418-21.
- 11 As Oliver explained to the House of Commons in 1908, "if a man can only farm one half of his land each year [the other half summerfallow] then he must have twice as much land if he is going to raise as much crop" [Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 23 June 1908, 11141].
- 12 Saskatchewan, *Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Farming Conditions* [hereafter *Better Farming Commission*] (Regina: King's Printer, 1921), 34.
- 13 John H. Archer, *Saskatchewan: A History* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1980), 171.
- 14 Saskatchewan, *Report of the Department of Agriculture* (hereafter *Agriculture Report*), 1915 (Regina: Government Printer, 1916), 120.
- 15 Morton and Martin, 410.
- 16 Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 7 Geo. V, A. 1917, No. 25, 4; Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, (Calgary: Fifth House, 2005), 258-9; *Manitoba Free Press*, 5 September 1919, 13.
- 17 Barry Potyondi, *In Palliser's Triangle: Living in the Grasslands, 1850-1930* (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Purich Publishing, 1995), 92.
- 18 Saskatchewan, *Agriculture Report*, 1915, 21-22; 1918, 111; 1919, 105; 1920, 17.
- 19 According to the 1921 Census, there were twenty LIDs situated within the five Census Districts (2, 3, 4, 7 and 8) located in Saskatchewan's drought area in 1919 [Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921, Vol. V: Agriculture* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1925), 163-65].
- 20 By 1920, the acreage ratio of patented to unpatented homestead lands in Saskatchewan stood at 8.7 to 1 [Morton and Martin, 410].
- 21 *Swift Current Sun*, 18 July 1919, 1.
- 22 *Saskatchewan Farmer*, July 1920, 5; *Regina Morning Leader*, 9 August 1919, 28; SAB, Department of Agriculture [hereafter Ag.] Papers, R-261, File #22.15, Thos. Malloy to F.H. Auld, 24 November 1919.
- 23 Saskatchewan, *Agriculture Report*, 1920, 257.
- 24 *Saskatchewan Farmer*, July 1920, 5.
- 25 Gross provincial revenues for Saskatchewan in 1920 totaled \$9,903,885 [Canada, *Canada Year Book 1932*, (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1933), 734].

- 26 J. William Brennan, "Charles A. Dunning" in Gordon Barnhart, ed. *Saskatchewan Premiers of the Twentieth Century* (University of Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2004), 69.
- 27 SAB, R-184, File #2.1, *Official Report of the 'Better Farming Conference'* [hereafter *Conference Report*], 167.
- 28 Saskatchewan, *Better Farming Commission*, 14.
- 29 These communities were Mortlach, Herbert, Leader, Cabri, Gull Lake, Tompkins, Maple Creek, Senate, Eastend, Robsart, Shaunavon and Ponteix.
- 30 H.W. Campbell, *Campbell's 1907 Soil Culture Manual* (Lincoln, Nebraska: The Campbell Soil Culture Co., 1909), 118-26, 250.
- 31 SAB, Ag. Papers, R-261, File #22.15, R. Fenerty to F.H. Auld, 15 December 1918.
- 32 Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Handbook of Agricultural Statistics Part 1: Field Crops, 1908-63* (Ottawa, Queen's Printer, 1964), 18.
- 33 Author unknown, "Rutherford, William John" in the *Saskatchewan Encyclopedia*, 789-90.
- 34 W.J. Rutherford quoted in Saskatchewan, *Agriculture Report*, 1908, 121-22.
- 35 By the end of World War I, the average Winnipeg Price for a good quality butcher steer was \$11.60 per hundredweight. By 1924, this price had fallen to \$5.27 per hundredweight [Potyondi, 60-62].
- 36 Statistics calculated from Canada, *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921: Volume V—Agriculture* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1925), 122.
- 37 For more on the Country Life ideology in Canada, see David C. Jones, "'There Is Some Power About the Land'—The Western Agrarian Press and Country Life Ideology" *Journal of Canadian Studies* Vol. 17, No. 3 (Fall 1982), 96-108.
- 38 Allan R. Turner, "W.R. Motherwell and Agricultural Development in Saskatchewan, 1905-1918" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1958), Chapters 2 and 3.
- 39 D.J. Hall, "Clifford Sifton: Immigration and Settlement Policy" in R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer, eds. *The Prairie West: Historical Readings* (Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, 1985), 286.
- 40 Paul Voisey, *Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 94.
- 41 Voisey points out that in the period 1920-1940, farm families in the Vulcan district of southern Alberta consumed over half the eggs, three-quarters of the butter and 95 per cent of the milk that they produced [Ibid., 81-86; 95; see also Edith Rowles, "Bannock, Beans and Bacon: An Investigation of Pioneer Diet" *Saskatchewan History*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Winter 1952), 6-9].
- 42 Canada, *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921: Volume V—Agriculture* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1925), 722-23.
- 43 This works out to about 10 horses, 8 cattle, 2 sheep, 2 pigs and 61 head of poultry on each farm [Ibid.].
- 44 Data tabulated from Saskatchewan, *Agriculture Report*, 1919, 114; 1920, 26; 1921, 35-36.
- 45 Saskatchewan, *Agriculture Report*, 1920, 221. Farmers in southwestern Saskatchewan interviewed by BFC personnel in the fall of 1920 "invariably" and often "emphatically" answered "Yes" to the question "Is the keeping of livestock essential to your success?" [SAB, Ag. Papers, R-261, File #23.12, "Report of Sub-Committee [on Grazing Lands] of Saskatchewan Better Farming Commission" 4 October 1920, 4].
- 46 John Kendle, *John Bracken: A Political Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 24.
- 47 John Bracken, *Dry Farming in Western Canada* (Winnipeg: The Grain Growers' Guide Ltd., 1921), 269-70.
- 48 Ibid., 267.
- 49 Mary W.M. Hargreaves, "The Dry-Farming Movement in Retrospect" *Agricultural History* Vol. 51, No.1 (1977), 155-58.
- 50 Bracken, chap. 16. Manley Champlin gave a detailed overview of the "summerfallow substitute" system in an address to the Better Farming Conference [SAB, R-184, File #2.1, *Conference Report*, 40-50; 129-32].
- 51 Saskatchewan, *Better Farming Commission*, 36, 54.
- 52 SAB, R-184, File #2.1, *Conference Report*, 20.
- 53 Since 1914, the Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture had been collecting weather data for the Dominion Meteorological Service at a number of points in each Crop District, including a dozen within the BFC's study area [Saskatchewan, *Better Farming Commission*, 19-33].
- 54 John Bracken quoted in Saskatchewan, *Agriculture Report*, 1917, 301.
- 55 Saskatchewan, *Better Farming Commission*, 51.
- 56 Ibid., 33.
- 57 Swift Current *Sun*, 6 April 1920, 1.
- 58 Saskatchewan, *Better Farming Commission*, 51.
- 59 Public enthusiasm for the Better Farming Train was remarkable. For example, when it visited Shackleton (near Cabri), where there were scarcely a dozen buildings, between four and five hundred people showed up to "learn something at the train and not to spend a day in town." Some 38,000 people visited the train in 1915 alone. Southwestern Saskatchewan was singled out for attention in 1914 and 1915, and special emphasis was given to soil tillage and weed control methods to eager audiences there. But the trains would not visit the region again until 1919, and they did not operate at all in 1918—likely due to the disruption of the war [SAB, Ag. Papers, R-260, I.34, Unnamed correspondent to F.H. Auld, 7 January 1920; Swift Current *Sun*, 24 July 1914; 29 June 1915].
- 60 SAB, Ag. Papers, R-261, File #23.13, Lewis John Harvey to C.M. Hamilton, 19 July 1920.
- 61 Saskatchewan, *Better Farming Commission*, 68.
- 62 See Roy V. Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer: The Rise of Agricultural Extension to 1914* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), Chapters 8-10.
- 63 These four "Agricultural Representatives" were graduates of the Manitoba Agricultural College and were stationed at Shaunavon, Swift Current, Rosetown and North Battleford. They were to "utilize all available avenues for improving agriculture" in their respective areas, and their duties included: organizing agricultural societies, cooperatives and competitions; assisting in securing markets and better prices for farm products; and helping to improve rural life conditions by promoting farm diversification and beautification. They were also responsible for organizing and supervising a series of "demonstration fields" in western and southwestern Saskatchewan to, in W.R. Motherwell's words, "demonstrate what can be done by proper soil preparation even in a dry

- country.” Under this scheme, willing farmers hosted demonstrations in summerfallowing and in growing corn, fall rye, barley, alfalfa and winter wheat on up to 25 acres of their own land [Saskatchewan, *Agriculture Report*, 1914, 97-105; 1915, 12-23; J. Castell Hopkins, *Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs 1915* (Toronto: The Annual Review Publishing Company, 1916), 654].
- 64 In the spring of 1915, the Canadian Bankers Association provided free corn seed to any prairie farmer who promised to sow one acre for green feed for livestock, and it arranged shipping discounts with the railways on all seed it sent to its branches in the Prairie Provinces. (The member banks included: the Bank of Montreal, the Merchants’ Bank of Canada, the Canadian Bank of Commerce, the Bank of British North America, the Union Bank of Canada, the Royal Bank of Canada, and the Bank of Toronto). The “demonstration fields” were really intended to become a source of seed with which to grow much larger areas of summerfallow substitute crops. That year the chartered banks in the Prairie Provinces also jointly mailed some 100,000 leaflets procured from the Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture on corn growing and summerfallowing to their rural customers [SAB, Ag. Papers, Ag. 3, File #21, G.W. Allen to T.F. Ellis, 8 February 1915; V.C. Brown to A.F. Mantle, 15 February 1915; Thos. Acheson to Duncan Marshall, W.R. Motherwell and Geo. Lawrence, 23 March 1915; and R.U. Weir to A.F. Mantle, 3 April 1915; *Regina Morning Leader*, 17 February 1915, 1].
- 65 In the North Battleford district alone, demonstration fields were established on some thirty farms in 1915. The North Battleford representative served until 1918, at which time he was transferred to the extension division of the College of Agriculture [Saskatchewan, *Agriculture Report*, 1915, 12-23; 1917-18, 10].
- 66 Saskatchewan, *Better Farming Commission*, 68-9.
- 67 The *Eastend Enterprise* indicated that many farmers who came out to the BFC’s public hearings in that community “were disappointed, having attended under the impression that the idea of the meeting was to receive information instead of giving same.” The editor of that newspaper even feared that the BFC had left thinking that the district was “on the verge of starvation.” He cited an example where “...two of our farmers were asked if they had made any success of farming; one replied that he had managed to keep the wolf from the door, and the other that he had managed to get sufficient to eat. The commission [sic] were probably led to believe that these men lead a hand to mouth existence. Another man had a tale of woe and explained that he had tried dairying and failed; had tried grain growing and failed and had even tried three weeks at raising sheep and finally decided that none of these classes of farming were successful. One man thought that sweet clover was a failure and had even sown some while the snow was on the ground without getting results. Generally, farmers are not communicative in regards to their successes, and we venture to think that had the sitting been more fully advertised and more time given the farmers to explain their methods instead of holding them down to concrete answers to questions, more information would have been elicited and the commission more fully fulfilled its purpose” [*Eastend Enterprise*, 21 October 1920, 1, 4].
- 68 Saskatchewan, *Better Farming Commission*, 50-51.
- 69 Ibid., 55, 58.
- 70 Alberta, *A Report on the Rehabilitation...*, 38. Statistics calculated from Canada, *Census of Saskatchewan, 1921* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1922), 256-60.
- 71 In 1920, the Dominion Lands agent for Moose Jaw informed the press that “homestead lands south of the South Saskatchewan River are practically exhausted” [*Saskatchewan Farmer*, June 1920, 13].
- 72 In the Maple Creek/Richmond area, for example, average land prices rose from \$2.85 per acre in the period 1907-11 to \$15.75 per acre in the period 1917-21; prices at Medicine Hat even reached \$24 an acre—on par with land values in the Aspen Parkland of east-central Saskatchewan (land values in Census District 5 in 1921 were \$24.99 per acre). Land values are calculated by dividing the total value of land by the total area of occupied farms in a given census district [R.W. Murchie, *Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1936), 270; Canada, *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921: Vol. V—Agriculture* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1925), 122].
- 73 Total leased acreage in the province in 1921 was over 3 million acres Kai-iu Fung, ed., *Atlas of Saskatchewan, Second Edition* (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 1999), 65; Saskatchewan, *Better Farming Commission*, 37.
- 74 The Gordon, Ironsides and Fares Company of Winnipeg, for example, held a million acres north of Piapot as well as a 250,000 acre lease near the Frenchman River in 1921 [SAB, Ag. Papers, R-261, File #23.12, A.J. Unsworth to F.H. Auld, 14 January 1921; D.M. Loveridge and Barry Potyondi, *From Wood Mountain to the Whitemud: A Historical Survey of the Grasslands National Park Area* (Parks Canada: National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, 1983), 137].
- 75 *Saskatchewan Farmer*, September 1920, 17; SAB, R-184, File #2.1, *Conference Report*, 171.
- 76 In September 1920, Hugh McKellar, the secretary of the SSGA, wrote to C.M. Hamilton reminding him that a typical rancher knew “the value of rough lands and deep ravines for pasture perhaps better than any professional agriculturalist” [SAB, Hamilton Papers, M-13, File #10, Hugh McKellar to C.M. Hamilton, 2 September 1920; F.H. Auld to Jack Byers, 9 September 1920].
- 77 SAB, Ag. Papers, R-261, File #23.13, F.H. Auld to W.W. Cory (Deputy Minister of the Interior), 13 August 1920.
- 78 Saskatchewan, *Better Farming Commission*, 12; SAB, “Report of Sub-Committee [on Grazing Lands]...,” 1-5.
- 79 Alberta, *A Report on the Rehabilitation...*, 39.
- 80 Canada, *Sessional Papers*, Vol. XLV, 1 George V. A. 1911, No. 25, 24.
- 81 The advantages of having a closely settled and well organized community with good roads, schools, churches, telephones, hospitals, etc., requires no elaboration, as it can easily be seen that these conveniences and their efficiency are likely to be greater in a closely settled area than in a sparsely settled community, while the cost of maintenance would be less [Saskatchewan, *Better Farming Commission*, 41].
- 82 Ibid., 42.
- 83 Ibid., 15-16.
- 84 In 1911, the Saskatchewan government surveyed the main sources of domestic water supply around the province on behalf of the federal government. The results showed that

- "wells form the chief source of supply;" water obtained from springs, creeks and sloughs formed the second most important source; and some farmers with greater financial means excavated their own dugouts. In areas where water could not be conveniently secured through the above means, the provincial Department of Public Works built dams in coulees and natural water courses and excavated reservoirs to trap run-off [Saskatchewan, *Agriculture Report*, 1911, 67-72].
- 85 Lewis H. Thomas, "The Search for Water on the Canadian Plains" *Saskatchewan History* Vol. 1, No. 1 (1948), 4-5; Northwest Territories, *Department of Public Works Annual Report, 1899* (J.A. Reid, Queen's Printer, 1900), 34-35.
- 86 Saskatchewan's Department of Public Works maintained the test auger program until 1912 when it was transferred to the RMs. Though many settlers undoubtedly benefited from the provision of test augers and other supplies for the establishment of wells, the Department's report for 1910-11 indicated that the program had become a "considerable inconvenience." A number of private firms had set up well drilling operations in the province and it saw no need to compete with them [Saskatchewan, *Department of Public Works, Annual Report, 1910-11* (Regina: Government Printer, 1911), 72].
- 87 Saskatchewan, *Better Farming Commission*, 15-16.
- 88 A number of major rivers emanating from the Rocky Mountains' eastern slope make large parts of southern Alberta well adapted to large scale irrigation, and private interests had established irrigation works adjacent to these in the 1880s [Morton and Martin, 114-15].
- 89 Canada, Department of the Interior, *Report on Irrigation Surveys and Inspections, 1916-17* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1917), 18, 68-72.
- 90 E. Alyn Mitchner, "William Pearce and Federal Government Activity in the West" *Canadian Public Administration* Vol. 10 (1967), 240-42.
- 91 Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 10 Geo. V, No. 25, A. 1920, 3.
- 92 Ibid., 12 Geo. V, No. 25, A. 1922, 3.
- 93 SAB, R-184, File #2.1, *Conference Report*, 168.
- 94 SAB, Ag. Papers, R-261, File #23.11, Thos. Lannan to F.H. Auld, 15 July 1921.
- 95 SAB, W.M. Martin [hereafter Martin] Papers, R-7.2, Reel #25, A.W. Last to W.M. Martin, 14 July 1920, 39545.
- 96 A spokesman for the RM of Cymri—located on the eastern fringes of the BFC's study area—had written to F.H. Auld in October 1920 stating that his area had suffered five consecutive crop failures so far. He added that "[m]any farmers are leaving, principally tenants, although a number of owners are also leaving, mostly for the United States, and these will naturally bring bad tidings to their new locations, to the detriment of the province. There are a number of farms vacant, with no prospect of getting them worked next season, and it is to be feared that there will be a great number more vacated...It is the belief of the Council that the Better Farming Commission which has investigated like conditions in other parts of the province, could be of material assistance by investigating conditions as they exist here and help to find a remedy as well as by giving the community the benefit of what they have already learned" [SAB, Ag. Papers, R-261, File #23.12, S. Molberg to F.H. Auld, 27 October 1920].
- 97 Ibid., Thomas Rennie to F.H. Auld, 21 November 1920.
- 98 Saskatchewan, *Agriculture Report*, 1920, 9.
- 99 SAB, Hamilton Papers, M-13, File #10, Alex E. Cumming to C.M. Hamilton, 10 June 1920; John Hodges to C.M. Hamilton, 14 September 1920.
- 100 Saskatchewan, *Better Farming Commission*, 15.
- 101 SAB, "Report of Sub-Committee [on Grazing Lands]..." 1.
- 102 Ibid., 40.
- 103 Saskatchewan, *Better Farming Commission*, 44.
- 104 SAB, Hamilton Papers, M-13, File #10, C.M. Hamilton to J.H. Mitchell (Secretary of the Prince Albert Board of Trade), 21 May 1921.
- 105 Saskatchewan, *Better Farming Commission*, 43-44.
- 106 Ibid., 43.
- 107 D.M. Loveridge and Barry Potyondi, *From Wood Mountain to the Whitemud: An Historical Survey of the Grasslands National Park Area* (Parks Canada: National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, 1983), 143; Saskatchewan, *Final Report of the Live Stock Commission of the Province of Saskatchewan, 1918* (Regina: King's Printer, 1918), 15.
- 108 Saskatchewan, *Better Farming Commission*, 38.
- 109 SAB, R-184, File #2.1, *Conference Report*, 132-40.
- 110 Albert Z. Guttenberg, "The Land Utilization Movement of the 1920s" *Agricultural History* Vol. 50, No. 3 (July 1976), 483-84; P.S. Lovejoy, "Theory and Practice in Land Classification" *Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (April 1925), 167-75.
- 111 J.A. McKeague and P.C. Stobbe, *History of Soil Survey in Canada, 1914-1975* (Ottawa: Canada Department of Agriculture, Historical Series No. 11, 1978), 7-8.
- 112 Moss, 1; SAB, R-184, File #2.1, *Conference Report*, 21.
- 113 Roy Hansen—who was trained at the University of Illinois before joining the faculty of the SCA—made explicit reference to the positive results obtained from soil survey work in that state in an address to the Better Farming Conference [SAB, R-184, File #2.1, *Conference Report*, 132-40].
- 114 Saskatchewan, *Better Farming Commission*, 44.
- 115 Ibid., 49.
- 116 Alberta's drought area study—also known as the Southern Alberta Survey—was published in January 1922. It made reference to the "...valuable assistance made available in the Report of the Inquiry into Farming Conditions in Saskatchewan..." in its acknowledgements page. Its recommendations generally followed those of the BFC's, including summerfallow substitutes to control soil drifting, mixed farming, community pastures, soil surveys, agricultural representatives and relocation of settlers. However, the Alberta report featured more a lengthy discussion on irrigation, largely because of the relatively strong potential for large-scale irrigation development in southern Alberta. It also devoted significant attention to the worsening problem of debt among farmers, school districts and rural municipal governments in the Alberta Dry Belt. The province would act on its recommendations by passing the *Drought Relief Act* in 1922, succeeded by the *Debt Adjustment Act* the next year [Alberta, *Report of the Survey Board for Southern Alberta* (Edmonton: Government Printer, January 1922); Gregory P. Marchildon, "Institutional Adaptation to Drought and the Special Areas of Alberta", *Prairie Forum*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Fall 2007), 258].

Footnotes continued on page 44.

Indigenous Paradigms, Rankean Conventions and the Quest for a Post-Colonial Saskatchewan History. A Brief Review of Selected Local Indigenous Written Scholarship.

By Michael Cottrell

In his recent book, *Research Is Ceremony. Indigenous Research Methods*, Shawn Wilson, a young Cree scholar from the Opaskayak First Nation in northern Manitoba, articulates his understanding of what he terms an *Indigenous research paradigm* and an *Indigenous research methodology*. By comparing the philosophical practices of Prairie, especially Cree, First Nations with Aboriginal peoples in Australia, Wilson argues that both Indigenous groups share some fundamental beliefs about learning and research that stem from similarities in worldviews, cultures and historical experiences. He then proceeds to outline the main features of the research traditions and philosophies subscribed to by both of these groups. Readers will encounter some jargon as Wilson wrestles with complex academic constructs such as *ontology*, *axiology*, *epistemology*, *EuroAmerican ethnocentricity* and *relational accountability*.¹ Since historians are notoriously shy of abstract discussions of theory and methodology, this is a lexiconography that social scientists are much more likely to be comfortable with.

Nevertheless, Wilson's work is a rewarding read and his ideas have very significant implications for anybody interested in studying and writing about the history of Saskatchewan. Many of his conclusions echo arguments advanced by other local Indigenous scholars about the need for non-Native popular and academic historians to acknowledge the existence of an alternative Indigenous version of the history of Saskatchewan. Further, they argue that the persistence within Saskatchewan First Nations cultures of an entirely different philosophical understanding, interpretive framework and methodology governing how history is understood, constructed and transmitted, needs to be

recognized within the academy.² This dialogue reflects broader national and international discourse around issues of knowledge construction and representation within a context of decolonization, as many English-speaking settler societies come to terms with the legacies of their colonizing past, and are required to establish new relationships and chart new futures with often-burgeoning Indigenous populations.

In engaging the main features of Wilson's argument, this brief commentary is offered as an attempt to encourage respectful dialogue on the implications of the intersection of Western and Indigenous historiographies for understanding and writing about the history of Saskatchewan. I consider how ideas presented in Wilson's text align with other Indigenous scholars' writings on the representation of Indigenous peoples in the written history of Saskatchewan. I then assess how these views disrupt some very fundamental Rankean norms about what constitutes both history and the appropriate methodologies for recording and transmitting aspects of the past: norms which continue to inform most current popular and academic writing on Saskatchewan history. I conclude with a brief consideration of how engagement with Indigenous historiography by non-Native academic and popular historians and a greater willingness to adopt a comparative perspective on our own local history can challenge and compliment conventional empiricist methodologies and broaden what has often been an excessively parochial historical lens, constrained by

Dr. Michael Cottrell is the resident history and Distance Education Coordinator at the Indian Teacher Education Program (I.T.E.P.). His research interests are the history of the Irish Diaspora and the history of Native-Newcomer relations in Canada

the province's boundaries. The result would likely be a deeper and richer tapestry, conveying a more balanced, inclusive, exciting, colourful, interdisciplinary and genuinely postcolonial version of Saskatchewan's history.

Local Indigenous history was (and remains) primarily an oral construct, but there also exists a long tradition of Native people committing their version of Saskatchewan history to writing. One of the first such enterprises was Edward Ahenakew's *Voices of the Plains Cree*, written originally in 1923. An Anglican Minister from Athabasca First Nation, Ahenakew felt that "...the time has come in the history of my race when that which has been like a sealed book to the masses of our Canadian counterparts-namely the view that Indians have about certain matters affecting their lives- should be known."³ He dedicated the first half of the book to recounting traditional Cree stories told to him by Chief Thunderchild and in the second half assumed the voice of *Old Keyam*, to comment on the experiences of Saskatchewan Native people adjusting to reserve life in the early twentieth century. This tradition of Indigenous people presenting their version of local history in writing was continued in a variety of different narratives by Eleanor Brass, Dan Kennedy, Stan Cuthand, Freda Ahenakew, Maria Campbell, Howard Adams, Jean Goodwill and Harold Lerat, amongst others.⁴ Reflecting educational advances and an increase in the number of Aboriginal people attending post-secondary institutions, some of the more recent contributions to this genre are being produced by professional academics such as Blair Stonechild, Winona Wheeler, Neal McLeod, Robert Innes, Brenda MacDougall, Willie Ermine, Terrance Pelletier, Ron Laliberte, Patricia Dieter, Harold Johnson and Leo Omani, to name but a few.⁵ Many of these are strongly influenced by the post-modernist trends and assumptions shaping academic discourse since the 1990's and, broadly speaking, many subscribe to post-colonialist theories and agendas.⁶ As Neal McLeod states:

Understanding Treaty Six (from an Indigenous perspective) is important, but not merely as an abstract academic exercise. It is important in order to come to terms with the moral foundations of Canada.⁷

Although the texts identified here vary widely in style, focus and content, all in some fashion illustrate Wilson's central argument that for Indigenous people principles of *relationality* and *relational accountability* underpin all efforts to understand the universe and

attain knowledge.⁸ "Relationships do not merely shape reality, they are reality," Wilson insists, and the relationality that he sees at the heart of all Indigenous epistemology is multi-dimensional.⁹ It often involves an overt statement of positionality or situationality in describing the relationship between the researcher and the material being researched. This forceful articulation of researcher or author positionality is one of the key characteristics of Indigenous historiography, and is mandated by the need to ensure what Wilson calls 'relational accountability.'¹⁰

Most Indigenous historians employ a self-consciously emic approach to the task of exploring and reconstructing the past and they privilege oral communication, personal relationships, insider perspectives, intuition and subjectivity as valid means to achieve understanding and insight. In doing so they clearly reject Rankean notions of objectivity derived from the positivist paradigm which see the researcher and the data being researched as value neutral and which further insists that objectivity is critical to comprehension. Nor do many of these Indigenous histories conform exactly to the standards of objectivity, testability, causation or precision in form and chronology that define conventional Rankean historical methodology.¹¹

Indigenous relationality also applies to methods of data collection and Wilson's directives on the importance of respectful research techniques, especially in the collection of oral history and testimony, is echoed in many other texts, from Edward Ahenakew's payment of Chief Thunderchild for his sharing of the traditional stories that comprise the first section of *Voices of the Plains Cree*, to Wheeler's argument that "social relations" are at the heart of Cree historical methodology.¹² Relationality also applies to Indigenous ways of understanding how human beings interact, prompting Wilson and others to describe their history essentially as the unfolding of a relationship between themselves and with non-Native peoples. In the Cree world, according to Wheeler, "everyone's personal, family and regional histories interconnect and overlap; all are extensions of the past, and all are grounded in wahkotowin *kinship/relations*."¹³

This concept of "history as relationships" is especially evident in Harold Johnson's view that the treaties involved a form of cross-cultural fostering or adoption, in which non-Aboriginal peoples became *kiciwamanawak* or cousins of the First Nations living on the Plains and the northern boreal forests.¹⁴ Many of the texts further stretch Rankean norms by defying

rigid academic disciplinary boundaries. Indeed this tendency towards interdisciplinarity may also be seen as a distinguishing feature of most Indigenous historians and histories. Many of the accounts are semi autobiographical, have frequent interjections by multiple narrators or voices, include poetry, fiction and other creative pieces and often follow circular or cyclical rather than linear organizational and narrative structures.

Where Indigenous historiography departs most radically from Rankean notions of critical empirical inquiry, however, is in its insistence on a spiritual dimension both to the content of history and to the methods employed to access and understand that content. Wilson's assertion that *research is ceremony* speaks to arguments of other Cree scholars that history has both secular and spiritual dimensions which must be acknowledged. The Cree language according to Johnston, Wheeler and McLeod, has no word for *history* in the Western sense but rather consists of many different kinds of overlapping and related stories. These include *atayohkewina* or sacred stories of the mystical past and *kayas acimowina*, stories of long ago which, for example, see the negotiations leading to the signing of the Numbered Treaties as a process involving three parties: the First Nations, representatives of the Crown, and the Creator.¹⁵ And others caution against the temptation to compartmentalize or separate the two in order to demythologize the content and give it greater validity in the Western sense of historiography.¹⁶ Even more challenging from a secular, academic perspective is the insistence by some Indigenous scholars that participation in ceremonial activities, channelling of dreams and visions and the employment of other supernatural rituals to communicate with ancestors is a legitimate method for accessing knowledge and gaining understanding of the past.¹⁷ Arguments sounding suspiciously like essentialism, even racialism, which suggest that since the "experience of colonialism is essentially one of the body (as Cree people) we hold these experiences within us and pass this embodied memory through the generations," will also be difficult for conventional, secular, academic and popular historians, operating from empiricist rational and universalistic assumptions, to accept.¹⁸

Using Shawn Wilson's *Research Is Ceremony* as a starting point, this brief review has sought to highlight the existence of a tradition, dating back almost a century, whereby Indigenous people in Saskatchewan have employed the written medium to communicate their own

version of their history, with both Indigenous people and non-Native readers as the intended audience. The voices of these authors were always proud, were sometimes defiant and were occasionally tinged with despair as it seemed that demographics and the trajectory of history was flowing against them. As creators of a body of scholarship, however, these writers were critical in preserving an Indigenous understanding of the past and in providing what one contemporary scholar describes as "the basis for an anti-colonial political imagination that struggled to preserve the Indigenous political system and identity."¹⁹

Recent demographic and social changes have contributed to an increase in the numbers, visibility, power and influence of Indigenous people in Saskatchewan and beyond and have injected a new note of confidence in their assertion of the validity of their own version of history and their own methods of recording and transmitting that history. Indigenous scholars are becoming more vocal in challenging Eurocentric interpretations of Saskatchewan history and in critiquing the Rankean standards and conventions which, some claim, hinder or repress Indigenous scholars in expressing the traditional methods by which they retain and transmit their own history. As in other parts of the world where "colonial power relations gave rise to certain fields of knowledge...shifts in power relations in new times correspondingly give rise to new forms of knowledge."²⁰

Post-colonialism as an academic theory and as a demographic, political, cultural and social reality has clearly come to Saskatchewan and will have profound implications for the way in which Saskatchewan history will be written, taught, studied and understood in the near future. As part of the wider shift to incorporate Indigenous epistemology into educational curricula, academic historians are being challenged to initiate a more meaningful engagement with Indigenous historiography. K-12 curricula, undergraduate teaching and especially graduate programs will be required to accommodate Indigenous pedagogical approaches, methodologies, languages and schedules. A method will have to be found for according academic credential equivalency to Indigenous Elders and knowledge keepers within the academy and research methods classes which cultivate respectful oral research techniques and cross-cultural community relationships will have to be enhanced. Those who hold knowledge within Indigenous communities will also have to adjust to changing circumstances. At the very least they will be

required to demonstrate patience and kindness towards what may appear as seemingly ignorant and impertinent questions of inquiring non-Native graduate students. In doing so they will be called on to model the respectful relations that they insist are at the heart of Indigenous knowledge systems.

In preparing for these shifts Saskatchewan historians, regardless of cultural background, could benefit from the adoption of a larger comparative perspective on our own local history. To date what little comparative historical scholarship that has been done has focused largely on the American West, but Wilson makes a strong case for looking further afield.²¹ Part of the value of his work is his compelling argument for a comparison of Saskatchewan's local experience with various Australian regions since both are home to ancient Indigenous cultures and a more recent White settler population which arrived under the British flag. Another fruitful basis for comparison would be my own homeland of Ireland. The Irish experienced both sides of colonization; as a conquered and displaced Native population at home and as members of the broad White European charter group that effected the displacement and marginalization of Indigenous people in North America, including Saskatchewan.²² The fact that the Irish were also part of the Anglo-Celtic settler population in Australia allows for an analysis of large-scale transnational processes that affected many parts of the world, and allows for an analysis of aspects of Saskatchewan's history within this larger global context. Being mindful of these comparisons should also help us to avoid Australia's bitterly contentious *History Wars* and assist in the creation of a more inclusive, multifaceted, vibrant and compelling narrative of Saskatchewan's past in which the presence, experiences and contributions of all of the peoples who occupy this land, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, are equitably represented, reflected and celebrated.²³ It is incumbent upon all of us who are engaged in the pursuit of knowledge and truth to maintain good relations as we navigate our way through the exciting and challenging learning that lies ahead.

Endnotes

- 1 Wilson, S. *Research Is Ceremony Indigenous Research Methods* (Halifax and Winnipeg, Fernwood Publishing, 2008), p. 7, 9, 54.
- 2 See footnotes four and five below.
- 3 Ahenakew, E. *Voices of the Plains Cree*. Ruth M. Buck, ed, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1995), p.9.
- 4 Brass, E. *I Walk in Two Worlds*. (Calgary: Glenbow Museum,

1987), Kennedy, D. and Stevens, J.R. *Recollections of an Assiniboine Chief* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), Campbell, M. *Halfbreed* ((Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), Adams, H. *Prison of Grass. Canada from a Native Point of View*. (Toronto: New Press, 1975), Ahenakew, F. *Stories of the House People. Cree Texts of Peter Vandall and Joe Duquette*. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1987). Lerat, H. *Treaty Promises, Indian Reality. Life On A Reserve* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2005). Sluman, N. and Goodwill, J. *John Tootoosis* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980).

- 5 See for example Stonechild, B. *The New Buffalo. The Struggle for Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006), Wheeler, W. "Reflections on the Social Relations of Indigenous Oral History" in Ute Lischke and David T. McNab (eds) *Walking a Tightrope: Aboriginal People and their Representations* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 189-213, McLeod, N. *Cree Narrative Memory. From Treaties to Contemporary Times*. (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2007), Johnson, H. *Two Families. Treaties and Government*. (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2007), R. Innes and T. Pelletier.
- 6 Young, R. *Postcolonialism. An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001)
- 7 Neal McLeod "Rethinking Treaty Six in the Spirit of Mistahi Maskwa" *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, XIX 1999/1, 69-89. P71.
- 8 Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony*, p.7.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Gilbert, F. *History: Politics or Culture? Reflections on Ranke and Burckhardt* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990).
- 12 Ahenakew paid Chief Thunderchild \$5 for his stories. Wheeler recounted that Maria Campbell chopped wood, carried water and drove people for groceries to earn the right to receive a particular story, and in other cases paid for stories with gifts of blankets, tobacco and even a prize Arabian stallion. See Ahenakew *Voices of the Plains Cree*, P.1 and Wheeler, p.201 and 203.
- 13 Wheeler, "Social Relations" p.196.
- 14 Johnson, *Two Families* ,p.13.
- 15 McLeod, *Cree Narratives* p.11-18, Wheeler, "Social Relations" p. 201-202, Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan *Our Dream is that One Day Our People Will Be Recognized As Nations*.
- 16 Knight, H. "Preface". In *Earth Elder Stories: The Pinayzitt Path* by Alexander Wolfe. (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1988)
- 17 Fogelson, R.D. "The Ethnohistory of Events and Nonevents", *Ethnohistory* 36. 2 (1989): p.134-35.
- 18 McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory*. p.80.
- 19 Ibid, p.78.
- 20 McConnaghey, K. p. 201.
- 21 See, for example, P.N. Limerick 'The Adventures of the Frontier in the Twentieth Century' in J.R. Grossman, ed., *The Frontier in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

Footnotes continued on page 32

People and Places

The Life of Peter P. Verigin

By Kathy Morrell

In 1924, a bomb placed aboard the train on which he was travelling killed Peter Vasilevich (Lordly) Verigin, the leader of the Doukhobours. The perpetrator was never found. The loss of Peter Verigin's leadership was a tragedy. Divided in ideology and faced with public hostility,¹ the Doukhobours turned to Verigin's son, Peter Petrovich Verigin. The Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood (CCUB), the corporate name for the sect, found \$18,000 to finance his emigration from Russia. Some writers claimed the younger Verigin, reputed to be a hot headed drinker and gambler,² squandered the money before his departure.³ Others accepted that the new leader was forced to bribe his way out of Russian jails.⁴ In 1927, Peter Verigin II arrived in New York with \$500.

Peter P. Verigin was a fascinating figure in Saskatchewan history. He did much to benefit his people,⁵ but his involvement with the law tarnished the already negative opinion some Canadians held of the Doukhobours – an opinion based largely on the actions of the Sons of Freedom, a minority within the larger sect.⁶ During the 1930s, the trials involving Peter P. Verigin dominated the docket of the Yorkton Court House. The first involved a civil suit against George P. Chutskoff.

In 1928, Chutskoff purchased a quarter section of land for \$4000 from the CCUB on a deferred payment plan. Chutskoff claimed he had paid the debt in full. Verigin said that the final payment of \$1000 had never been paid and entered into a civil suit for non-payment of debt against Chutskoff. On November 18, 1931, the case was heard before Chief Justice Brown. The jury found for the defendant, George P. Chutskoff.⁷

On December 8, Verigin laid information with the police claiming Chutskoff had committed perjury during the civil trial and four days later gave a statement to Corporal William Ward of the Kamsack Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Chutskoff was arrested and

charged with perjury. Verigin arrived in Yorkton on January 26, 1932, to appear as a Crown witness at the preliminary hearing. As defence counsel for Chutskoff, John Alexander Macdonald Patrick submitted Verigin to a six-hour gruelling cross-examination. He forced him to admit that he had spent two years in Russian jails, been twice sentenced to death, and squandered the \$18,000 provided by Canadian Doukhobours for his immigration to Canada. In addition, Verigin said the Independent Doukhobours were responsible for the instances of arson in the Kamsack area. Concluding that the Crown had sufficient evidence to prove its case, Magistrate Alex Macdonald set a trial date for May and Chutskoff was released on \$1000 bail.⁸

In a game of tit for tat, Verigin was arrested while leaving the Court House – the charge: witness tampering.⁹ It was alleged that Verigin had threatened Wasil F. Konkin to “dissuade” him from testifying in the civil trial involving George Chutskoff. At his preliminary hearing before Police Magistrate Macdonald on February 16, the case was set over for the spring sitting of the Court of King's Bench in Yorkton. The major issue was the question of bail. The Crown opposed release on the grounds that Verigin was seeking to move his people to Mexico. As Doukhobour leader, he had access to the money of the CCUB to make the move to that country from which extradition was difficult. J.A.M. Patrick, Defence Counsel for Verigin, opposed, stating that to refuse release, to set

Kathy Morrell is a writer and playwright whose focus is on the portrayal of Canadian, provincial and local history. She has written the script for *Nellie McClung: A One "Person" Play* and produced three scripts for Haunts of Yorkton, historical walking tours of Yorkton's downtown. She has been a writer with Yorkton *This Week* and her work has been accepted for publication in *Folklore*, *Prairies North*, *Ghost Stories of Saskatchewan* and the *Leader Post*.

a heavy bail would amount to “persecution rather than prosecution.” Verigin was released on \$15,000 bail.¹⁰

The hearing was peculiar in the extreme! In January, one month earlier, J.A.M. Patrick had represented Chutskoff in his preliminary hearing on the perjury charge. In an amazing about-face, Patrick dropped Chutskoff to represent Verigin.

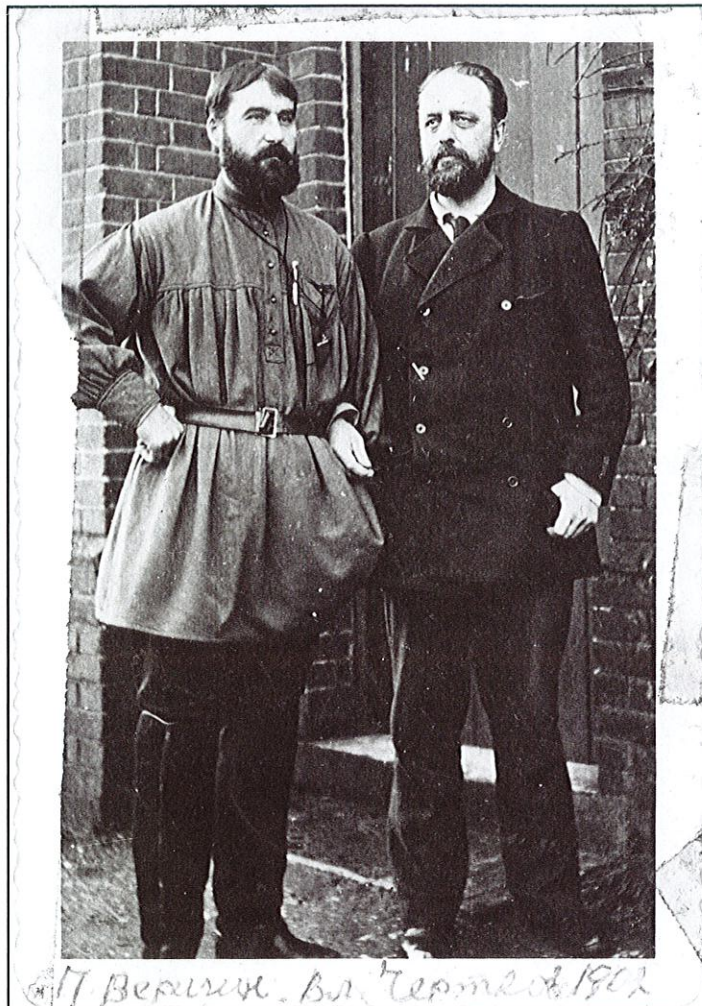
Verigin’s legal difficulties were to become more complicated. On Saturday, March 12 the Doukhobour leader again appeared before Police Magistrate Alex Macdonald. This time the charge was perjury. At Verigin’s preliminary hearing, the case was set over to the spring sitting as well. Bail was set at \$10,000.¹¹

The public was incensed. People discussed the leader’s deportation as a possible solution that might bring an end to the lawlessness they saw in Verigin and in the Doukhobour community. A delegation of Doukhobours met with the provincial cabinet to protest the rumoured plans for Verigin’s deportation.¹²

The week of May 1 fuelled the worries of an anxious Yorkton public. Six to seven hundred Doukhobours arrived in the area to witness the trial. In Brilliant, British Columbia on May 3, 117 community members participated in a nude parade. The citizens of Yorkton could not fathom, but feared such demonstrations in their own city. They felt that these people – or Bolsheviks as some called them¹³ – might set fire to their schools, their businesses, their homes. Rumours ran rampant. It was reported that court personnel had been placed under twenty-four-hour surveillance. Peter Verigin addressed his followers from the Doukhobour brickyard just north of Yorkton. Speculation was that the leader’s speech would lead to an uprising. The police called for reinforcements from Regina and Vancouver and deputized 50 Yorkton citizens.¹⁴

On May 3, 1932, George P. Chutskoff appeared in Court of King’s Bench on a charge of perjury. It was alleged that he had lied under oath in the civil case involving his non-payment of a debt to Verigin and the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood. The jury acquitted Chutskoff after deliberating for only thirty minutes.¹⁵

The Peter P. Verigin trial began the next day. Above the main courtroom presided Judge Maclean. To his right sat the twelve jurors. Their names were listed in the May 6 edition of *The Enterprise*, Yorkton’s newspaper. From today’s perspective, it is surprising that the names were printed at all. Not surprisingly, there were no women on the jury.¹⁶ Before the bar



Peter Vasilevich Verigin with Victor Chertkov in England following Verigin’s release from Siberian Exile, 1903
Saskatchewan Archives Board (S-B5446)

were two tables – one to the left for Crown Counsel F.C. Wilson, K.C. and W.J. McDonald; the second for the Defence – J.A.M. Patrick, K.C. and R.J. Pratt of Wadena. In the box stood the accused. Peter P. Verigin was an imposing figure, well over six feet tall. He was intelligent, educated in the Russian technical institute in Tiflis. He had a reputed weakness for gambling and vodka, a weakness compounded by a violent temper.¹⁷

The courtroom was packed. The case had attracted “the press throughout the world. Fifteen barristers including Peter G. Makaroff of Saskatoon viewed proceedings.”¹⁸ Makaroff, a Doukhobour lawyer, was later to represent Verigin in the appeal process.

Peter P. Verigin was charged with four counts of perjury. The Crown alleged he had lied during Chutskoff’s preliminary hearing. At that hearing, Verigin claimed he had been “in British Columbia from July of 1928 until March of 1929 continuously.”¹⁹ This claim accounted for two of the counts. Count



Peter Petrovich Verigin and his wife, Anastasia Holobovia
Saskatchewan Archives Board, (S-B5437)

number three related to a conversation on the evening of November 17, 1931. Verigin claimed that Nick Morosoff had hidden in a bedroom and overheard a conversation between George Podovinnokoff and himself. Judge Maclean was later to drop this charge prior to jury deliberations. The fourth was one related to Verigin's personal receipt of moneys from the Great West Assurance Company. Of the four counts, the first two relating to Verigin's domicile during the period 1928-29 proved to be the most crucial.

Verigin pled not guilty and the prosecution began the presentation of its case.

Crown Prosecutor F.C. Wilson called Paul M. Zaitzoff to the stand. He testified that Verigin had attended the wedding of his son, Paul P. Zaitzoff and Anastasia P. Verigin. The wedding occurred at his farm seven miles from the town of Veregin. Wasil Potapoff, the next Crown witness and another guest at the marriage, confirmed Zaitzoff's testimony. Wilson tendered the wedding certificate verifying the date of

the wedding – December 28, 1928, a date when Verigin claimed to be in British Columbia.

The next two witnesses were Dr. Boris Black of Veregin and Margaret Simpson, a nurse from Yorkton. Black testified that he had been called to attend to the accused at his Veregin home during the month of October 1928, that Verigin had been confined to his bed for a period of ten days. Miss Simpson provided nursing care from October 21st to 26th.²⁰

The evidence of Paul M. Zaitzoff, Wasil Potapoff, Dr. Boris Black, Nurse Margaret Simpson and George P. Chutskoff clearly refuted Verigin's statements that he had been in Brilliant during the period of time mentioned in the perjury charge.

Chutskoff appeared as a witness for the prosecution. In his testimony, he claimed that he had purchased the land in question and paid for it in full by November 1928. Patrick's cross-examination was a brutal attack on Chutskoff's credibility.²¹ The testimony underlined the animosity between Verigin and Chutskoff. Both Peter V. Verigin and his son, Peter P., had tried to bring the Independents back into the communal fold. Chutskoff, an Independent, had refused.

Wilson finished the case for the prosecution. J.A.M. Patrick stated the Defence would call no witnesses and proceeded to closing arguments. The Yorkton *Enterprise* stated:

Seldom, if ever, has a Yorkton jury listened to a finer oration than the one given by Mr. Patrick in his address to the jury on behalf of the Doukhobor leader.²²

Patrick began his closing address.

I concur in everything my learned friend says in his definition of perjury and we admit that Mr. Verigin did make certain statements at the preliminary inquiry of Chutskoff that were not entirely true to the letter, but as His Lordship will point out to you a false statement does not always constitute perjury. I contend that Mr. Verigin did not commit perjury in this case.

You, as a jury, find yourselves placed in a peculiar position. You are the sole judges of this case. Many long years ago, by a great charter, our forefathers secured for us the right to be tried by our peers and equals; hence we have a trial by jury.

I realize quite well that none of you men are biased in your opinions. You may have read certain things recently in the

newspapers concerning Doukhobors but I would ask you to divorce those thoughts and opinions from your minds...

Following his plea for impartiality, Patrick continued:

Let us consider the facts of this case in the true light and not in a camouflaged manner as my learned friend would have you believe. Mr. Verigin, the accused, found that Chutskoff owed him \$1,000. He asked Chutskoff for payment and he refused saying he did not owe any money. Mr. Verigin then began legal proceedings against Chutskoff. This case came up for hearing before Chief Justice Brown and Verigin lost the decision. Verigin held that Chutskoff had won the case by committing perjury and quite properly laid an information. In due course of time the preliminary hearing of Chutskoff took place and Mr. Verigin was submitted to lengthy examination. He was asked to recall certain transactions that took place three and four years before. In giving the evidence he may have slipped a little but what man among you could tell just where he was or what he did two or three years ago today."²³

Patrick continued saying that Verigin was a very busy man, the head of a corporation worth \$6,000,000, a corporate executive (if you will) who often travelled to New York and Montreal. The defence further claimed that Chutskoff was most likely trying to get out of paying the \$1,000 debt. Verigin was a wealthy man; why would he claim that \$1,000 had not been paid when it had? In addition, Chutskoff's story was ridiculous. Under cross-examination, he had told the Court that everyone except himself was a liar. In concluding, Patrick asked the jury to weigh all the evidence. If in their considerations, the jury had doubts as to Mr. Verigin's guilt, they must find the defendant not guilty.²⁴

Mr. Wilson's closing address was a seventy-minute review of the case. The prosecution stated that Verigin admitted he had many times repeated the statement regarding his continuous presence in British Columbia. Wilson claimed that Verigin had made the statement in order to deceive, to lead the Court to believe that he could not have received payment of the debt because he was not in Saskatchewan. The testimony of Dr. Black, Margaret Simpson, Paul Zaitzoff, Wasil Potapoff and George Chutskoff proved Verigin's statement false. Wilson concluded:

Gentlemen of the jury, this case might at

first seem a trifling thing to you but when you consider the seriousness of perjury, I am sure you will consider it a very grave offence indeed. The accused stands charged with an offence that strikes at the very roots of justice. Perjury is a serious offence between man and his Maker. The serious feature about this case is that if perjury is to go unchallenged it will become impossible to administer justice in our courts. If you consider all the evidence before you, I am convinced you can arrive at no other verdict but that the accused concocted this vile and false tale for no other purpose but to secure a conviction against Chutskoff and if that is so he is guilty of perjury.²⁵

The jury retired at 12:40 p.m. and returned their guilty verdict at 3:35 P.M. Court adjourned until the following morning for sentencing.

At the sentencing hearing, Patrick made an impassioned plea for leniency. However his pleas fell on the deaf ears of the judge. Maclean stated:

Verigin, you have been found guilty by the jury on the evidence which to my mind fully justifies their verdict. That evidence shows that your conduct was deliberate, very much so; that from the time you laid the information on the 8th of December until the 28th of January at least you were pursuing a course which was with the view of having one of your country men convicted of a serious offence which probably would end in the penitentiary or in gaol.

... You knew quite well what you were doing and I want to remind you of the statement you gave Corporal Ward yourself when you said: "I am appealing to the Canadian government as president and leader of the Doukhobours, on behalf of all Doukhobours, to punish severely whoever commits a breach of Canadian laws, particularly the law which prohibits the taking of a false oath and mislead a court of justice, and I promise in addition to this man Chutskoff, if I find any of the Doukhobours that have committed any offence, I will report them to proper authorities." So you realized yourself how serious it is to commit the crime of perjury and mislead the courts and thereby help to undermine the administration of justice which depends finally on the matter of witnesses telling the truth, whether they affirmed or swore to do so. The crime is too serious to be passed over lightly... The

sentence of the court is that you be confined in the penitentiary at Prince Albert for three years.²⁶

The second criminal charge, witness tampering, was dropped.

The Yorkton *Enterprise* reported: "Mr. Verigin and his 700 followers who came to Yorkton to be present for the hearings took the verdict in good sporting manner and none of the demonstrations which the police had feared and which the scare-mongers had promised materialized."²⁷ The citizens of Yorkton could rest easy – the Doukhobours were after all "good sports!"

Members of the CCUB returned to their farms talking once again of persecution. They sent petitions to the provincial and federal governments calling for their leader's release. Meanwhile, Verigin and his lieutenants met in the visiting room at the Prince Albert Penitentiary to direct the on-going affairs of the Community.

The Yorkton *Enterprise* may well have been premature in its description of the Doukhobour "sporting" reaction to the verdict. The sport turned to anger in the Canora area where the Sons of Freedom staged a nude parade. Forty-nine were arrested and jailed. Fire destroyed four schools and buildings on the farm of George and Alex Gazakoff. Police Magistrate Alexander Macdonald sentenced four of the nude demonstrators to three years in jail at the Prince Albert Penitentiary, while eight others were to serve periods of two years less a day or sixty days in the Regina jail. Many complained that they had not been sent to Piers Island where their British Columbia brethren were serving terms for similar offences. As for the women, the sentences ranged from a year and half to two days in Saskatchewan institutions. Young Fanny Derhousoff, who "had given the police no end of trouble", was turned over to the Department of Child Protection.²⁸

Peter G. Makaroff, a Doukhobour lawyer from Saskatoon, appealed both the verdict and sentence to the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal. The appeal against the conviction was dismissed. The sentence, however, was reduced from three years to eighteen months.²⁹

Verigin was not a willing participant in his next foray into Canada's justice system. Near the end of January, 1933 Verigin's sentence was pardoned by the Governor-General and he was whisked onto a train for Halifax.³⁰ His request to speak to counsel was denied. Makaroff, notified of his client's sudden departure, contacted the vice-presidents of the CCUB, Joseph Shukin at Brilliant and Mike Cazakoff at

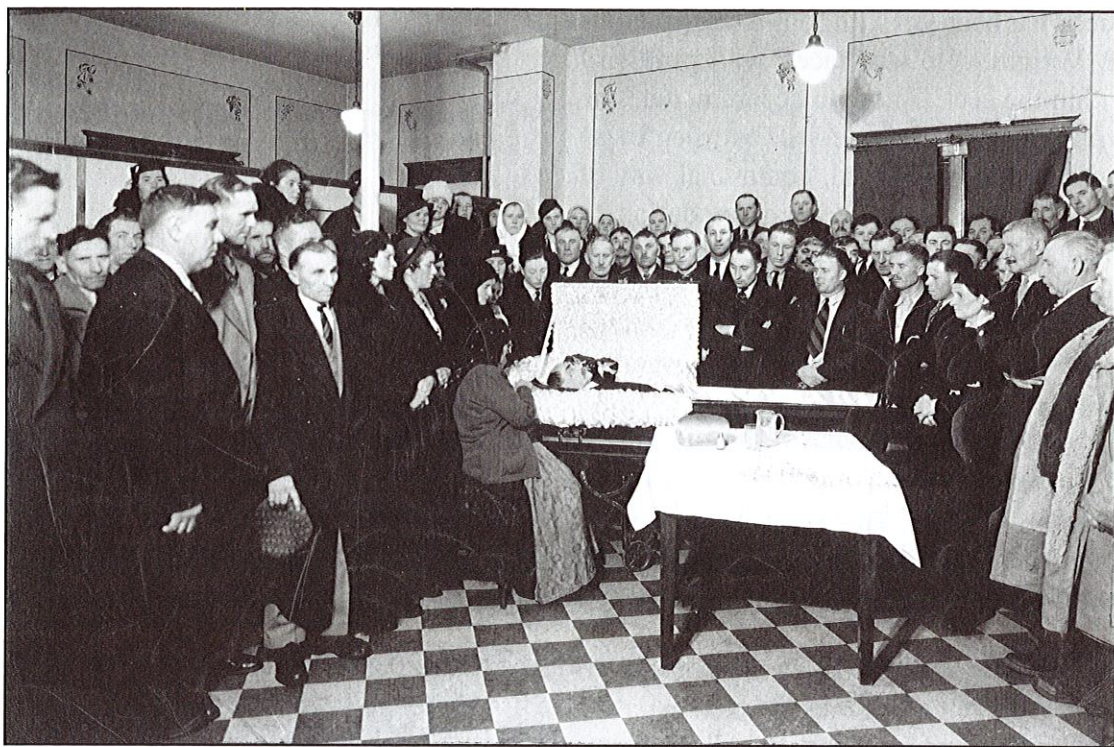
Veregin. He phoned Prime Minister Bennett and Minister of Immigration, Wesley Gordon, requesting that Verigin be held at Winnipeg so that he could offer legal advice. Makaroff's requests were denied. Fearing Verigin's deportation, Makaroff and the leader's personal secretary, Semeon Reibin, flew to Boston, met with Shukin and then made their way to Halifax the night before Verigin's planned deportation. Lawyers Lionel Ryan and Peter Makaroff appeared in a Halifax courtroom that morning. The argument was simple. If Verigin had been pardoned, he was free. If not, he should be still serving his sentence in Prince Albert. In any case, the authorities had not shown cause for his deportation. Judge Mellish ordered that Verigin be held until immigration authorities showed reason for his detention. Makaroff and Shukin went to Ottawa to appeal the deportation order before the Minister of Immigration. On February 26th, Verigin was released. He had been pardoned. There was no such thing as a pardon for the purpose of deportation.³¹ Such bureaucratic tactics simply led to an increase of Doukhobour mistrust of government.³²

Peter P. Verigin was a man of contradictions. Many Doukhobours regarded him with a fanatical devotion that declared the man could do no wrong. J.G. Bondoreff, secretary of the Doukhobours of Canada, stated in the May 10th edition of the Yorkton *Enterprise* that Verigin had liquidated debts through loan subscriptions, debts largely incurred by the expansionist ambitions of his father. By 1938, he had paid off \$704,243 of the debt of \$1,202,000, \$543,661 in interest and \$301,949 in taxes. This was no small feat given that these payments came during the depression of the 1930s.³³

In 1928, Verigin organized an umbrella organization, the Society of Named Doukhobours, bringing the Independents back into the fold. He organized libraries, built meeting houses and advocated education and adherence to Canadian law. As a result of his work John Bondoreff proclaimed the "Doukhobours awakened and realized they were saved."³⁴

Verigin's negative reputation, however, continued with his on-going forays into the justice system. In 1933, he ordered Makaroff to sue his Yorkton counsel, J.A.M. Patrick, claiming an overpayment of \$7,000 in legal fees. On April 28, 1933, Verigin dropped the suit.³⁵

That same year American Senator Joseph Hackney sued Verigin over a land deal. In 1930, seven Doukhobours had traveled to Mexico at the Senator's



The Funeral of Peter P. Verigin in Saskatoon, February 12th, 1939.
Saskatchewan Archives Board, (S-B5461)

expense to view land on which Hackney held an option. The Community was looking to move the colony south. When the Doukhobours decided not to purchase the land, the Senator initiated his lawsuit for the total sum of the land purchase, \$750,000. After five years, the case was heard before Judge Embury at Court of King's Bench in Yorkton. The judgement awarded Hackney \$11,300, the sums he had advanced for travel. However, Hackney was ordered to pay the general costs of the case, meaning the speculator in fact received no compensation from the lawsuit.³⁶

In 1933, Nelson police were called to the Savoy Hotel as a drunken Verigin proceeded to smash beer glasses. Constable Bob Harshaw asked the man to come outside and talk. Verigin called the officer a "son of a bitch" and hit him in the chest. The Constable put him in a headlock, then handcuffed and jailed him. Verigin was found guilty of being drunk in a public place, sentenced to three months in jail, and fined twenty-five dollars.³⁷

In 1934, Verigin appeared in a Winnipeg courtroom charged with assaulting his interpreter, Fritz Ammeter. In his testimony, the "frail and pale-faced youth" stated that he had fainted after Verigin had hit him, stepped on his head and kicked him in the side. The bellboy, John Serychuk, then revived him by throwing water at him. Verigin hit the lad again and

the hotel employee dragged Ammeter from the room. Verigin was found guilty and sentenced to two months imprisonment in Headingly Jail. The sentence stood on appeal.³⁸

In 1937, Verigin attempted to block the Nelson-Castlegar highway and forced Alfred Erickson and his wife to stop five times on a difficult mountain road. The religious leader cursed the couple in English and Russian on each occasion. Magistrate West found Verigin guilty of vagrancy, sentenced him to three months hard labour and a fine of \$75.15. West called on the Doukhobour leader to set a better example for his people.³⁹ Peter Makaroff, his former lawyer and a prominent member of the Society of Independent Doukhobours, described Peter's actions as "typical of the man who is irresponsible, temperamental and subject to fits of temper."⁴⁰ In contrast, Joseph Shukin, vice-president of the CCUB, said he could not understand why Verigin had been arrested. In his opinion, it was all but a serious misunderstanding.⁴¹

Many Doukhobours shared Shukin's thinking. Verigin's ongoing legal problems were, in their opinion, but further proof of persecution. Many Orthodox Doukhobours clung to the basic tenet that the leader was to be treasured and obeyed. To judge Verigin irresponsible and temperamental was literally beyond belief.

The public has been left with conflicting opinions about Peter P. Verigin. He was faced with problems of division within the sect – how to accommodate the differences within the Doukhobour sect between those who wished to retain their isolated, communal way of life and those who wanted more accommodation to the wider Canadian community. He was faced with a depression that made the repayment of debt difficult. But more than these two factors, he was faced with his own limitations. He was an irascible leader who did not have the skills to lead his followers to adaptation with Canadian society.

On New Year's Day, 1939, Peter P. Verigin entered a Saskatoon hospital. Three infected ribs were removed. A month later, on February 11th, Verigin died of cancer of the liver and the stomach. He was buried beside his father in Brilliant, British Columbia.

Endnotes

- 1 Pierre Berton, *The Promised Land: Settling the West 1896-1914*, (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart) 1984, p. 42. In the first decade of the century, there came an ideological break between the Independents and the rest of the Doukhobour community. The Independents signed the Oath of Allegiance and claimed title to their land on an individual basis. The rest of the Doukhobour community saw the Oath of Allegiance as a renunciation of pacifism, a core part of their doctrine. In 1907, the more orthodox, 5000 in number, moved to the interior of British Columbia where they planned on maintaining their communal life style. The break between the Independents and those who made the trek west caused divisions over the next decades. The Canadian public were hostile to the Doukhobours, an hostility based largely on the nude demonstrations and arson charges against a Doukhobour minority, the Sons of Freedom.
- 2 June Calwood, *Emma, The True Story of Canada's Unlikely Spy*, (Toronto, Stoddart Publishing) 1984, p. 33.
- 3 "The Life of Peter Verigin, Doukhobor, Chieftain", *The Yorkton Enterprise*, May 10th, 1932, p. 3.
- 4 "Leader of Doukhobours Arrested in Yorkton Following Perjury Case", *The Yorkton Enterprise*, February 2nd, 1932, p. 1.
- 5 "The Life of Peter Verigin, Doukhobour Chieftain," Op. Cit. p. 3. Ibid. p. 1.
- 6 The Sons of Freedom held demonstrations during which they would shed their clothes. They were also held responsible for incidents of arson.
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- 8 Ibid.
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- 10 "Doukhobor Leader Remanded on \$15,000 Bail", *The Yorkton Enterprise*, February 10, 1932, p. 1.
- 11 "Verigin Arrested Sat. and is Released on Bail Set at \$10,000" *The Yorkton Enterprise*, March 15th, 1932, p. 1.
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- 18 "Doukhobour Leader Guilty of Perjury: Op. Cit. p.1.
- 19 Transcript of Rex v. Peter P. Verigin, Court of King's Bench, Yorkton, May 4, 1932, p. 4.
- 20 Ibid. Testimony of Black p. 45-49; testimony of Simpson p. 71.
- 21 Ibid. p. 66-71
- 22 "Doukhobor Leader Guilty of Perjury", Op. Cit. p. 6.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Transcript of Rex v. Peter P. Verigin, Op. Cit. p. 144-146.
- 27 "Doukhobor Leader Guilty of Perjury", Op. Cit., p. 1.
- 28 "Sask. Doukhobors in State of Confusion When Left Leaderless", *The Yorkton Enterprise*, August 23, 1932, p. 1.
- 29 Transcript of Rex v. Peter P. Verigin, p. 144 – 146.
- 30 John McLaren, "Wrestling Spirits, The Strange Case of Peter Verigin II", *Canadian Ethnic Studies Association*: 1995. See footnote #80.
- 31 J. F. C. Wright, *Alava Bohu, The Story of the Dukhobors*, (New York, Rarrar and Rinehart, Inc.) 1940, p.352.
- 32 John McLaren, Op. Cit. See footnote # 136.
- 33 "The Life of Peter Verigin, Doukhobor, Chieftain", *The Yorkton Enterprise*, May 10th, 1932, p. 3.
- 34 Ibid. p. 3.
- 35 J. F. C. Wright, Op. Cit. p. 394.
- 36 Ibid. p. 352.
- 37 Ibid. p. 358.
- 38 Ibid. p. 363.
- 39 Ibid. p. 394.
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- 41 Ibid. p. 395.

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“It’s a Secret, But...,”

The Early Journalism of Gladys Arnold

By Joanna Leach

Gladys Arnold, foreign correspondent for the Canadian Press (CP), was advised in 1940 that she was leaving the London office. She was to accompany, and report on, a group of children being sent to Canada for safety from the war in Europe.¹ Arnold had arrived in London five years earlier as a young reporter from the prairies, determined to make her mark as a journalist. She moved to Paris soon thereafter where she lived for four years, submitting articles with a “Canadian angle” to the CP’s Toronto office. In September 1939, when Paris fell to the German army, Gladys Arnold was the CP’s only accredited Canadian foreign correspondent to witness and record the events.² Nearly a year later, at the height of her career and deeply absorbed in world events as they unfolded, it was impossible for Arnold to accept that she was being sent home: “On the way [to the ship] I had taken a last look at London, ..., the only place in the world I wanted to be. How could I bear to be so far from the action?”³

Arnold overcame her disappointment and, for the next four years, worked tirelessly for the Free French Information Service in Canada, supporting the French Resistance movement.⁴ She was made a member of the French Legion of Honour in 1971 in recognition of her work for France.⁵ In her book, *One Woman’s War* (1987), Arnold described her work and life experiences during the Second World War. She was praised for presenting, “...one of the most valuable personal documents of the second world war.”⁶ It was *One Woman’s War*, and the documentary produced on Arnold’s wartime experiences, entitled *Eyewitness to War* (2002), that brought the journalist to the attention of historians.⁷

This article offers a different perspective on Gladys Arnold. It gives consideration to the opinions and attitudes of the journalist prior to her European experience, as revealed through the daily column she wrote for the Regina *Leader-Post* from January 1934 to August 1935.⁸ In her book, Arnold shared what she considered to be the most relevant experiences of her life as a journalist. By contrast, the column, entitled “It’s a Secret, But...,” was rarely mentioned by Arnold

and, for the first time, it is examined for what it reveals regarding the journalist’s character, her successes, and the society about which she wrote.

Arnold discussed numerous topics during her two years as a featured columnist on the women’s page of the *Leader-Post*. Health and beauty, fashion, and city news columns were followed by lengthy editorials on international political events, economic analysis, and social problems. The emphasis here is on the columnist’s opinions regarding women’s issues, both past and present. From her daily articles an image emerges of a young woman frustrated with the state of women’s economic, political and social status, who chose to raise awareness through her column. Arnold became increasingly willing to push the boundaries of traditional women’s page material as she worked to inspire in her readers a reformist spirit.

As a permanent part of most daily newspapers in Canada, the United States and Britain by the 1900s, the women’s page was inherently insulting in the presumption that women were either not interested in, or capable of understanding, the entire newspaper. It was, nevertheless, the opening female journalists needed to break through gender barriers ingrained in the industry, historically male-dominated and resistant to change. Women wrote for women on subjects presumably of interest...to women. Food, fashion, beauty and home-making were necessary elements of traditional women’s page, while men continued to cover the “real news,” - news that was reported as it happened on the weightier issues of the day.⁹

Gladys Arnold was twenty-nine years old when she first started writing “It’s a Secret, But...”. From childhood she had been determined to write professionally and travel, both of which were atypical for a woman in the 1920s. Restricted by gender based assumptions regarding their nature, their abilities and their social responsibilities, women of Arnold’s time

Joanna Leach is an alumnus of the University of Saskatchewan. She recently completed a Master’s degree in History at the University of Regina.



An undated photo of Gladys Arnold
University of Regina Archives and Special Collections (2007-42)

were generally predestined to a life of domesticity.¹⁰ For those women who wanted more, journalism was frequently thought to be the answer.¹¹ Travel, new opportunities, exciting people, and escaping the ordinariness of everyday life, were all thought to be glamorous aspects of the journalism experience.

However, as Marjory Lang, author of *Women Who Made the News*, remarked, “the gloss wore off,” and few women followed through on a journalism career before conforming to the customary path of marriage and motherhood.¹² The reality was that the odds of success for female journalists were minimal. Positions were limited,¹³ and competition by women with men for jobs still an unpopular concept.¹⁴ Further, many women believed that a journalism career and raising a family were mutually exclusive. Most were not so determined to report the news as to sacrifice their chance at mothering.¹⁵ Although appealing in the eyes of many, journalism appeared to be an unattainable goal except to the very few.

Gladys Arnold had little respect for social conventions and attitudes based on prejudice of any

kind. The idea of competing with men, and sharing their work environment, did not begin to dampen her enthusiasm for all that a journalism career offered. Her commitment to the written word, in all forms, was as deep as her passion for travel, and for Arnold there simply were no barriers that could prevent her from achieving her goals.¹⁶ Her conviction that a strong work ethic should and would be rewarded was as firm as her belief in the equality of all individuals.¹⁷

Although Arnold experimented with teaching and business school following her high school graduation in 1924,¹⁸ her insistence on not settling for anything less than what she wanted eventually paid off. In 1930, she “jumped at” the opportunity to work as secretary to the editor of the *Leader-Post*.¹⁹ Her hard work and perseverance opened up new opportunities at the newspaper and it was not long before Arnold was reporting different areas of the news, having earned the respect and friendship of her editor, Bob MacRae.²⁰ By 1934 Gladys Arnold not only published a daily column for the women’s page, but served as the section’s editor as well.²¹

Arnold wrote “It’s a Secret, But...,” under the pseudonym “Robin,” just as many female columnists adopted fictional names and personalities behind which to write. Some represented themselves as being exceptionally maternal or committed to traditional values, securing the adoration of their readers through conformity.²² Conversely, Arnold invented “Robin” to be a rigorous social critic. Considering her direct and straightforward approach to life in general, and her column in particular, her readers and editor seemed to grant her a great deal of freedom regarding the contents and tone of her columns. At times “Robin” scolded her readers, calling them names and pointing out their inadequacies, however, her rebukes seemed to be graciously tolerated as she cleverly endeared “Robin” to the readers of “It’s a Secret, But...” with her wonderful wit and sense of humor. Arnold was critical and outspoken, but she was also admired for her sense of honesty and fairness.²³ A reading of her personal papers, including letters and interviews, gives rise to the conclusion that “Robin” was essentially Gladys

Arnold reinvented as herself, her egalitarian and liberal views evident in both.

Although she wrote on traditional topics with professionalism and regularity, the journalist was clearly more interested in events and circumstances of global concern. She was well aware of the worldwide economic depression and the political unrest in Europe and she was adamant that her readers recognize the events shaping their future and that of their children. She was a commentator and a theorist, enthusiastically describing the social condition, without committing herself to any kind of action. Perhaps not surprisingly, Arnold was particularly distressed over the female condition, repeatedly bringing to her readers' attention the historical imbalance of power between the sexes, as well as the emerging opportunities for women to improve their social position.

Not only did women have a political voice by 1934, with suffrage granted less than 20 years prior,²⁴ but there were more jobs available for women as the labour market grew in response to the needs of a expanding economy, and higher education was increasingly becoming a viable option for women.²⁵ Arnold maintained that women's access to economic independence, and their united political voice, would be the catalyst for increased gender equality throughout all levels of society.²⁶ However, she had an underlying fear and resentment that some women would not take on the challenge, and from this seemed to grow her contempt for women in general. On those women she wrote, "She is guilty on at least two counts, her ignorance and indifference. She is ignorant of her own powers - and she is too indifferent to find out about them."²⁷

Arnold recognized that women had been socialized to accept the gendered allocation of social roles, and that rather than work to change the inequalities inherent in the system, most women tended to accept traditional and customary patterns.²⁸ The expectation for women of her day and age was marriage and motherhood and their lives were directed toward that end. Be it a focus on their appearance or social engagements, practicing mothering skills through child-minding or working at interim jobs, women were, "relentlessly directed ... to wedding vows, childbearing, and child rearing."²⁹ The cycle of financial dependence and lower social ranking was thus sustained, and Arnold wanted no part of it.

At twenty-five, the journalist knew she was different from most women her age in terms of ambitions, interests, and lifestyle.³⁰ She did not regard

her job as a stepping-stone toward marriage; she looked upon marriage as a threat to her career and her personal aspirations.³¹ Looking back on her life in 1987, she remembered her independence and that she could not, "bring [herself] to make a selfless commitment to one person for life."³² Nor could she have imagined, "living in one place forever when [her] consuming desire is for travel."³³ However, the journalist strongly believed in the rights of all people to make their own choices, and the freedom to pursue their goals without conditions.

Arnold grew up believing in the inherent equality of all people; people from all races, nationalities, religions, economic classes and genders were equal in her view and all deserved fair treatment as well as equal rights and opportunities: "I have no patience with stupid prejudices, wrangling about accents and voices and customs of food and clothing and living...Why not accept the differences as interesting - giving variety to life."³⁴ During her teaching days, she recalled teaching children from 15 different nationalities, and wrote, "It made me realize that people are all alike fundamentally - the same hopes and joys and sorrows..."³⁵ Arnold confirmed her personal belief in gender equality when she wrote,

[Women] have wasted much time during the past 100 years contending for or against rights for women. We have forgotten that men and women alike are human beings, equipped with emotions, hands, eyes, and brains...Let us prove that we have attained a sex maturity by no longer asking special distinction or praise - or segregation - because of biological differences.³⁶

At the same time she recognized that, for the most part, it did not exist: "Women - especially business women - are still paying the penalty of being born girls instead of boys...Take for instance, the salary discrimination that exists between men and women. In almost any line of business you care to mention where men and women are working side by side at the same jobs, women are paid less than men."³⁷ She was of the opinion that historically, women had not been given equal opportunity to excel in a role beyond that of wife and mother, and she was frustrated with the prejudices holding women back, her own ambitions obviously thwarted by gender discrimination.³⁸

Women occupied an inferior position in the workplace, in politics, and in the home, and Arnold theorized on the male advantage. In two of her columns from July 1934, she suggested that men had wisely foreseen the benefits of standing together in the face of

challenges to their power.³⁹ In order to malign women's attempts at bettering their condition, Arnold wrote that men had worked together to instill in women's minds certain ideas that propagated men's own superiority. By negatively characterizing women's behavior and creating hostile, divisive categories among women, the columnist generalized that "men" had prevented women from advancing.⁴⁰ She told her readers that men had convinced women to believe in the myth that "nice women" were everything that men were not. Curiously, she justified their approach as tolerable because their goal, that of maintaining their economic and political power, was admirable.⁴¹

As though determined to elicit a response from her readers, Arnold went on not only to admire men for their "astute use of psychology,"⁴² but to simultaneously accuse women of being responsible for their own historical demise. Women were "simpletons," she wrote on 6 July 1934, for accepting the double standard propagated by men.⁴³ As she pointed out, the same characteristics disparaged in women were qualities to be emulated in men. She implored her readers to understand the injustice of a situation where women were criticized for doing what men were praised for. Arnold concluded, "...women are such *dunderheads* that they swallow the stuff holus-bolus and are their own worst enemies. What a man says a woman emphasizes a hundred-fold."⁴⁴

In Arnold's opinion political action was the most effective, if not the only, means for women to rectify the inequities they faced. She did not seem to consider that without a serious restructuring of social attitudes, political action would accomplish little in terms of gender inequality. Rather, Arnold stressed that women must, on specific issues, "...manage to co-operate long enough without regard to party to decide what they expect their representatives to do - to put the question up to the candidates and refuse support unless the candidates promise to fight for such legislation..."⁴⁵ She believed that eventually women themselves would achieve greater political representation, thus ensuring that the female perspective would become an integral part of the decision-making process. In this way an effective and egalitarian government would replace the historically male political arena.⁴⁶

The columnist implored women to vote according to their own convictions, free from male influences, just as she encouraged them to choose their own paths in adulthood. For the most part she was open-minded regarding women's choices; those

who preferred a career were as honourable in Arnold's view as those who committed their lives to home and family.⁴⁷ Her support was based on the provision that each woman made the decision that was right for her, independent of social or familial influences.⁴⁸ While it was not surprising that, as a career woman herself, she supported women in the labour force, it was a greater indication of her sense of fairness and equality that she defended the homemaker in the face of criticism from working women.⁴⁹

Arnold's tolerance ended with women who dared criticize the decisions of others. She defended women who were accused by others of having their intelligence and creativity "blunted" by staying at home, just as she recoiled against the discrimination faced by single women.⁵⁰ For the "ambitious working woman..." Arnold explained to her readers, "...the words 'home and family' have a certain terror.... they suggest to her a cottage up to its eaves in mortgages with a deadly round of badgering the butcher... or getting worn and drawn and uninteresting."⁵¹ However, she took offense to the comment made that modern working women had no interest whatsoever in "making a home." She defended their cause, suggesting that a woman employed outside the home was still capable of enjoying homemaking in her free time. The columnist wanted it understood that the two were not mutually exclusive, or that one lifestyle was better than the other.⁵²

Arnold felt it was essential for women's individual choices to be respected by other women, and men, and she further believed that these choices needed to be validated by government and community. For example, she wanted it recognized that some women chose to remain single, due to lack of interest not opportunity. In this respect, she was fighting against traditional and customary behaviour. The "single working woman" was a relatively new concept in 1934.⁵³ While it had become acceptable for a young woman to work for a period after graduation, marriage was the eventual objective; it was a disgrace to end up an "old maid."⁵⁴

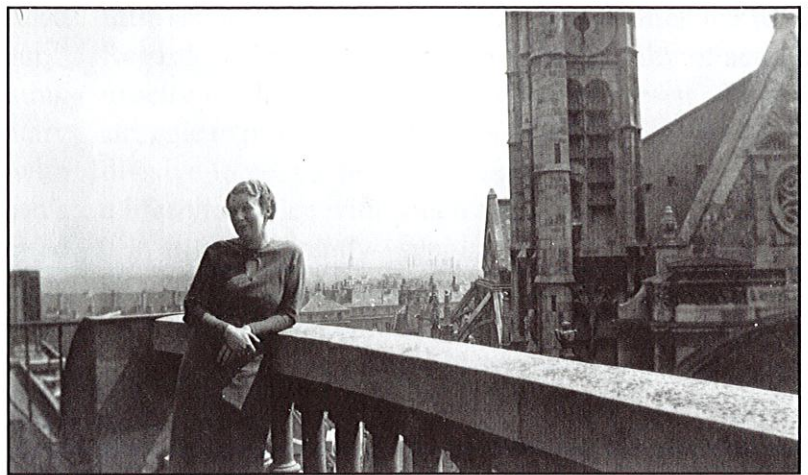
Arnold was pleased, therefore, when a court judge publicly recognized the monetary contribution working single women could and did make to the family struggling during times of economic depression. Although she included few details on the case, she quoted the judge as saying, "...during the entire period of financial distress the unmarried woman earning her own living has stood out like a star. I do not know what many a family would have done if it had not been for the

refuge from their problems - the old maid in the family.”⁵⁵ Arnold took the judge’s words as a positive sign for women’s progress and wrote, “It is possible that at last a little recognition and gratitude are to be given to the most downtrodden and unfortunate of their sex under the patriarchal rule of the last century.”⁵⁶ It was a reason, if a reason was indeed necessary, for society to accept and support the choice she and others made.

Arnold went on to point out to her readers that in a household where the single woman was not allowed to work outside the home because it reflected badly on the family, she was made to feel like a burden. A woman in that position was forced to perform the duties of cook, housekeeper and nursemaid, all the while being treated more as a liability than an asset.⁵⁷ She surmised that given the choice, the “old maid” would surely have opted for employment outside of the family home.⁵⁸ Arnold shrewdly considered the possibility that the misery of girls confined to their parents’ home was the catalyst for women overcoming their fear of the business world.⁵⁹

A month later Arnold published a letter from one of her readers who presented another view of the matter. The letter discussed all the reasons for young women to have marriage as their ultimate goal. It warned that unmarried women were destined to a life of servitude for deplorable wages, as well as being forced to live in constant fear of being replaced by someone younger. The author had no doubt that the single woman’s family would take her wages, since they would assume she had no life of her own and therefore no need of them. The letter concluded, “Life at 40 is a tragedy. My advice to girls is to marry - never mind who. If you can’t get the one you want, take the one you can get. [signed] ‘The Family Goat - a Spinster.’”⁶⁰

In a later column, Arnold presented a more hopeful picture. She called her readers’ attention to Vera Brittain’s *Testament of Youth*, in which the single working woman of mature years is portrayed in a positive light: “A woman who seeks a position at 30 is past the age when she is considering it as a stopgap between school and marriage. Her judgment is mature, she has poise, experience and is not likely to be carried away by impulsive enthusiasms.”⁶¹ The columnist was proficient at providing her audience every side of every issue and allowing for freedom of choice.



Gladys Arnold in Paris, 1936
University of Regina Archives and Special Collections, (2007-42)

Gladys Arnold did not support giving preference to women *because* they were women. She expected everyone to make their way in the world on the basis of merit, and merit alone. That this was not necessarily the way the world worked did not make it any less expected by Arnold, and she was almost disbelieving when she was not treated accordingly.⁶² She pointed out to her readers that when women were given advantages because of their gender it sustained their position on the margins; it confirmed that they could not pull their own weight and needed special consideration.⁶³

Women themselves have erected many of the barriers which act as a hindrance to economic development. We have taken a pride - a prudish, unhealthy pride - in the fact that certain projects are woman-managed. By calling attention to that fact, we announce that it is unusual for women to be capable.⁶⁴

Her equal rights feminism meant, for her, that the impediments to full and practical equality were primarily in women’s minds. Men and women were already equal, if different, and therefore equality should not, and could not, come as a gift from the patriarchy.

Arnold rejected the argument of maternal feminists, popular during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries with social reformers. While equality feminism was based on the similarities between the sexes, maternal feminism was built on the idea of woman’s uniqueness. It was her superior morality, purity, and nurturing gifts that made her particularly important in the governing of the nation. Arnold pointed out that it was this view that had historically denied women access to the public sphere, including the labour force.⁶⁵ The belief that, “women are an



Gladys Arnold in Paris, 1936
University of Regina Archives and Special Collections, (94-54)

inspiration, something to be set on a pedestal to be protected, admired and cared for by men,” had only served to keep women isolated from the institutions of power.⁶⁶

The columnist reminded her readers that when the economy had needed women to step forward as in times of war, performing the jobs they had previously been labeled as too fragile to handle, they had proven themselves capable. That women were not allowed to maintain their newly earned positions at war’s end was not due to their failure, but rather to the belief that men were the rightful wage earners. She insisted that women had been “hoodwinked,” given that they were only morally superior, pure, and innately nurturing when society did not need them to be otherwise.⁶⁷

Clearly, if women were going to think of themselves as equal to men, neither morally superior, nor maternally gifted to guide the nation, nor “too fine” for the public sphere as men would suggest, then women had to learn to think independently. Arnold did not want women to attend political meetings because they were told to by the men in their lives.⁶⁸ She did not want women to vote as directed by their husbands or fathers,⁶⁹ and she did not want women to live their lives as instructed.⁷⁰ Gladys Arnold consistently encouraged

women to think for themselves, to make their own decisions, and to reconsider customs and traditional beliefs that were detrimental to women’s progress. Using one particular example she knew of where several wives had acted according to their husbands’ lead she wrote, “... [they] have behaved like sheep and obediently followed in the footsteps of their lords and masters, thus deliberately admitting that they cannot think and decide for themselves.”⁷¹

In response to Arnold’s criticism, she received a letter that accused her of not understanding the relationship between a husband and wife:

Remember, Robin, it’s a man’s world and you can’t get away from it, however, much emancipated the women are. A husband can make it pretty unpleasant for a wife if she does something of which he doesn’t approve and it’s those little unpleasantnesses [*sic*] that are worse than a good “beating up.”⁷²

Arnold did not back down from her position. She suggested in a follow-up paragraph that women’s increased economic freedom should provide them with the autonomy to leave bad marriages or what she considered to be “tyrannies.”⁷³

Arnold had the further temerity to write, in reference to the “unpleasantnesses” that could occur

when a wife disregarded her husband, that she had trouble believing men were capable of such behaviour.⁷⁴ This was but one instance of Arnold's habit of coming to the defense of men in general. Even her commentary on men's stratagems to hold onto power was tinged with admiration. She seemed genuinely impressed at men's skill and intelligence, even when they were exercised to the detriment of women. In this respect, she was curiously lenient with the former and harsh toward her own sex. She respected men for their ability to maintain control for so long, while needling women for all the mistakes they had made.

Women had always been followers, according to Arnold, and they needed to "grow up" into their new role, presumably that of modernity and independence.⁷⁵ She suggested that in the past, while men acted as hunters and adventurers, women had nothing to do but "sit around and ... gossip."⁷⁶ She seemed to have a preconceived image of women throughout time that denied their part in the progress of humanity, apparently accepting the devaluation of women's work in the private sphere. As well, Arnold did not appear to put much value in women's potential, despite the fact that she railed at them to make use of it. In fact, she surmised that should they ever make advancements in the economic or political power institutions they would be ill-prepared to fill positions of leadership.

The columnist based her opinion on the actions of women who employed household help, anticipating female leadership to be comparable to a tyranny given that women who employed domestic servants acted as "petty tyrants over those who [held] minor positions."⁷⁷ She wondered, in fact, if "women would not be even greater tyrants than men ... if it would be safe to put ourselves at the mercy of women ... and if women could stand power without abusing it."⁷⁸ Arnold went on to accuse some members of the female sex to "deal in those subtle and refined cruelties that stunt the soul and drive fellow creatures to despair..."⁷⁹

Her condemnation was neither subtle nor refined. It was women who were not employed but had servants to manage the household that Arnold seemed to resent or, at least, habitually present in a negative light. They were the one group whose life choices she seemed unable to understand, let alone defend. If Arnold were jealous of their situation, of a life made easier by domestic help and prosperity, it would help to explain her hostility. However, she was more determined to travel than to marry, and certainly did not seem to value the acquisition of wealth, often spending what

little she had on experiences that would enrich her life. Regardless of her reasons, Arnold was guilty of acting exactly as she counseled her readers to resist. In her struggle to promote solidarity, she was in this instance a divisive force, unable to be wholly objective regarding a lifestyle choice with which she disapproved.

Intermittently supportive of some groups, Arnold was persistent and vocal with her criticisms of women in general. From "dunderheads" to "an army of 'yes' women" she really had very little positive to say about her readers. Women sat around and "gossiped," or behaved "tyrannically" toward their help. In spite of that, her readers supported her column for nearly two years. Perhaps they came to enjoy her candid observations on issues and social conditions that were relatively new. Suffrage, for example, had only been granted in Saskatchewan fifteen years before, and women were still in conflict over their proper roles. They had proven themselves during the war years, yet social opinion lagged behind. The "new woman" of the 1920s - white, independent, educated, and single - broke down some barriers,⁸⁰ but she was still governed by discriminatory attitudes as she found herself employed in low-wage, low-skill and therefore low-status jobs. Arnold's column, though contentious on occasion, was at least an attempt at an honest evaluation of the uncertain times.

Despite her theories, Arnold was young and inexperienced and her bias were evident, often writing with an attitude that suggested women could advance, just as she had, if they tried. Yet, to a certain degree Arnold was freer than most to ignore traditional ideas and move forward. She had no family responsibilities, no siblings to care for or parents who needed her support, and she had been forced into self-dependency early on. Although she suffered far more than a child should, she did grow into adulthood with a confidence that served her well. She had no doubt that she would move beyond the women's page and she did. However, gender inequities were deeply entrenched and not so easily overcome as she envisioned. Her frustration must have been overwhelming when she recognized, in 1940, that it was her gender that had earned her a trip home. Arnold wrote that, "It [was] the only time I was discriminated against as a woman journalist."⁸¹

Although she wrote for the women's page, Arnold's character did not reflect the principles upon which it was based. The columnist wrote with professionalism, respecting the requisites for her column, but she did not cater to preconceived notions of



Part of Gladys Arnold's column from the February 25th, 1934, edition of the
Regina Leader Post.
Author's Collection

women's interests or gender-prescribed roles. Beyond women's issues, Arnold's liberal and egalitarian views extended to all aspects of life as she defended the integrity of the younger generation, the worthiness of the unemployed, and the necessity of a broad-based educational system, especially in times of political and economic turmoil.⁸² Her work ethic was above reproach and, combined with her determination, led to her success as a journalist. Gladys Arnold's early newspaper journalism brings to Canadian history one woman's personal battle against conformity.

Endnotes

- 1 Gladys Arnold, *One Woman's War: A Canadian Reporter with the Free French* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1987), 84.
- 2 Ibid., 3.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid., 84.
- 5 See Arnold, *One Woman's War*.
- 6 Alixie Carter, "France Honors Gladys Arnold," *Ottawa Journal*, 12 March 1971, in Gladys Arnold Papers, Box 28, File 694, University of Regina Archives and Special Collections.
- 7 Review by *Montreal Gazette*, in Arnold, *One Woman's War*, cover.
- 8 Barb Campbell and Daryl D. Davis, *Eyewitness to War*, Video Documentary: Produced by Lori Kuffner and Barb

Campbell, 2002.

- 9 Gladys Arnold, "It's a Secret, But..." *Regina Leader Post*, November 1933, January to December 1934, January to August, 1935. Hereafter referred to as "It's a Secret, But..."
- 10 Marjory Lang, *Women Who Made the News: Female Journalists in Canada 1880-1945* (Kingston: McGill/Queen's Press, 1999), 6.
- 11 Ibid., 32-33.
- 12 Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada 1919-1939* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988) 19.
- 13 In June 1938, *Canadian Home Journal* published a survey concluding that of 167 female university graduates, one third of them chose journalism as their preferred job. A. Harriet Parsons, "Careers or Marriage?" *Canadian Home Journal* (June 1938): 63, In Strong-Boag, 25.
- 14 Lang, 248-49.
- 15 Ibid., 13.
- 16 Ibid., 13.
- 17 In 1941, 75.6% of female journalists were single. Ibid., 13-15.
- 18 Arnold wrote, "The 'love' I could cling to came in the letters from my mother and brother, and for that reason the printed word has a very special significance for me - I love words. They move me more than people do. They satisfy that great longing, fill that great void that opened up when my father died and my mother went away..." Gladys Arnold, "A Belated Tribute to My Mother," Gladys Arnold Papers, Box 14, File 203. And on journalism she wrote, "Sometimes I get so discouraged I think 'to h... with it

- all,”...But on the other hand, the thought of giving up makes me absolutely disgusted with life. If I can’t do this, I’d rather be dead - and do nothing.” Arnold, “Dearest Mother and Arnold,” Gladys Arnold Papers, Box 4, File 25.
- 19 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 21 December 1934, 6.
- 20 See Joanna Leach, “Gladys Arnold, The Formative Years,” (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Regina, 2008), Chapter One.
- 21 Marjorie Gillies, “Writing From Behind the Front Lines,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 11 May 1987.
- 22 Gladys Arnold, “A Lamp in the Dark,” Gladys Arnold Papers, Box 15, File 206.
- 23 Gillies, “Behind Front Lines.”
- 24 Kate Simpson Hayes (1856-1945) wrote “Women’s World,” under the pseudonym Mary Markwell. Mary Markwell was known by her readers for being strongly committed to the ideology of women’s purity and for firmly believing that a woman’s place was in the home. Conversely, Hayes was a working woman, left her husband and bore two children out of wedlock. Constance Anne Maguire, “Convention and Contradiction in the Life and Ideas of Kate Simpson Hayes, 1856-1945,” (Unpublished MA Thesis: University of Regina, 1996).
- 25 An anonymous reader wrote in, trusting in “Robin” because of her “fair-mindedness and ... sense of justice.” “It’s a Secret, But...,” 12 September 1934, 7.
- 26 Alison Prentice, et al eds. *Canadian Women-A History* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1996), 189-242.
- 27 Strong-Boag, 24-34.
- 28 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 20 July 1934, 6.
- 29 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 18 April 1934, 7.
- 30 Sometimes Arnold specified that only a certain group of women were guilty of her accusations, and other times she made generalizations about women as a whole. “It’s a Secret, But...,” 6 July 1935, 6.
- 31 Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*, 12-13.
- 32 As she wrote in her article for *Chatelaine*, “I Would Rather Have Beauty Than Brains”: “Haven’t I had it drummed into me that a husband is the prize packet in the lottery of life and that a family and a home is every normal girl’s real job.” *Chatelaine*, February 1931, in Sylvia Fraser, *Chatelaine: A Woman’s Place: Seventy Years in the lives of Canadian Women* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1977), 225-227.
- 33 Arnold did not seem to view marriage as a priority, though not for lack of opportunity, and later in life she was relieved she had not brought children into a world that she considered dangerous. Arnold, “Diary Entry,” 9 January 1985, “Diary 1979, 1950-51, 1985,” Gladys Arnold Papers, Box 2.
- 34 Gillies, *Ottawa Citizen*.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Dearest Mother and Arnold,” 18 January 1936, Gladys Arnold Papers, Box 4, File 25.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 18 January 1934, 9.
- 39 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 3 March 1934, 7.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 20 July 1934, 7.; 6 July 1934, 6.
- 42 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 6 July 1934, 6.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid. Author’s italics.
- 47 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 9 March 1934, 7.
- 48 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 22 December 1934, 7.
- 49 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 5 April 1934, 6.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 11 June 1934, 7.
- 54 Ibid. From 1921-1931, for ages 20-24, the percentage of working women in Canada jumped from 39.8% to 47.4%; and for ages 25 to 34 the percentage fell from 7.6% to 4.9%. Historian Veronica Strong-Boag explained, “A newer phenomenon, although it originated in the 19th century, was the entry of middle-class girls into the paid labour market.” Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*, 43.
- 55 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 26 July 1934, 7.
- 56 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 14 April 1934, 6.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 26 May 1934, 7.
- 62 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 1 October 1934, 7.
- 63 “Arnold was “outraged” when she nearly lost her passage to Europe because the captain did not approve of a woman traveling without a companion. She proved herself to be equal to every man on the ship when she “white washed” the engine room trying to appease the crew, also angry that a single woman was on their ship. Arnold, “The First Five Years,” 1935, Gladys Arnold Papers, Box 15, File 205. It’s a Secret, But...,” 18 January 1934, 7.
- 64 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 18 January 1935, 9.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 24 April 1934, 7.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 20 April 1934, 7.
- 70 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 11 February 1935, 6.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Ibid.
- 73 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 18 February 1935, 7.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 Ibid.
- 76 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 9 January 1935, 6.
- 77 Ibid.
- 78 “It’s a Secret, But...,” 2 November 1934, 8.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 Jane Errington, “Pioneers and Suffragists,” in *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada*, eds. Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code, Lindsay Dorney (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), 51-80.
- 82 Karen Boyd, “Canadian Journalist Recalls German Occupation,” *Arizona Republic*, December 2, 1976.

Book Reviews

Eric Cline, *Making a Difference: Reflections From Political Life*. Saskatoon: Thistledown Press, 2008.

There are different types of political memoirs. Politicians who publish immediately after leaving politics often have an axe to grind, and what they write is eagerly awaited by political pundits. Others consult public and private records and spend much time reflecting carefully over their careers and produce books of considerable historical value. This recent book by Eric Cline, cabinet minister in the governments of Roy Romanow and Lorne Calvert, does not fit neatly into either category. It appeared shortly after Cline's retirement from politics in 2007, and yet there is nothing sensational or wildly controversial about what it contains. At the same time, it is an interesting and informative book that will be consulted by historians.

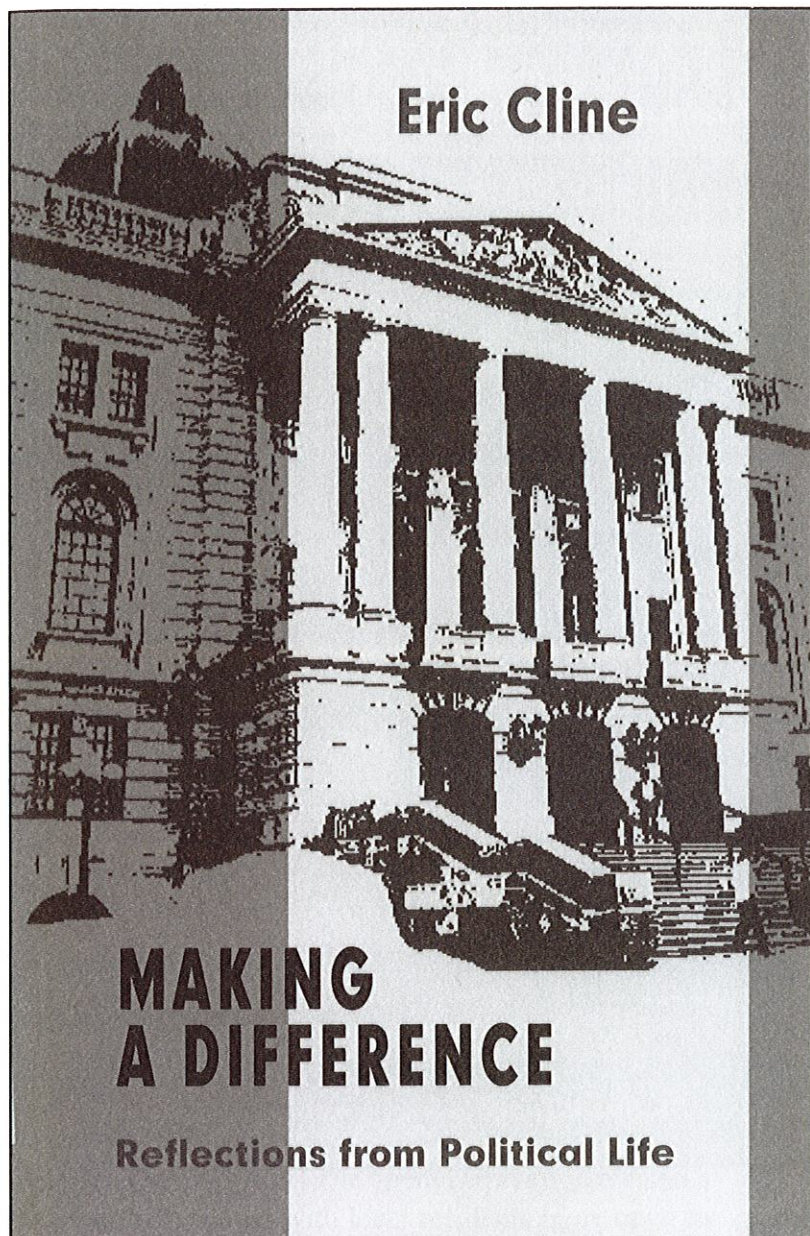
Eric Cline was elected to the Saskatchewan legislature from a Saskatoon constituency in the 1991 NDP sweep. From 1995 to 2007 he was a member of the provincial cabinet. He served as minister of health, minister of finance, minister of justice and minister of industry and resources, as well as having numerous other responsibilities. When Cline announced at a Saskatoon press conference in December, 2006 that he would not run in the next election, it was widely recognized that Premier Calvert possibly was losing his most competent cabinet minister.

Making a Difference is not primarily about party politics. Eric Cline remained loyal to the New Democratic party through thick and thin. He harshly criticizes the Devine Tories, and we are reminded again how central an issue the legacy of the Devine government was for Saskatchewan politics in the 1990s and beyond. There is an interesting chapter on how Cline won his first nomination, and some attention is given to his constituency organization, which served him well and successfully between and during the four election campaigns he fought. But there is not a great deal about important political matters like debate over policy within the NDP, cabinet resignations and leadership changes. Either Cline, unlike Janice Mackinnon, another former Saskatchewan minister of finance who wrote her memoirs, was personally reluctant to tread into such

delicate areas, or he considered other matters to be more significant aspects of his public career. Probably it was a bit of both. Accordingly, the most informative parts of the book relate to government policy between 1995 and 2006.

In 1995 Eric Cline was appointed minister of health. He notes that Premier Romanow said at the time that "this will either make you or break you." It was an accurate but not likely a reassuring statement. Saskatchewan was in the throes of health reform, and the challenges Cline faced were formidable. His account of the months that followed is interesting. He supported health reform and the wellness model that had been put in place, but in a chapter entitled "Minister of the Crown and the Civil Service," he discusses how he had serious misgivings about how officials in the department of health handled various matters. One is left with an underlying impression that he felt that much could have been done differently. The implementation of health reform was a political mine field, and it is now clear that it contributed greatly to the decline of the NDP, especially outside of Regina and Saskatoon. No doubt, Cline was relieved to move from the health portfolio to finance in 1997.

Eric Cline spent nearly ten years as either minister of finance or minister of industry and resources. Nearly half of *Making A Difference* is devoted to those years, and at one point he comments, "I enjoyed my job immensely." These chapters contribute greatly to understanding public policy in Saskatchewan, particularly for the period after the worst of the economic crisis of the early 1990s had been overcome. They contain an interesting discussion of the complexities of taxation and resource issues during a time when a number of significant changes were made to both what had been done in the province previously and to what the NDP had formerly advocated. Cline was a minister who mastered the complicated details in the files before him. He emerges as a social democrat of the Tony Blair variety, favouring an activist government but one that maintained the confidence of the private sector. He believed that in an era of free trade and globalization a NDP provincial government could not have pursued a fundamentally different economic policy if it had



wanted to and clearly Eric Cline did not want to. He supported sound fiscal management and balanced budgets. Growing resource revenue, the result of increased production and rising world demand, enriched provincial coffers and enabled the government to cut income taxes substantially and still maintain, and in some cases increase, social spending. This book shows that Cline strongly supported such an approach. He, as much as anyone, symbolized the economic policy the province was following as the twentieth century ended and the new century began.

Making a Difference also brings out a number of Eric Cline's personal attributes. He was serious and extremely hard working but one who never took himself too seriously. He was a partisan politician but one who won the respect and friendship of opposing members.

He believed in the democratic process and public service and gave fifteen years of his life to serving Saskatchewan. One surely could not ask for more, and in this regard all political parties would be well served with more of the same.

Reviewed by George Hoffman

Claire E. Swan, *Scottish Cowboys and the Dundee Investors*. Dundee: Abertay Historical Society, 2004.

While reading an old copy of *The Scots* (August 2005) magazine, I noticed a book included on a page listing Recent Local History books. It was titled *Scottish Cowboys and the Dundee Investors*. What drew my attention was the sub-title -"Dundee's Matador Land and Cattle Company". As a long time reader of Saskatchewan history I've certainly heard of the Matador Land and Cattle Company but Dundee?

Dundee is a port city on the Firth of Tay. Thus its citizens traded abroad and had worldwide interests and knowledge. Noted for "Jute, Jam and Journalism, during the last quarter

of the nineteenth century (Dundee) boasted seventy two textile mills with 42,000 employees".(p.3) This industry supplied sandbags, tenting and ropes as well as fabric for clothing for the American Civil War. Sometimes payment came in the form of land grants.(p.11)

Scots who managed and worked for the Company spent varied periods of time in Texas and other states where cattle operations were located. William Fife Sommerville, manager in America from 1885 to 1890 was a photographer. He had a buggy converted to a traveling darkroom and some of his photographs are included.

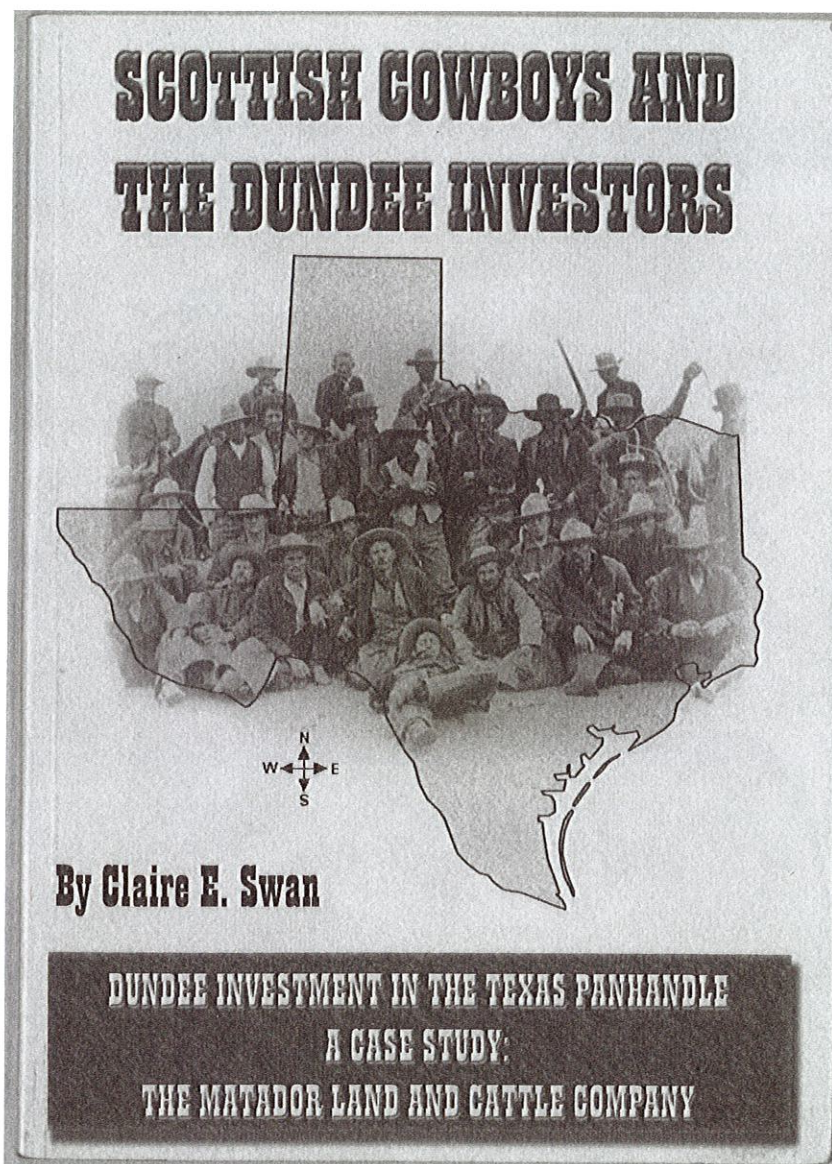
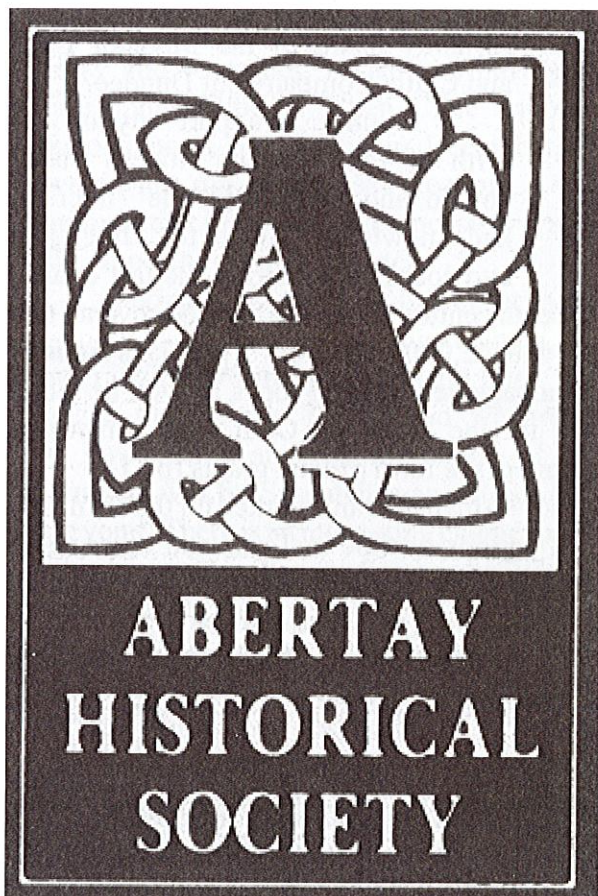
The Matador Land and Cattle Company leased about 140,000 acres of rangeland north of the Saskatchewan River near Kyle, which was used to fatten cattle. This lease was in effect from 1905 to 1921;

after which the land became the first community pasture operated by the Federal Government.

The Company operated from 1882 to 1951 when it was sold to American buyers. There still exists a town named Matador in the Texas panhandle. While the book does not contain stories of the Matador in Saskatchewan which I had hoped to find, it is an interesting account of how and why the investment company was formed and operated.

The book of 100 pages which includes maps, index and bibliography, was written by Claire E. Swan. It began as a dissertation for her degree in history. It is available from Abertay Historical Society, C/O SUAT Ltd., 55 South Methaven Street, Perth, Scotland PH2 7NQ at a cost of 10 pounds sterling for overseas mailing.

Reviewed by Jeannette Dow



Endnotes continued from "Dominion Lands" policy, Drought and Saskatchewan's 'Better Farming' Commission, 1920, p.21.

- 117 J.S. Campbell, *The Swift Current Research Station, 1920-70* (Canada Department of Agriculture, Historical Series No. 6, 1971), 4.
- 118 Kenneth Norrie, "Dry Farming and the Economics of Risk Bearing: The Canadian Prairies, 1870-1930" *Agricultural History* Vol. 51, No. 1 (1977), 144.
- 119 Canada, Department of Agriculture, Experimental Station, Swift Current, Sask. *Results of Experiments, 1931-1936 Inclusive* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1938), 12, 18-19; Gray, 78-95.
- 120 Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 12 Geo. V, No. 25, A. 1922, 26.
- 121 Moss, 3-4.

Erika Dyck, *Psychedelic Psychiatry: LSD from Clinic to Campus*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.

It is serendipitous that Erika Dyck's *Psychedelic Psychiatry: LSD from Clinic to Campus* is published the same month the City of Weyburn's city council sought tenders for the demolition of the former Saskatchewan Mental Hospital. An associate professor of history at the University of Saskatchewan, Dyck has written a scintillating and provocative work on the clinical research history of LSD, with roots in 1950s Saskatchewan generally and Weyburn in particular, which morphed into its black market form in the counterculture of 1960s North America. *Psychedelic Psychiatry* breaks new ground by challenging conventional wisdom positing that clinical LSD research and experimentation yielded positive results in efforts to ameliorate mental illness and alcoholism. In the final analysis, it is Dyck's central contention that uneducated fear among the general public induced the political and medical establishment to relegate LSD into the realm of criminality.

The London-born Humphrey Osmond found mid-1950s Weyburn to be conducive to LSD and psychedelic research due to its physical isolation and the relative lack of colleagues in the province, which meant that Osmond faced fewer opposing views from fellow specialists. In addition, the economic and political dynamic of Saskatchewan provided fertile ground for experimentation.[pg. 7] The Great Depression created a professional vacuum with local residents more open to new health professionals combined with experimental ideas to improve health services. Just as importantly, claims Dyck, the provincial government of Tommy Douglas attracted medical researchers with promises of grants, research autonomy, and the opportunity to work in North America's first experiment in socialized medicine.[pg. 23]

As clinical director of the Saskatchewan Mental Hospital, Osmond was known for an infectious enthusiasm which was reflected in how LSD reactions were to be analyzed. "Be sure to record [LSD reactions], wrote Osmond to a colleague, "I know it sounds detached to record every bit of information . . . [but it] is valuable – gold." [pg. 37] Dyck posits that Osmond believed mental illness was observable by "subjective experience" and that psychedelic drugs bridged dichotomies in the psychiatric world that believed in psychoanalysis versus that of psychiatric

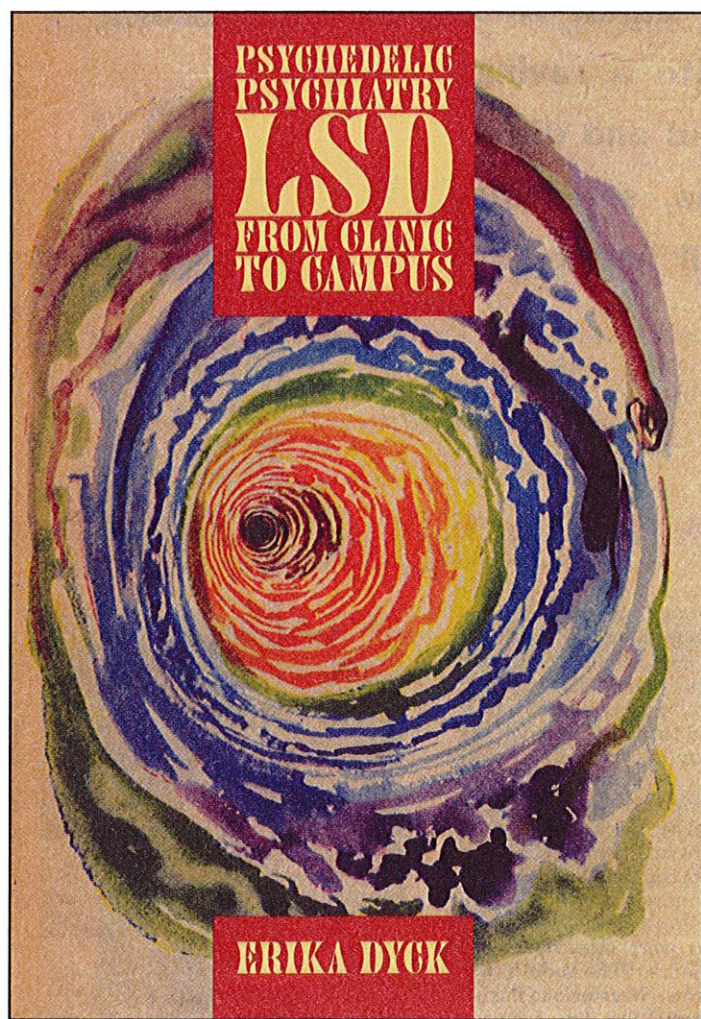
treatment through medication. The psychiatrist also took LSD, which he later introduced to graduate students, colleagues, family and friends, many from Weyburn. Researchers believed that LSD created symptoms similar to those described by mentally ill patients. LSD, which often caused temporary dysfunctional thinking, hallucinations, and delusions were taken by Osmond in order to facilitate empathy and communication between himself and his mentally ill patients. Indeed, Osmond believed that psychedelic psychiatry "depended on an appreciation for immeasurable perception," and resisted strict "controlled [clinical] trials that minimized the importance of the individual experience." [pg. 48] The subjective and individualized methodological trials utilized and proselytized by Osmond in the 1950s proved to be anathema to many but not all of his colleagues outside Saskatchewan.

Trials conducted throughout Saskatchewan that involved former mentally ill patients felt that LSD reactions "allowed them to reflect upon their past illness with greater insight and clarity. . ." [pg. 44] The drug also induced self-reflection among some alcoholics who – during trials – were forced to confront their reasons for drinking. Claims Dyck, approximately fifty percent of alcoholics that undertook LSD trials in Saskatchewan stopped drinking. [pg. 59] Indeed, the latter results earned the support of Saskatchewan-based temperance organizations, in part, due to the spirituality LSD generated in some patients. Clinical trials also noted low rates of long-term negative reaction to LSD.[pg. 64] Osmond's personal approach with LSD included participation in a peyote ceremony with Saskatchewan First Nations. Aware of the intense spirituality often triggered by LSD and similar hallucinogenic drugs such as mescaline (a by-product of the peyote cactus) Osmond accepted an invitation to a peyote ceremony at the Red Pheasant First Nation, near Battleford. According to Dyck, Osmond believed that the use of the drug expanded both his knowledge of Aboriginal culture and further convinced him that peyote was not addictive and therefore not a narcotic.[pgs. 85-88]

In the second half of *Psychedelic Psychiatry*, Dyck provides evidence that fear of LSD in the 1960s constituted a "moral panic" characterized by generational cleavages, an establishment versus the counterculture dynamic, and the perception of revolutionary ideas percolating in North American universities.[pg. 103] The distinctions between acid and black market LSD and that of pharmaceutically produced LSD were lost in the popular ethos. Humphrey

Osmond, a resident of New Jersey in the 1960s, is presented by Dyck as a tragic figure attempting to preserve his research reputation within the psychiatric establishment. Already considered something of an outsider in the psychiatric profession in the 1950s due to his unwillingness to test LSD under controlled conditions, which he believed dehumanized research within an investigative methodology that benefited pharmaceutical companies, Osmond also railed against Timothy Leary. Accusing the counterculture icon of masquerading as a psychologist, Osmond condemned Leary. "As a good member of my profession [I] strongly oppose you." [pg.108] The psychiatrist also blamed the media for publicizing Leary's efforts in the counterculture and for weaving a "tenuous" connection that scholars, such as the defrocked Harvard professor, endorsed black market LSD. [pg. 109] In the end, Osmond believed that the politicization of LSD in the media gave the medical establishment critics of psychedelics leverage in the criminalization of LSD.

Psychedelic Psychiatry is a highly nuanced work of scholarship that sheds new light on LSD research in Saskatchewan. The work admirably

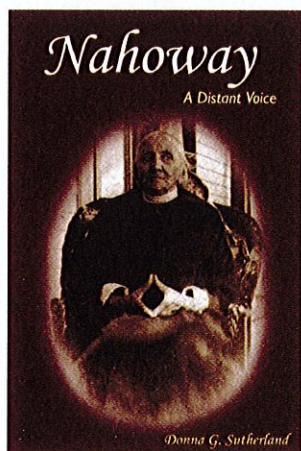


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synthesizes psychiatric practices within the political, economic and social contexts faced by Osmond and his Saskatchewan partners, such as Abram Hoffer. In the final analysis, Erika Dyck presents a compelling argument that the medical and psychiatric establishment utilized the mindset of an uninformed public to dismiss LSD research. That said, this reader craved greater analysis of the social impact psychedelic (a word coined by Osmond in Weyburn) research had within the province though Dyck made no pretense that her monograph was limited to Saskatchewan nor was it a work of social history. In some ways, Dyck was also constrained by the psychiatric and medical terminology of her subject. For those not versed in the lexicon, *Psychedelic Psychiatry* can be a challenging read. This stylistic concern notwithstanding, however, this ground breaking book is worth the challenge.

Reviewed by Kam Teo.

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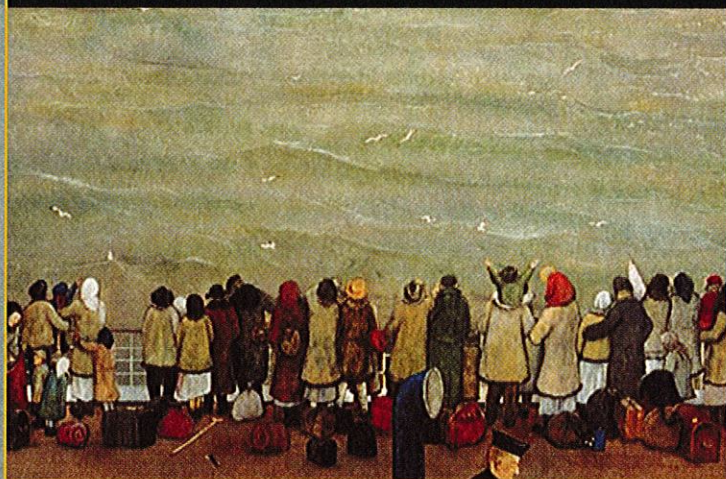
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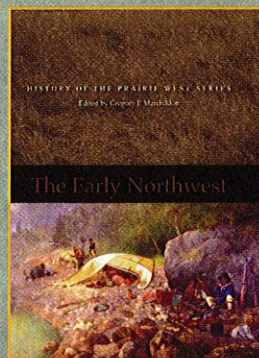
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