

No. 64 | Spring 2012 | \$10.00

# Manitoba History

The Journal of the Manitoba Historical Society

Manitoba Expands Northward





## Manitoba History

Published by the  
Manitoba Historical Society

ISSN 0226-5036

GST Reg. No. 12281 4601 RR0001

Canada Post

Publication Agreement No. 40015704

## Manitoba Historical Society

61 Carlton Street  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3C 1N7  
Telephone: 204-947-0559  
Email: [info@mhs.mb.ca](mailto:info@mhs.mb.ca)  
Web: [www.mhs.mb.ca](http://www.mhs.mb.ca)

## Annual membership

CAD\$, includes subscription to *Manitoba History*

	Canada	USA	All other countries
Regular:	\$40	\$45	\$60
Youth/Student:	\$20	\$25	\$40
Family:	\$45	\$50	\$65
Nonprofit:	\$50	\$55	\$75
Corporate:	\$275	\$280	\$295
Life:	\$575		

Contents © 2012 of the  
Manitoba Historical Society.  
All rights reserved.  
Reproduction inquiries  
should be directed to the Editors.



A project sponsored by  
Culture, Heritage and Tourism



The Manitoba Historical Society, established in June 1879, is the oldest historical organization in Western Canada. Its mandate is to:

- promote and encourage public interest in Manitoba and Canadian history
- encourage research and publications relating to the history of Manitoba
- foster the preservation of property relevant to an appreciation of the history of Manitoba
- assist in the formation and work of local historical societies in furthering the objectives of the Society throughout Manitoba

## Manitoba Historical Society

The Honourable Philip S. Lee, C.M., O.M., Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba, *Patron*  
Annabelle Mays, *President*

James Kostuchuk, *First Vice-President*

Samuel Matheson, *Second Vice-President*

Harry W. Duckworth, *Past President*

Gordon Goldsborough, *Secretary*

Gwyneth Jones, *Treasurer*

Dennis Butcher, *Member at Large*

Joyce Wawrykow, *Member at Large*

Jacqueline Friesen, *Chief Administrative Officer*

Jennifer Bisch, *Chief Program Officer and Curator*

## Manitoba History

### Editorial Staff

Robert Coutts, *Editor in Chief*

Gordon Goldsborough, *Gazette & Photo Editor*

Frieda Esau Klippenstein, *Reviews Editor*

James A. Burns, *Copy Editor*

Elizabeth Blight, *Photo Consultant*

Salix Consulting, *Design & Layout*

### Editorial Advisory Board

J. M. Bumsted, *Winnipeg*

David Carr, *University of Manitoba Press*

Lyle Dick, *Parks Canada*

Jean Friesen, *History Department, University of Manitoba*

Peter Geller, *Grant MacEwan College, Edmonton*

Sharon McLeod, *University College of the North, Thompson*

Jim Mochoruk, *History Department, University of North Dakota*

Morris Mott, *Brandon*

Michael Payne, *Ottawa*

Adele Perry, *History Department, University of Manitoba*

### Printing

Premier Printing, *Winnipeg*

### Inquiries

Editorial and advertising inquiries should be directed to the MHS office or to  
[journal@mhs.mb.ca](mailto:journal@mhs.mb.ca).

*Manitoba History* publishes scholarly, feature-length articles as well as shorter, popular articles, documentary selections, essays, pictorial essays, and reviews relating to the social, economic, political, intellectual, and cultural history of Manitoba and the Canadian West. Scholarly articles should not normally be longer than twenty-five typed, double-spaced pages, including endnotes. Contributors should consult the *Chicago Manual of Style* when formatting citations, and should allow sufficient time after submission for peer review. Popular articles for the *Gazette* should not be longer than ten typed, double-spaced pages and do not require endnotes. Contributors are not paid but receive six copies of the issue containing their article.

Illustrations provided with article submissions are welcomed. Scanned images must be of sufficient resolution for high-quality reproduction, and no less than 300 dpi. Permission to publish photographs and artwork from archives or other repositories is the responsibility of the contributor. Manuscripts should be submitted electronically, preferably in Microsoft Word format. The Manitoba Historical Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors.

Readers' responses to articles published in *Manitoba History* are welcome. Letters that add substantial information or new perspectives may be published, and will be edited for clarity and length at the discretion of the Editors. Letters should be no more than 500 words and include the writer's name, daytime phone number, and address (including email, if possible) for verification. Letters should be sent to: Editors, *Manitoba History*, 61 Carlton Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 1N7, email: [journal@mhs.mb.ca](mailto:journal@mhs.mb.ca).

# Manitoba History

No. 68 | Spring 2012



**Churchill Railway Station, 1992**

The station was built in 1929–30 to serve as the terminus of the Hudson Bay Railway, primarily to move grain to the new port on Hudson Bay, and illustrates the railway's crucial role in the development of northern Manitoba. The building was declared a Heritage Railway Station in 1992. It has since been restored by Parks Canada.

Source: Parks Canada.

[www.mhs.mb.ca/  
docs/mb\\_history/68](http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/68)

- 2 Manitoba Expands Northward: A Special Edition of *Manitoba History*  
by Jim Mochoruk
- 6 Developing a Better Model: Aboriginal Employment and the Resource Community of Leaf Rapids, Manitoba (1971–1977)  
by Sarah Ramsden
- 17 High Stakes and Hard Times: Herb Lake and Depression-Era Mining in Northern Manitoba  
by Will Steinburg
- 28 W. J. Wainess, the IUN Crisis of 1978, and the Development of Post-Secondary Education in Northern Manitoba  
by Jennifer Marchant and Tom Mitchell

## Gazette

- 35 A Trapper's Diary from Northern Manitoba, 1928–1946  
by Rosemary Malaher
- 40 Roblin City: A Gleaming Metropolis on the Bay  
by James Burns and Gordon Goldsborough
- 44 James Isham (c1716–1761): How an Eighteenth Century Fur Trader is Influencing Canada Today  
by Scott Stephen

## Reviews

- 47 P. G. Downes, *Sleeping Island: The Narrative of a Summer's Travel in Northern Manitoba and the Northwest Territories*. Edited with a new Introduction and Notes by R. H. Cockburn  
by Graham A. MacDonald
- 49 Frances Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes: Ethno-Religious Identity and the Canadian Prairies*  
by Peter J. Melnycky
- 50 Hugh A. Dempsey, *Always an Adventure: An Autobiography*  
by W. B. Yeo
- 52 *Cool Things in the Collection:*  
Spotlight on Northern Manitoba, Photographs in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives  
by Debra Moore

*"People will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors."*

Edmund Burke (1729–1797)  
*Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 1790

# Manitoba Expands Northward: A Special Edition of *Manitoba History*

by Jim Mochoruk

Department of History, University of North Dakota

**T**he fifteenth of May 2012 marks the one-hundredth anniversary of Manitoba's dramatic expansion northwards to the shores of Hudson Bay and the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel. Understandably, this expansion was cause for much congratulation and excitement in the Manitoba of 1912 as it represented the culmination of a battle waged by local political leaders for many years and opened up whole new vistas for provincial economic development. "New Manitoba," as it was then called, was to be the province's new frontier, the place where the old prairie province would break the shackles of wheat monoculture and enter the brave new world of 20<sup>th</sup>-century natural resource development. Of course, as matters turned out, the addition of all this new territory was not entirely without a downside—either for the people of "southern" Manitoba or for the people who already lived in the north. However, in 1912 there were few people who harboured any serious reservations about provincial expansion or the incredible benefits this territory would bring to the people of the province. Perhaps even more to the point is this: the addition of New Manitoba changed the face and the future of Manitoba irrevocably. Thus, it is entirely appropriate that *Manitoba History* should issue a special "northern edition" to commemorate this centennial.

The readers of this special edition will be treated to what I think is a particularly interesting assortment of contributions related to the history of the provincial north. In the *Gazette* section, we have three pieces. The first is Rosemary Malaher's contribution on the diaries of an obscure, but intriguing, trapper who lived and worked out of his base at "Mile 445" of the Hudson Bay Railway from the 1920s through the 1940s. Next there is a fascinating analysis by Jim Burns and Gordon Goldsborough of the 1912 plan for the model northern town, Roblin City—the town that never got built. Finally, from Scott Stephen we have a look at the eighteenth-century construction works of James Isham at Prince of Wales Fort at the mouth of the Churchill River and York Factory at the mouth of the Hayes River. In regards to full-length articles Will Steinburg provides a compelling examination of an important, but vastly understudied mining community in northern Manitoba—Herb Lake—between 1914 and 1950; an examination which poses and answers important questions about the nature of northern development

and the human impact of changing modes of economic production. Sarah Ramsden's contribution takes us into the 1970s with its theoretically sophisticated analysis of the attempts of the provincial government to integrate aboriginals into the workforce and community of the newly created mining town of Leaf Rapids. Finally, Jennifer Marchant and Tom Mitchell provide the readers of *Manitoba History* with a detailed analysis of the successful struggle to establish, retain, and improve post-secondary educational opportunities for northerners through Inter-Universities North throughout the 1970s.

Before turning to these pieces, however, it is useful to consider exactly how Manitoba came into possession of its new hinterland. It is worthy of note that if Louis Riel had had his druthers in 1869–1870, Manitoba—or rather the super province of Assiniboia he was then proposing—would have come into Confederation consisting of all the land of "Rupert's Land and the North-West," roughly the region stretching from Lake Superior to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Riel and his principal advisors wanted control over this vast region's public lands and natural resources to be vested in the provincial government, as was the case in all other Canadian provinces.<sup>2</sup> This, however, was not to be. The Dominion government, led by Sir John A. Macdonald, admitted Manitoba to Confederation as the rather minuscule "Postage Stamp Province"—barely 100 miles square,<sup>3</sup> and, adding insult to injury, did not allow even this tiny jurisdiction to control its public lands, reserving them instead "for the purposes of the Dominion."<sup>4</sup> As the Prime Minister explained it to the House, he thought it "injudicious to have a large province which would have control over its lands, and might interfere with the general policy of the government."<sup>5</sup>

Over the next 41 years both the size of Manitoba and its lack of control over public lands and natural resources would become the source of regular complaint for a series of provincial administrations. Moreover, these matters were usually tied together, for not having public lands to sell or other natural resources to "rent" or lease left Manitoba in a precarious financial situation. For example, in 1873 the provincial legislature petitioned Ottawa for territorial expansion, believing that more territory and the increased population within it would lead to an increase in the federal subsidy for Manitoba.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately for Manitoba, the Macdonald administration, which had seemed favourable to the proposal, fell as a result of the Pacific Railway scandal before action could be taken. The new Mackenzie government gave its tentative approval to boundary

*Jim Mochoruk was born, raised, and educated at Winnipeg. He specializes in researching northern development in Canada and the social and labor history of western Canada.*



Archives of Manitoba, Manitoba Natural Resources, Series I, #321, N14744.

The crew of the Manitoba Air Service flying boat inspects northern Manitoba fishing sites, 18 September 1933.

extension but refused to even consider an increase in subsidy to defray the increased costs of administration. As a result, Manitoba's Legislative Council was forced to decline any territorial addition.<sup>7</sup>

This was a bitter lesson for Manitoba's political leaders, and it was one that would be repeated all too often. Time after time, they would turn to Ottawa—seeking more provincial territory, more funding (typically expressed as “Better Terms”) or control over the public domain, and in some cases all three at the same time. The responses they received varied from administration to administration, but they were never quite enough to satisfy the desires of Manitoba's political leadership. For example, it is clear that both Prime Ministers Macdonald and Mackenzie were quite willing to consider an extension of Manitoba into the so-called “disputed territory” between Manitoba and Ontario in the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Prime Minister Mackenzie confided to Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris late in 1874 that he hoped the dispute would soon be settled by arbitration and that “Wherever the Ontario border may be fixed to the west the boundary of Manitoba should also reach, while an extension West and North would also seem desirable.”<sup>9</sup> So, there was no question that he was willing to expand Manitoba; he was simply not inclined to pair such an expansion with more money for administrative purposes. As events would demonstrate, Macdonald was even more willing to expand Manitoba's boundaries, but in his case it was clear that Manitoba was simply a useful cat's-paw in his dispute with Ontario's Liberal administration. Indeed, immediately upon returning to office in 1878, Prime Minister Macdonald vetoed the award of the Board of Arbitration which had just set the Ontario border at the Lake of the Woods (which was highly satisfactory to Ontario premier Sir Oliver Mowat) and eventually attempted to settle the matter by introducing the Manitoba Boundary Extension Act of 1881.<sup>10</sup> Manitoba was now to

be extended all the way to Thunder Bay! In explaining the reasoning behind this remarkable piece of legislation, Macdonald was brutally frank: “we cannot afford to give it [the disputed territory] to Ontario... because the lands would belong to Ontario. Keeping it as a portion of Manitoba, the lands belong to the Dominion.”<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately for Manitoba, after three years of rather pathetic attempts to assert provincial jurisdiction in hotspots like Rat Portage, control over the disputed territory was passed to Ontario by a ruling of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council and the province lost any claim to the lands of what would henceforth be known as northwestern Ontario. As Manitoba's most distinguished historian, W. L. Morton, observed of this verdict: “The decision was no doubt good law and it ended an intolerable uncertainty. It did, however, fly in the face of both history and geography and deprived Manitoba of an area which by historical and physical ties had always been part of the Red River basin.”<sup>12</sup>

Still, the western and northern extensions of the 1881 Boundary Extension Act—west to the present-day border with Saskatchewan and north to 52° 50'—did remain in place and, by expanding the provincial landmass by a factor of ten, this Act gave Manitoba at least part of the territory it had desired (it was not as far north or west as Norquay wanted—a point made in subsequent extension requests). For the next two decades, although the question of boundary extension did arise in Manitoba on several different occasions, it was usually overshadowed by fights with Ottawa over matters such as the provincial right to charter southward-running railways, increases in provincial subsidies (usually based upon a claim for federal payments “in lieu of lands” withheld from the province) and, in the 1890s, the Manitoba Schools Question.<sup>13</sup> Even more to the point, although there was considerable economic activity beginning to stir along the northern edge



of Manitoba—commercial fishing, lumbering, prospecting, mining, increased trapping, and even some first steps towards the construction of a railway to Hudson Bay (as an outlet for western Canadian grain)—until 1905 demands for northward expansion were really secondary to Manitoba's desire for further westward expansion into the rich, arable lands of the districts of Assiniboia and Saskatchewan.<sup>14</sup>

Nowhere would this become more evident than in the efforts of the Rodmond P. Roblin administration. Roblin and his leading cabinet ministers—Robert Rogers and Colin Campbell—were well aware that Manitoba was running out of internal frontiers to develop. The railway of Mackenzie and Mann, which had now become the Canadian Northern Railway, and which owed much of its success to provincial government support—first from the Greenway/Sifton administration and then even more dramatically from Premier Roblin's government—was now opening up territories north and west of Manitoba's 1881 boundaries. The western districts of the province, Manitoba's last substantial farming frontier, were now essentially filled and the lumber and fishing frontiers seemed to be pushing steadily northwards—in several cases beyond 52° 50'. Thus, Roblin came to the conclusion that it was time to resurrect many of Premier Norquay's demands of the 1880s—for federal construction of a Hudson Bay Railway (HBR), for boundary extensions both west and northwards, for "Better [financial] Terms," and for either control over public lands and natural resources or more federal payments "in lieu of lands."

As quickly became evident, although he and his government consistently requested a northern extension to Hudson Bay and the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel, Roblin's eyes were fixed most firmly on expansion westwards into the rapidly filling agricultural territories of the Assiniboia and Saskatchewan Districts of the NWT. He even went to the NWT to debate Territorial Premier Haultain regarding the matter of Assiniboia joining Manitoba in 1902—a debate that he lost badly.<sup>15</sup> Undeterred, between 1901 and 1905 he and his government submitted a series of Resolutions to the federal government, calling for western and northern extensions of Manitoba.<sup>16</sup> However, in 1905 all hopes of westward expansion were dashed by Prime Minister Laurier's introduction of the North-West Autonomy Bills. However, this was only part of the bad news for Roblin and Manitoba: Laurier rather coolly explained that although the new provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta were to extend north to the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel, no such extension could be made for Manitoba prior to consultations with every other interested party. Indeed, the prime minister observed that Quebec, Ontario and even newly created Saskatchewan might all have equal claims to an extension to the shores of Hudson Bay.<sup>17</sup>

Manitoba's political leaders were stunned by this particular turn of events. In many regards, the writing had been on the wall for some time concerning the creation of one or more new provinces in the west, but that any province other than Manitoba would be allowed

to expand due north into the old territory of Keewatin—which had been administered out of Winnipeg by the Lieutenant-Governors of Manitoba since the 1870s—was just too bitter a pill to swallow. Not surprisingly, a nasty and convoluted battle between Roblin's (Conservative) provincial administration and Laurier's (Liberal) federal administration was now fully joined. As Roblin put it to an appreciative audience in southwestern Manitoba: "Manitoba has been shorn of territory which belonged to her, crippled for all time, treated as an outcast, cribbed, cabined and confined, left to remain a very small postage stamp on the very large envelope of the Dominion."<sup>18</sup> Up with this he would not put!

The complex political manoeuvrings and machinations that went on for the next seven years were amazing to behold—and they threw light into several dark corners of Canadian political life. To begin with, the lingering and always dark shadow of the Manitoba Schools Question was cast across the issue of boundary extension, for Quebec and the Catholic Church were quite concerned about the future of French and Catholic education in the north. By the same token, Ontario's self-interest in gaining control over every possible/viable deepwater port on Hudson Bay, as well as its interest in gaining access to even more natural resources than it already controlled came to the fore. Meanwhile, Manitoba's deep-seated envy of the old provinces of Confederation and of British Columbia—that "spoilt child of Confederation"—was now joined by its resentment at the much better terms (financial and physical) which its two newest prairie siblings enjoyed. And even the Maritime provinces would eventually join their voices and grievances concerning their place in Confederation to the debate over the extension of Manitoba, Quebec and Ontario northward in 1912. But what was perhaps most notable about all of these debates and arguments was the sheer amount of posturing that went on between Manitoba and Ottawa—posturing that was designed not to settle the boundary matter, but to secure partisan political advantage in the exciting political contests of 1908 and 1911.<sup>19</sup>


During that three-year period Manitoba's desire to expand northwards was actually conceded to on several different occasions by the Laurier administration, which was now apparently willing to ignore the interests of Saskatchewan, Quebec and, to a certain extent, Ontario, in the area north of Manitoba. The issues that still divided the two sides were not so much territorial—although the exact northeastern boundary remained up in the air until 1909—as they were financial and perhaps, constitutional. Premier Roblin and his negotiators now argued that, in addition to the boundary extension, Manitoba should receive either the exact same financial terms and subsidies as Saskatchewan and Alberta or be given beneficial control over public lands, as was the case in Ontario and the other old provinces.<sup>20</sup>

Prime Minister Laurier was so disheartened by this new bargaining strategy that he stayed away from the bargaining table for two years. By 1911 though, with his

government in trouble over a whole variety of issues, he needed to shore up political support wherever he could, so he once again reopened negotiations with Manitoba. There was no substantive movement on Roblin's part, but when this latest conference broke up, the Prime Minister made one final effort to settle the matter. In what was far and away the most generous federal offer to date—embodied in a federal Order-in-Council—Laurier offered Manitoba extension to its current boundaries (originally offered in 1908 and agreed to by both sides by 1909), plus an additional \$200,000 per year “in lieu of lands” for the new territories that would be added.<sup>21</sup> This came very close to granting Manitoba full fiscal parity with Saskatchewan and Alberta, and if one considered Manitoba's existing subsidies in lieu of lands for the southern part of the province plus some other special arrangements it had with the federal government concerning swamp lands, the offer may actually have been better than what Saskatchewan and Alberta were getting. However, with the Laurier administration on the political ropes, Premier Roblin had no intention of taking any deal that was not specifically what he had requested. Thus the offer was rejected—and no new offer would be made prior to the federal election of 1911—the election that drove Laurier from office and brought the very friendly Borden administration to power.

Within months of this election the Manitoba Boundary Extension Act of 1912 (as well as similar acts for the extension of Ontario and Quebec) was drafted and passed—on the exact terms Premier Roblin had demanded, that is to say, exact parity with Saskatchewan and Alberta.<sup>22</sup> There was a tortuous accounting procedure that had to be applied to the new deal—swamp lands had to be returned, already alienated drained lands had to be accounted for etc., etc.—but at the end of the day Manitoba had won its northern extension, increases in its subsidies in lieu of lands and its debt allowance which amounted to \$500,000 per year, a lump-sum payment of \$201,723 to construct public buildings in the north and, in a very pleasant surprise, a \$1,382,800 payment as “arrears” on land subsidies, back-dated to the negotiations of 1908. Even better, not only had Manitoba won its battle for the north—and better terms—but its new territory, “New Manitoba”, already had the much ballyhooed Hudson Bay Railway ready to move beyond The Pas and out across the north to the Bay. Surely that road would open up more than just a new route for grain shipments. Prospectors, lumbermen, railwaymen and so many more were already flocking to the north and it was confidently believed that they would make this territory into the new frontier of an already booming provincial economy. Manitobans clearly had much to celebrate on 15 May 1912.

Of course, there was still much to be done—and there would be more battles to be fought in the future concerning northern development, the HBR, and the thorny issue of beneficial control over natural resources, but W. L. Morton was right when he noted that in 1912, “the ‘Cinderella of

Confederation’ became for the time being the favourite child.”<sup>23</sup> 

## Notes

1. See, “The Third ‘List of Rights,’” Appendix I in W. L. Morton, (ed.) *Manitoba: The Birth of a Province*. (Winnipeg: Manitoba Record Society, 1965), p. 245.
2. *Ibid.* For a more detailed analysis of Riel's goals in this regard see Jim Mochoruk, “Manitoba and the (Long and Winding) Road to the NRTA.” *Review of Constitutional Studies/Revue d'études constitutionnelles*, Vol. 12, #2, 2007, p. 259.
3. According to Lt. Gov. Archibald's calculations the new province was precisely 116.3 miles by 103.5 miles. See Library and Archives Canada (LAC) RG 15, Vol. 228, #800, “Confidential, Archibald to the Secretary of State for the Provinces, Fort Garry, 20 December 1870,” p. 8.
4. Canada, Statutes, 33 Vic, Cap. 3, Sec. 30 [The Manitoba Act].
5. Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 1870, Vol. 1, pp. 1317–1318.
6. “Provincial Parliament,” *Manitoba Free Press*, 15 November 1873.
7. See Jim Mochoruk, *Formidable Heritage: Manitoba's North and the Cost of Development, 1870–1930* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2004), p. 25.
8. This was the region between Lake Superior and the original eastern boundary of Manitoba. Ontario's governments claimed that all the territory from its then current western boundary on Lake Superior to the Northwest Angle of the Lake of the Woods should be granted to Ontario. Prime Minister Macdonald disagreed quite vehemently, wanting the lion's share of this territory to either remain as part of the NWT or be passed to Manitoba. Prime Minister Mackenzie was less vexed by the issue and wanted it settled by arbitration.
9. Archives of Manitoba (AM), Morris Papers, “Alexander Mackenzie to Morris, 11 December 1874.”
10. Canada, Statutes, 44 Vic., Cap. 14, “An Act to Provide for the Extension of the Boundaries of Manitoba”
11. Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, Vol. II, 1880–1881, pp. 1451–56.
12. W. L. Morton. *Manitoba: A History* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), p. 219.
13. For a discussion of this period and its major political issues see, Jim Mochoruk, “Thomas Greenway, 1888–1900” in Barry Ferguson and Robert Wardhaugh (eds.) *Manitoba Premiers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center Press, 2010), pp. 80–102.
14. For an account of these economic developments see Mochoruk, *Formidable Heritage*, Chapters Three and Five.
15. *Macleod Gazette*, 16 May 1902.
16. See for example, Manitoba, Journals of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba (JLAM), 1901 “Resolutions,”; *Ibid.*, 1902 “Resolutions,” *Ibid.*, 1904–1905 “Resolutions”; and *Ibid.*, 1908, Appendix, “Memorial: To the Honourable Senate (or House of Commons) of Canada,” pp. 36–37.
17. Laurier's comments are reprinted in Manitoba, JLAM, Appendix, “Memorial: To the Honourable Senate (or House of Commons) of Canada,” p. 37.
18. Cited in the *Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs*, (1905) p. 363. (The speech was given in Baldur, Manitoba on 4 April 1905.)
19. For a detailed discussion of the convoluted manoeuvrings of 1905–1912 see Mochoruk, *Formidable Heritage*, pp. 127–142.
20. Manitoba Sessional Papers, 1910, No. 5, “Report of Messrs. Rogers and Campbell. 14 April 1909,” pp. 209–210.
21. Canada Sessional Papers, Vol. 46, No. 24 “PC 573: Certified Copy of a Report. 17 March 1911,” pp. 4–5.
22. Canada, Statutes, 2 George V, Cap. 32 “Manitoba Boundaries Extension Act, 1912.
23. W. L. Morton, *Manitoba: A History*, p. 324.

# Developing a Better Model: Aboriginal Employment and the Resource Community of Leaf Rapids, Manitoba (1971–1977)

by Sarah J. Ramsden  
Department of History, University of Manitoba

**B**uilt to service the operations of the Sherritt Gordon Mining Company and the Ruttan minesite, Leaf Rapids was a highly planned urban centre commonly represented as a departure from the past and distinguished by attempts to bring modern comforts to the north and implement a new degree of social equality.<sup>1</sup> Constructed between 1971 and 1974 and located 950 kilometres northwest of Winnipeg, Leaf Rapids was described as innovative instead of historical, primarily due to the town's close connection with Manitoba's (as well as Canada's) first New Democratic Party and its subsequent politicization. The involvement of the Schreyer administration (1969–1977) in Leaf Rapids was triggered by objections to Sherritt Gordon's plan to use the traditional "bulldozer" method when clearing a site for the town.<sup>2</sup> In addition to calling for a more enlightened design that would preserve elements of the natural environment, the Planning and Priorities Committee, which reviewed the company's proposal, saw in Leaf Rapids the opportunity to implement the new government's strategy for northern development and demonstrate its commitment to democratic socialism. The re-examination of the resource town model by the NDP government led to the replacement of the company by a crown corporation, the Leaf Rapids Development Corporation (LRDC), as the primary developer of the community giving Leaf Rapids such descriptions as the "baby of Manitoba" and the "great democratic socialist experiment in the North."<sup>3</sup> The close association between the NDP and Leaf Rapids has been noted by academics who usually identify the formal changes made to the resource town model when assessing the significance of Leaf Rapids.<sup>4</sup>

This article explores the overlap between the political agenda pursued by the Schreyer administration in the north and the discussion of racial integration in relation to the Leaf Rapids. That the discussion of racial integration was a key part of the Leaf Rapids project is undeniable. The objectives for the town, outlined by the LRDC, announced the intention to create a "multi-cultural town" and "to increase

local, northern employment and manpower programs."<sup>5</sup> The commitment to racial equality and the local Aboriginal population<sup>6</sup> was made even more explicitly in the town's first bylaw, which stated that developers sought to create "[a] community which will encourage human development by way of employment and recreational opportunities for a diversity of people including native northerners."<sup>7</sup> The myriad of actions inspired by these goals and their underlying sentiments included using Cree words when naming streets, celebrating aspects of Aboriginal culture at local events and the Leaf Rapids Exhibition Centre, as well as efforts to modify the education curriculum for Aboriginal students. This essay will partly discuss the Tawow program in the Ruttan mine because it shows the connections between Schreyer's northern development strategy, which advocated for the modernization and development of the north by northerners, and an emerging discourse of liberal pluralism that shaped Aboriginal policy at the local, provincial, and national level. A critical examination of the Leaf Rapids project and these work programs will, therefore, illustrate the homogenizing effects of modernity and the ethnocentric methods associated with the particular push towards integration and racial equality guided by representatives of the Schreyer administration. It will additionally demonstrate how attempts to include Aboriginal people in the wage economy and make them participants in the Leaf Rapids project were motivated, animated, and legitimized by the political pragmatism of the NDP, the interventionist philosophies of a social democratic government, and a liberal pluralist discourse that attempted to erase the racial hierarchy between white and Aboriginal populations, which had historically developed in this region.

One of the advantages of putting a model town, whose designs and practices were imported and exported on a global scale, at the centre of this study is that it draws together different historical forces operating on Leaf Rapids.<sup>8</sup> The purpose of this article is not to abstract these forces and make far-reaching claims about the nature of colonialism or racism, however, but to investigate their manifestations and the subsequent limitations placed on raced individuals in Leaf Rapids. That being said, there will be a focus on how the Leaf Rapids project and labour program were framed within the language of modernity, social progress and liberal pluralism. To find descriptions of these topics that unearth this language, a wide variety of sources was consulted. These sources include the records of the Leaf

*Sarah Ramsden spent her early childhood in Leaf Rapids. After completing high school in Killarney, she studied history at Brandon University (BA, 2008). She then studied history at Queen's University (MA, 2009). Currently a student in the Archival Studies program at the University of Manitoba, she is interested in community archives and the politics of representation.*





University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Tribune Collection, PC18, Box 48, 3298-10.

Boreal forest surrounded the growing town of Leaf Rapids in this aerial view from 1974.

Rapids Corporation and the Northern Manpower Corporation currently held at the Archives of Manitoba and records held at the Leaf Rapids Community Archives.<sup>9</sup> Other sources include newspapers, *The Forum* (Leaf Rapids) and the *Winnipeg Free Press* (WFP), and reports created by the Centre for Settlement Studies at the University of Manitoba. Established in 1966, this Centre took up the subject of planning northern resource communities and discussed strategies for the creation of stable settlements in this region. The production of these studies signifies the professionalization of town planning and demonstrates the renewed interest in the north that dates back to the fifties, which saw the establishment of the Department of Northern Affairs and Natural Resources (1953) and the creation of Diefenbaker's northern vision.<sup>10</sup>

In a speech made at the official opening of the Leaf Rapids Town Centre, Schreyer expressed his commitment to the north and the Leaf Rapids project declaring, "It is considered improper, if not politically unwise for a person in public life to admit to having a love affair. But I have just

such a love affair: and it is with northern Manitoba."<sup>11</sup> He went on to describe Leaf Rapids as "a jewel of the north" and later acknowledged the role of Sherritt Gordon saying, "If I have been speaking almost entirely of the Manitoba government role in this project, it is because of our special interest in it. But we have not been alone in this venture.

I must make it very clear that all of this would have been very different if not impossible were it not for the enlightened position and cooperation of Sherritt."<sup>12</sup> This paper engages with the work of the economist John Loxley who interprets the town and the actions of Sherritt Gordon much differently than Schreyer. According to Loxley, "The building of Leaf

Rapids townsite, a reformist move to the extent that miners benefited from unusually comfortable living conditions, represented in essence a subsidization of multi-national mining capital."<sup>13</sup> Established in 1927, Sherritt Gordon was a Canadian company that had its beginnings in Manitoba.<sup>14</sup> By the time of the Leaf Rapids project, the company had expanded overseas with ventures in Western Australia,

---

**... the Planning and Priorities Committee [of the Schreyer administration], which reviewed the company's proposal, saw in Leaf Rapids the opportunity to implement the new government's strategy for northern development and demonstrate its commitment to democratic socialism.**

---

the Philippines and Indonesia. According to its 1969 annual report, it was also in negotiations with Klockner & Co. of Duisburg, Germany to “explore a low-grade nickel prospect in Africa.”<sup>15</sup>

The election of a democratic socialist party had symbolic significance in the eyes of Manitobans and, as such, certain expectations, including a shift in policy and a move towards the left, accompanied the Schreyer administration into the provincial legislature. The objectives of this administration were clearly outlined in the *Guidelines for the Seventies*, which was, according to Avrum Regenstreif, “probably the most comprehensive outline of social and economic objectives ever presented to the electorate by a provincial government in Canada.”

<sup>16</sup> The four major goals this document identified were: a stay option, greater equality of the human condition, maximizing the well-being of Manitobans and increasing local participation.<sup>17</sup> Even though the NDP’s eight-year period in the legislature was certainly defined by a flurry of activity that saw tax and labour reform, the extension of provincial welfare and social services, the creation of a public auto insurance scheme, and regional development programs, the successful translation of these goals into effective programs proved difficult.<sup>18</sup> Citing the growth in government spending that characterized the Roblin administration (1959–1968), failed projects, and the protection of capital interests, academics have further shown that the NDP largely continued the policies of previous governments and practised a “mild form of social democracy.”<sup>19</sup>

Although the province of Manitoba was active in its northern region even before securing control over resources in 1930, Nelson Wiseman claims that, “the NDP devoted more energy and attention to the area than any government or party in the past.”<sup>20</sup> The policies the government pursued in northern Manitoba were largely in keeping with the objectives identified in *Guidelines for the Seventies*. The Northern Strategy for Development stressed the importance of regional development associated with the stay option and emphasized the human element by privileging local needs over domestic markets and participatory approaches to development.<sup>21</sup> Loxley has criticized this “socially minded” approach, however, asking, “why should a capitalist state wish to reverse the process of underdevelopment ... [considering] the contribution of the state to this process? Why then was the exercise attempted in the first place?”<sup>22</sup> In a critique of state policy and economic strategies, Loxley posited that even though greater efforts were made by the province to halt the economic exploitation of the north, listen to the demands of workers, and create greater social equality, the Schreyer administration did not fully implement this new development model and failed to realize the entrenchment of capitalism in the north.<sup>23</sup> The reality of the situation did not, however, stop the Schreyer administration or its supporters from presenting the government’s involvement in this region as a success story in which public welfare

triumphed over capital interests. A NDP campaign ad for the 1977 election printed in the *Northern Breeze*, for example, expressed the NDP’s “strengthen[ing] [of] the north” in terms of family, community and economic development and highlighted such things as housing programs, health care services, municipal grants, better transportation and recreational facilities, tourist development, consumer co-

---

**Although the province of Manitoba was active in its northern region even before securing control over resources in 1930, Nelson Wiseman claims that, “the NDP devoted more energy and attention to the area than any government or party in the past.”**

---

operatives, and consulting with local people. The tagline for this ad aptly read: “The north is now being developed by northerners. It didn’t just happen.”<sup>24</sup>

Leaf Rapids became a northern success story told by the Schreyer administration and was a direct product of this government’s northern strategy. Commenting on the replacement of the company by the LRDC, one NDP candidate identified the town’s symbolic importance saying, “The government’s actions in going into mineral exploration and building the first non-company mining town at Leaf Rapids will bring closer the day when it will be we, and not the multinational corporations, who will control our economic destiny.”<sup>25</sup> In addition to being understood as an intrusion on business and a \$30-million investment, Leaf Rapids was described, in the words of a member of the opposition, as “pie in the eye little-boy socialism.”<sup>26</sup> The presence of the government and its influence in Leaf Rapids is further evident in its organization. Although construction of the townsite began in 1971, it was part of a local government district until 1976 when Leaf Rapids achieved official town status.<sup>27</sup> This legal arrangement allowed the LRDC to act as “controller and manager” in lieu of an elected town council.<sup>28</sup> The LRDC was primarily responsible for the building of all facilities (residential, commercial, and recreational) and the establishment of a social development program. Under the Ruttan Townsite Agreement, Sherritt Gordon officially became a taxpayer—an arrangement that designated a new kind of corporate citizenship.<sup>29</sup> In keeping with the principles of participatory democracy, however, Leaf Rapids was supposed to be a “people place” instead of a company or government town.<sup>30</sup> Formed to increase public participation and advocate for the betterment of people’s general living conditions then, the Citizen’s Committee was established by local residents in February 1972.<sup>31</sup>

In tandem with the NDP’s economic and political objectives in the north, Leaf Rapids was promoted to the public and in such spaces as the UN Habitat Conference as “the image of the modern north in Manitoba” and “the



modern realization of the potential quality of life attainable in the North.”<sup>32</sup> This stress on modernization echoes a recurring dream of the north as an integrated region within Manitoba with a booming industrial core, a vision that dates as far back as the Bracken administration (1922–1943).<sup>33</sup> Signifying the increased emphasis on permanence were attempts to diversify the local economy. Whereas 70 per cent of people worked for the mine in most resource towns, planners aimed for 60 per cent in Leaf Rapids and expressed the desire to encourage other economic activities such as tourism and fish processing.<sup>34</sup> This measure was supposed to lessen its dependence on one industry as well as secure the government’s investment by minimizing the likelihood that Leaf Rapids would become a ghost town. While such activities sought to provide the structural foundation for stability, the establishment of modern conveniences and southern comforts in the north was considered a necessary precondition for the long-term relocation of residents.

The planning of Leaf Rapids shows why new considerations, such as “people, nature, and the commonwealth,” were made in the context of post-war community development approaches and how the NDP and Sherritt Gordon continued to follow previous models and old strategies that typify the history of resource community planning.<sup>35</sup> Private consultants were mostly responsible for the physical planning of Leaf Rapids. Firms in Winnipeg, including Gary Hilderman and Associates and W. L. Wardrop and Associates, were guided by the design philosophy of centralization and integration.<sup>36</sup> Leaf Rapids was removed from the industrial area in order to “avoid noise, noxious fumes, dirt, heavy traffic and unsightly buildings.”<sup>37</sup> There was a central system of walkways constructed to minimize the use of vehicles and, in doing so, further protect the “beautiful natural environment.”<sup>38</sup> Houses were available in a number of styles all patterned on southern models and were arranged in a bay street system.<sup>39</sup> In order to accommodate the target population of 3500, firms planned for 218 single-family detached houses, 63 duplexes, and 119 townhouses (stage one

---

**... just like the town centre, the bay street system, which created neighbourhoods by enclosing and organizing space, was supposed to bring individuals from different backgrounds together into a social space that would encourage feelings of kinship and belonging.**

---

development).<sup>40</sup> Epitomizing the design philosophy more than any other space, however, was the town centre, which received the Vincent Massey Award for Excellence in Urban Environment.<sup>41</sup> At 220,000 square feet, the town centre was divided into four basic quadrants that converged at the “town square.”<sup>42</sup> This intersecting mall system included

the hospital, school, library, post office, hotel, shopping complex, restaurants and recreational facilities. The only room with no public entrance from the interior was the beverage room. In addition to being practical and cost-efficient, the design was supposed to promote socializing among residents and the creation of an active community.<sup>43</sup>

The separation between living and working spaces reflects capitalist routines that demarcate and structure time along with space—a strategy that brings to mind David Harvey’s work on Fordism and the “search to forge a particular kind of worker.”<sup>44</sup> When analyzing some of the other designs, additional strategies used to mould workers and citizens become even more clear. Sherritt Gordon’s hiring policy, which favoured married men, was the determining factor in the decision to privilege the single-family home and minimize the number of rental units available. The rationale in this instance was that residents who had families and a mortgage were more likely to stay because they had invested in the community and could not move as freely as the transient workers of the past.<sup>45</sup> Another method aimed at prolonging residence was the forging of affective ties. For example, just like the town centre, the bay street system, which created neighbourhoods by enclosing and organizing space, was supposed to bring individuals from different backgrounds together into a social space that would encourage feelings of kinship and belonging.<sup>46</sup>

Performing a similar function were community recreation programs and public events.<sup>47</sup> A Recreation Commission was established to organize evening activities for adults and teenagers alike as well as bingo games, movie nights twice a week, cross-country skiing trips, and square dances.<sup>48</sup> The annual winter carnival was also created with the aim of fostering social cohesion. Winter carnival events included power toboggan races, cross-country skiing, log-splitting, hockey, figure skating, tea boiling, snow-sculpture contests, as well as arts and crafts.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, the title of Kechi-Mahekun (Cree for Big Wolf) was given to the person who could best demonstrate such northern skills as flour-packing, goose- and moose-calling, trap-setting, muskrat-skinning and bannock-baking.<sup>50</sup> The festival also held demonstrations and booths that spotlighted parts of the community thereby creating a panorama that allowed “Leaf Rapids [to] look at itself.”<sup>51</sup> While the winter carnival was very much a celebration of northern living then, it should be noted that organizations that were popular in the rural south—like the Order of the Royal Purple and the Elks—were established in Leaf Rapids further exemplifying the importance of southern links.

One of the ways that people identified Leaf Rapids was by defining it against the mining towns of the past. The replacement of the single-male, immigrant radical historically associated with resource communities with the stable family man, for instance, shows the increasing importance placed on the nuclear family.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Sherritt Gordon actually advertised in rural newspapers for the type of family man who was already “a hard-luck, hard-





UM Archives & Special Collections, Tribune Collection, PC18, Box 48, 3298-1.

Sid Green, Manitoba Minister of Mines and Natural Resources, opened a bridge at Leaf Rapids, 1971.

working farmer.”<sup>53</sup> A campaign ad in *The Forum* spotlighted the new man of the north as well. It featured Lester Osland, “Les,” and portrayed him as the model citizen (married, six children, veteran, deep social commitment to the wage-earner, and sensitive to Aboriginal exploitation—there is even a note written in Cree).<sup>54</sup> The status of the family in this modern town was also signified by the establishment of annual family days and further demonstrated in the early editions of *The Forum*, which had a weekly segment that featured different families from the community. There was even an official ceremony held when the first family of Leaf Rapids, Roger and Diane Harrington and their two children, moved into their home on 21 December 1971.<sup>55</sup> Present at this ceremony were W. F. Clarke, a representative of Sherritt Gordon Mines, and Al Plaskett from the United Steelworkers Union.

As a family town that was highly critical of the social problems that had plagued bachelor communities in the past, the community of Leaf Rapids was incredibly reflective and intent on the idea of providing opportunities for women outside the home and creating a suitable environment for a child’s development. Women, including “native women, professionals, unmarried women and home makers with children,” according to *The Forum*, met to discuss and in effect define women’s issues in Leaf Rapids.<sup>56</sup> Sometimes their concerns were locally specific as they talked about boredom, which they linked to northern isolation and lack of employment opportunities. To give greater credibility to their concerns, they used the universalizing languages of social needs and liberal feminism. Referring to stress and breakdown in mental health, solutions proposed at these meetings included working with the Department of Health

and Social Welfare to establish a daycare centre in which “groups [would] not be restricted to the traditional sex-orientated activities, but that girls would be able to learn wood work and boys cooking, if they should so desire.”<sup>57</sup>

Another grievance voiced by women was the absence of the arts and high culture in Leaf Rapids, whereby “the end result [was] a psychosis which develops endemically and manifests itself in alcoholism and depression.”<sup>58</sup> At Women’s Week held in honour of International Women’s Year (1975), there was, in response to this specific concern, a workshop on how to make handicrafts, a display from the Winnipeg Art Gallery featuring the work of a female photographer, and a special exhibit from the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature entitled “Changing Women’s Roles.”<sup>59</sup> This exhibit “explored the traditional roles of native women, immigrant women and the Victorian women.... [and] [c]ontemporary female roles such as mine worker and bus driver.”<sup>60</sup> Other workshops at this event, which was organized by local community members in co-operation with the Secretary of State’s Office in Winnipeg, included Budgeting in 1975, Skin Care, Exercising with Housework, Women in the Labour Force, and Family Life Education—a list that shows the mixture of “progressive” views and gendered assumptions continuing to operate in Leaf Rapids.<sup>61</sup> Overall, the evaluation of this event session was positive.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, even though invitations were extended to women in the nearby reserves of Nelson House, South Indian Lake and Pukatawagan, one criticism identified during the evaluation session was that there should have been “more native involvement.”<sup>63</sup>

Weller argues that, before the Second World War, the importance of the provincial north “was largely historic and symbolic rather than economic.”<sup>64</sup> The economies that typified the north prior to the war—including native activities like hunting, fishing, and trapping, as well as frontier-type development—were complex and constantly changing but rarely required a significant white population or large amounts of capital.<sup>65</sup> Due to economic underdevelopment and the absence of a well-established political presence, northern Manitoba was continually seen as peripheral from the perspective of a white southern majority. Post-war economic growth, nation- and province-building projects, and advancements in technologies, however, ultimately led capital interests to re-evaluate the economic potential of this area.<sup>66</sup> The megaprojects that were launched during this more aggressive stage of development, marked by the rise of industrial capitalism and global integration, brought with them an influx of capital, white settlers, and technology as well as a developmental paradigm that identified economies and assessed their value on the basis of capital growth.<sup>67</sup> Whereas money, technology, and white settlers (re)configured a hegemonic colonial presence in the north by further linking this region with the south, the developmental paradigm saw a fundamental tension existing between a “white” society defined by an

expanding resource economy and an “Aboriginal” society distinguished by primitive accumulation.<sup>68</sup>

Unlike other northern economies, such as the fur trade and the fisheries in which Aboriginal skills and labour were needed then, industrial capitalist ventures like mining operations saw the exclusion of Aboriginal people by northern developers.<sup>69</sup> While local Aboriginal labour was commonly used in the first stage of production that involved clearing the land to make way for such activity as mining operations, the importance of securing a stable workforce—a defining feature of capitalist ventures—and assumptions about the natural capacity of different races to work consequently privileged white labour over Aboriginal labour.<sup>70</sup> These assumptions proved persistent as the following comment made by a shift boss overseeing a work program exemplifies: “The Eskimo are better than the half Indians and the latter are better than the pure Indians. Among the half Indians some are good and some are bad depending on whether they are more like the whites or the Indians. The pure Indians are unteachable.”<sup>71</sup> In addition to demonstrating how race operated in an unspecified northern Manitoba mining community during the sixties, this quotation illustrates the belief that the timeless “Indian” could not be assimilated. Few Aboriginal people benefitted from this stage of development, which interrupted patterns of land use and was further marked by the destruction of Native land and their means of subsistence.<sup>72</sup>

Individuals in “white” and “Aboriginal” societies had little contact with each other, and until the early seventies, indigenous people from northern Manitoba made up less than three percent of the total work force in northern mining communities.<sup>73</sup>

The Province of Manitoba further established a dual presence in the north by creating the infrastructure that extended and supported a white southern hegemony.<sup>74</sup> Beginning with Duff Roblin’s administration, the Manitoba government solidified its presence in the north by expanding its “capacity ... to respond to and resolve social and economic issues.”<sup>75</sup> Commenting on the growth of government bureaucracy and the increased service networks that accompanied the rise of the welfare state, one report produced by the Centre for Settlement Studies concluded that, “There does not ... appear to be a particular northern flavour about the system. The social welfare service network, in all senses, appears to be a southern transplant!”<sup>76</sup> The administering of health, education, financial assistance and other services requiring the presence of government agents as well as social networks helped to usher in a new era whereby an exploitative capitalist system was legitimized by the presence of a benevolent state.<sup>77</sup> This political presence increased

divisions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people by institutionalizing their differences and categorizing them as dependent and independent populations. This situation reinforced the presence of two economies and societies in the north, a reality that ultimately gave rise to a new theoretical rationalization known as dualism. According to Loxley, “This approach argue[d] that alongside a modern industrialized white society, which enjoys the good Canadian life, there is a Native society characterized by drunkenness, an inability to adapt, a lack of reliability and an inability to participate in industrial society which becomes racist in its connotations.”<sup>78</sup>

Modernity in the form of capitalist progress, material comforts, and integration within provincial, national, and global networks made possible the establishment of resource communities that were essentially white microcosms of the south (also referred to as “wilderness suburbs” by Robson).<sup>79</sup> These settlements excluded Aboriginal people allowing resource and reserve communities to develop alongside one another. The poverty of the latter eventually

forced the federal and provincial governments to address this situation, however, and led to the modernization of some reserve communities (better housing, new public buildings and infrastructural improvements), the extension of the social welfare system, and attempts to create a self-sustaining population through its entry into the capitalist wage economy.<sup>80</sup> Some moderniza-

tion efforts that date to this period were particularly disastrous and tragic as the story of Island Falls and Sandy Bay exemplifies. These were neighbouring communities in Saskatchewan that supplied hydroelectric power to Flin Flon, Manitoba in the fifties. Whereas Island Falls was a prosperous, white community with modern conveniences, the latter was populated by Aboriginal people who lived in deplorable conditions, worked menial jobs and—rather ironically—did not even have access to electricity.<sup>81</sup>

Writing on the subject of diversity in resource communities, L. B. Siemens said, “we are nowadays increasingly concerned about enlarging the range of opportunities for Canada’s citizens and tend to view segregation, whether along racial, ethnic or socio-economic lines, as something to be deplored or something which it is possible to avoid through orderly development and planning .... Thus the possibility of planning for greater social integration, if we desire to do so, seems greater at this time.”<sup>82</sup> That the community of Leaf Rapids was supposed to be “multi-cultural” demonstrates the importance of context and the influence of contemporary theories of liberal pluralism as well as popular discourses on the Canadian mosaic. While it is hard not to draw a parallel between the objectives of the LRDC and the federal policy

---

**The [post-war] megaprojects that were launched during this more aggressive stage of development, marked by the rise of industrial capitalism and global integration, brought with them an influx of capital, white settlers, and technology as well as a developmental paradigm that identified economies and assessed their value on the basis of capital growth.**

---





UM Archives & Special Collections, Tribune Collection, PC18, Box 48, 3298-6.

The 211,000-square-foot Leaf Rapids Town Centre, built at a cost of \$8.5 million and opened in September 1974, brought under one roof the town's school, hospital, hotel, bar, department store, supermarket, bank, and municipal offices.

of multiculturalism that had its origins in 1971—the same year that the town was established and the LRDC identified its objectives,<sup>83</sup> it should also be noted that the Manitoba government did not have a multicultural statute until 1992.<sup>84</sup> This absence, however, does not indicate the extent to which the Schreyer administration was influenced by the language of racial and ethnic pluralism. Schreyer himself was given the title of Honourary Chief White Eagle and his non-Anglo-Saxon status was identified as a distinguishing mark and asset during the campaigns of 1969 and 1973.<sup>85</sup> The social aims of the Manitoba NDP, which were captured by the slogan “humanity first” and further outlined in the *Guidelines of the Seventies*, stressed both “equality of opportunity” and “equality of condition.”

Following the symbolic win for the movement towards social equality, the Manitoba Government committed itself to “the gainful placement in employment of native northern people.”<sup>86</sup> This commitment was largely directed by the newly created Northern Manpower Corporation. Established in July 1971 and composed of a directorate with members from various provincial departments, the NMPC was guided both by the new development strategy as well as the social platform that expressed concern for the betterment of the human condition and equality of opportunity. Commenting on the social purpose of the

NMPC and the potential of this body, Schreyer said, “There are many underemployed and unemployed northerners, most of them of Indian ancestry who with the right kind of information, training and orientation programs, would be willing to take up the northern jobs that became available. To see that this happens is one of the high priority policies of the Manitoba Government.”<sup>87</sup> It is then with this particular arm of government that the Schreyer administration launched a series of programs aimed at increasing the number of northerners in northern jobs.

After calling previous Aboriginal employment programs “complete failures,” Ed Schreyer went on to say in an article published in the *WFP* that, “The natives ... simply couldn't make the transition from the remote reserves to a white man's kind of community and a permanent job and went back to the reserves after failing to adjust.”<sup>88</sup> This article, titled “Indian Miners Goal of Plan,” appeared on 13 May 1972—a day after the Tawow program was announced. The Tawow program, meaning “you are welcome” or “(come in) there is room for you” in Cree, was developed by the NMPC and co-sponsored by Sherritt Gordon Mines Ltd. (an agreement was reached in 1972).<sup>89</sup> Although participants were required to start at entry-level positions, performing such jobs as mill labourer, truck driver, and dozer/loader operator, the program



promised that upward mobility based on merit was possible within this system. The stated objectives were to have fifty residents of northern Manitoba “supported in meaningful employment at the Sherritt Gordon Ruttan Lake mine” and “to develop and evaluate a continuing program of recruitment and job development in the mining industry with particular reference to Sherritt Gordon Mines and Ruttan Lake.”<sup>90</sup> Another objective was “to determine the best way of helping northern people take the step from the small remote communities where seasonal fishing and trapping is the way of life, to the northern urban communities where the jobs are industrial ... helping the men and their families to make the tremendous psychological and social adjustment to their urban environment.”<sup>91</sup>

Distinguishing this program from others was its approach, which was comprehensive and aimed at helping native participants and their families adjust to an industrial way of life. Prospective participants were identified by distributing brochures and showing videos—both containing information on the mine and community life—on reserves after attaining band approval. When an individual expressed interest, he was provided with more information including a tour of Leaf Rapids and, if he agreed to move there with his family, was given assistance finding housing and “intensive counseling” upon arrival.<sup>92</sup> Other services included vocational counselling, orientation, occupational training and visits to native workers and their families in the new homes. The family presence was important for reasons previously stated. In the case of Aboriginal people, however, who were often seen as lacking proper family values, the emphasis was placed on the relocation of families to prevent “Indian men from deserting their wives.”<sup>93</sup> The husband or wage earner was not the only one to receive advice or be embraced by the ever-expanding reach of the state. An advertisement in the *WFP* for the position of Home Visitor with the Tawow program stipulated that the applicant “have budgeting and domestic home social development.”<sup>94</sup> In this totalizing and “socially minded” approach then, the new wage earner learned how to book off work for holidays as the new homemaker was taught how to operate a dishwasher. Organizers of Tawow acknowledged that the success of the program did not entirely rest on Aboriginal participants. Further attempts were made to “orient the southerners among the mining staff to the special needs and problems of the Tawow employees.”<sup>95</sup> On the subject of advisory support, the creators of Tawow also agreed that certain departments and groups like Indian Affairs, the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood, and the Manitoba Métis Federation should be consulted through the duration of the program and called for continual evaluation. These approaches proved somewhat successful as the program boasted a sixty-six per cent success rate. Nonetheless, Tawow never achieved its unofficial goal of having Aboriginal employees compose one-third of the workforce.<sup>96</sup>

Comments made by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in respect to the Tawow program

reveal racial stereotypes that continued to shape views of Aboriginal people and indicate the ethnocentric ideas behind socialization. The “success story” of Peter and Ellen Mekish, which appeared in the *WFP*, 6 June 1975, is an extremely dense record containing many voices that—at least on the surface—seem to agree on certain key issues, such as what the natural habits of “the Indian” were as well as the necessary steps for group advancement.

The Mekishes were a married couple who worked alongside each other in the Ruttan mine. While the article does give background information on these two individuals, Bob Lowery, its author, was primarily concerned with outlining the significance of the Tawow program and therefore used quotations that made generalized statements about Aboriginal people as a group within and outside the mine. For example, Ken Bear, the Sherritt Gordon Co-Director of the Tawow program, was quoted as saying, “At first people don’t recognize the value of their job.... After a while they begin to see what the medical, dental and other benefits mean to their families and future.”<sup>97</sup> Bear later went on to say that counselling was an important service because “Indians don’t normally push themselves forward.”<sup>98</sup> Born on the John Smith Indian Reserve in Saskatchewan, Bear’s comments speak to the difficult transitions made by Tawow participants who left their communities in an attempt to better their lives.

The Mekish article further shows how the language of liberal pluralism worked to conceal a colonial presence in the north and the power imbalance between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Near the end of the article, Lowery wrote:

The Polish born Mr. Korski [manager of the Ruttan mine] says that having been part of a so-called minority group himself he can appreciate what the Indian people are up against in making their way through numerous entrenched [sic] attitudes. He thinks that the trend will be towards the Indian being part of an integrated Canadian mosaic, as has happened over the centuries in Europe. Setting Indian people up on reservations, in his view, has set this process back a hundred years.<sup>99</sup>

While there is some sensitivity to the challenges that Aboriginal people faced, the equation of Polish and Aboriginal peoples flattens out a racial hierarchy that had been (re)constructed throughout the history of northern Manitoba. The curious and ahistorical comparison between Canada and Europe has a similar effect. While the former analogy signals diversity, both of them erase the historical circumstances that shaped the (re)creation of racial categories in the north and fail to recognize the “racial domination ... at the very heart of Canadian nationhood.”<sup>100</sup>

Even though the picture shown of the Mekishes’ experiences was shaped by the article’s narrative structure and the author’s desire to tell an uplifting story about the progress made by Aboriginal people as a direct result of their

inclusion in a morally just society, there is some personal information to be gleaned from the brief descriptions of these experiences. Ellen Mekish, for example, indicates that she chose to move to Leaf Rapids with her family because of the opportunity for “better pay and more adventure.”<sup>101</sup> In addition to working in the mine, Ellen Mekish taught Cree at a night class, a task she took great pride in. She and her husband achieved a comfortable standard of living (defined by modern norms) and were further able to buy a house and adequately provide for a family of four. This picture of a happy, modern family also included a German Shepherd named Toby.<sup>102</sup> Those writing on the Tawow project and the interested parties emphasized the role of choice to explain these “transformations.” Such arguments, however, failed to mention or provide any description of the conditions on reserves or the destruction of Aboriginal land as a result of hydroelectric projects.

When Sterling Lyon and the Progressive Conservatives rode into the Legislature on a platform of fiscal responsibility, the government terminated employment programs and community projects, cut back social services, and reduced taxes on mining companies.<sup>103</sup> With the construction process over and no need to justify the expenditure to taxpayers, the Schreyer administration’s hopeful forecasts for the future of Leaf Rapids quickly faded from the historical record. Nevertheless, people familiar with the community continued to talk about the town, mentioning its community spirit and the progressive stance towards the environment. It should come as no surprise then that in March 2007, Leaf Rapids made headlines once again by becoming the first town in North America to pass a bylaw banning plastic bags.

During the period in between headlining stories, the community of Leaf Rapids changed significantly. Although some developers predicted that Leaf Rapids would reach a population of 12,000–15,000 when construction began, it peaked at around 3,500 and eventually dwindled to 500 after the 2002 closing of the mine.<sup>104</sup> At present, the majority of the population of Leaf Rapids is Aboriginal, and the former resource community has become known as a “welfare town.” The rows of empty bungalows so reminiscent of the seventies in their styles testify to the impermanence of the NDP’s northern vision then, which fundamentally contrasts with the strong and permanent Aboriginal presence in this region.

The current scholarship on Leaf Rapids does not identify the various formal and informal consequences of its politicization, probe the dimensions of this process, or even discuss the town to any considerable extent. This article by contrast has looked at Leaf Rapids to see how the Schreyer administration, the LRDC, and residents responded to the challenge of creating a new community in the north. The excitement and optimism surrounding the town suggest both planners and residents wanted an enlightened design that would reflect the politics of a social democratic government and incorporate progressive social and environmental ideas. By examining the discussion

of racial integration and Aboriginal participation in Leaf Rapids, this article has sought to uncover the limitations

---

**When Sterling Lyon and the Progressive Conservatives rode into the Legislature on a platform of fiscal responsibility, the government terminated employment programs and community projects, cut back social services, and reduced taxes on mining companies.**

---

of the design and the reluctance to break with the past in order to implement a new model of development. ❧

## Notes

1. This paper is a version of a cognate essay written in 2009 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, Department of History, Queen’s University. The opinions and conclusions expressed in this paper are the author’s and have not been endorsed or approved by the Government of Manitoba. The author acknowledges financial assistance of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and her Research Agreement with the Government of Manitoba. The author thanks her supervisor Barrington Walker and second reader Karen Dubinsky for their feedback. Many helping hands were given during the completion of this essay and the author would like to acknowledge the community of Leaf Rapids including Chuck Stensgard and the Leaf Rapids Public Library, the Archives of Manitoba, Tom Mitchell, Jim Mochoruk, Alison R. Marshall, and James Naylor.
2. University of Winnipeg, *The Planning and Development of the Township of Leaf Rapids*, seminar project report, 1972–1973, public administration 2326-1 (Winnipeg: University of Winnipeg, 1973), p. 15.
3. Rick Neufeld cited in “Leaf Rapids Crowd Applauds Rick Neufeld,” *WFP*, 5 October 1973, p. 28. Whereas Neufeld called Leaf Rapids the “baby of Manitoba,” Martin O’Malley called Leaf Rapids the “great democratic socialist experiment in northern Manitoba.” Leaf Rapids Community Archives (hereafter LRCA), File 33-112, “Press Releases,” newspaper clipping, “Social Experiment with a Song,” *Globe and Mail*, 2 June 1972.
4. See Nelson Wiseman, *Social Democracy in Manitoba: A History of the CCF-NDP* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1983), p. 144; Robert Robson, “Manitoba’s Resource Towns: the Twentieth-Century Frontier,” *Manitoba History*, No. 16 (1988), pp. 12-14; John Loxley, “The ‘Great Northern’ Plan,” *Studies in Political Economy*, No. 6 (Autumn 1981), p. 172; Oiva W. Saarinen, “Single-Sector Communities in Northern Ontario: the Creation and Planning of Dependent Towns,” in *Power and Place: Canadian Urban Development in the North American Context*, Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan F. J. Artibise, eds. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986), p. 254; Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan F. J. Artibise, “Canadian Resource Towns in Historical Perspective,” *Little Communities & Big Industries*, Roy T. Bowles, ed., (Toronto: Butterworths, 1982), p. 56; Gerald Friesen, “Northern Manitoba 1870–1970—An Historical Outline,” *People & Land in Northern Manitoba* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1992), p. 47.
5. The official objectives of the LRDC are cited by Robson, “Manitoba’s Resource Towns,” p. 13.
6. While the use of the term “Aboriginal” refers to status and non-status Indians as well as Metis people, I recognize that lumping these groups together is problematic. This problem is partially the result of the sources, which, although exhibiting sensitivity towards these

- populations, fails to make distinctions between them when referring to the "Indian problem" and the racial dualism of the north.
7. Local Government District of Leaf Rapids and the Province of Manitoba, *The Leaf Rapids Planning Scheme*, By-law 1 for the LGD of Leaf Rapids (7 December 1971), p. 38. Property of Chuck Stensgard.
8. The design model relied heavily on the ideas of British architect Ralph Erskine including integrated planning and subarctic design—ideas associated with his Svappavaara project, Archives of Manitoba (hereafter AM), EC0044/GR4048/P-16-5-8, Planning and Priorities Committee of Cabinet Departmental and Subject Files, Leaf Rapids: New Town, report by Dr. Krisno Nimpuno, "Leaf Rapids, A New Town in the Remote North," July 1976, p. 3.
9. Local newspapers, press releases, a community history book, photos and scrapbooks located at the community archives in Leaf Rapids and belonging to previous and current residents of the town were also examined. The documents housed in the community archives were mostly uncatalogued and collections were sometimes incomplete but fortunately the majority of *The Forum* [Leaf Rapids] was housed at the Manitoba Legislative Library. This newspaper describes the progress of the community's early construction as well as its social ambitions.
10. David Neufeld, "Parks Canada and the Commemoration of the North," in *Northern Visions: New Perspectives on the North in Canadian History*, Kerry Abel and Ken S. Coates, eds. (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001), p. 49. Also see F. Abele, "Canadian Contradictions: Forty Years of Northern Political Development," *Arctic*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (December, 1987), p. 312.
11. AM, EC0030/GR6792/Q027492, Premier's Speeches, "Leaf Rapids Town Centre Opening," 21 September 1974, p. 2.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
13. Loxley, "The 'Great Northern' Plan," p. 172.
14. For more on Sherritt Gordon see, "A New Mine – Another Milestone: Sherritt Gordon Opens Ruttan Mine," *Manitoba: Canada's Number One Sun*, Vol. 29, No. 5 (September–October 1974), Seven A – Eight A.
15. Manitoba Legislative Library. Sherritt Gordon Mines Limited, *Annual Report 1969*, (Toronto, 1970), p. 8.
16. Avrum Regenstreif, Assistant Secretary, Housing and Urban Development, Government of Manitoba, *Leaf Rapids, Manitoba: A Case Study in Planning for a Contemporary Resource Based Community*, presentation to the Canadian Association for American Studies, 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference (McMaster University: 1977), p. 2.
17. Office of the Premier, *Guidelines for the Seventies* (Manitoba, 1973), pp. 57-58.
18. Keith Brownsey and Michael Howlett, *The Provincial State in Canada* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001), pp. 218-219.
19. *Ibid.* Also see Loxley, "The 'Great Northern Plan,' p. 172, and "Manitoba: the Dynamics of North-South Relationships," in *People & Land*, pp. 59-61; James A. McAllister, *The Government of Edward Schreyer* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984), pp. 20-87.
20. Wiseman, *Social Democracy*, p. 130.
21. Loxley, "The 'Great Northern' Plan," pp. 163-166.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 172. Also see Loxley, "Manitoba: North-South Relations," p. 61.
24. LRCA, uncatalogued collection, NDP campaign ad, *The Northern Breeze*, 14 September 1977, p. 8.
25. Vic Schroeder cited in "NDP candidate is Schroeder," *WFP*, 4 February 1972, p. 2.
26. J. Frank Johnson as cited by Katie Fitzrandolph, "Leaf Rapids Plan Hit By Johnson," *WFP*, 18 May 1973, p. 7.
27. Bob Lowery, "Leaf Rapids Makes Official Town Status," *WFP*, 24 September 1976, p. 6.
28. Jo Ann Greisman, "The Leaf Rapids Project," *The Forum*, 29 March 1972, p. 4.
29. This Agreement was between the Province and Sherritt Gordon. The term "corporate citizenship" was used by Roger Newman, "Avoiding 'Company Town' Atmosphere: Whatever Withers Leaf Rapids Will Live," 11 July 1972, p. 39.
30. Leaf Rapids Development Corporation, Ltd. *Leaf Rapids, Manitoba: A Bold New Concept for Community Development* (Winnipeg: Manitoba, 1972), p. 3.
31. Carole Bowman (co-ordinator), *Leaf Rapids: A Local History, 1970-1989* (Leaf Rapids, Manitoba: Leaf Rapids Education Centre, 1989), p. 14.
32. AM, EC0044/GR6788/Q26867, Planning and Priorities Committee of Cabinet Departmental and Subject Files, Leaf Rapids Corporation - General, Box 19, Province of Manitoba, "Leaf Rapids Public Relations Document," 15 August 1975, p. 2.
33. Jim Mochoruk, *Formidable Heritage: Manitoba's North and the Cost of Development, 1870-1930* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2004), pp. 298 and 379.
34. Roger Newman, "Avoiding 'Company Town' Atmosphere: Whatever Withers Leaf Rapids Will Live," *WFP*, 11 July 1972, p. 39.
35. LRDC, *A Bold New Concept*, p. 3.
36. H. D. Linn and J. C. Stabler, *Economic, Social and Planning Requirements for Northern Communities* (Regina: Saskatchewan: Department of Mineral Resources, 1978), p. 579; Bob Lowery, "Big Community Centre Complex Being Built at Leaf Rapids," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 15 November 1973, p. 62.
37. University of Winnipeg, *The Planning and Development of the Township of Leaf Rapids*, p. 19.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
39. Linn and Stabler, *Economic, Social and Planning Requirements*, p. 5-24.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 5-29.
41. AM, EC0044/GR6788/Q26867, Planning and Priorities Committee of Cabinet Departmental and Subject Files, Leaf Rapids Corporation - General, Box 19, news release, "Leaf Rapids Town Centre Wins 'Excellence Award.'"
42. Bob Lowery, "Big Community Centre Complex Being Built at Leaf Rapids," *WFP*, 15 November 1973, p. 62.
43. University of Winnipeg, *The Planning and Development of the Township of Leaf Rapids*, p. 12.
44. David Harvey, *Fordism* (Kingston: Queen's University, 2008), pp. 125-126.
45. University of Winnipeg, *The Planning and Development of the Township of Leaf Rapids*, p. 14.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.
47. Work that provides an insightful look at this aspect of resource community planning include Robert Robson, "Flin Flon: A Study of Company-Community Relations in a Single Enterprise Community," *Urban History*, Vol. 12 (February 1984), pp. 29-44; Rex Lucas, *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown: Life in Canadian Communities of Single Industry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971).
48. "Rec Commission," *The Forum*, 23 February 1973, p. 6.
49. "Festival!" *The Forum*, 23 February 1973, p. 1.
50. "Marvin Cooks wins Leaf Rapids derby for third time," *WFP*, 18 March 1976, p. 28.
51. Bob Lowery, "Leaf Rapids festival eye opener for many," *WFP*, 27 November 1973, p. 48.
52. Robert Rutherford, "Approaches to Community Formation and the Family in the Provincial North: Prince George and British Columbia's Central Interior," *BC Studies*, 104 (1994-1995), pp. 124-125.
53. The University of Winnipeg, *The Planning and Development of the Township of Leaf Rapids*, p. 14.
54. "A Man Committed to the Future of the North," *The Forum*, 22 June 1973, p. 21.



55. Bowman, *Leaf Rapids: A Local History*, p. 12.
56. "Women Meet," *The Forum*, 26 January 1973, p. 14.
57. *Ibid.*
58. *The Forum*, 12 January 1973, p. 8.
59. Other cultural events were sponsored by federal and provincial grants and included festivals like Women & Film. Brought to Leaf Rapids in June 1973, this event explored traditional and alternative images of women in films like *Christmas at Moose Factory*, "Film Festival," *The Forum*, 8 June 1973, pp. 1, 3.
60. LRCA, uncatalogued collection, *Report on Women's Week*, 4-8 November 1975, p. 23.
61. For a compelling argument about the value of a gender analysis in the study of resource communities see Nancy M. Forestell, "Women, Gender, and the Provincial North," in *Northern Visions*, pp. 107-116.
62. The report on Women's Week says that ten people attended the evaluation session. *Report on Women's Week*, p. 20.
63. *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 24.
64. G. R. Weller, "Managing Canada's North: The Case of the Provincial North," *Canadian Public Administration*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer 1984), p. 198.
65. For an economic history of Aboriginal people in northern Manitoba see Frank Tough, *As their Natural Resources Fail: Native Peoples and the Economic History of Northern Manitoba, 1870-1930* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996).
66. David Quiring, *Colonialism in Saskatchewan: Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004) xi; Kenneth Coates and William Morrison, *The Forgotten North: A History of Canada's Provincial Norths* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1992), pp. 85-112.
67. Friesen, "Northern Manitoba 1870-1970," p. 46; also see Weller "Managing Canada's North," p. 201. Weller says there is a "basic contradiction in northern development because of the incompatibility of these two economies."
68. Quiring, *Colonialism in Saskatchewan*, p. 64.
69. Tough, *As their Natural Resources Fail*, pp. 15, 188; and Mochoruk, *Formidable Heritage*, p. 370.
70. Helen Buckley, *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare: Why Indian Policy Failed in the Prairie Provinces* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), p. 72; Alex Himelfarb, "The Social Characteristics of One-Industry Towns in Canada," in *Little Communities*, p. 21.
71. Shift boss as cited by Andrew Friedman, *Market Factors Affecting the Viability of Four Single-Enterprise Communities in Manitoba* (University of Manitoba, Centre for Settlement Studies, 1970), p. 40.
72. Coates and Morrison, *The Forgotten North*, p. 84.
73. Avrum Regenstreif, *A Case Study in Planning for a Contemporary Resource Based Community*, p. 18.
74. Eva Mackey, *House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 28.
75. R. A. Young, Philippe Faucher, and André Blais, "The Concept of Province-Building: A Critique," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (December 1984), p. 800. The quotation is a summation of work by Chandler and Chandler.
76. L. B. Spearman, *Comparison of Social Welfare Needs with Service Network in Two Northern Manitoba Communities* (Winnipeg: Centre for Settlement Studies, University of Manitoba, 1975), p. 71.
77. Coates and Morrison, *The Forgotten North*, 104; and Mackey, *House of Difference*, p. 62.
78. Loxley, "Manitoba: North-South Relations," p. 60.
79. Robson cited by Friesen, "Northern Manitoba 1870-1970," p. 46. Quiring, *Colonialism in Saskatchewan*, p. 59. Here, Quiring refers to the creation of "a white, prosperous microcosm of the south."
80. Robert Robson, "Modernization in the Manitoba North: the Housing Initiative," p. 106. For contemporary economic approaches to the "Indian Problem" see P. Deprez and G. Sigurdson, *The Economic Status of the Canadian Indian: A Re-examination* (Winnipeg: Centre for Settlement Studies, University of Manitoba, 1969); and Deprez, "Education and Economic Development: the Case of Indian Reserves in Canada," in *Two Papers on Canadian Indians* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, Centre for Settlement Studies, 1973).
81. Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2005), p. 360; also see R. Bothwell, *Eldorado: Canada's National Uranium Company* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp. 68-69.
82. L. B. Siemens, "Planning Communities for the North: Some Social and Psychological Influences," in *Market Factors*, pp. 68-69.
83. Robert Harney, "So Great a Heritage as Ours: Immigration and the Survival of the Canadian Policy," *Daedalus*, Vol. 117, No. 4 (1988), p. 65.
84. Joseph Garcea, "Provincial Multiculturalism Policies in Canada, 1974-2004: A Content Analysis," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (2006), pp. 1-19.
85. Brian Dewalt, *Challenge and Achievement: the Manitoba New Democratic Party* (Winnipeg: Manitoba New Democratic Party, 1987), pp. 11-12.
86. AM. EC0044/GR0167/Q26230, Planning and Priorities Committee of Cabinet Departmental and Subject Files, Northern Manpower Corporations - Leaf Rapids, 1971-1972, Temporary box 3, Agreements, *Leaf Rapids Local Involvement*, Department of Agriculture, "Background Leaf Rapids/Lynn Lake Strategy Plan," p. 2.
87. LRCA, uncatalogued collection, newspaper clipping, Ed Schryer as cited in, "Northern Manpower Corps: A New Approach to Northern Employment," *Miskamok News*, 6 March 1973, p. 1.
88. Egon Frech, "Indian Miners Goal of Plan," *WFP*, 13 May 1972, p. 1.
89. Bowman, *Leaf Rapids*, p. 33.
90. AM. EC 0044, Planning and Priorities Committee of Cabinet Departmental and Subject Files, Q026230, temporary box 3, "Agreements," "Memorandum of agreement pertaining to the provision of project management services to the Northern Manpower Corps-Sherritt Gordon Employment Project at Ruttan Lake-Leaf Rapids," June 1972, pp. 1-2.
91. *Ibid.*, new file, "Leaf Rapids Corporation," Government of Manitoba, *Leaf Rapids: New Town*, p. 19.
92. Linn and Stabler, *Economic, Social and Planning Requirements*, p. 5-32.
93. Bob Lowery, "Indian Couple Earns \$1,200 Monthly as Native Training Program Pays Off," *WFP*, 6 June 1975, p. 18.
94. *WFP*, 2 November 1974, p. 39. The practice of teaching Aboriginal women domestic skills was by no means unprecedented. F. Abele cites programs aiming to teach housekeeping skills to these women in "Canadian Contradictions," p. 313.
95. Linn and Stabler, *Economic, Social and Planning Requirements*, p. 5-32.
96. This unofficial goal was cited by Lowery, "Indian Couple Earns \$1,200 Monthly," p. 18.
97. Ken Bear as cited by Lowery, "Indian Couple Earns \$1,200 Monthly," p. 18.
98. *Ibid.*
99. Lowery, "Indian Couple Earns \$1,200 Monthly," p. 18.
100. Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 18.
101. Ellen Mekish as cited by Lowery, "Indian Couple Earns \$1,200 Monthly," p. 18.
102. *Ibid.*
103. John Loxley, "The 'Great Northern' Plan," p. 173.
104. "The Leaf Rapids Project," *The Forum*, 29 March 1972, p. 1; also see <http://www.communityprofiles.mb.ca/cgi-bin/csd/index.cgi?id=4623034> (accessed 30 April 2009).

# High Stakes and Hard Times: Herb Lake and Depression-Era Mining in Northern Manitoba

by Will Steinburg

Department of History, University of Manitoba

Don't you know that for two hundred and fifty years Canadians have been puddling along on the southern rim of a country as rich as any country in the world and have handed the rest of it over to a company of moneyed Englishmen who never saw Canada and never give a tinker's damn if they ever do or not. God Almighty's going to give Canada the next hundred years to make good in... We've got enough fish in the lakes north of the Saskatchewan to feed the rest of the world week-days and Fridays. There's more good salmon in the Hudson's Bay than they ever dreamed of in Alaska or British Columbia. There's enough water power here in one province to turn every wheel, light every house and every street in the village from Halifax to Vancouver. There's timber and stone and minerals—why, God bless my soul, it isn't a question of whether the stuff's here or not. It's a question of whether we're packing the kind of stuff here [pointing to his belt]... That's where we stand!<sup>1</sup>

**T**his excerpt from Manitoban author Douglas Dirkin's 1921 novel *The Lobstick Trail* will seem a bit unusual to modern readers, particularly for the self-assured tone and outlandish claims of its speaker, the novel's hero Kirk Bradner. Bradner's speech expresses a kind of wild optimism for northern settlement that seems naïve and out of place today. During the 1920s and 1930s, however, this sort of boosterism and romance of the north was commonplace. Like many newcomers to Manitoba's frontier in that period, Bradner imagines that the north is a land waiting impatiently to be subdued; that it contains a treasure trove of resources that will make the province productive and prosperous; and that it is missing only the right addition of people and infrastructure to unlock this potential. Bradner's utopian vision is telling of how southern Manitobans generally viewed the provincial north during the Depression: while boosters presented a land of untapped, unimaginable potential on the one hand, on the other their promises and appeals expose a fractured and malfunctioning society in need of reassurance and security. The First World War had been hard on Canadians

and Manitobans particularly. General economic malaise followed the war and later came the Great Depression. Many homesteaders and labourers were forced from their homes. In these troubled times Manitoba's northern frontier afforded southern society the room and resources it needed to adjust to abrupt economic and social change. In this period, the hinterland acted as a release valve, absorbing some of society's most disadvantaged people. In order to escape harsh economic conditions in the south, many poor, alienated and unemployed individuals flooded into the north during the Depression. At the same time this exodus occurred, the provincial north was also a refuge for commercial interests. New space was opened up for well-connected companies to expand their business in the form of large industrial mines and company towns. In the 1930s, both extremes of the economic spectrum were well represented in the north, but they did not often overlap. They existed in separate communities, formed on fundamentally different philosophies and shaped by drastically different methods of production. It can be said that every northern community reflects its founders in significant ways, that each town is an expression of its founders' beliefs and their needs. The goal of this article is to explain the exodus of mostly poor, alienated southerners to the north, and to show how a community that they created represented their beliefs and circumstances in a distinctive way. In the Canadian north, company towns have dominated the scene, but this article is meant to highlight the lives of men and women who did not settle in company towns during the 1920s and 1930s. The focal point of their northern exodus was the small mining town of Herb Lake that developed along the east shore of Wekusko Lake (near present day Snow Lake, 150 km northeast of The Pas). There they created a haven from the Depression. The migrants who settled in Herb Lake bargained on little more than an expectation of gold and relied mainly on their own industry. As an engine of wealth creation their town was an abject failure, but its unlikely existence was a surprise that begs some explanation.

## A Typical Resource Town?

Herb Lake was the last, and perhaps the only, resource town in Manitoba created by independent miners of limited means. It is also a fairly typical example of the numerous mining boomtowns that developed across the Canadian north before 1930. These were created on an *ad hoc* basis in response to large mineral discoveries and the rush of prospectors that they attracted. As in all other resource towns, every aspect of life in Herb Lake was governed by

Will Steinburg was raised in St. Adolphe, Manitoba. He received a BA from the University of Manitoba (2005) and an MA in history at Queen's University (2009). Currently studying law at the University of Manitoba, he is a mining enthusiast and avid canoeist of historic rivers who aspires to be a fine paddler and a perfect shot.



A view of Herb Lake, October 1938.

Archives of Manitoba, Natural Resources Collection, Series 1, #51.

the resource the townspeople extracted and the means they used to extract it. Since the means of extraction was mainly controlled by individuals, development in Herb Lake proceeded in a helter-skelter fashion as scattered individual entrepreneurs acted without much direction or any reference to an overall plan. Like many early mining towns, Herb Lake began as a loose assortment of poorly constructed tents and bunkhouses and transformed gradually into a community.

In 1914, Richard Woosey and M. J. Hacket discovered a vein of gold-bearing quartz on the east shore of Wekusko (Herb) Lake that contained “free gold.” News of this find drew a rush of prospectors into the area, and in a short time “the whole shore of the lake north of the [Woosey] claims and for some distance in was staked.”<sup>2</sup> Initially a number of promising claims were made in the area, but as the region’s inhabitants would eventually discover, these finds were not representative of the area’s generally low-grade, unprofitable ore.

### **Manitoba’s Mining Boom and the Impetus for Settlement**

At the outset, enthusiasm for the Herb Lake area seemed reasonable. During this period, Manitoba experienced a mining boom that has since been unmatched for size and scope in the province’s history. After the war, resource towns were being created all across the province’s north: Flin Flon, Bissett, Pine Falls and Sherridon are just some examples. Attesting to the impressive scale of the province’s

mining boom, Jim Mochoruk notes that “in 1928 alone [the height of the boom period], almost 11,000 new mineral claims had been staked in Manitoba. Sixty-eight new mining companies had been formed under provincial law, and thirty-two out-of-province syndicates had set up shop in Manitoba.”<sup>3</sup> Enthusiasts and experts had every reason to believe that the mining potential of Manitoba was only just beginning to be realized. Promoters bragged of “mineral wealth” in the province “of such promise as to put Manitoba on the map as a mineral producer.”<sup>4</sup> The war effort had also elevated the mining industry to a “matter of great national importance” for the “manufacture of munitions.”<sup>5</sup> The province’s vast stores of strategic minerals—nickel, copper, and zinc—were sure to bring increased prosperity to Manitoba just as they had in Ontario and Quebec. Within this context, Herb Lake flourished and its future seemed assured.

Meanwhile, after The First World War declining wheat prices and drought forced foreclosure on many farmers. At roughly the same time, industrial unemployment rose to unprecedented levels.<sup>6</sup> As farms and factories closed down, many working-class Canadians and recent immigrants left their homes behind to pursue self-employment and short-term wage labour in the developing north. Their exodus to the north was aided by steadily rising fur prices and pre-war railroad projects that had opened up vast stretches of “new” territory to prospectors and trappers. This unusual movement from urban to rural areas continued right into the Great Depression.



The presence of “free gold” in Herb Lake was a major draw for Depression migrants. Along with furs and fish, free gold was one of the first resources to be exploited on the northern frontier. This is because a “free,” or “placer,” gold deposit is one that an individual or small group can successfully carry to production without much initial capital investment.<sup>7</sup> It can be extracted and transported easily, using simple, affordable tools and machinery. Gold mining of this kind is perfectly suited to people of limited means working in remote areas. For a minimum of overhead costs mining, prospecting and trapping provided a reliable livelihood with potentially huge rewards. A full set of prospecting tools, for example, included “a heavy steel mortar and pestle, a gold pan, a long-handled pick, a magnet to separate iron from gold in the pan, a magnifying glass and a book on minerals.”<sup>8</sup> For a \$5.00 fee, prospectors could obtain a licence that entitled them to stake nine claims of 1,500 square feet each.<sup>9</sup> In those days, all of the resources needed to prospect successfully could easily be bought, carried and employed by a single knowledgeable individual. To hunt, fish, and trap, meanwhile, provided both a means of subsistence and of exchange for industrious white settlers. Productive trappers could feed themselves and their families more or less reliably, and, in addition to that, sell some of their catch for cash or household goods. Although hunting and prospecting increased dependence on environmental factors, such as the population or quantity of a given resource, these occupations offered Depression migrants certain advantages that compensated for this. They required a “relatively small and simple set of productive factors that could be reproduced or purchased, and maintained, by the individual or household.”<sup>10</sup> Being able to set up a business easily without much capital would have been an important feature for prospectors and trappers in the context of the economic depression as access to wage employment was unreliable. In addition, prospecting and trapping are “neither capital nor energy intensive,”<sup>11</sup> meaning that the lower cash earnings they offered were mediated by lower costs. Furthermore, their schedules are complementary; prospecting and development took place in summer, and trapping in winter, so many of Herb Lake’s residents could comfortably engage in both. In fact, few of Herb Lake’s prospectors could have afforded to support themselves otherwise.<sup>12</sup>

### The Economics of Everyday Living

Being a luxury item, fur tended to change in price according to general levels of economic prosperity as well as the whims of fashion. The stock market crash of 1929 and the following depression forced fur prices down to lows not seen since the war. Because gold was perceived as a secure commodity, at the same moment that fur prices went down, demand for gold sky-rocketed. Increased gold prices made the region’s low-grade ore more economical to develop. According to Rothnay and Watson, “across Canada old gold mines were revived and expanded and new ones came into being... By 1935, the value of Manitoba’s annual gold

output had climbed to \$5,018,551. This amounted to nearly half the value of total metal production in Manitoba.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, during the thirties, gold became the mainstay of Canada’s trading economy; each year the value of gold production climbed, growing from 12.8% to 38.8% of all mineral production in the country.<sup>14</sup>

While high prices stimulated mining activity in Herb Lake, trapping continued, and even expanded. Rather than lowering their production in response to poor fur prices, trappers worked the area more intensively in order to

---

**Gold mining ... is perfectly suited to people of limited means working in remote areas. For a minimum of overhead costs mining, prospecting and trapping provided a reliable livelihood with potentially huge rewards.**

---

compensate for their lower earnings. Local populations of fish and fur-bearing animals were vastly depleted. Although mining became *the* “big business” of the thirties, trapping and fishing continued to form the bulk of northern Manitoba’s employment. In 1930–1931, for instance, there were 12,364 self-employed trappers in Manitoba, and about 78.2% of the country’s fishermen, trappers and guides were self-employed.<sup>15</sup> Thus, both of Herb Lake’s economic mainstays, gold mining and trapping, received a boost during the Depression.

Most of the people living in Herb Lake and its surrounding area were engaged in small-scale entrepreneurial activities, particularly prospecting, mine-development work and trapping. Occasionally, wage work could be obtained from mines and construction projects, but for the most part Herb Lake’s residents laboured on a formally independent basis.<sup>16</sup> In the summer of 1924, just as the town’s speculative boom was reaching its peak, one government inspector described the local economy thus:

There are many employed in the building trades, in transportation, in constructing a hospital, some stores, and there are a number engaged in prospecting. It is estimated that the population is about 450, and that the payroll of the district would amount to about \$10,000 per month.<sup>17</sup>

Surprisingly, only a small number of these people (116) were employed by mines directly. This was possible because mining, in contrast to trading furs, required enormous inputs of labour, supplies and transportation services. If there was enough mining and prospecting taking place within a concentrated area, as there was in Herb Lake, the “spinoff” effects of this business were substantial enough to support a permanent local population. In this way, Herb Lake was similar to many early mining towns. It was a

supply centre that sprang up suddenly to provide the materials and services needed by the many prospectors and miners that flooded into the region after the Great War. As various prospects were developed along the east shore of the lake, tents, shacks and mining camps sprang up within the vicinity of the town's first gold discovery. It was these mining camps that provided the nucleus for wider, more permanent settlement of the town between 1918 and 1925. Herb Lake's population, only a few dozen during the war, rose to 450 by the fall of 1924.<sup>18</sup> In that year, the *Canadian Mining Journal* presented Herb Lake as Canada's new mining town on the make:

The Herb Lake gold mining area in Northern Manitoba is still a hive of industry. Exploration work is being carried on at a large number of properties, and in almost every case, results have proved most satisfactory. In an almost unbelievably short time Herb Lake has graduated from an isolated northern settlement to a fully fledged mining town with hospital, school, restaurants, boarding establishments, stopping places, and many other adjuncts of a Canadian town.<sup>19</sup>

The businesses and facilities of Herb Lake reflected its status as a supply centre for transient prospectors, trappers and wage workers. According to a correspondent for *The Pas Herald*, these included three stores, a post office, two poolrooms, two restaurants, a boarding house, laundry, hospital, church and school.<sup>20</sup> The town also boasted an athletic association, an outdoor rink and even an orchestra. En route from the railway connection, several businesses served incoming and outgoing people with supplies. Nearby Wekusko and Hale's Landing consisted of two restaurants, two stopping places, a lumber mill, two trucks and at least three boats. Cordwood cutting for the mines' wood-powered steam engines also employed a number of locals on occasion. Sources also suggest that there

was a significant amount of illicit business in the vicinity including prostitution and bootlegging.<sup>21</sup>

### Gold Production in Herb Lake

Between 1914 and 1940, a large number of claims were staked and developed to various degrees, but only four of these produced gold, and only one in amounts large enough to cover the cost of production. The town's building phase, marked by rapid, speculative population growth, was then contrasted by a prolonged state of decline, due mainly to the absence of productive mines. Although producing mines employed a small number of wage labourers in the community, employment in Herb Lake's mines was generally unstable. Mines often went dormant or closed down for a variety of reasons including lack of capital, labour, war conditions, or, more often, low gold prices. While a very select few mines made it into production, only one of these, the Rex mine (later called the Laguna mine), proved productive enough to cover its costs.<sup>22</sup> Total production of Rex/Laguna at its close in 1940 amounted to 59,970 ounces of gold, valued at \$2,019,973, and 6,478 ounces of silver, valued at \$2,787.<sup>23</sup> Other mines were too small or of too marginal a grade to be significant gold producers.<sup>24</sup> A more substantial, although equally sporadic, source of income for Herb Lake's residents was development work on promising claims. This type of work required large numbers of migrant wage labourers and materials that generated sudden and brief periods of growth followed by periods of inactivity between 1914 and 1940. According to C. H. Stockwell, the total output from the area prior to August 1936 (excluding the Rex mine) amounted to only 8,000 ounces of gold with a total value of about \$166,000, a low yield considering how much development work had been done over the years.<sup>25</sup>

### The Romance and Hardships of Gold Mining in Herb Lake and Canada

Gold mining in Herb Lake, as in the rest of Canada, involved a high degree of risk. Prospectors had to do trenching and stripping to prove their finds. If the results were good, further exploration and assay work was done involving diamond drilling and sinking one or more shafts to get an idea of what lay underground. In the next, and most expensive stage, the mine would be prepared for production. This typically involved building a surface plant as well as transportation facilities.<sup>26</sup> In each stage, the people and money needed increased exponentially. For this reason, bringing a mine into production has been compared to a poker game, "in that the earlier stages require progressively higher stakes and full development of the operation to fill out the entrepreneur's hand may cost several million dollars."<sup>27</sup> While thousands of gold mining companies were formed in the interwar years, very few of these were money makers; in Ontario, for example, of the approximately 4,000 gold mining companies in the province before 1955, only about 35 had returned sufficient dividends to cover the cost of bringing them into production.<sup>28</sup> For most lenders,



Archives of Manitoba, John A. Campbell Collection, #13.

Cabin of Richard "Dick" Woosey who, in 1914, discovered a vein of gold-bearing quartz on the east shore of Wekusko (Herb) Lake.



potentially large payoffs simply did not justify the risks. In the case of Herb Lake, this translated to consistent problems of capitalization. Few mines attracted enough investment to bring them into production quickly. Many had to be operated with local capital, either in the form of owner/operators or local investors. For example, local shareholders comprised the Northern Manitoba Mining and Development Company in Herb Lake in 1918. This company developed the Moosehorn mine and other claims. Local capital, however, was not “found sufficient to work this mining property satisfactorily.”<sup>29</sup> Recognizing the gravity of Herb Lake’s undercapitalization problem, the local press eagerly reported the sale of options and properties and the discovery of promising claims and assay results in an effort to bolster the region’s popularity. Newspaper reports reveal that persistent efforts were made to attract foreign investment, and frequent references to the lack of capital demonstrated that this was seen as a major obstacle to the region’s development.<sup>30</sup>

Since there were few restrictions on the incorporation of gold mining companies during the interwar years, many unscrupulous managers erected mills and dug shafts on their properties where the actual geological conditions did not justify these actions. This was done to raise the speculative value of their mines and in doing so, to boost the price of company stock. Generally, as mines moved closer to production, the value of the company’s stock increased. Dishonest managers, exploiting public interest in gold properties, could easily purchase bogus claims in well known districts and set up mines that amounted to nothing more than big holes in the ground. In the worst cases, fake drilling results were given. Since trading often rested on little more than the popularity of an area, instances of fraud could seriously damage a region’s reputation, driving investors away indefinitely. Unfortunately, Herb Lake was the scene of “one of the most sensational frauds [of this kind] ever perpetrated on Canadian mining.”<sup>31</sup> In 1924, it was discovered that Joseph Myers, director of Bingo Gold Mines Limited, which operated the Bingo mine, had been adding gold filings to the bags used for assay samples. Using the “salted” samples as evidence of his mine’s future profitability, Myers went to England where he raised £50,000. A thorough resampling by suspicious investors revealed that the mine’s high-grade ore (\$24.31 per ton), was in reality only worth \$1.61 per ton.<sup>32</sup> Myers was arrested and tried, but acquitted, since “salting” was not a crime under the current laws. High hopes for the region hinged on the Bingo mine, and its failure was a serious disappointment for Herb Lake residents. More importantly, the Bingo scandal seriously undermined the area’s credibility, effectively ending any future chance of attracting English investors there.<sup>33</sup>

---

**Dishonest managers, exploiting public interest in gold properties, could easily purchase bogus claims in well known districts and set up mines that amounted to nothing more than big holes in the ground.**

---

### Problems of an Unplanned Community

In 1920, R. C. Wallace, the Commissioner of Northern Manitoba from 1918 to 1921, and provincial Commissioner of Mines in 1927, noted that “the mining industry attracts large populations in a relatively short period. That population is not stable, as the average length of a mining camp is not more than twenty years.”<sup>34</sup> His observation was prophetic, for by 1940 Herb Lake’s last and only productive gold mine had finally closed.<sup>35</sup> Developing a mining camp into a town like Herb Lake was an exception to the general rule. Shacks and log cabins, hastily built by normally transient workers, made a statement of cautious optimism about a region’s productive future. Whether or not these communities were viable in the long term was an inconvenient and abstract afterthought. Unplanned communities like Herb Lake conveyed the tentative nature of mining during the interwar years. As historian Rob Robson explains, “beyond the overcrowded unsanitary living conditions, the major problem associated with the temporary townsite was its permanence. Once constructed and later augmented by further additions it took on an air of permanence.”<sup>36</sup> Since the mineral deposits of Herb Lake were staked out and mined by several individuals and small companies, building proceeded without any common direction or coordination.<sup>37</sup> Planning was not totally absent; rather, the initiative was left to individuals and private interests, without any regulation or provisions for the community and its future.<sup>38</sup> Houses, stores, mines, and so on were simply added on haphazardly to the existing paths and structures. Tents and houses sprang up along the lakeshore, as near as possible to the area’s mines and ore bodies. Businesses clustered around the town’s first dock and general store.

Herb Lake, like other pre-1930 mining communities, was plagued by a number of problems stemming from its sudden creation. Housing was often insufficient and poorly built. Most homes and stores were built by their owners, using local materials as much as possible.<sup>39</sup> What health care was available was not well equipped to deal with serious emergencies such as an outbreak of flu.<sup>40</sup> Placement of buildings could be inefficient or unsanitary, and on occasion conflicts emerged between mine managers and residents over the location of certain businesses and houses.<sup>41</sup> One resident, for example, built a large barn in the town’s cramped centre.<sup>42</sup> Transient labourers were another persistent problem. Although the town experienced a serious dearth of labour during and immediately after the war, the Depression led to an oversupply; unemployed drifters who arrived in town to find work frequently had to be sent away.<sup>43</sup> The absence or neglect of infrastructure and municipal services was, perhaps, the most problematic



Archives of Manitoba, John A. Campbell Collection, #40.

The road to Herb Lake, circa 1918.

aspect of life in Herb Lake. The town had no sanitation facilities, no clean drinking water and no firefighting equipment.<sup>44</sup> Roads were simply winding mud paths. The lack of numerous other services, usually taken for granted in cities, was a constant source of irritation. For example, one resident recalled that:

The usual mode of travel at Herb Lake in the winter was by dog team, and since dogs were not needed in summer they were allowed to run free. The dogs were often aggressive and were not used to being with people. In town they could become a danger to young children; dog fights were annoying and the constant yapping was an irritant to the community. Herb Lake people always watched where they walked because of the mud, but dog defecation posed another hazard.<sup>45</sup>

Establishments erected to serve the recreation and leisure needs of surrounding work-camps suggest that Herb Lake had its share of “notorious camp followers.”<sup>46</sup> Pool halls, beer parlours, and “blind pigs” (illegal taverns selling bootlegged liquor) offered a range of activities catering to the interests of so called “bunkhouse men.” These places provided working-class men with male-centred diversions, both legitimate and otherwise. Attractions included gambling, drinking and sports such as boxing and hockey. Taken together, they demonstrate that a “homosocial” male, working-class culture was predominant in the community.<sup>47</sup> Mine managers complained that some of these businesses threatened the discipline of their camps and the emerging community. For example, federal timber inspector W. S. Gordon reported that

There are a number of houses [in Herb Lake] starting upon the claims of both these companies, and they contend (the Companies) that some of

the occupants are a menace to the Mine Workers, and are in a way irresponsible, being Bootleggers and Pool Room Owners...On the [Bingo] Company property there is one Poolroom close to the mine, that is now being operated, three log and two frame buildings as well as three cabins and two shacks, the latter two having been sold, it is alleged to Bootleggers. There are similar buildings on the Rex Mining Company property.<sup>48</sup>

Well into the interwar period, southern reformers and morality squads maintained that drunkenness, brawling and self-indulgence were commonplace in remote work-camps. According to Forestell, “the fact that many of the region’s inhabitants were male, working class, and immigrant, with a tendency towards political radicalism, directly contributed to its perception as a dangerous and chaotic place.”<sup>49</sup> A social culture based on self-indulgence and moral laxity was seen as a predictable result of labouring in isolated northern camps. As Edmund Bradwin explained in his biography of work-camp life entitled *The Bunkhouse Man*,

Men... are deprived during months at a stretch of the companionship of women, of home ties, and all that elevates life in a man; they are starved by isolation and monotony. When they again reach the outskirts of civilization, the frontier town with its “aurer,” lights, its music and noisy hilarity entices them from their deepest resolves. Vice too frequently pervades such places and, in diverse haunts, drugged potions aid in “rolling” the victim.<sup>50</sup>

Beer parlours and pool halls were considered dangerous influences on impressionable females and children. According to the Manitoba Government Liquor Control Act of 1928, a partition was required to separate the sexes if women were to drink in the same space as men.<sup>51</sup> Yet these places were often the only accessible space in which miners and bunkhouse workers could gather and socialize. Aside from outdoor rinks and the occasional dance, opportunities to fraternize in a more wholesome atmosphere were seriously limited.

### Gender and the Mythology of Settlement Life

This unruly male social culture earned frontier communities a notorious reputation in the south. As Karen Dubinsky has noted, conceptions of the northern frontier were heavily influenced by contemporary ideas of gender and morality. During the Victorian period constructions of the region portrayed mining towns as places of corruption and social disorder, largely due to their position beyond the fringes of the metropole’s moral and legal authority.<sup>52</sup> “The ‘civilized’ rural south could only assert its moral superiority by contrasting itself to something else, by creating an immoral adversary in the cities in the North. Thus as the rural south



got 'cleaner', the North became 'dirtier'.<sup>53</sup> Reformers and moral authoritarians created an image of the north as a dangerously immoral, uncivilized place of vice.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, perceptions of the north were also connected to popular ideas of gender—the concept that certain places had a masculine quality, while others were more feminine in character. The northern frontier was seen as a harsh and

---

**According to the Manitoba Government Liquor Control Act of 1928, a partition was required to separate the sexes if women were to drink in the same space as men.... opportunities to fraternize in a more wholesome atmosphere were seriously limited.**

---

demanding environment that naturally favoured more individualistic and masculine aspects. Its challenging environment was thought to require "a special breed of men—men of rugged physique, indomitable courage, and resourcefulness,"<sup>55</sup> hardy frontiersmen, voyageurs, prospectors, and so on. It was a place of "men's men," who "slept upon the ground, saw the stars by night and were lulled by the winds of the forest." "Such as he", Bradwin wrote for instance, "will readily wager his days and weeks in a contest with the elements."<sup>56</sup> This north was a romantic, exotic place, a refuge for society's adventurers, misfits, and independent minds, full of audacious and heroic characters.

Contrary to this notion, there is evidence that women in Herb Lake had a sustained and substantial influence in the development of the region. Although prospecting and mining were largely considered to be the reserve of men, women were considerable contributors to prospecting in the area. In fact, numerous claims in Herb Lake were staked by women.<sup>57</sup> The most notable of these was Rice Island, staked by Miss Kathleen Rice and her partner Dick Woosey. Miss Rice was well known in the area as a successful, full-time, female prospector.<sup>58</sup> Sources suggest that most women worked in collaboration with their husbands. Geologist Russell McIntosh recalled that local prospector Tom Webb and his wife operated their small mine together: "Webb did the mining and his wife did the hoisting."<sup>59</sup> And in a similar instance, Mary Hale, who ran a stopping place with her husband at the south end of the lake, was reported to be "an industrious prospector and the best poker player in the country."<sup>60</sup>

While men could earn wages as labourers in Herb Lake, cash-earning opportunities for women were limited. Entrepreneurial women were typically engaged in domestic-type services in exchange for income—i.e., running of boarding houses, restaurants, teaching—sometimes in partnership with husbands, sometimes not. These services were in demand due to the town's large proportion of single men, who lacked the set of vital

services usually provided by the unpaid labour of wives and mothers. Sophie May Ryan, also known as "The Diamond Queen," for example, ran a boarding house at Wekusko. According to Sydney Augustus Keighley, "she provided rooms and meals for trappers and miners."<sup>61</sup> Her services, Keighley says, were an asset to local prospectors; "many times she gave grubsteaks to trappers who needed a helping hand and she was always ready to help them out."<sup>62</sup> Entrepreneurial activities for women also included services that were not part of the "official" market system, such as prostitution and blind-pigging. These services were a feature of life in many early mining towns. According to Nancy Forestell, such activities were often "tacitly accepted," but not officially recognized.<sup>63</sup> In her study of Timmins, Ontario, she explains that "sexual relations were largely a matter of monetary exchange in the public realm between male, working-class residents and female prostitutes in the early mining camps."<sup>64</sup> Since prostitution and bootlegging were illegal, it can be difficult to ascertain conclusively the extent of these businesses in a given area. However, in regard to Herb Lake, there are a few sources that provide some evidence. For example, in his autobiography, Sydney Augustus Keighley recalls meeting "Box Car Annie, a prostitute and bootlegger, doing very well in both her businesses. There were also characters named Cutthroat Rosie, and Jewish Rosie."<sup>65</sup> Arnold David Hoffman similarly recalled "Klondike Jessie," a local woman who ran a blind-pig near Cold Lake (next to Sherridon) and did some pimping.<sup>66</sup>

### **A New Era: "Manpower Planning" and the Predominance of Industrial-Scale Mining**

During the Depression, the mining industry proved its worth. By 1929–1930, Manitoba's mining companies were spending over \$1,000,000 per month in Winnipeg on locally manufactured or distributed goods.<sup>67</sup> Despite the poor market price of copper, production of the metal peaked in 1932, during the height of the Great Depression.<sup>68</sup> As



Will Steinburg

Abandoned machinery at the Bingo gold mine site, 2009.



Will Steinburg

A building foundation is one of the few remnants of the Rex/Laguna gold mine site, 2009.

industrial mines came on stream in the early thirties, the value of mines producing metals in Manitoba increased several fold, from \$3,427 in 1927 to \$8,186,190 in 1931, and \$12,000,000 in 1933.<sup>69</sup>

Manitoba's considerable growth was due to mines that specialized in the industrial-scale production of base metals (zinc, nickel, copper). These mines were extremely advanced and only possible in the context of a wider industrial network. Their mining and milling program required large-scale use of sophisticated machinery, and the recovered metals were used to manufacture high-tech products such as cars, military vehicles and equipment, and industrial machinery. To create and maintain a high-tech mine and mill, a network of external support systems was needed; machinery and expertise had to be imported from urban industrial centres, and the high-bulk-per-dollar-value of base metals meant their extraction and transportation were possible only with the use of hydroelectric dams and railroads. Such a sophisticated arrangement of capital, technology and labour was beyond the scope of any individual, small company, or even a single community acting in isolation.

Within this context, the company town emerged as the pre-eminent model of northern settlement. In contrast to Herb Lake, life in company towns was structured around a single mode of production, a single commodity and a single company. Settlement of the town was directed by capital in ways that were consistent with industrial discipline and the goals of optimal efficiency and profit maximization. The company town of Sherridon, Manitoba, created by Sherritt Gordon Mines Ltd. provides a good example of this arrangement.

Planning and construction of Sherridon took place in the 1920s (roughly concurrent with the formation of Herb Lake). The town's design was meant to reinforce economic and ideological connections with the urban south. All of the technologies, infrastructure, conveniences and comforts

typically found in southern centres was imported into the remote wilderness. The company's own management was seen as the best way to ensure a stable, satisfied workforce, and to avoid problems normally found in other frontier mining towns like Herb Lake. Like many other company towns, Sherridon was developed on the principle of "manpower planning"—planning motivated by the need to maintain a loyal and disciplined labour force to operate an industry.<sup>70</sup> Construction of the town reflected the company's realization that, "in order to attract a desirable class of employees... they must be provided with proper living conditions, and that provisions be made for modern comforts and conveniences."<sup>71</sup> As Robson has noted, Sherritt Gordon's decision to develop and manage the townsite as an adjunct to the mine introduced a new phase of frontier settlement.<sup>72</sup> Manpower planning reflected the company's ability to call on a wider range of resources available in urban industrial areas in order to recreate a southern-style community in the remote north. Just as Sherritt Gordon's mining operation was created on the cutting-edge of the industry, the community built by Sherritt Gordon demonstrated its commitment to modernization and a high standard of efficiency.

Company reports clearly state, "there is no doubt that the development cost of the town of Sherridon will be repaid to the company over the life of the mines, through attracting a better class of employees."<sup>73</sup> By forming a "loyal and efficient crew" via the maintenance of "a modern and well equipped townsite", it was hoped that the company could avoid problems associated with having a "transient and dissatisfied force of employees" of the kind seen in Herb Lake.<sup>74</sup> The company actively suppressed "promiscuous

---

**In contrast to Herb Lake, life in company towns was structured around a single mode of production, a single commodity and a single company.**

---

squatting" within the town's perimeter and attempted to construct a "properly organized community" consistent with, or even in advance of, the highly industrialized, ordered society seen in the south.<sup>75</sup> The following passage provided by town manager C. R. Neely is telling of how the company attempted to create a model social space:

The town of Sherridon is remarkably free from the parasites often found in mining towns... [and] people who would not qualify as desirable citizens... [and] Sherritt-Gordon has managed to secure a better than average class of employee. This can be attributed to the various employee benefits. Wages are good. The men have their own organization, the Welfare Committee... Each



employee is insured for life and sickness, half the cost being borne by the company. An annual holiday of one week with pay is granted to all employees. An intensive safety campaign is in force, resulting in a low accident rate.<sup>76</sup>

### The Decline of Herb Lake, 1945–1960

Lack of capital and the low productivity of mines had always capped the amount of development that could take place in Herb Lake, but once its low-grade ore was matched with poor gold prices following the Second World War, the town experienced a gradual decline. Eventually this once-promising mining town was overshadowed and replaced by the more modern, industrial gold mining operation in nearby Snow Lake.

While the Second World War was a boon to industrial base metal mines, it effectively ended the short-lived era of independent gold mining in Manitoba. Gold was not seen as an essential commodity for the war effort, so the federal government took measures to channel labour and machinery into higher priority industries connected with allied armament production; the number of producing gold mines was reduced and the price of gold was fixed. Due to higher overhead costs and a fixed price, most small producers were effectively squeezed out of the gold mining business.<sup>77</sup> The post-war period offered no relief. In 1951, the federal government allowed gold to be sold at market prices once again. This stimulated activity for a short time, but the price collapsed in 1953 and gold mining again entered a period of decline lasting until the 1970s. Under these conditions, Herb Lake's already lagging economy collapsed just as a new mine and townsite were being developed in nearby Snow Lake under the direction of Nor-Acme Gold Mines Limited.

### Unrequited Visions and the Limits of Northern Settlement

Today, places like Herb Lake no longer exist. Changing methods of resource extraction have drastically altered patterns of settlement and daily life in northern communities. Herb Lake's decline in the late 1930s demonstrates a permanent turn in northern settlement that took place in the interwar years, a move away from self-employment and small-scale resource extraction models to the all-encompassing entity of the company town. The presence of furs and a limited amount of "free gold" enabled Herb Lake's residents to work on a formally independent basis as prospectors, trappers, entrepreneurs and small-scale producers. This particular combination of resources and production methods allowed individuals and several small mining companies to eke out a modest living using little more than a select few tools and machines, some learned skills, and the physical and mental capacity to work. Because the settlers and Depression-era migrants who set up shop in Herb Lake went unchecked by regulations or any kind of coordinating body, development of Herb

Lake proceeded in a disorganized, improvised fashion. Like many early Canadian mining towns, Herb Lake's formation was directed by individuals who acted according to the perceived needs of the area's residents and mines, without a comprehensive plan to avoid problems such as poor sanitation, lack of infrastructure and services, and an unruly social culture.

Although the frontier tends to be seen as a place of self-sufficiency and independence, this has never been so. Staple resource commodities such as metals, lumber and furs are the lifeblood of northern communities; their survival is intimately linked to world demand for these primary products. Life in these communities was governed by a complex set of factors beyond the control of their inhabitants. In both Herb Lake and Sherridon, mineral prices based on perceived world supply and demand dictated the course of development. Settlement was a speculative undertaking based on the expectation of high prices; although high prices occasionally generated spurts of rapid economic development and population growth, low prices acted against the communities' interests, suspending or terminating production. To put it simply, instability and dependence were a fact of life in these communities. Geographic isolation did not soften the tumults of war or economic depression that took place in this era; in fact, it is clear that the communities felt these dramatic swings of fortune more violently than most other places. ❧

### Notes

1. Douglas Durkin, *The Lobstick Trail: A Romance of Northern Canada*. Toronto: Musson Book Company, 1921, pp. 20-21.
2. J. A. Campbell, *Manitoba's Northland*. The Pas: Office of the Commissioner of Northern Manitoba, 1918, p.16.
3. Jim Mochoruk, *Formidable Heritage: Manitoba's North and the Cost of Development, 1870 to 1930*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2004, p. 293.
4. Campbell, 1918, p. 13.



Will Steinburg

Remains of a boiler at the Moosehorn mine site, 2009.

5. "It is now seen that the possession of sources of the metals required for the of war is of vital importance, and when it is attempted to draw up a list of these it appears that in some way or other they are nearly all required. This national need of metals in times like the present becomes so insistent that other considerations, including that of cost, have to be put to one side." From "The Development of Mineral Resources of the British Empire" by William Frenchville, professor of Mining at the Royal School of Mines, London. Quoted in Campbell, 1918, p. 47.
6. "The fall of the price of wheat from an average price of \$3.19¼ a bushel in December 1920 to one of \$1.10¼ a bushel in August 1922... The price was to continue at unprofitable levels until 1924." Drought in southwestern Manitoba from 1919-1923[this sentence is an orphan, or part of quotation?]. Industrial unemployment rose to hitherto unknown levels in 1921 and 1922. W. L. Morton, *Manitoba: A History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967, pp. 380-381.
7. Morris Zaslow, *Northward Expansion of Canada, 1914-1967*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988, p. 101.
8. *Ladyslipper News*, Fall 2000, p. 1.
9. Mines Branch, Department of Mines and Natural Resources, *A Guide for Prospectors in Manitoba*. Winnipeg: Queen's Printer, 1952.
10. Peter J. Usher, "The North: Metropolitan Frontier, Native Homeland?" in L. D. McCann, ed., *A Geography of Canada: Heartland and Hinterland*. Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall, 1982, p. 421.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Zaslow, 1988, p. 103.
13. Russ Rothnay and Steve Watson. *A Brief Economic History of Northern Manitoba*. Winnipeg: Department of Northern Affairs and Resources, 1975, p. 36.
14. "By the end of the thirties, gold bullion was second only to newsprint...among Canada's commodity exports. The value of non-ferrous metal exports represented 32.1% of Canada's total by 1938-9, and alone practically equaled in value the full range of agricultural products exported...by 1939-40 wheat ranked no higher than third in dollar terms among Canada's exports, behind newsprint and gold bullion. After wheat came nickel in fourth place, copper in fifth." (Zaslow, 1988, pp. 127-128.)
15. Rothnay and Watson, 1975, p. 37.
16. "Formally independent" meant that they were officially self-employed but occasionally contracted themselves out as seasonal wage workers on railroad construction, logging camps, and so on. (Rothnay and Watson, 1975, p. 30).
17. National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC), RG 85, Vol. 1855, #141652, "Department of the Interior Memo: C. S. Spence to Mr. Rowatt, November 20, 1924."
18. *The Pas Herald*, 31 October 1924.
19. *The Canadian Mining Journal*, 7 November 1924. Also see *Northern Miner*, 26 July 1924: "Buildings surrounding the post office are springing up like mushrooms and building operations at other points make Herb Lake a very busy camp."
20. *The Pas Herald*, 31 October 1924.
21. Subtle references to prostitution can be found in some news articles and journals. For example, one newspaper report mentions "a certain unaccompanied lady well known in The Pas and Herb Lake" who did not pay her fare between Hale's Landing and Wekusko (*The Pas Herald*, 8 August 1924). The same newspaper also makes reference to the illegal sale of alcohol and other problems with liquor.
22. "From 1917-1927 small mines were operated for short periods with indifferent success in the Province, most important of which was the Rex, whose sporadic production to the end of 1927 when it was suspended was \$211,688... while it was the first important gold producer in the province it has not proven a financial success." (Benjamin Franklin Townsley, *Mine-Finders: The History and Romance of Canadian Mineral Discoveries*. Toronto: Saturday night press, 1935, p. 131.)
23. *A Guide for Prospectors*, p. 99. Information on other producing mines, the Ferro and Gurney mines, can be found in R. G. Zahalan, *The Mines of Manitoba*. Winnipeg: Manitoba Culture, Heritage, and Citizenship, Heritage Grants Program, 1990. For information on all claims and mines of note, see M. A. J. Fedikow, *Mineral Deposits and Occurrences in the Wekusko Lake Area: NTS 63 J/13*. Winnipeg: Manitoba Energy and Mines, Geological Services, 1993.
24. *A Guide for Prospectors in Manitoba*, 1952, p. 99.
25. C. H. Stockwell, *Gold Deposits of Herb Lake Area, Northern Manitoba*. Ottawa: Department of Mines and Resources, 1937, p. 1.
26. Roy M. Longo, *Historical Highlights of Canadian Mining: Including Canadian Personalities*. Toronto: Pitt Publishing Co., 1973, pp. 145-146.
27. Zaslow, 1988, p. 101.
28. Kenneth Coates and William Morrison, eds., *The Forgotten North: A History of Canada's Provincial Norths*. Toronto: Lorimer, 1992, p. 49.
29. This problem was resolved when the Makeever brothers of Boston bought an interest in the property. (Campbell, 1918, p. 17.)
30. Even during the height of Herb Lake's popularity as a mining district, newspapers frequently reported problems of insufficient capital. The articles "No English Capital for Canadian Mines" (*The Pas Herald*, 10 November 1924) and "What About Capital?" (*The Northern Miner*, 26 July 1924) provide instructive examples of the frustrations faced by Canadian gold miners during these years.
31. Townsley *Mine-finders ...*, 1935, p. 145.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
33. Optimistic reports on the Bingo mine came out in *The Pas Herald* almost daily in the summer and fall of 1924. On the importance of the Bingo mine, see especially 14 November 1924.
34. R. C. Wallace, "Report of the Commissioner of Northern Manitoba for the year ending December 1, 1919," *Sessional Papers of the Legislative Assembly: Manitoba*, 1920, p.7.
35. This does not include the Ferro mine, which produced sporadically until 1960, although in much smaller amounts than Rex (see Fig. 1).
36. Rob Robson, "Flin Flon: A Study of Company-Community Relations in a Single Enterprise Community." *Urban History* 12, February 1984, p. 33.
37. Douglas Baldwin, "The Development of an Unplanned Community: 1903-1914", in *Little Communities Big Industries*, Roy T. Bowles, ed. Vancouver: Butterworth & Co. Ltd., 1982, p. 112.
38. Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan F.J. Artibise, "Canadian Resource Towns in Historical Perspective," in *Little Communities Big Industries*, Roy T. Bowles, ed. Vancouver: Butterworth & Co. Ltd., 1982, pp. 47-60.
39. Newspaper accounts contain references to workers building "shacks" near the mines (e.g., *The Pas Herald*, 5 December 1924). Nancy Forestell explains that, "the most serious obstacle to relocating families continued to be a lack of housing. Although cheap boarding house rooms were plentiful, single family dwellings were constantly in short supply." (Nancy Forestell, "Bachelors, Boarding-Houses, and Blind Pigs: Gender Construction in a Multi-Ethnic Mining Camp, 1909-1920," in *A Nation of Immigrants: Women, Workers, and Communities in Canadian History, 1840-1960s*, Franca Iacovetta with Paula Draper and Robert Ventresca, eds. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998, p. 257) and "Their residences were often little more than poorly constructed shacks, lacking even a rudimentary separation between sleeping and eating spaces.", *ibid.*, p. 262.
40. Flu created serious problems. During the 1930s, Women of the Order of Bishop's Messengers provided nursing. (R. B. Horsefield, "Willows and Hard Rock: An Account of a Century of Missionary Work in Northern Manitoba." *The Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society*, vol. 3, no. 4, February 1958, p. 7. Unsanitary bunkhouse conditions undoubtedly contributed to the problem.
41. Archives document arguments between mine developers and residents over land upon which they have settled. In 1936, for example, the director of surveys in Herb Lake noted that "practically all the land area of the Papyrus M. C. [mineral claim] is taken up by



- the townsite." Archives of Manitoba (hereafter AM), GR 1600/ G4579, #31.1.2, "Mineral Claims of Herb Lake Area, 1931-56."
42. *The Pas Herald*, 12 December 1924.
  43. *The Pas Herald*, 19 December 1924.
  44. Houses and mines were often lost in fires (e.g., *The Pas Herald*, 12 December 1924). In 1942, one Herb Lake owner/operator lost all his property in a single fire, but it is difficult to tell if his was a typical example (AM, GR 1600/ G4579, #31.1.2). The Health Department also noted the town's need of a water tower and water services, (*ibid.*).
  45. *Ladyslipper News*, Summer 1999, p. 2.
  46. Taking Dawson as an example, Stelter and Artibise observe that speculative settlement in early mining towns often involved the full set of "notorious camp followers, the promoters, the drifters, lawyers, gamblers, and prostitutes." (Stelter and Artibise, 1982, p. 50).
  47. "Extending out from the masculine environment of the mine, a homosocial working class culture was formed that involved a range of male-centred pursuits such as drinking, gambling, sports, and associational life...These pursuits upheld a public culture based on self-indulgence and male privilege. Moreover, they reinforced a male gender identity that placed a greater emphasis on 'rough' expression of masculinity, and less on 'respectable' elements such as breadwinning." (Forestell, 1998, p. 252).
  48. NAC, RG 85, vol. 2028, # 175517, "W. S. Gordon, Timber Inspector to J. Tod, Acting C. T. A. Winnipeg, August 13, 1924, Dauphin."
  49. Forestell, 1998, p. 251.
  50. Edmund W. Bradwin, *The Bunkhouse Man: A Study of Work and Play in the Camps of Canada, 1903-1914*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1928, p. 163.
  51. Geoffrey Bernard Toews, "The Boons and Banes of Booze: The Liquor Trade in Rural Manitoba, 1929-1939. *Manitoba History*, no. 50, October 2005), p. 20.
  52. Dubinsky explains that the term "imaginary geographies" reflects how certain areas become associated with "particular values, historical events, and feelings." (Karen Dubinsky, *Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1880-1929*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 145). Adding to this notion, she explains that, "Rob Shields suggests that binary opposition between high and low culture, a staple of European civilization, has sometimes been specialized geographically as the "central/marginal dualism" (*ibid.*, p. 152).
  53. *Ibid.*
  54. *Ibid.*
  55. Zahalan, 1990, p. 88.
  56. Edmund W. Bradwin, *The Bunkhouse Man: A Study of Work and Play in the Camps of Canada, 1903-1914*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1928, p. 203.
  57. See C. H. Stockwell, *Gold Deposits of Herb Lake Area, Northern Manitoba*. Ottawa: Department of Mines and Resources, 1937; and *Mineral Deposits and Occurrences in the Wekusko Lake Area*, NTS 63/13. Winnipeg: Manitoba Energy and Mines, Geological Services, 1993.
  58. A description of Herb Lake would be incomplete without mention of its most famous eccentric, Kathleen Rice. Miss Rice was born of a well-to-do Loyalist family in St. Mary's, Ontario. She received her BA from the University of Toronto in 1906 and taught in Ontario and Saskatchewan. In 1913 she homesteaded in The Pas and made her way into Herb Lake trapping and prospecting. She staked several claims, some with her partner Dick Woosey (of Moosehorn mine fame). After her partner's death she lived alone for twenty years and wrote a thesis on the Aurora Borealis and some articles. She committed herself to an asylum in Brandon, where she died in 1964. See Alma Mardis, *Snow Lake's Centennial Salute to the Trailblazers*. Snow Lake, Man., 1967.
  59. *Ladyslipper News*, Fall 2000, p. 6.
  60. Alma Mardis, *Snow Lake's Centennial Salute to the Trailblazers*. Snow Lake, Man., 1967.
  61. Sydney Augustus Keighley, *Trader, Tripper, Trapper: the Life of a Bay Man*. Winnipeg: Rupert's Land Research Centre in co-operation with Watson & Dwyer Publishing Co. Ltd., 1989, p. 21.
  62. *Ibid.*
  63. Forestell, 1998, p. 263.
  64. "The sources do suggest that prostitution was neither well organized nor contained within a discreet geographical area or 'red light' district. Instead, women were dispersed in several of the hotels in the central business area, and more commonly in shacks along the Mattagami River outside the town boundaries. Yet the informal tolerance of prostitution by the local police and community at large...points to the widespread tacit acceptance, if not the existence, of sexual commerce." (Forestell, 1998. p. 263.)
  65. Keighley, 1989, p. 21.
  66. Arnold David Hoffman, *Free Gold: The Story of Canadian Mining*. New York, Toronto: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1947, p. 12.
  67. Mochoruk, 2004, p. 294.
  68. Innis, Harold A, "Settlement and the Mining Frontier," in *Canadian Frontiers of Settlement*, vol. 9, W. A. Mackintosh and W. L. G. Jeorg, eds. Toronto: MacMillan, 1936, p. 403.
  69. *Ibid.*
  70. Robert Robson, "Flin Flon: A Study of Company-Community Relations in a Single Enterprise Community." *Urban History*, vol. 12, February 1984, p. 44.
  71. Staff. Sherritt Gordon Mines Ltd., "History, Development, and Production Plans at Sherritt-Gordon Mines. *Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Transactions*, XXXIII (1930), p. 269.
  72. "When in 1928 the Sherritt Gordon Company...undertook to regulate townsite affairs, this in effect concluded the era of the temporary townsite and foreshadowed the greater participation of the company in townsite development." (Robert Robson, "Manitoba's Resource Towns: The Twentieth Century Frontier", *Manitoba History*, no. 16, 1988, p. 5.
  73. Staff. Sherritt Gordon Mines Ltd., "History, Development and Production Plans at Sherritt-Gordon Mines", p. 269.
  74. Sherritt-Gordon. *Annual Report*, 1930.
  75. *Ibid.*
  76. C. R. Neely, "Managing the Town of Sherridon", *Precambrian*, XIII, March 1940, p. 17.
  77. Correspondence between Herb Lake owner/operator Oswald MacDonald and J. S. MacDonald, Minister of Mines and Natural Resources in 1942, offers an instructive example. After a fire destroyed his mine in May of that year, O. MacDonald was forced to abandon it. "Taking into consideration the general trend of gold mining as an industry" he stated, "I am compelled to seek other fields." AM, GR 1600/ G4579, #31.1.2.

## Future History

In the next issue of *Manitoba History* ...

- 2012, An historic year:  
Selkirk settler bicentenary, Queen Elizabeth's diamond jubilee, Manitoba's *Titanic* victims, & more
- Northern Manitoba on the eve of industrialization
- Historic Ralph Connor House



# W. J. Waines, the IUN Crisis of 1978, and the Development of Post-Secondary Education in Northern Manitoba

by Jennifer Marchant, Winnipeg, Manitoba & Tom Mitchell, Brandon, Manitoba

"A final answer to the question – Why I.U.N.? The North will raise 'hell' if it is discontinued."<sup>1</sup>

W. J. Waines

**B**eginning in 1971, Inter-Universities North (hereafter IUN), now subsumed under the aegis of University College of the North, emerged as a collaborative effort among the three Manitoba universities to deliver university credit and non-credit courses and programs to serve the people of northern Manitoba.<sup>2</sup> By 1978, the universities of Manitoba, Winnipeg and Brandon were delivering courses in 40 subjects, to 450 students living in 13 northern centres.<sup>3</sup> However, as part of a broad curtailment of government programs in 1978, the newly elected Progressive Conservative government of Sterling Lyon dramatically reduced funding for post-secondary education and the Universities Grants Commission (hereafter UGC) announced the end of funding for Inter-Universities North.

Northerners immediately reacted in disbelief and anger: IUN courses, one Northerner argued, met an "urgent academic and cultural need in the north," and the end of IUN would only "increase the wall that seems to be dividing northern and southern Manitoba."<sup>4</sup> Kay Campbell, a former northern regional director for the Manitoba Association of School Trustees, accused the UGC of making the north the "whipping boy" in its austerity program. The Commission's decision was "grossly unfair." "If they'd limited us to the three-per-cent increase they gave the three southern universities we could have made do. But they cut us out completely and made the north their whipping boy."<sup>5</sup> In the midst of the crisis, the UGC asked veteran academic administrator W. J. Waines to prepare a report on IUN for the guidance of the Commission. The Waines Report that resulted secured the future of IUN and laid the foundation for the evolution of post-secondary education in Northern Manitoba.<sup>6</sup>

## Origins and Development

Prior to the inception of IUN in 1971, few opportunities existed for people living north of the 53<sup>rd</sup> parallel to take university credit courses. Administrative and delivery challenges, including the cost of running such courses, undermined the few initiatives taken by southern universities to respond to northern requests for courses. Northern initiatives were also undermined by the dramatic expansion of traditional university registration: growing demands for post-secondary education in southern Manitoba remained the principal concern of Manitoba's publicly funded universities.

This changed in March 1970 when Lionel Orlikow, in his capacity of Human Development Assistant to the Planning and Priorities Committee of the new Schreyer government, submitted a series of Special Project proposals to the Committee. These were designed to reduce financial, geographic, motivational and academic barriers to post-secondary education in Manitoba. Orlikow's Special Project for the North involved the creation of an educational extension unit for the North, initially termed the Tri-University Committee, with a field office in The Pas to deliver university courses offered by the southern universities. Courses were to be taken to "where the people are."<sup>7</sup> Orlikow's plan was amended in March 1971 when Dr. Lloyd Dulmage, President of Brandon University, proposed a merging of university efforts under one umbrella rather than a simple co-ordination of efforts through a liaison office in The Pas. IUN, defined by the University Grants Commission as "a joint endeavor of all three universities to provide a series of university credit courses at centres in Northern Manitoba," was born.<sup>8</sup>

It was an immediate success. Newspaper reports shouted IUN's positive reception by Northerners: "U Courses Draw Wide Interest in North-Areas," "Manitoba's Three Universities Offer Credit Courses to Northern Residents," "Co-operative Program Almost Manitoba's fourth University."<sup>9</sup> By January 1974, fifteen university credit courses were being taught to 307 students in The Pas, Cranberry Portage, Lynn Lake, Snow Lake, Thompson, Gillam and Churchill.<sup>10</sup> In the 1975–1976 term, 27 courses were given in eleven communities and enrolment reached a record 450, up from 377 the previous year. "The demand is constantly growing," Albert Pyke, Coordinator of IUN in The Pas, told the *Winnipeg Free Press*. "There is pressure for more and more credit courses...." Housewives, shift workers, police officers, teachers, businessmen and women filled IUN classrooms in the North. In Garden Hill, the most remote IUN teaching centre, Cree and Métis students were studying psychology.<sup>11</sup>

And IUN did expand to meet the demand for courses throughout the North. From 1971 to 1977, "under severe

*Jennifer Marchant completed a BRS degree at the University of Manitoba and later took graduate-level courses in adult education and counseling. She is an Academic Advisor in the University's Faculty of Science. Tom Mitchell retired recently as University Archivist at Brandon University. With Reinhold Kramer, he wrote When the State Trembled: How A.J. Andrews and the Citizens' Committee Broke the Winnipeg General Strike (2010).*

organizational and administrative difficulties", IUN delivered 150 full course equivalents to 3,000 course registrants and gave Northerners the opportunity to work towards degrees in Arts, Science and Education. In a few short years, IUN became an organization regarded by Northerners "with very special favour and as an institution which belong[ed] to them and ...[was] financed by them as taxpayers."<sup>12</sup> But storm clouds loomed on the horizon.

On 11 October 1977, Manitobans went to the polls and elected a new provincial government headed by Progressive Conservative Sterling Lyon. Lyon had campaigned on the need for smaller government and a period of "acute protracted restraint" in public spending. In the spring of 1978, Lyon's government introduced a series of reductions in government spending.<sup>13</sup> Grants to the Universities Grants Commission to fund the province's universities plummeted; they had requested grant increases in the order of 15 percent, but had to settle for increases of three percent coupled with the suggestion that they hike tuition fees by 20%. And the axe fell on IUN: the Universities Grants Commission (UGC) announced that existing funding for IUN would end effective June 1978: a grant was provided by the Commission for the 1978-1979 fiscal year to allow for the orderly closing of IUN doors in the north.<sup>14</sup>

The UGC announcement was met with shock, disbelief, and anger, particularly in northern Manitoba. For Michael Blonar, Senior Officer of the tripartite northern program, the UGC announcement "came as a shock to all involved." Blonar was "sad, especially because Inter-Universities North is the only avenue northern Manitobans have of pursuing credit courses in their own or neighboring communities."<sup>15</sup> Don Jewison, President of the University of Winnipeg Faculty Association, expressed shock at the cancellation of the program; he thought the Commission was "picking on those who are most vulnerable ... It's pretty shocking. It shows a very centralist altitude."<sup>16</sup>

In the north, Randy Rudd, Principal of Hapnot Collegiate, pointed out that the total cost of the program in 1977-1978 was \$217,500: "Where else can you get education at that level for about \$600 per pupil?" Neil Anderson, assistant superintendent of schools for Mystery Lake School Division in Thompson, underscored this point: the education dollars put into Inter-Universities North, he said, were well spent because there are no capital or maintenance costs involved: communities donated the facilities for IUN use. Carol Bowman, IUN Coordinator at Leaf Rapids, protested that the Grants Commission decision was "a hard blow and it's causing a lot of resentment because it takes away the one chance a lot of people in this community have of getting university training."<sup>17</sup>

Among northern Conservatives, the extent of Lyon's austerity caused unease, but the death knell for IUN drew most of the attention. Thompson Conservative Rich Whidden pointed out that in "traditional Conservative circles the concern is mostly over the university program."<sup>18</sup> Cecil Smith, the Progressive Conservative Member of Parliament for Churchill, got on the phone to his provincial colleagues to report that he had received numerous calls from Northerners protesting the end of IUN. Smith's exchanges with Northern Affairs Minister Ken MacMaster and other Manitoba cabinet ministers produced results; he was assured that the program would continue unchanged, and that details of new financial arrangements would be announced shortly.<sup>19</sup>

Smith's disclosure broached an obvious question: Just how independent was the UGC's decision-making process? It appeared that, under pressure from its grassroots, the provincial government was preparing to overrule the decision of the supposedly arm's-length independent Commission.<sup>20</sup> In early April, the *Winnipeg Free Press* reported that the UGC planned to take \$30,000 from its Emergency Fund to beef up the \$90,000 already committed to ending the program in fiscal 1978-

1979.<sup>21</sup> In the legislature, Education Minister Keith Cosens announced that the UGC had decided to continue operating the program "on a limited basis."<sup>22</sup>

The proposed UGC allocation amounted to less than half the \$247,500 budget for the previous fiscal year, and would restore only a fraction of the program that had developed since 1971. Such half-measures—a concession to northern protest—would not satisfy the advocates of IUN.<sup>23</sup> A delegation representing municipal governments in Thompson, Flin Flon, The Pas, and ten other northern centres that had hosted IUN programs, headed south to lobby Education Minister Keith Cosens, UGC Chair Condo, and the presidents of the three Manitoba universities.<sup>24</sup> In Winnipeg, the northerners extracted a commitment from Education Minister Keith Cosens and Northern Affairs Minister Ken MacMaster that the program would continue: details to follow. Northern Manitobans were determined to gain full restoration of the Inter-Universities North program.<sup>25</sup> Early in the fall of 1978, a Co-ordinating Committee of thirty drawn from thirteen northern communities would be assembled to prepare a submission for the Committee of University Presidents and the UGC on the future of IUN.<sup>26</sup>

### The Waines Report

Facing austerity imposed by the Lyon government and growing protest in the North, on 21 September 1978, the UGC retained W. J. Waines to undertake a two-month commission of investigation of Inter-Universities North.<sup>27</sup>

---

**Northerners immediately reacted in disbelief and anger: IUN courses, one Northerner argued, met an "urgent academic and cultural need in the north," and the end of IUN would only "increase the wall that seems to be dividing northern and southern Manitoba."**

---

Waines was asked to report on the original mandate of IUN, its accomplishments, its needs both current and future, and its organizational structure, and he was also invited to offer “such proposals and recommendations on both programs and structure” as he deemed appropriate.<sup>28</sup> The report produced by Waines, which was born of the crisis of 1978, provided a road map for the restoration of funding to IUN, and the future course of development for post-secondary education in northern Manitoba.

Born in Moosomin, Saskatchewan, in 1901, Waines graduated from the University of Manitoba with a B.A. in 1924, and an M.A. in 1925.

Following post-graduate work at Northwestern University and the University of Chicago, he returned to the University of Manitoba in 1928 to teach in the Department of Political Economy. He became head of the Department, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science from 1947–1961, and Vice-President (Academic) of the University of Manitoba from 1961–1966. As a testament to his standing as an academic administrator, he was appointed Associate Director of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada in 1966. He served in this capacity until 1974.<sup>29</sup>

During the course of his career, Waines participated in numerous commissions, consultations, and public inquiries including the Rowell-Sirois Commission. He was a seasoned, pragmatic academic administrator, who viewed post-secondary education as a crucial ingredient of social and economic development.

In his Presidential address before the Canadian Political Science Association in 1963, Waines observed that education opportunity was a determining factor in the political, cultural and economic life of the country. The provision of educational opportunities “should have top priority in a newly developing country.”<sup>30</sup> In 1970, he prepared a report for the AUCC on projected university enrolment, operating expenses, capital expenditures, support for research, and the capacity for rationalization of university activities in various jurisdictions across Canada for the AUCC.<sup>31</sup> In 1978, Waines had an enviable record as an institutional builder fully informed on the current state of post-secondary

education in Canada. Could he provide the leadership required to address the crisis of post-secondary education in northern Manitoba?

The UGC assignment in 1978 was not the first time that Waines had considered the matter of post-secondary education in northern Manitoba. In the early 1960s, when the federal government closed a military installation in Churchill, the *Churchill Post* called for the creation of a Northern University at Fort Churchill as part of Canada’s Centennial program for 1967. Churchill, the *Post* argued, was strategically located for research into problems connected with life

in the Arctic and sub-Arctic. A northern university could offer degree programs for northern students in the arts and sciences, and foster the establishment of vocational training and adult education programs for Northerners. An Arctic zoo with muskox, polar bear and Arctic fox could be a central feature of the new institution.<sup>32</sup>

But the idea got short shrift from provincial authorities. Asked for his opinion, Waines thought that a research organization of some kind might be established in Churchill, but no university. “You can only build a university on top of a school population,” he said. And it was the case that in 1964, outside Churchill and Thompson, only four students were attending high school north of The Pas. Waines thought the north required at least 4000 high school students before a university was a realistic possibility. Even then, Waines was not convinced that Churchill would be the

right location.<sup>33</sup> Notwithstanding this cool reception in the south, the idea of a northern university would not go away. In the early 1970s, the provincial Liberals under the leadership of Izzy Asper made the establishment of a northern university a central plank in their policy for northern development. The creation of IUN gave the Schreyer government a riposte to counter opposition demands in the provincial legislature for the creation of a northern university.<sup>34</sup>

Under its *Guidelines for the Seventies*, the government of Edward Schreyer, elected in 1969, was committed to giving Manitobans a choice of staying in their home region, to promoting greater equality of the human condition,



University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg Tribune fonds, MSS 24, personality files.

**William John Waines** (1901–1991), the academic who led 1978 look into the operation of Inter-Universities North.



to maximizing the well-being of Manitobans, and to increasing local participation in decision-making.<sup>35</sup> In the north, this meant furnishing Northerners with the services and amenities available in the south. NDP advertisements during the 1977 provincial election highlighted new housing programs, health care services, municipal grants, better transportation and recreational facilities, tourist development, consumer co-operatives, and local

---

**Wainess had an enviable record as an institutional builder fully informed on the current state of post-secondary education in Canada. Could he provide the leadership required to address the crisis of Northern post-secondary education in Manitoba?**

---

consultation in policy formulation as accomplishments of the government in the North. When, in the fall of 1978, W. J. Wainess flew north on his investigation of IUN, he encountered a North on the move, expectations were on the rise, and Northerners were alive to the needs of region.<sup>36</sup>

In 1973, the total population of the region was 79,700. Two-thirds of the population, or approximately 53,000, was composed of recent arrivals of Euro-Canadian descent. They were located in ten centres associated with mining, forestry, hydro construction and public administration.<sup>37</sup> The Aboriginal people in northern Manitoba numbered 26,360, located in 46 settlements. In a survey of the history of northern Manitoba, Gerald Friesen has observed that “the truth of the Northern Manitoba story has at least two faces, Aboriginal and European-Canadian.”<sup>38</sup> Wainess’ terms of reference and his account of IUN fall within a European-Canadian narrative of northern development. He was an “external evaluator” of the existing IUN program and administrative structure. Both had emerged principally to address the post-secondary needs of the new North. A similar bifurcation seems to have afflicted the northern development policy orientation of the Schreyer government in the mid-1970s.<sup>39</sup>

There is no evidence that Wainess spoke to Aboriginal leaders in the North. Nor does his report make specific references to the needs of the Aboriginal population of the region.<sup>40</sup> Still, he appears to have given Manitoba’s northern Aboriginal population some thought in the composition of his report. A copy of the “Report on the University of Canada North Conference,” held 11–19 November 1971, in Inuvik, NWT, is contained in his archival records dealing with the production of his IUN Report.<sup>41</sup> The conference report reflected the challenges inherent in the creation of a university program in the North acceptable to Aboriginal people. The subject of post-secondary educational opportunities for Aboriginal Manitobans was canvassed in Wainess’ interview with Dean Dale Hayes of Brandon

University concerning the role and effectiveness of the Brandon University Northern Teachers Education Program (BUNTEP) in northern post-secondary education.<sup>42</sup> In the early 1970s, the education of Aboriginal people in northern Manitoba was not entirely ignored by universities in the south. In large part, the story of university-level Aboriginal education in these years is a Brandon University story due to that institution’s generous admission requirements that permitted the launch of a number of innovative initiatives directed towards Manitobans of Aboriginal descent.<sup>43</sup>

The Northerners Wainess encountered made it clear that they expected post-secondary education to be among the services and amenities available to them. They told Wainess that the UGC elimination of IUN was an act of neglect by the Government. A spokesperson for the Thompson Library Board told Wainess that it was “inconceivable to the Board that the impact of reduced university funding should be disproportionately borne by the North where alternatives are simply not available.” A resident of Gillam explained that the end of IUN meant that Northerners were “denied opportunities to develop our talents....” In Lynn Lake, Wainess was reminded that IUN was “the only method by which our citizens can upgrade themselves academically while continuing their employment.”<sup>44</sup>

In his report, Wainess told the UGC that, like Manitobans in the south, Northerners expected access to universities to earn degrees, to engage in professional development, to fill leisure time, and to enjoy the satisfaction derived from learning. Moreover, “Northerners pay taxes—many of them substantial amounts—and claim they are discriminated against if they do not receive similar services to those available elsewhere in the province.”<sup>45</sup> It was clear, Wainess observed, that for many Northerners, access to post-secondary education was a basic measure of the quality of life in the north. No small matter, the existence of IUN helped to keep people living and working in the north. Wainess arrived at an obvious conclusion: Northerners deserved and were entitled to the same education and services as people in the south.<sup>46</sup>

Wainess was impressed by the commitment to IUN as an organization. He discovered the roots of this loyalty in the effectiveness with which IUN had served the north. Until the cutbacks ordered by the government in 1978–1979, there was a constant increase in the number of courses offered and registrations at IUN. In 1975–1976, there were 620 people in 24.5 courses. At its highest registration point in 1976–1977, there were 644 people registered in 21.5 courses in eleven locations north of 53°.<sup>47</sup> The result: “IUN was well known and well respected by 1978 in the north and people were willing to fight to keep it running.”<sup>48</sup> The upshot was clear: southern universities on their own had failed the north; IUN had been a dramatic success with the result that IUN had become “a symbol to Northerners of the willingness of the Manitoba Universities to repair what they regard as deliberate long time neglect of their educational and cultural needs and a belated symbol of recognition by the South of the rights of the North.”<sup>49</sup> He concluded his

account of northern sentiment with the following blunt assessment: "Why I.U.N.?" Answer: "The North will raise 'Hell' if it is discontinued."<sup>50</sup>

Waines also faced the delivery question squarely: "[Do] these services [need to] be provided in a co-operative fashion by way of an organization especially funded, like I.U.N. or can and will the universities, individually... provide a satisfactory level of services to the North[?]" His investigation led him to conclude that IUN was the only "rational way" to provide education to the northern

---

**Northerners ... made it clear that they expected post-secondary education to be among the services and amenities available to them....[and] that the UGC elimination of IUN was an act of neglect by the Government.**

---

communities. It was, he said, "probably the only effective way to serve the north at modest cost."<sup>51</sup> He had the data to support his conclusion: "Over nine years (1970-71 to 1978-79), IUN has served a population of some 71,000 persons who are isolated from other sources of higher education by distance and high cost of transportation."<sup>52</sup> In this time, IUN served at least 66 communities in the north with some 150 courses (FCE) for about 33,000 registrants. Between 1972 and 1978, the government grant to support IUN ranged from \$91,000 to \$247,000 per year, a total of \$967,000. This was "a small fraction of the money spent by the government on universities over that period of time."<sup>53</sup>

In March 1978, the UGC concluded that the province's universities could "carry on giving the courses in the North on a voluntary and co-operative basis without the \$250,000 superstructure."<sup>54</sup> Would each southern university continue with courses in the north? "Past experience has taught Northerners that whether they can or not, the universities in Manitoba will not individually provide the educational services which they consider to be their right."<sup>55</sup> Collaboration was required for one other reason: Northerners expected IUN to expand. Resources from each of the southern universities would have to be pooled to meet the needs of the north.

### Findings and Recommendations

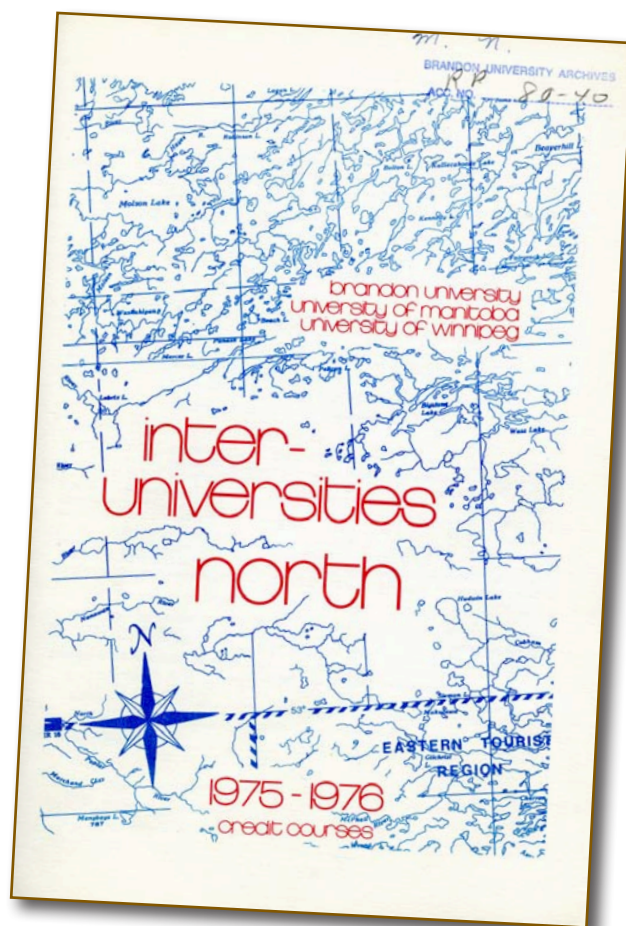
Waines' findings may be summarized. Northerners deserved and were entitled to the same education and services as people in the south.<sup>56</sup> They expected to have access to university-level, post-secondary education and would "raise hell" if IUN were not restored fully.<sup>57</sup> During the few short years of its existence, IUN had earned the affection and respect of the Northerners it served by bringing university credit courses to the north economically and professionally. Experience had shown that, with a few modifications, the administrative structure evolved under

IUN adapted well to the organization's requirements and was cost effective.<sup>58</sup>

His findings led to several recommendations. First, he concluded that the IUN mandate was "unduly restrictive." He proposed that it "be extended to include credit courses ... from any faculty or school" approved by the faculty or school for the purpose of distance delivery.<sup>59</sup> Second, he recommended that "non-credit courses which are of appropriate caliber and content ... be included as a non-credit university offering and should be planned in co-operation with Keewatin College."<sup>60</sup>

Waines recommended that a study and identification of the needs of the people in northern Manitoba, both current and future, be undertaken as a foundation for future programming.<sup>61</sup> It was essential to "find out what people of the North need and want." Here, consultation with Northerners was essential. He had been warned by Northerners: "Beware the South telling the North what it needs!" The UGC should be alert to Southern presumption.<sup>62</sup>

He emphasized that continuing financial support would be a necessity to ensure that long-range planning was effective. Manitoba's universities had faculties and programs that would satisfy the educational needs of the north, but IUN required the financial resources to bring



S. J. McKee Archives, Brandon University.


Inter-Universities North calendar, 1975-1976.



these programs to the north.<sup>63</sup> As was the case with southern universities, it was “imperative that sufficient finance be guaranteed for each year over a period of years.” This would allow potential students to plan their programs in advance of the delivery of the program.<sup>64</sup> In short, finances to provide for the continuation of long-range planning were essential; planning based on year-to-year and course-to-course had worked so far, but long-range plans would ensure the success and continuation of IUN for years to come.<sup>65</sup>

Almost exactly one year after the UGC had announced the end of IUN, W. J. Condo wrote to W. J. Waines on behalf of the Commission to thank Waines for the “very excellent and thoughtful report on Inter-Universities North.” Condo was glad to report that the Commission had “approved the report with some modifications.” The IUN Advisory Committee and the Committee of Presidents had fine-tuned some of Waines’ recommendations. However, on fundamentals, Waines’ findings and recommendations culminated in the restoration of the \$250,000 grant to IUN and the decision by the Commission “to continue the IUN program.”<sup>66</sup>

### Conclusion

Since IUN was established in 1971, it had been sustained by advocates of a progressive political agenda committed to the expansion of educational opportunities in northern Manitoba. A change in government in 1978 threatened to end IUN, but the organization’s death was forestalled by vigorous and unrelenting political pressure and protests from northern residents who refused to allow their only accessible link to secondary education to be taken away. To Northerners, IUN was a symbol of the efforts of Manitoba’s universities to make up for what was seen as a deliberate long-term disregard for the educational and cultural needs of the north. Northern protest underlined the political nature of educational initiatives. Though neither the UGC nor Waines received much credit from the press, the institutional response to northern protest, shaped by the UGC and the investigation of W. J. Waines, culminated in the restoration and strengthening of IUN and made it a permanent feature of education in northern Manitoba.<sup>67</sup> For his part, Waines identified the basic organizational principles required for future development of northern post-secondary education: these included continuing consultation with the Northerners, long-range planning, adequate financial commitments, and collaborative delivery of credit and non-credit programs in northern communities. From the period after the Waines Report (1978), until 1988, IUN entered into a period of experimentation and organizational growth based on the principles set out in the Waines Report. IUN remained open and functional through years of experimentation and consolidation before becoming Campus Manitoba in 1999.<sup>68</sup> 

### Notes

The authors would like to thank Bruce McFarlane, Michael Blamar and Shirley Lyon for their recollections of the IUN crisis of 1978; the staff of Legislative Library, Chris Kotecki (Archives of Manitoba) and Brian Hubner (University of Manitoba Archives) for assistance in tracking down a copy of Dr. Waines’ report.

1. See University of Manitoba Archives, W. J. Waines Collection, MSS 114, Box 3, Folder 1, W. J. Waines, Report To The Universities Grants Commission and the Committee of University Presidents on Inter-Universities North, December 1978, p. 3. (hereafter, Waines, Report to UGC)
2. On the development of IUN see Waines, Report To UGC, pp. 4-7. On the creation of University College of the North, see *University College of the North: Recommendations and Action Plan: Report of the Consultation on Post-Secondary Education in Northern Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Advanced Education, 2003). Inter-Universities North is now titled Inter-Universities Services under University College of the North. See <http://lynx.ucn.ca/IUS/>
3. “University Grant Cut-Off Riles Northerners,” *Winnipeg Free Press* (hereafter, *WFP*), 20 March 1978, p. 2.
4. “Northerners Angered by Move to Cut \$\$ for U Credit Courses,” *WFP*, 16 March 1978, p. 17.
5. “University Grant Cut-Off Riles Northerners,” *WFP*, 20 March 1978, p. 2.
6. For the unpublished report, see University of Manitoba Archives, W. J. Waines Collection, MSS 114, Box 3, Folder 1, Waines, Report To UGC, December 1978.
7. Waines, Report To UGC, p. 4.
8. For an account of IUN’s origins, see Shirley Lyon, *Native People and Brandon University: A Documentary Record of Academic Programs*, (Brandon University, 1987, 26-27.). For the quote, see Waines, Report To UGC, p. 6.
9. “U Courses Draw Wide Interest in North-Areas,” *WFP*, 3 October 1972, p. 42; “Response Widespread to U Courses in North,” *WFP*, 23 February 1973, p. 21; “Expanded U Courses Offered at North Centres,” *WFP*, 18 June 1973, p. 50; “Survey Seeks Views on Evening Courses desired in North,” *WFP*, 28 November 1973, p. 76; “Manitoba’s Three Universities Offer Credit Courses to Northern Residents,” *WFP*, 7 September 1974, p. 23; “Co-operative Program Almost Manitoba’s Fourth University,” *WFP*, 6 September 1975, p. 31.
10. “North Survey Indicates What U Courses Wanted,” *WFP*, 21 January 1974, p. 22.
11. “North University Credit Courses to Be Continued at Reduced Level,” *WFP*, 22 May 1976, p. 13.
12. Waines, Report To UGC, p. 10. For a detailed account of IUN enrolments see pp. 8-12.
13. “What the PCs Promised Us,” *WFP*, 12 October 1977, p. 17.
14. For the rationale developed for this decision by the Grants Commission, see University of Manitoba Archives, W. J. Waines Collection, MSS 114, Box 3, Folder 2, W. J. Condo to Dr. D. R. Campbell, Dr. H. E. Duckworth, and Dr. H. J. Perkins, 10 March 1978. For a press account see “1978-79 Grants Leave Universities in Shock,” *WFP*, 10 March 1978, p. 6.
15. “University Grant Cut-off Riles Northerners,” *WFP*, 20 March 1978, p. 2.
16. “1978-79 Grants Leave Universities in Shock,” *WFP*, 10 March 1978, p. 6.
17. “Northerners Angered By Move to Cut \$\$ for U credit Courses,” *WFP*, 16 March 1978, p. 17.
18. Alice Krueger, “On Alienating Northern Support,” *WFP*, 22 March 1978.
19. “U Credit Courses To Continue, Northern Manitoba Assured,” *WFP*, 23 March 1978.



20. "North U Courses To Go On," *WFP*, 9 May 1978.
21. "\$30,000 Pledged," *WFP*, 4 April 1978, p. 2.
22. "North U Courses To Go On," *WFP*, 9 May 1978, p. 61.
23. "Northerners Get University Pledge," *WFP*, 27 April 1978.
24. "Budget Relief Sought," *WFP*, 18 April 1978, p. 12. The delegation delivered a brief that had been composed to defend IUN. "Northern Manitoba's Position on Inter-Universities North." Submission by the Citizens of the North to the Hon. Keith Cosens, Minister of Education, 24 April 1978. We have not been able to locate a copy of this document.
25. "Full Grant Sought for U Program," *WFP*, 19 October 1978, p. 5.
26. "North University Courses \$\$ Return Urged," *WFP* (Country News edition), 19 October 1978. See *Inter-Universities North: A Northern Perspective. Brief to the Universities Grants Commission*, November 1978. We have not been able to locate a copy of this document.
27. As early as 12 December 1977, D. R. Campbell, President of the University of Manitoba, had written to W. J. Condo to convey a request from the Committee of Presidents that a review of IUN be undertaken. The suggestion had originated with Dr. Michael Blonar, former Senior University Officer for IUN. For his letter of appointment, see University of Manitoba Archives, W. J. Waines Collection, MSS 114, Box 3, folder 2, W. J. Condo to Dr. W. J. Waines, 21 September 1978.
28. "Terms of Reference," Waines, Report To UGC, np.
29. W. J. Waines' obituary, *WFP*, 23 April 1991, p. 22.
30. W. J. Waines, "The Role of Education in the Development of Underdeveloped Countries," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Nov. 1963), p. 339.
31. W. J. Waines, *Federal Support of Universities and Colleges in Canada* (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 1970).
32. "Idea for a Northern University," *WFP*, 13 February 1964, p. 27.
33. "Winnipeg Experts Reject Northern University Idea," *WFP*, 5 November 1964, p. 52.
34. "Dawson Wants Northern University," *WFP*, 7 May 1969, p. 36. For the provincial Liberals and the idea of a Northern University see "Women a Big Need in the North," *WFP*, 10 February 1971, p. 35; "Dr. Blain Johnson Joins Liberals in Thompson, Manitoba," *WFP*, 15 February 1971, p. 3; and, "Proposal for University in North Made by Member in Legislature," *WFP*, 2 June 1971, p. 9.
35. Office of the Premier, *Guidelines for the Seventies* (Manitoba, 1973), 57-58. For a general account of the Schreyer government's accomplishments in the North see Nelson Wiseman, *Social Democracy in Manitoba: A History of the CCF-NDP* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1983), pp. 144-145.
36. For Dr. Waines' itinerary and interview schedule in the North, see University of Manitoba Archives, W. J. Waines Collection, MSS 114, Box 3, folder 2, "Itinerary Nov. 5-Nov 10," and "Appointment Schedule for Dr. Waines."
37. John Loxley, "The 'Great Northern' Plan," *Studies in Political Economy*, No. 6, (Autumn 1981), p. 152.
38. Gerald Friesen, "Northern Manitoba 1870-1970 - An Historical Outline," in Y. George Lithman and Georg Yrigve (eds.), *People & Land in Northern Manitoba: 1990 Conference at the University of Manitoba* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1992), pp. 43-55.
39. For an insider's account of the Schreyer government's policy concerning Aboriginal communities in the North, see John Loxley, "The 'Great Northern' Plan," *Studies in Political Economy*, No. 6 (Autumn 1981), pp. 151-182.
40. University of Manitoba Archives, W. J. Waines Collection, MSS 114, Box 3, folder 2, "Itinerary Nov. 5-Nov 10," and "Appointment Schedule for Dr. Waines."
41. University of Manitoba Archives, W. J. Waines Collection, MSS 114, Box 3, Folder 2, Report on the University of Canada North Conference held November 19-11, 1971 in Inuvik, NWT.
42. University of Manitoba Archives, W. J. Waines Collection, MSS 114, Box 3, Folder 2, Interview Notes, "BUNTEP," Dean Hayes.
43. On BUNTEP and related initiatives, see Shirley Lyon, *Native People and Brandon University: A Documentary Record of Academic Programs* (Brandon University, 1987).
44. Waines, Report To UGC, p. 1.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
51. Waines, Report To UGC, p. 23.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
54. University of Manitoba Archives, W. J. Waines Collection, MSS 114, Box 3, Folder 2, W. J. Condo, "Inter-Universities North," Briefing Note for the Minister, 20 March 1978.
55. Waines, Report To UGC, pp. 2-3. For an account of IUN contemporary with, but at variance with, some of Waines' conclusions regarding the effectiveness of consortia, see James W. Fox, "The Consortium in Higher Education: A Second Look," *The Journal of Educational Administration*, Volume XVI, No. 2, October 1978, pp. 219-225.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
66. University of Manitoba Archives, W. J. Waines Collection, MSS 114, Box 3, Folder 2, W. J. Condo to Dr. W. J. Waines, 6 March 1979 and R. A. Johnson, Secretary, Committee of Presidents to Dr. W. J. Condo, Chair, UGC, 2 March 1979. See "University Grants Higher Than Expected," *WFP*, 3 February 1979.
67. For press reaction to the restoration of IUN's budget see "University Grants Higher Than Expected," *WFP*, 3 February 1979.
68. For reports on IUN subsequent to the Waines Report, see University Grants Commission. *Discussion Paper on Inter-Universities North* (Winnipeg, 1988); Michael Blonar, *Inter-Universities Cooperation: A study - Phase I*. (Winnipeg, 1989); *University College of the North: Recommendations and Action Plan: Report of the Consultation on Post-Secondary Education in Northern Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Advanced Education, 2003).

## A Trapper's Diary from Northern Manitoba, 1928–1946

by Rosemary Malaher  
Whistler, British Columbia

To study daily life of earlier times, fur trade historians have gleaned a wealth of information from diaries, letters and post journals, many preserved today in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives. In more modern times, the task of keeping a diary is unusual but immeasurably valuable to the historian.

Fortunately, a set of diaries by a fur trapper, Harry Pienowski, has survived. These diaries, now deposited in the Fort Dauphin Museum, Manitoba, cover the years from 1925 to 1937, and 1942 to 1946 in northern Manitoba. The writing is very legible and the style is conversational. In reading them, you feel that they were written to be read. Many of the activities are explained carefully, so that a fairly complete picture of the trapper's life emerges. However, some routine things were taken for granted, so they must be deduced, or left unexplained. As a resource for understanding the life of a trapper in the north, they are remarkable. The advantage of having multiple years is that, as the round of activity is repeated, more details emerge and the events are exposed, with their high drama and boredom, their virtues and vices. The reader is informed on the extremes of weather, the dangers of subsistence living, the food and the clothing, the summer

plagues of flies and mosquitoes, the hunting and the fishing along with the price of fur.

Aside from work done by A. J. Ray, the 20<sup>th</sup>-century fur trade has not been much investigated by scholars.<sup>1</sup> When the records of the Northern Stores are scrutinized,

and some of the first person accounts of these independent trappers come to light, the period will be fleshed out, just as personal correspondence and diaries have done for earlier fur trade business journals. Attention will be directed to the transition period after the sale of the Hudson's Bay Company lands to the Dominion of Canada in 1870. The company continued to have some control over the north, their accustomed area of business, and they retained possession of their trading posts.

However, following the First World War, the period of adjustment for the returned men was difficult because the economy was not robust enough to absorb the numbers that flooded the employment market. Some white men took up trapping in the sparsely populated areas north of farming settle-

ment, and were able to eke out a living. They also pressed through the waterway and rail links to more northerly areas hoping to find better quality and more plentiful furs.

By turning to the story revealed through this first person account, we begin to expand our view of this transition period. In March 1942, Harry Pienowski was 52 years old. He had lived at mile 445 on the Hudson's Bay Railway for 14 years and had faithfully kept a diary for most of his life. Like the earliest French-Canadian *bois brûlé*, he and his partner, Emil Buss, had escaped "the restrictive



Pienowsky Album, Fort Dauphin Museum

Harry Pienowsky and friends, 1916.

*Rosemary Malaher was Executive Director (1977–1983) and President (1988–1990) of the Manitoba Historical Society, and Manitoba representative to the Heritage Canada Foundation (1990–1996). In 1992, she received the Prix Manitoba Award for her work in promoting local, regional, and provincial heritage.*



codes of civilization"<sup>2</sup> but they lived by a much more severe code of survival in the north. The fact that they were able to do so for so long was a tribute to their own discipline. They drank intemperately, in binges, and smoked, but they took good care of their dogs and their trap lines, because that was their livelihood.

Pienowski and Buss moved up to the end of track on the Hudson Bay Railway in 1928. They had been in the north, in other locations for at least three years, which are documented in the first three diaries. Neither of these men had much education. They had worked on the rodeo circuit and had tried other jobs with little permanent success.

The Hudson Bay Railway project had been revived in 1927 after having been shut down during the First World War. It had taken considerable political pressure from the prairie provinces to get the work started again. In a reminiscence by Major J. G. MacLachlan, the engineer building the Hudson Bay Railway, he says, "There was a large surplus of labour during these early years, and it was not unusual to have several hundred men at the office door looking for work. At one point, it was necessary for me to keep two C.N. police constables to protect my person. They threatened to burn up my house and blow up the Saskatchewan

River Bridge [at The Pas]. We only paid 25 cents an hour in those days."<sup>3</sup>

Three trappers, Pienowski, Buss and another partner, built their cabin near the end of track the first year and then later took over a camp which had been used by the railway surveyors, three and one quarter miles south of what became a railway section point at Mile 445, shown on the railway map as McClintock, a name Pienowski seldom uses. As far as he is concerned, his address is "Mile 445, H.B. Ry., Man. Via The Pas."<sup>4</sup>

Joe Robertson, a retired employee of the Manitoba Wildlife Branch living in Dauphin, Manitoba, had encountered these trappers in the course of duty as a game guardian. Robertson kept a diary one winter when he trapped north of Churchill.<sup>5</sup> He said that he did it to keep track of the days. His writing is a bit more cryptic than Harry's but, still, the adverse conditions often brought out the emotions of the moment. After one particularly hazardous trip, Robertson credits his dogs for getting him safely back to his camp.

Pienowski writes of a similarly hazardous trip, (in the quotations I have left Harry's spelling and have usually given the whole day's entry to provide the context):

December 1936

Thur. 3 Snow fell last night and this morning it still snowing and starting to storm, but must pull out anyway so I will meet the Sunday's train for I want to go to Churchill on it. It turned out a real bad storm and I got the full force of it on the open barren lands, at times I could not see my lead dog, had to stop and take the ice out of the dogs eyes a number of times. At first tent to night, what a day, what a day. Pork sausage spluttering in the pan and dried spuds sizzling. Storming as bad as ever.

About the cold, the following series of entries gives a good example:

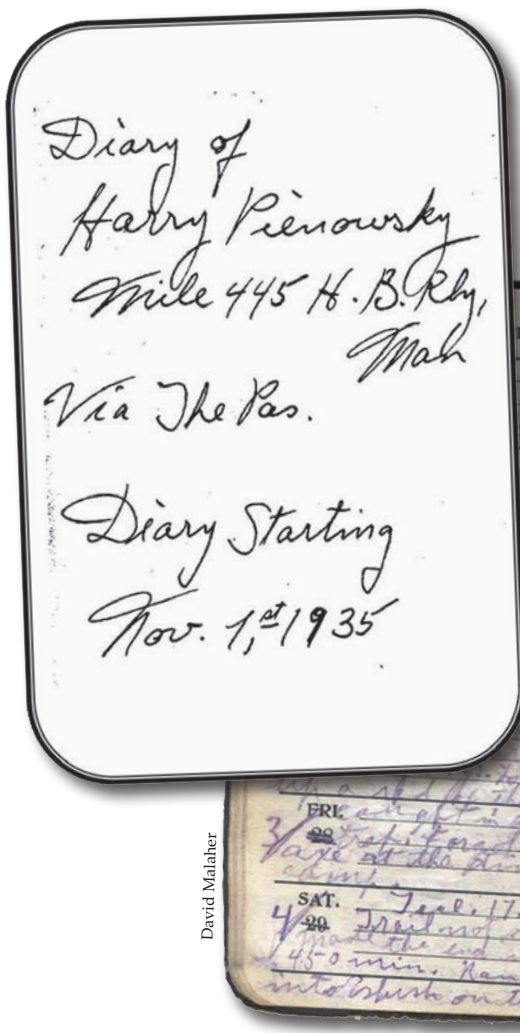
January 1943

Thur. 14 Nice calm day but quite frosty, got a little more fur today.

Fri. 15 Very frosty. Shot 3 shots at caribou but as the mist was so dense I likely overshot. Got the first white fox on the new creek which I follow back to camp 57.

Sat. 16 Extremely cold. Made good time coming to camp 8. Also the best fur day so far.

Sun 17 Very cold, the coldest day we had this winter, must be 60 below but I managed to get to camp 9 without freezing anything. Very poor fur day, hope to get home tomorrow.



Cover and pages of the Pienowsky Diary.

Mon. 18 Colder even than yesterday but got home O.K. Found Emil home with another big catch of colored foxes. There are lots of colored foxes on his line as he is mostly in the bush & semi bush, but I am on the barren lands & foxes are much scarcer this on account of so many severe storms. Pete Konkak also at our camp, came down from 445 with Emil last night. Emil said it was 62 below zero this morning, no wonder I found it cold.

Tue. 19. Got my fur all off the stretching boards. 60 below.

Wed. 20 51 below this morning. Were supposed to go to 445 to help drink up 40 oz. of rum & 40 oz. of scotch that was to come up on today's train. Frank & Helen Pidskalney came along from 427 with gas car built in [an enclosed cab] going to 445 so they stopped in at our camp & we went with them, but the booze didn't come so our trip there for it was no good.

Unlike Robertson, Pienowski and Buss had a veritable army of neighbours, other trappers and the workers on the railway. The section men at nearby stopping points formed a fairly large social group, with only one or two wives mentioned, and dropping by for meals and overnight was common. The workers had access to gas cars and hand cars and often took the trappers along the line to visit their friends. The diaries mention many of the names and jobs, bridge gangs, pump men, including vacation replacements. Less frequently, we hear of the game guardians and the RCMP. Often fur buyers were on the train and furs were sold between one stop and the next. Supplies and mail came by train and the trappers frequently went to Churchill, 65 miles north, to sell their catch.

The dealers to whom they sold the furs are usually mentioned. Sometimes it was an agent of the Hudson's Bay Company. Most frequently, it was J. R. Kerr of The Pas who personally travelled on the train and, on one occasion, bought fur on Christmas day. There was only one early mention of Revillon Freres, a rival to the HBC. Others were Horace Halcrow in The Pas, Thomas Riddock of Churchill, and later his widow who acted as an agent when she sent some fur to the Montreal fur auction. They also traded with O. Lindell at the White Fox Store in Gillam and Soudack's Fur Auction in Winnipeg.

In 1934, one of the section men got a radio and the group spent evenings listening to the programs, boxing matches or music shows from stations in Chicago and Hollywood. Otherwise, they ate, drank and played bridge. They heard the abdication speech of Edward VIII and worried about trouble in Europe. By the 1940s, the radio was not mentioned. The continuity of the story was lost by the gap in the diaries between 1937 and 1942. By that time, the war was on and the Americans were building a military air base at Churchill, providing an added attraction to visits there.

During the summer, the men went south, visited relatives, binged in Winnipeg or perhaps worked on farms. Someone was left in charge of the dogs. Summer in the north is fly season. In the following excerpt, you can understand why they would want to get out:

July 1934

Sun. 1<sup>st</sup> Emil & I went to 445 after the mail, musketos bad in eve. Jack fish biting good, so were the mosquitoes.

Mon. 2. Another foolish moose swam across the river at our camp so I shot him. Liver for supper. Section men had supper with us, taking some meat home with them. Musq. very bad.

Tue. 3 Pulled out the green wood from the river as the mosquito's were not bad, being held down by a strong wind.

Thur. 5 Mosquitoes bad. Must grease dogs now.

Fri. 6 Another showery day. Mosquitoes very bad. Cut a little wood for exercise.

Sat. 7 Cut a few sticks of wood but the flies and mos. drove us into the house to stay. Had a batch of visitors to night.....Mosquitoes very bad, had to grease the dogs in the middle of the night.

Sun. 8 Went to 445 after dinner and caught the train for Churchill, so quite a few of the boys, not all in yet from the north. Flies so bad that I can't find a word for it.

Returns from Montreal fur sale are not so hot, the money will not be here yet for a week or two. Stayed for the night with Charley Vanderbrook. Couldn't sleep on account of mosquitoes.

In winter, there were a few celebrations, always Christmas and Easter, and birthdays when a gift of whisky would arrive for the party. In the fall, southerners would come up to hunt moose or caribou and the trappers would act as guides. The best Christmas is described as follows:

December 1934

Dec. 25 Well Xmas came off in good style. Had turkey which Mrs. Rutherford sent up to Bob. Keeler also brought up one, and Pete bought one on the train. Also had chickens, 4 of them and a ham, in fact it was a good spread with gin, brandy and scotch, also oranges, apples chocklates and nuts and lots of other things. Had Cornell and Dave Brown from 461; Bob, Pete and Sam from 445 and Joe Chambers and Louie Matichuck from 435 besides Otto Keeler who came up to visit us for a month. The 461 and 445 boys went home, (except Bob) about 2:45 A.M., the rest stayed over night. Very cold.



Mon. 31 Bob dressed turkey for New Year's day. Emil chief cook. Otto cooked dog feed and I baked apple and apricot pie. I rushed to 445 late in P.M. and came home after dark, bringing back spuds and a cake that Bob's sister in Ont. send to him.

Besides the continual fight with the elements, health problems did occur. Harry had an operation in The Pas hospital, which, he says, was for a rupture, probably a hernia, and for some time after, he checked in with the doctor. He does mention mishaps with an axe, head colds and local infections. At one point, he put his back out on the trap line, but this was a tendency, which was caused by the physical work required in several of his earlier jobs.

The trapping season opened on the first of November and the first trip, referred to as his "maiden trip" involved soft dogs, some open water and a heavy load of supplies, as he set up his various camps for later trips around the line. The sites had often been damaged by summer conditions, in spite of his spring efforts, and he planned changes in route from the year before. There was a different pattern of trips between the thirties and the forties. Consistently, he started off his eastern trip by going to the 445 section house and then heading east into the bush country. There was at least one permanent cabin on this route, which he found a great relief from tenting. Alternately, going west into the barrens, he headed out directly from their camp. In the winter of 1933-1934, the average length of the eastern trips was a little more than 6 days while the average western trip was almost a day longer. Altogether, there were 15 trips from 7 November to 11 April. In the last set of diaries, in the forties, he had one line, which formed a large circle, which he started by going to 445 and staying overnight. He referred to the camp sites by number, from 1 to 8 with one of the central ones having a one-day "pitch out line." In the winter of 1943-1944, from 15 November to 6 April, he made seven trips averaging 14 days. A short example will portray a day on the trap line.

Feb. 1937

Tue. 2 Had quite a cold day coming to the 2<sup>nd</sup> tent, saw quite a few very fresh caribou tracks but saw no caribou. Very cold and calm tonight. Just finished my supper of bean soup and meat, finishing the meal with trail bannock and strawberry jam and tea.

Information on the care of the dogs and the development of a good team is scattered throughout the text. It takes some work to piece together a comprehensive story. Large

quantities of dog food were ordered from the south in the fall, consisting of cornmeal, oatmeal and tallow. The men were always on the lookout for caribou, which they used for themselves and the dogs. With a plentiful supply, meat could be dried for use over the summer. After breakup and the spring flood, they put in fish weirs and nets and dried the fish. The dogs of their own team were bred or they bought a dog from another trapper or from someone in Churchill. One dog purchased from The Pas turned out to be too soft, being blamed for being a "southern dog." Of course, the running conditions were often mentioned, with the last day of the trip, literally "the home run" done in record time.

Somehow, these men acquired manual skills, which made their life possible and limit the need for cash. The first requirement was a log cabin, which they construct in a few days and then set about building in cupboards and other fittings. They made and repaired snowshoes, and sometimes sewed their own caribou winter clothing. Certainly, they made gauntlet mitts and moccasins and decorated them with fur and feather-stitching. They also made these for others and presumably received something in trade although that is not mentioned. Perhaps this was a way of paying for the trips on the railway cars. They made themselves stoves out of stove piping for their tents and trapping cabins. Emil baked bread and several of the group made pies. Clothing is extremely important and Harry writes:

Nov. 1942

Wed. 4 Left 445 for the first trip over my trap line this season. Tent chewed by some squirrels. Late supper & no dinner. All set at 8.30 P.M. Stormed

before I got here. Sewed caribou patches on the knees of my overalls. Fox tracks few, caribou nil.

Thurs. 5 Wore caribou parka going to camp 2 which only had one corner of tent tore.

No caribou & fox tracks scarce. Corn meal cached in my stove last spring O.K.

March 1943

Sun. 14 Waited at 445 for the south bound train to see the 10 tanned caribou hides I ordered in Churchill, must get a complete outfit of caribou clothes for next winter (parka, pants & vest with sleeves, all with the fur on).

It would be nearly impossible to make any sensible accounting of the trappers' finances. Pienowski and Buss have a partnership, based in Churchill with the Hudson's



Pienowsky Album, Fort Dauphin Museum  
Sign at mile 445 on the Hudson Bay Railway.



Pienowsky Album, Fort Dauphin Museum

"Our Camp, Deer River, 1934."

Bay Company and mention paying off debts. The formal partnership agreement had originally included another trapper, but they "let him out" in the summer of 1933. Pienowski comments on the prices they received for their furs as good, fair, more or less than expected, and sometimes he gives actual figures. These might be of some use in a more detailed discussion of the economics of fur trapping. Only one year, 1932–1933 has a detailed accounting at the back of the diary. It includes furs caught in each month, and proceeds of each sale. The total amount made by three trappers was \$1,208.40. It was better than having no job at all in those depressed times.

The trappers order goods from Eaton's and HBC catalogues and use the telephone from time to time, but this is seldom mentioned in the later years.

Harry was a handsome ladies' man. In my conversations with Joe Robertson, his opening comment was that Pienowski was "as conceited as Hell." Harry got letters from many of his female friends and Christmas presents, too. During his stay in hospital in The Pas, he certainly charmed the nurses. In August 1942, a young woman scientist accompanied her professor and his wife on an expedition to study bacteria in permafrost and a romance developed. She and Harry corresponded during the winter and then the next summer Harry proudly announced that he was going to Toronto to visit her. He had a great visit. He proposed during the next winter but she did not reply for quite a while. Later, letters come from her, but he does not mention her actual refusal.

In Pienowski's diary, there are mentions of local Indians in the early years. Robertson said that the Indians could not keep dogs over the summer until they got gill nets for fish. It is likely that Pienowski and Buss were included in the Registered Trap Line process, which took place in the forties sometime after the end of these diaries. They did have licences as fur trappers. There is some mention of an issue regarding trappers who caught fur before the opening of the season but when Dan Austin visits in July 1942 he has come "about Indians trapping beaver on our trap line."<sup>6</sup> When the diaries were returned to Manitoba, Gerald Malaher, a former director of the Wildlife Branch,

recognized the two men as trappers who had been prosecuted for over-harvesting caribou.<sup>7</sup>

In discussions with Joe Robertson comparing Pienowski and Buss, there were some similarities. Robertson was also a farm boy with only an elementary education. He was younger and was still with his family when the depression hit. He went north to trap fox for one winter (1936) because he had heard that foxes had been very plentiful the year before.<sup>8</sup> Moving into a remote area north of Churchill, he found the barren grounds unproductive and returned to Churchill as soon as he could. He served in the Air Force in the Second World War and then worked for the Province of Manitoba in Wildlife Management.

It would be interesting to compare Pienowski's diary with those of other frontiersmen and fur trappers. One example might be Osborne Russell who was with Nathaniel Wyeth's party in 1834 in the American west. H. M. Crittenden recommends Russell's published journals as an excellent account of daily life in that earlier era.<sup>9</sup> The differences in climate and the presence of some modern conveniences would be apparent but the difficulties of survival are no less apparent.

Buss and Pienowski were older than Robertson, and more entrenched in the trappers' life. They stayed in the north, but when they and their contemporaries passed away, they were not replaced by any younger men.<sup>10</sup> Harry never moved away from the camp. His partner Emil finally left the camp and trapping in 1966 at the age of seventy-three to live in Gillam, a town on the Nelson River. It had been 39 years since they first ventured up the rail line. Emil mailed the diaries to Robert McCabe in Madison, Wisconsin. McCabe returned them to Manitoba in 1981. 🐾

## Notes

1. Arthur J. Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade in the Industrial Age*, (1990)
2. Peter C. Newman, "Hudson's Bay, USA", *Globe and Mail*, 18 February 2006, p. F5.
3. [www.zambonista.com/hbr](http://www.zambonista.com/hbr). I would like to thank Dean Berezanski of the Wildlife Branch, Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship, for this reference.
4. Inside front cover, Diary, 25 October 1933 to 31 October 1934, p. 9, Fort Dauphin Museum (Hereafter FDM)
5. Joe Robertson, *Resource Management: A History of the Successes and Failures of Wildlife and Fishery Resource Management in Manitoba*, Dauphin, Manitoba, self-published, 2004. Appendix II, pp. 167-204.
6. Because of serious depletion of the beaver in the north, trapping of them was banned in the late 1930s and early '40s. Gerald Malaher, *The North I Love*, Winnipeg, Hyperion Press, 1984, pp. 91 & 92.
7. For a discussion of the situation in the Province of Manitoba see Malaher, 1984, pp. 133 to 137.
8. Robertson's diary covers 3 August 1936 to 21 March 1937. He went trapping on the Seal River because of the exceptional catch of foxes the year before. This is corroborated by Pienowski's diary note for 29 March 1936, "Heard that our old partner Gordon Moffatt on the upper Seal river got over 200 foxes with his pardner." FDM, p. 11, p. 42.
9. *Journal of a Trapper* was prepared for publication in 1848 but not actually published until 1914. See Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West*, Vol. 1, University of Nebraska Press, 1986, p. 198.



## Roblin City: A Gleaming Metropolis on Hudson Bay

by James Burns and Gordon Goldsborough  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Winnipeg was an ambitious, exuberant place—bursting with energy and growing at a phenomenal rate. Inhabited by as many millionaires as any other city in Canada at the time,<sup>1</sup> Winnipeg boasted more new construction in 1910 than anywhere else in the Dominion. Its population increased by 80%, from 255,000 in 1901 to 461,000 in 1911.<sup>2</sup> In the latter year, Winnipeg ranked fourth in Canada in manufacturing. It was the third largest city in Canada, after Montreal and Toronto. What a vibrant place to live!

Scottish architect William Bruce rode this wave of excitement into Winnipeg with his wife Annie, in June 1906. Initially a junior employee in the architectural firm of Thomas Wright, then a partner with Daniel Smith, and finally the principal of his own firm, Bruce designed a modest number of works in the city.<sup>3</sup> His sojourn in Winnipeg may have lasted eleven years (1906–1917), perhaps a little longer, but he is not credited with the design of any significant Winnipeg buildings after 1913.

Bruce's *magnum opus* was a signal example of the boldness that characterized Manitoba in those heady days prior to the First World War. It was a concept drawing, presented in 1912, of an entire, new city. Roblin City, as it was to be called in homage to Premier Rodmond P. Roblin, would be located at the mouth of the Churchill River, at the present site of the Town of Churchill. It might have been a beautiful monument to his sense of the dramatic, had it not been so redolent of naïve optimism.

At the time, Winnipeg was the nexus of all rail traffic moving goods and people, especially immigrants from Europe, in all directions across Canada and the continent. Fabulous fortunes were being made in part due to the fortuitous location of the city, as the "Gateway to the West." Yet, even as fortunes were being made, entrepreneurial eyes were turning northward. Reports of the vast, untapped natural resources to be found beyond the northern limits of Manitoba, as it was then delineated, meant that mining concerns and timber companies were preparing to make

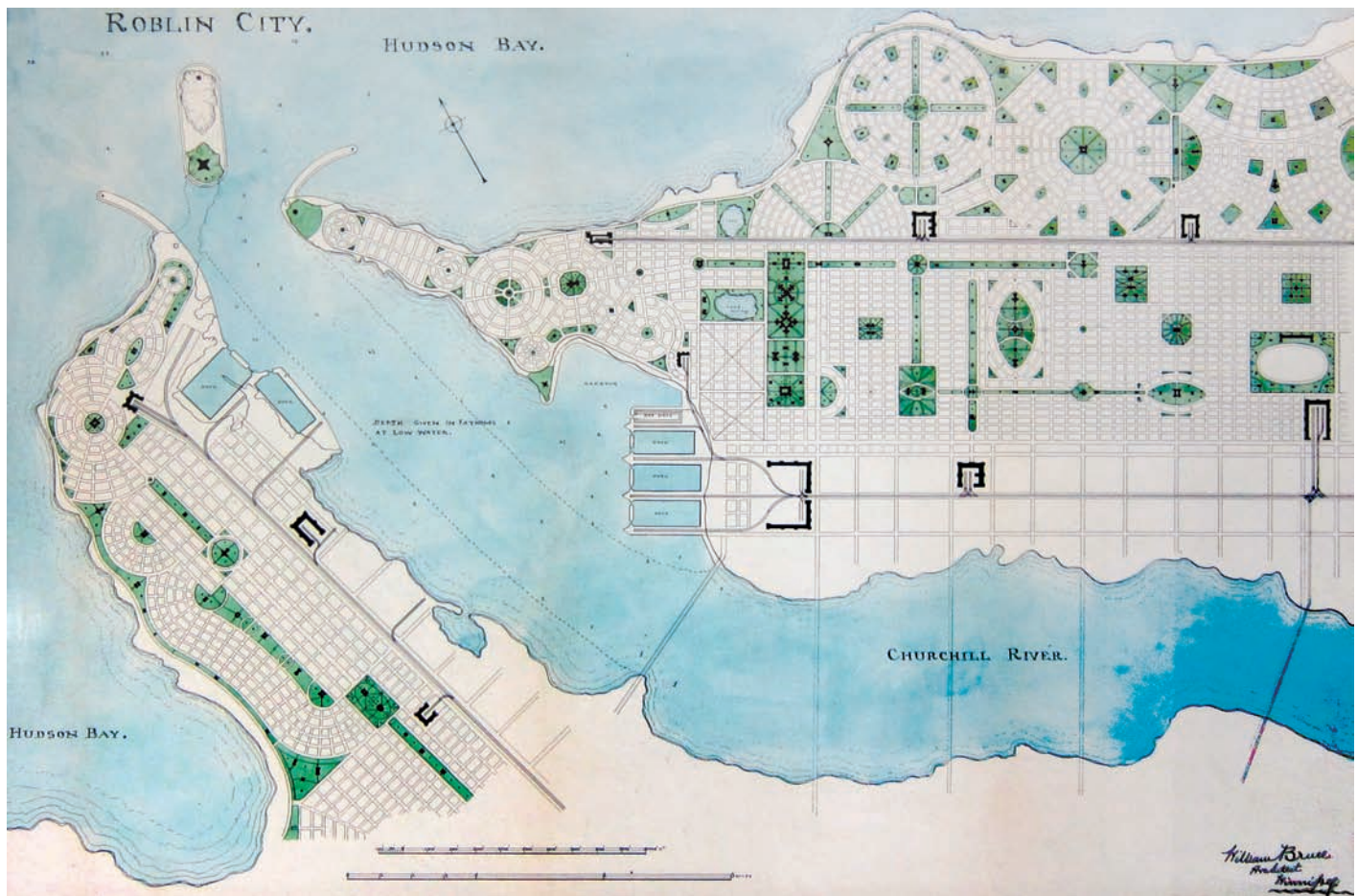
tracks and to exploit the north. Many took comfort from the northward orientation of "Golden Boy" atop the dome of the provincial Legislature, gazing and pointing "forever fixed toward the untold wealth of the northland."<sup>4</sup>

York Factory, at the mouth of the Hayes River on the southwestern shore of Hudson Bay, had for generations been the gateway for Hudson's Bay Company furs bound for Europe. But the importance of a seasonally ice-free port for international grain shipping had not been truly embraced. The voyage to Europe could be shortened by almost 1,200 miles—compared to a route via the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River—if a port could be established at the mouth of the Churchill River.<sup>5</sup> What could be done to bring this bold necessity to fruition?

Bruce was impressed by the immense possibilities at Churchill. But he was also a dreamer. When he presented his ambitious plan for Roblin City in 1912, perhaps he was trying to prove his mettle as an architect and city planner. If Winnipeg was a busy and maturing metropolis, Bruce's new vision for a sparkling Roblin City was stunning and imaginative. It would be built properly—no doubt according to Bruce's own precepts—in part because it is so much easier to build something from the ground up than to retrofit and replace existing facilities. It was in May 1912, during Rodmond Roblin's fourth term as premier, that the land area of Manitoba was enlarged to its present size. The northern boundary was now located along the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel of latitude and the eastern boundary now coursed northeasterly to include Port Nelson and Fort Churchill—over strenuous objections from the Ontario and Saskatchewan governments.<sup>6</sup> These new limits gave Manitoba about 800 kilometres of saltwater shoreline and a fine potential seaport. The long-anticipated Hudson Bay Railway between Winnipeg and Roblin City, via The Pas, would expedite the flow of capital, and the making of fortunes in the north.

With the extension of the Hudson Bay Railway into the north, Roblin predicted that The Pas would become the second city in the province.<sup>7</sup> Community boosters from The Pas boldly claimed in 1913 that "the geographical and strategic position of their town is considerably more important than that of the Queen City of the prairies [Winnipeg]";<sup>8</sup> a premature claim made 16 years before the railway would be completed. They dismissed Winnipeg's

*James Burns is Curator Emeritus of Quaternary Paleontology at the Royal Alberta Museum. Gordon Goldsborough is an Associate Professor of Biological Sciences at the University of Manitoba, and a former President of the Manitoba Historical Society.*



Archives of Manitoba, Roblin City map

**The vision.** William Bruce's 1912 map of Roblin City was replete with gardens, artificial lakes, streetcar lines on both sides of the Churchill River, with Prince of Wales Fort isolated on an island at the mouth of the harbour.

great good fortune as an accident of its 40-year head-start and its profiting from the traffic of transcontinental enterprise through the city. Starting a thousand miles closer to Europe, rather than going by way of Port Arthur/Fort William and the Great Lakes, cargo would go faster and cheaper to Europe and elsewhere. Every bit of grain, every head of cattle, every ounce of minerals, every board-foot of lumber—in short, everything that would be shipped through The Pas—would help build and shape this new city, with Roblin City not far behind.

Bruce envisioned his Roblin City as home to 500,000 people, with 600 miles of streets and parkways, and a full range of facilities and amenities. One portion of the city, "a mile long and a third of a mile wide, [would be] devoted to municipal buildings, university, college, medical school, hospitals, museum, art gallery, court house, churches, schools, [and] libraries".<sup>9</sup> Bruce seemed oblivious to the numerous drawbacks of the site and his design. It featured a long and narrow urban spread, exposed to the weather on the treeless tundra. The population density, for the combined east and west sides of the harbour—an area of about 39 square miles—would have been about 12,800 people per square mile, or 3.5 times Winnipeg's urban density in 2006 (only 3,700 people per square

mile). However attractive the many circular drives and promenades might have looked on paper, firefighters would abhor such divertissements because they interfere with speedy navigation to fires. While the new city would provide most of the amenities of modern cities in the south, its remote location would hobble it in the dead of winter. What would occupy the citizens when shipping was halted during the winter? How would such a large population endure the 24-hour winter darkness, unable to use the outdoors effectively? The many public gardens that Bruce included in his plans were attractive but impractical. Playful, doubting citizens might have asked Bruce what they should plant in the gardens: perhaps snow peas and iceberg lettuce? In a northern city of a half-million people, how do you treat sewage where the ground is permanently frozen? How do you build sewer and sewage-treatment facilities that will freeze unless you put them well below frostline? How do you compost garbage? Snow-clearing would be a problem given the constraints of unrelenting curved streets. All fuel for heating, motoring and industry would have to be shipped in.

On the other hand, the site was not without its advantages. It had nearly limitless fresh water from the Churchill River, and hydroelectric power production



required only the construction of a dam. And there was a fine, well-protected, deep-water harbour to accommodate marine shipping.

Some insight to the nature of the Roblin City proposal can be gained from considering the career of its chief proponent. William Bruce, in a series of letters to the Editor of the *Manitoba Free Press*, was acutely aware of the problems facing any rapidly growing city. After six years of advocating for improved codes and tighter regulation of building inspections—as President of the Winnipeg Sanitary Association—he had made halting progress to ensure the erection and servicing of safe, healthy homes and tenement accommodations in Winnipeg. But it was not a smooth ride. And in step with his crusade for improved building codes, he continued to design buildings. These plans included a Manitoba Sanitorium on the Brokenhead River east of Winnipeg, a club house for the Reform Hunt Club on the borders of Lake Manitoba near Clarkleigh (where Bruce himself owned several “rural lots” that soon went up for sale), Winnipeg’s first public swimming pool and baths at the intersection of Charles Street and Pritchard Avenue, and the British and Foreign Bible Society building at 184 Alexander Avenue (known today as Oseredok, the Ukrainian Cultural Centre). Of the first three, only the pool and baths facility was ever erected.

Doubtless, Bruce also recognized the value of local building materials. Backed by investors to the tune of

\$250,000, in 1912 he became President of the Manitobite Stone Works Limited, which operated a quarry in the Broad Valley district of the Interlake. Its product was a marble-like stone called manitobite. Though hard, fine-textured, and polishable to a high lustre, and of pleasing dark yellow colour, the Silurian-age dolomite stone was probably never used in quantity in any city buildings. (A small quantity of manitobite may have been used, in 1931, to panel the staircase in the entrance to the Tier Building at the University of Manitoba.<sup>10</sup>) One probable reason was that Bruce was not the most diplomatic salesman.<sup>11</sup> More significantly, it is believed that his quarry was not capable of supplying the quantity or consistent high-quality of product due to partings in the stone; the geological stratum was also limited in areal extent, and nowhere was it more than 3.5 feet thick.<sup>12</sup>

The shortage of manitobite did not dissuade Bruce from trumpeting its virtues. During 1915–1916, he sought a contract to supply the provincial government with manitobite for their new Legislative Building in Winnipeg. At one point, the project’s chief architect, Frank W. Simon, grudgingly agreed to place some of the stronger-than-granite stone in the staircases leading to the galleries in the Legislative Chamber, but the offer was later rescinded. “It has been decided to use marble in the Parliament Buildings, and manitobite is not marble, nor of the quality required for such a building,” wrote Minister of Public



Mike Macri for the Churchill Gateway Development Corporation

**The reality.** This 2009 aerial view of Churchill, with Hudson Bay in the background, shows “Roblin City” as it was eventually developed.

Works Thomas Johnson to Premier T. C. Norris. It appears that the combination of Bruce's frequent complaints to the Minister, his querulousness and open distrust of Johnson's assistant in correspondence with the Minister, and his less-than-truthful assurances about the supply and quality of manitobite contributed to his failure to close a deal.

During the First World War, stone exploration and mining was impeded for want of labour and money to pay the men. Compounding Bruce's problems, "the alien menace" may have proved a potent force in closing his quarry. In a letter to the editor of the *Manitoba Free Press*, Bruce accused Austrian immigrants living in the Broad Valley district of sabotaging the quarry, scaring off the site superintendent and his family, killing some livestock and damaging equipment.<sup>13</sup> (In fact, the immigrant quarry workers may have been staging a strike.<sup>14</sup>) Bruce's letter comes off like a rant, for in it he claimed that federal authorities were unsympathetic to his pleas for help because they were courting the "alien vote."<sup>15</sup> Whatever the truth in the case, the reality is that Bruce's quarry was doomed. It closed in 1915 and the pits were later backfilled. The company's charter was cancelled in 1925 and its investors were left holding worthless assets.<sup>16</sup>

On another front, Bruce seems to have enjoyed a good public reputation. In 1909, he served as President of the Winnipeg Robert Burns Society, and he was Vice-President of the Winnipeg Caithness Association that assisted newly arrived Scottish immigrant families. He was asked to stand for Mayor of Winnipeg in 1912 and for a federal seat in 1917 but declined both nominations.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, he was unafraid to promote potentially unpopular views in public. He orated publicly in favour of conscription of men and women to the military but against women's suffrage.<sup>18</sup> He favoured conscription of aliens for labour crews but argued against their getting the vote on matters of importance to the national war effort.<sup>19</sup> Apparently, the quarry incidents were still fresh in his memory.

By 1915, William Bruce was 63 years old. The manitobite debacle followed his greater sadness at the death, in far-away Edinburgh, of his beloved wife Annie.<sup>20</sup> He promptly remarried only four months after her death.<sup>21</sup> His new bride, Eveline Elizabeth Baillie, was 35 years his junior, and an independent woman. Soon, Bruce would disappear from public sight. He may have retired to British Columbia around 1919 but a "Mrs. William Bruce" still occupied their home on Alloway Avenue in 1923. Then, curiously, their respective trails go cold.

Bruce's municipal dream was resuscitated in 1931,<sup>22</sup> and again in 1965 when local newspapers reconsidered his idea of a northern megacity on Hudson Bay, given the need for more efficient movement of prairie grain and of the products of mining, fishing and forestry.<sup>23</sup> The Hudson Bay Railway from the south, via The Pas, had been operating since 1929; the grain-handling facilities were operational in 1931; a large airfield was built in 1942 by the American military. By 1965, Churchill's population had reached 6,000 and many thought it was the Town's time to strut its stuff.

But again, as in 1912, the dream city remained just that.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for Churchill in 2012 and beyond is the uncertain effect on grain shipments due to the elimination of the Canadian Wheat Board's grain-shipping monopoly, currently the port's largest user. The prevailing consensus on global warming suggests the Arctic seas will soon open up and Hudson Bay may become ice-free year-round. Churchill remains the largest, the best—the only—serviceable deep-water port in the Canadian Arctic, a decided advantage for shipping. Only time will tell if its potential will be fully realized, and there still might be a "gleaming metropolis" on the Bay. ☞

## Acknowledgements

Help in locating sources was provided by Sharon Foley and Chris Kotecki (Archives of Manitoba), Monica Ball (Manitoba Legislative Library), and Randy Rostecki. Drs. Graham Young (Manitoba Museum) and Robert Elias (University of Manitoba) provided information on the elusive manitobite.

## Notes

1. A. J. F. Artibise, 1979. *Gateway City: Documents on the City of Winnipeg, 1873–1913*. Manitoba Records Society, Winnipeg.
2. L. Orlikow, 1959. The Reform Movement in Manitoba, 1910–1915. *Manitoba Historical Society Transactions*, Series 3, [www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/transactions/3/reformmovement.shtml](http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/transactions/3/reformmovement.shtml)
3. A list of Bruce's architectural works can be found in the *Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada, 1800–1950*. <http://dictionaryofarchitectsincanada.org/architects/view/1228>
4. I. Craig, "The Golden Boy" *Manitoba Pageant* September 1956, [www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/pageant/02/goldenboy.shtml](http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/pageant/02/goldenboy.shtml)
5. *Le Pas Herald*, 27 February 1913.
6. *Manitoba Free Press* (hereafter, *MFP*), 12 February 1912, p. 4; J. Mochoruk, *Formidable Heritage*, 2004, pp. 127–142.
7. *MFP*, 19 February 1912, p.13.
8. *Le Pas Herald*, 27 February 1913.
9. *Winnipeg Tribune*, 8 June 1912; *WFP*, 22 May 1965, p. 58.
10. G. A. Young, personal communication, January 2012.
11. Archives of Manitoba, G8014 GR1609 GS 0123, File 3.16.
12. Archives of Manitoba, *op. cit.*, memo from S. C. Oxtou to Public Works Minister Thomas Johnson, 30 December 1915; Goudge, 1944, p. 51. Bruce's silence in reply to a question put by Johnson, as to whether he had ever used manitobite in Winnipeg, suggests he had not.
13. *MFP*, 2 February 1917, p. 4; *Winnipeg Tribune*, 2 February 1917, p. 5.
14. Mochoruk 2004, p. 435.
15. Federal Minister of the Interior, W. J. Roche, received letters from Bruce about the disturbance, but did not act.
16. Archives of Manitoba, *op. cit.*
17. *Winnipeg Tribune*, 29 August 1912, page 1; *MFP*, 19 June 1917, p. 5.
18. *MFP*, 7 May 1915, p. 5.
19. *MFP*, 19 June 1917, p. 5.
20. Annie Bruce had been of delicate constitution, and had repaired to Edinburgh in September 1913 to recuperate her health. An apoplectic seizure put her into a coma and she died on 16 February 1915. Her husband was unable to be with her or attend the funeral overseas. *MFP*, 18 February 1915, page 32.
21. *MFP*, 7 May 1915, page 5; *MFP*, 12 June 1915, p. 7.
22. *WFP*, 27 June 1931, page 2. Minister of Mines and Natural Resources D. G. McKenzie made a rather more modest proposal than Bruce did.
23. *WFP*, 22 May 1965, p. 58.



## James Isham (c1716–1761): How an Eighteenth-Century Fur Trader is Influencing Canada Today

by Scott Stephen  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

James Isham was born around 1716 to Whitby Isham and Ann Skrimshire of St. Andrew's parish, Holborn, in London, England. In 1732, he entered the service of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), and quickly rose to a position of command. He spent most of the rest of his life in what is now northern Manitoba, in charge of two of the HBC's most important posts, York Fort (now known as York Factory) and Prince of Wales Fort (Churchill). During that time, he became known as a skilled trader, a keen natural historian and a keen observer of the world around him.

James Isham left behind him a tangible legacy of construction, which is influencing us some 250 years later. At Churchill, he built a fort—or, rather, he started rebuilding one—that is one of the most remarkable stone structures in Canada, and one in which Parks Canada has recently made considerable investment in studying and stabilising. And at York, he built a retaining wall along the banks of the Hayes River, where a multi-disciplinary team is now studying climate change in the northern environment, and trying to preserve what is left of one of Canada's most valuable symbols of our fur trade heritage.

Isham was given command of Prince of Wales Fort at the mouth of the Churchill River in 1741. He took charge of an establishment that looked more impressive than it really was. In the early 1730s, the HBC's London Committee had instructed Isham's predecessor, Richard Norton, to build a stone fortification to replace the wooden one previously built in 1717. The Committee was thinking more in terms of defence than of trade, remembering how easily French warships had captured HBC posts in the 1680s and 1690s. Prince of Wales Fort was the only stone fortification the HBC built on the shores of the Bay—indeed, it was one of only three stone forts the Company ever built anywhere (the other two were Lower and Upper Fort Garry).

Norton declared the construction complete before he retired in 1741, but it was soon apparent that there were

serious problems. One of Norton's subordinates, Robert Pilgrim, wrote a private letter to the Committee criticising Norton's management of the project. The Committee followed up on this report by interviewing the masons who had arrived home in Britain from Prince of Wales Fort. In 1742, the board of directors vented their anger on Isham, who of course had only just taken charge: "We are very sorry to find by the informations we have received, it doth not answer our expectations, nor the Great charge we have been at."

Besides errors in the original construction, the walls needed to be strengthened so they could support the installation of a stone parapet to replace the hastily-erected wooden one. Also, the ramparts needed to be widened to provide adequate space for the working of the cannon to be mounted there. Beginning with Isham, the fort was virtually rebuilt over the next thirty years.

Isham was given explicit instructions for correcting the problems. His first priority was to widen the walls from 24 to 32 feet by moving the interior walls eight feet farther in. The second priority was to provide for the mounting and working of cannon on the bastions. Norton had apparently left the interiors of the bastions open, leaving no room on the ramparts above for operating cannon: the recoil of the cannon would have dropped them into the open bastion! Finally, Isham was to replace the wooden parapet with one of stone.

The Committee seemed to be blaming Isham for some of these problems, but Isham curbed his usually acid tongue when responding. After reading the Committee's letter, and quickly consulting with newly-arrived carpenter Richard Ford and supply-ship captain George Spurrell, Isham suggested some revisions to the Committee's plan. He proposed widening the walls even more—by 12 ft at the top and 16 ft at the base—and enlarging the storage rooms inside the bastions. He also planned to build a wooden stockade around the fort to prevent snowdrifts, which in several places provided an easy ramp to the top of the walls from outside. Finally, he asked for more men and horses to get all the work done.

In fact, the work went reasonably well with the resources Isham already had at his disposal. He tackled the south bastion first: masons began working on it just

*Scott Stephen has spent twenty-five years working in museums, archives, and universities. For the last five years, he has provided support in Parks Canada's Winnipeg office to national historic sites from York Factory to the Yellowhead Pass. He lives in Winnipeg with his wife, son, cat, and an alarming number of books.*

four days after the Committee's instructions had arrived. By October, the storeroom and passageway had been enlarged and completed, the rampart filled in above it, wooden platforms installed, and four cannon mounted. His men immediately began work on the east bastion, but two days later had to stop for the winter: they picked up where they had left off at the beginning of April, more than a month earlier than masonry work usually started at Churchill. Spring frosts did not slow them down, though: the east bastion was completed by late August, the powder magazine in the north bastion by the end of September, and the west bastion by July 1744.

Work on the walls began in the autumn of 1743, when the men started digging a shallow foundation for the new interior wall on the southeast side of the courtyard. The wall itself seems to have been completed by late June or early July 1744, when they began working on the rampart on that side of the fort. The new parapet was 6 ft wide at the base and 6 ft high on the exterior side (4 ½ ft tall on the interior side). The masons were still working on the parapet in June 1745, when the Committee's annual letter redirected them to work on the powder magazine.

Despite being rebuilt, the bastions proved too damp for use as storage rooms year-round: dry provisions were regularly moved in and out of them throughout the fort's history. The powder magazine suffered from the same problem: Isham admitted that it was neither rainproof nor bombproof. After another private letter from Churchill's resident snitch, Robert Pilgrim, the Committee declared themselves "very much surprized that you have been so careless & neglectfull in Building the Powder Magazine"

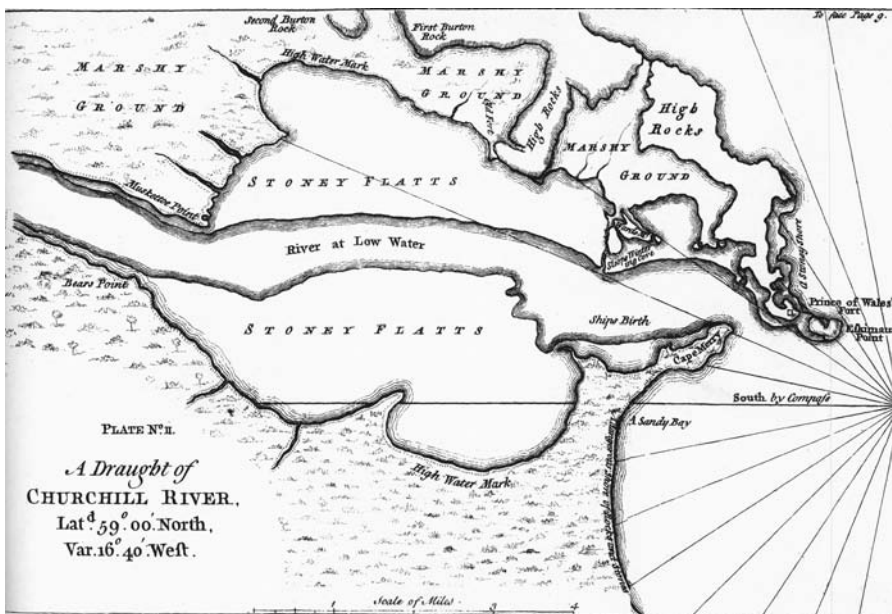
and ordered it rebuilt. In fact, it was Pilgrim who would rebuild it: he was given the command of Prince of Wales Fort and Isham was recalled to England.

Prince of Wales Fort was captured by the French in 1782: although the fort was taken without a shot, the French tried to blow it up anyway. As it turned out, the HBC never reoccupied the fort, which it had spent so much time and resources building. It lay in ruins until government work crews did some restoration work in the 1930s and 1950s.

James Isham did not return to Churchill, but was given command of York Fort in 1750 (his second spell in charge there). He immediately turned his attention to problems that had plagued York since it was first built—and which continue to plague it today. The land there is generally low-lying and marshy, the soil light and sandy and the riverbanks all too easily breached by spring floods and river ice. Riverbank erosion, spring flooding, permafrost, poor surface drainage and other environmental factors have consistently threatened the stability and even the safety of the buildings.

Tidal action, particularly in the spring and autumn, combined with dramatic breaking-up of river ice to scour the banks of the Hayes River. Isham marvelled at the damage caused by “such Deluges or floods,—I have Known the Ice when going out of the Rivers, to appear Like a wood or grove of trees with the perdigious Quantity of wood, which has been Brought off[f] the shores by the water and Ice.” Erosion of the riverbank was also connected with the permafrost: frozen soil on the shore inhibited proper drainage, while layers of permafrost exposed at the riverbank were subject to the melting warmth of the summer sun.

In the autumn of 1750, a “most unaccountable raging tide” swept away the launch, slips, and fencing along the bank. Although this event was unusual in its severity, Isham observed that the riverbank was “continually falling” due to “the force of the Ice, Tides or Rains.” The following year, Isham put his masons and labourers to work “Building a Stone wall under the Banks, to keep the Bank from falling, finding nothing Else will uphold it.” The retaining wall was 7 ft wide, 6 ft high, and had a 4 ft slope; at the base of the wall were wooden stakes 2 ft long, wattled with willows, and later reinforced with stones. Without such intervention, Isham feared that “...in 20 Years the Water would be near our gates.” He reported some early success with the wall: in the spring of 1752, “... the Ice had very little effect on it (tho’ at the same time tore away all our Wooden Launches, the Ice being 16 feet above the top of our banks).”



J. Robson, *An Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson's Bay* (London 1752)

Joseph Robson was a mason and surveyor who worked at both Prince of Wales Fort and York Fort in the 1730s and 1740s. This map of the mouth of the Churchill River is from his 1752 book attacking his former employers, the HBC.



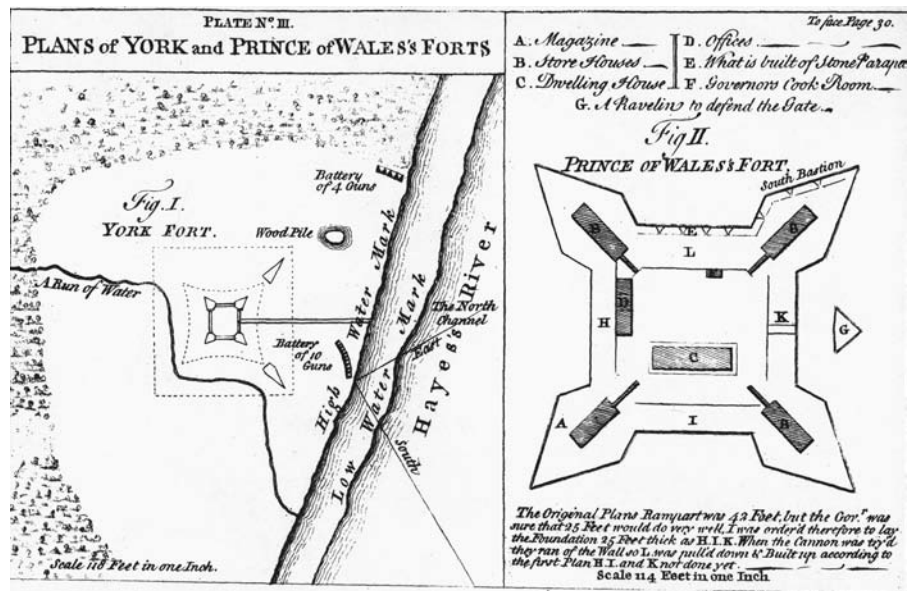
Work on the wall continued through the summer of 1753. The area between the bank and the wall was backfilled, though with what material is unknown. Isham declared himself satisfied with the experiment, observing to the Committee that “Our Riv’r broke up Ruff Last Spring [1753] by wch we had a Trial of Our wall the Damage Sustained Notwith Standing bodies of Ice 6 & 8 feet thick Drove Against it Only loosened Some of the top Stones wch cost two Day’s Repair, a Trifle Considering where no wall is Some Scores load of Dirt goes of in a tide.” Having completed 428 ft of wall, he announced his intention to wall and stake another 150 ft of bank during the coming year.

The retaining wall appeared to serve its purpose well: Isham observed “Little, or no damage” from the spring breakup in 1760. His successor, Ferdinand Jacobs, had the men collecting stones for “the repairs of the Banks” in 1764. However, such maintenance may not have been kept up, and the wall may have been undermined by erosion from the rear, caused by melting permafrost and poor surface drainage. By 1767, it was apparently unable to withstand a September storm: “The Sea was so great & It wash’d so high against the banks of the River as to beat down most of the Banks of the River.”

Isham’s retaining wall set the pattern of riverbank interventions for the next hundred years and more. Subsequent managers assigned to York invested a fairly large proportion of their human and material resources into trying to slow the rate at which the riverbank eroded. Until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, these efforts invariably involved the use of piles, slabs, and (especially) stones to physically protect the riverbank from the effects of tide and current: Joseph Colen in the 1780s and James Hargrave in the 1840s described their endeavours in terms so similar to Isham that they might as well have been describing the same wall.

These interventions succeeded in slowing the normal erosion, and at least partially mitigating the impact of fifteen-year or twenty-year events like floods. However, the HBC’s willingness to invest heavily in riverbank retention declined significantly in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As York Factory lost its formerly central point in the HBC’s continental trade and supply network, from the mid-1880s onward only occasional minor repairs were made.

Today, Parks Canada is struggling with the same issues that Isham struggled with. Melting permafrost and eroding riverbanks are seriously threatening York Factory National Historic Site. A multi-disciplinary team is studying the permafrost, the buildings, the hydrology, the botany, and the geology of the site, as well as tapping into the documentary records preserved in the HBC Archives



J. Robson, *An Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson's Bay* (London 1752)

In this plate from Robson’s 1752 book, note the similarities in design of the two forts, even though one was built of wood and the other of stone.

and into the traditional knowledge of local Cree people. Shrewd observers from the past—like James Isham—still have much to tell us about the environment of western Hudson Bay and how best to adapt to it.

As a young man, James Isham’s superiors described him as sober, honest and diligent. Isham grew into the role of senior statesman of Hudson Bay, mentoring a generation of young clerks who looked up to him as a father and who carried the lessons he taught them to the end of the century. Isham also has many lessons to teach us.

His work beginning to rebuild the unique stone fortification of Prince of Wales Fort provides a window onto an 18<sup>th</sup>-century construction site, detailing the tools, materials, and methods more carefully than most sources from elsewhere in Canada or in Britain in that period. For archaeologists, masons and engineers working to stabilise the ruin of Prince of Wales Fort, these details provide an intimate knowledge of the structure they are trying to save. Isham was a proud man, and would have been quite pleased to know that his work has survived French bombs and the ravages of time still largely intact. And at York Factory, Parks Canada engineers are designing pilot projects for protecting the north bank of the Hayes River from erosion due to water and ice: one of those projects is a wood-and-stone retaining wall modelled partly on Isham’s.

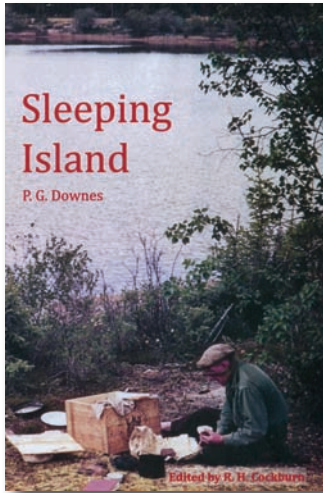
James Isham demands respect for his intimate knowledge of the human and natural environment in which he lived and worked for most of his life. When he was alive, nothing infuriated him more than strangers who thought they understood that world better than he did. He would be supremely satisfied if he knew that—so many years after his death—we’re still looking to him for guidance. 🐾

# Reviews

**P. G. Downes**, *Sleeping Island: The Narrative of a Summer's Travel in Northern Manitoba and the Northwest Territories*, Edited with a new Introduction and Notes by R. H. Cockburn.

Ottawa: McGahern Stewart Publishing, 2011, 294 pages

ISBN: 978-0-9868600-0-3, \$34.95 (paperback)



There is a modest post-1890 literary tradition associated with a patrician type of American writer, mainly resident in the northern border states or New England, preoccupied with the northern reaches of Canada. As a tradition, it has its origins in an understanding of what it meant for the western American frontier to have “closed” in the 1890s, as Frederick Jackson Turner would have it. For glimpses of a North America still not radically

touched by modernity, it was necessary to look to Alaska and the vast interior of Canada north of the railway belt.

Theodore Roosevelt can be linked with this tradition, for it was related to an interest in sport hunting and fishing. Thus, in the early 1900s one finds Harry Auer of Cleveland writing of his wanderings around *The North Country* of Lake Superior, and Kirkland Alexander of Chicago forming his North Shore Club of canoe adventurers keen to probe the landscape north of Sault Ste. Marie. A few years later, Charles B. Reed of the Chicago Historical Society ventured into the lands east of Superior and produced a valuable commentary, *Four Way Lodge*.<sup>1</sup> Most striking was the 1912 canoe trip of Ernst Oberholtzer, the future conservationist on Rainy Lake, who, with his Ojibway companion, Billy McGee, travelled to The Pas and then penetrated to the Nueltin Lake Country and east out to Hudson Bay and Churchill. The literary fruits of that audacious journey are only now appearing, although the valuable photographic record has been known to scholars for some time.<sup>2</sup> Well known, too, are the works of Sigurd Olson of Ely, Minnesota, an outstanding writer and conservationist of the border lakes region. In the 1950s, he teamed up with several Canadians to travel the “lonely land” of the Churchill River.<sup>3</sup> Between the trips of Oberholtzer and the Olson party, only a few fur traders, geologists, adventurers, missionaries and policemen had entered the lands north of the Churchill River. Even the ubiquitous J. B. Tyrrell in his 1894 geological survey of the Kazan River area missed seeing Nueltin Lake, although he made a rudimentary map of it. When Oberholtzer reached the lake in 1912, he was the first, of known record, to see it since Samuel Hearne in 1771.

Prentice Downes (1909–1959) takes his place in this tradition of writers who sensed, as had the Group of Seven painters, that time was running short to see relatively undisrupted fragments of the pre-Imperial northern world. Born in Connecticut, he was acutely aware of the Canadian historical background through close reading of basic sources. In 1935, he commenced exploration of the lower St. Lawrence on board the Hudson’s Bay Company ship *Nascopie*. His first venture into the Arctic came a year later, travelling to Churchill and then probing inland to Pelican Narrows and Reindeer Lake. In 1937, he engaged the support of the New England Museum of Natural History and went north to Ellesmere and Baffin islands and the Boothia Peninsula. He returned to the Territories in 1938, working his way from Isle à la Crosse to Great Bear Lake. By 1939, then, he had paid his dues. Now came the opportunity he sought: to go overland from the south in search of Nueltin Lake on the Manitoba-Northwest Territories border. The result was the publication of *Sleeping Island* in 1943. The reprint edition here under review is happily supplemented with many of the author’s photographs, which did not appear in earlier editions, along with additional maps, which assist the reader greatly.

The editor, Robert Cockburn, Emeritus Professor of English Literature at the University of New Brunswick, is the closest student of both Oberholtzer and Downes and a regular contributor to sub-Arctic studies. The photos selected are well reproduced in black and white (many of the originals were colour transparencies) and have been placed appropriately in the text rather than grouped. This is helpful, for the book is very much travel literature rather than an exercise in “dry as dust” reporting. Incident, personality, historical observation and landscape regularly coalesce with the result that we have a great philosophical adventure told, rather than a trip recorded. There are, indeed, many striking passages where one suspects the author of being a landscape poet of the Ruskin kind. Consider this passage composed at Brochet, at the north end of Reindeer Lake, before his final push northward:

An interim of perplexity and inaction was now forced upon me, anyway, for since my arrival the wind had become very violent. Mostly from the south, these winds whirled over Brochet with a tremendous force. Sometimes there fled with them shreds of black clouds but there was no rain. They had a peculiar character. They were like walls of air which pressed forward with a terrible eagerness,



shrieking and menacing. Sunset would bring a brief interlude of calm, and then once again they would start to roar through the pale night while the moon, nearly full, rode blood-red in the sky (p. 69).

Many intriguing personalities come and go in this narrative, including the long-serving Priest at Brochet, Fr. Joseph Egenolf, OMI. He was instrumental in obtaining the services of John Albrecht as a companion for Downes for the next phase of the trip. Albrecht was a superb canoe poleman, and Downes never regretted teaming up with him despite initial doubts, for Albrecht was a Prussian émigré, a former British prisoner of war, rather than an original man of the country (p. 284). The fine art of poling a canoe in rapids has probably never been better described, so skilled was Albrecht in this important function (pp. 88, 142).

The journey from Brochet, via the Cochrane River and the Kasmere Lake country, was long and gruelling. It took them through areas seen by few outsiders, past abandoned fur trade posts such as Fort Hall, and into the northern limits of the *Idthen-eldeli* (Chipewyan) and their small settlement at Putahow River. For the final push to Windy and Nueltin lakes, Downes and Albrecht were now joined by two Chipewyan, *Lopi-zun* (Crooked Finger) and the mysterious *Zah-ba-deese* (Shaggy Head). The detailed recording of the constant overcoming of obstacles quickly convinces the reader that this was no journey for the faint of heart or for those who cannot bear insects and privation. The moment finally arrived:

Then, turning to the north, a long narrow bay, and great Nueltin Lake, *Nu-thel-tin-tu-eh*, Sleeping Island Lake—one hundred and twenty miles of it lay before us. All the doubts, the rapids, the portages, the bad omens, the mournful predictions, the fearsome warning, all these were behind us now.

The men were now on the edge of the Barrens, the “land of little sticks,” that great boundary area of long contention between the Chipewyan-speaking *Dene* peoples and the inland *Inuit*—the “Caribou Eskimos,” first well described by Kaj Birket-Smith of the Fifth Thule Expedition in 1924.<sup>4</sup> Downes spent relatively little time on the Barrens, but there are important passages of an anthropological nature presented in these later chapters on the historic relations between the little known inland *Inuit* and their more southerly Chipewyan and Cree neighbours. A striking photo of Caribou *Inuit* hunters at Nueltin Lake is included, a valuable addition to the important photographic record of the “people of the willows” left by the Anglican Clergyman, Donald B. Marsh, who served at Eskimo Point (Arviat) between 1926 and 1948.<sup>5</sup> In the closing chapters there is also much about the lore and the regional importance of the caribou and the vagaries of the ways of this great migratory creature.

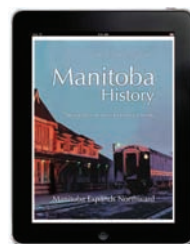
The conclusion finds Downes leaving his friends, including Albrecht, by flying out to Churchill from Nueltin Lake, with an unintended, but interesting stopover at South Knife Lake, Manitoba. From Churchill he worked his way back to New England. It had been the adventure of a lifetime, but, only shortly, for he was soon preparing to return the following year. Some of the photographs of this second 1940 trip have been worked into the text where they aid discussion.

As literature, *Sleeping Island* is of a very high order owing to the objective and non-romanticizing eye of the author. Being of an introspective and philosophical nature, Downes consistently recognized unique qualities in those he encountered. An astute student of human character, his instincts were those of the travel writer who knows that he is always a guest and at the mercy of his hosts. Every page is a fund of information and the book invites a slow rather than a rapid read. While there is little to complain about in terms of production values, in any future reprinting this reviewer would urge the inclusion of a detailed index. This third edition (the first is now rare) includes a taste of the Downes daily journals in the endnotes and in the new Sequel. An Epilogue has also been added, drawn from some of the author’s post-1950 writings. Readers of *Sleeping Island* will no doubt want to read the complete journals, which Robert Cockburn is editing and which will be published by McGahern Stewart Publishing.

Graham A. MacDonald  
Victoria, BC

### Notes

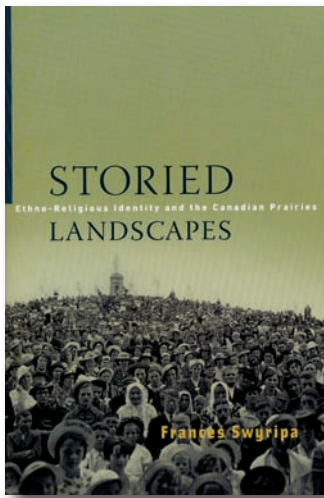
1. Harry Anton Auer, *The North Country*, (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke, 1906); Kirkland Alexander, *The Log of the North Shore Club*, (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1911); C. B. Reed, *Four Way Lodge*, (Chicago: Pascal Covici, 1924).
2. *Toward Magnetic North: The Oberholtzer-Magee 1912 Canoe Journey to Hudson Bay*, (Marshall, MN: Oberholtzer Foundation, 2000). Ernest Oberholtzer’s journal record of this trip is being prepared for publication by the Foundation.
3. Sigurd F. Olson, *The Lonely Land*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961).
4. Kaj Birket-Smith, *The Caribou Eskimos: Material and Social Life and Their Cultural Position*, Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition, Vol. V, Parts 1 and 2, (Copenhagen: Nordisk Forlag, 1929).
5. Donald B. Marsh, *Echoes from a Frozen Land*, W. P. Marsh, ed., (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1983).



*Manitoba History* is now available in a version for the Apple iPad and other tablets, as well as for desktop and notebook computers. This text-searchable and coloured version is available to MHS members at no charge.

[www.mhs.mb.ca/members](http://www.mhs.mb.ca/members)

**Frances Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes: Ethno-Religious Identity and the Canadian Prairies*  
Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010, 296 pages  
ISBN 978-0-88755-720-0, \$26.95 (paperback)**



In *Storied Landscapes* University of Alberta history professor Frances Swyripa examines the impact of ethno-religious settlement by European immigrants on the physical and cultural landscape of Canada's prairie provinces. This mass immigration over a 150-year period was unique in scope and effect within the Canadian experience, producing a remarkably diverse population (p. 6). Swyripa's study focuses primarily on Ukrainian, Mennonite,

Icelandic, Doukhobor, German, Polish, Romanian, Jewish, Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish and American Mormon settlement on the land along with the religious and cultural expressions that arose as a result. The landscapes explored "are both physical places and places of the mind, the stories, the multilayered, sometimes contested narratives and material legacies that immigrant settler peoples mobilized in shaping and claiming those places" (p. 9).

Swyripa examines multiple issues flowing out of this settlement process, pondering at what point ethno-religious identities and experiences transcended group commentaries to influence the self-image of all westerners and becoming central to Canadian national self-perception in general. She observes the widening spheres of group identity, the process of group domestication of the landscape and the subsequent attachment to the land, the evolving unique regional consciousness and collective memory, the crystallization of founding stories and entrenchment of landmark anniversaries, the commemoration of points of first arrivals, and the emergence of sacred places and sites of secular and religious pilgrimage. She cautions however that her treatise is not a history of the groups *per se*, but rather an exploration of themes rising from groups cultivating their self images and historic legacies, and readers expecting to find the story "of his or her people will therefore be disappointed."

The volume is thus an eclectic and selective rather than definitive study, leaving many important stories untold, such as the Icelandic pioneer memorial at Elfross, Saskatchewan, commemorating the *Vatnabyggd* bloc settlement in the Quill Lakes region, or that of "architect" priest Rev. Philip Ruh O.M.I., a native of Alsace-Lorraine who adopted the Ukrainian Catholic eastern rite, and singlehandedly imprinted the western Canadian

landscape with his "prairie cathedrals" and devotional shrines. Receiving no mention at all are early examples of conservation and commemoration efforts such as the pioneer earthen shelters or "Buddas" of Ukrainian pioneers reconstructed by Michael Swistun and donated to the Rural Municipality of Rosburn in Manitoba, or the Ukrainian Pioneer House erected by the Ukrainian Pioneers Association at Elk Island National Park. Similarly absent is the Negrych Homestead north of Gilbert Plains Manitoba, a municipally owned resource designated provincially and nationally as the oldest and most complete Ukrainian vernacular homestead complex in that province.

The focus of this book is on the original and fading footprints on the landscape. The preservation and interpretation of buildings individually, or within collective amalgams such as the Arborg and District Multicultural Heritage Village and the Mennonite Heritage Village, both in Manitoba, and the National Doukhobor Heritage Village in Saskatchewan, receive only passing attention. This is unfortunate in that these institutions play a key role in relaying the stories of western Canada's landscape. The Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village in Alberta, for instance, has an outstanding record of systematically studying, conserving and commemorating the imprint of Ukrainian settlement, through the preservation and interpretation of original representative buildings as well as through commemorative memorials. Noteworthy in this regard are the "Pioneer Family" monument, the Centenary Pioneer Recognition Monument, the monument to Dr. Josef Oleskow (champion of the emigration of Ukrainians to Canada), the memorial commemorating the internment of Ukrainians in Canada during the Great War, a cenotaph to Ukrainian Canadian servicemen, the Chernobyl Commemorative Cross and the monument to Vasyl Stefanyk (the western Ukrainian writer whose short story masterpiece *Kaminnyi khrest* [Stone Cross] immortalized the story of Ukrainian immigration to Canada). More importantly, the Village commemorates the specific story of "founding father" Ivan Pylypow, through the preservation and interpretation of his circa 1928 dwelling.

By excluding urban areas from her analysis, the author creates an artificial divide between urban and rural dwellers. While she crosses this divide at will to discuss aspects of the Icelandic and Jewish communities especially, she largely avoids mention of the symbiotic relations between urban and rural Ukrainians in cities such as Winnipeg and Edmonton. As a result, such striking imprints of commemoration as the trio of Ukrainian memorials erected on a major thoroughfare in Winnipeg's Point Douglas between 1942 and 1944 are overlooked. The first was a stone cairn dedicated to Ukrainian Canadian



Heroes ["Heroiam ukraintsiam kanadiiskym"] and "their brothers in arms" fighting in the Second World War, topped with a statue of Archangel Michael extending a laurel wreath. A similar cairn commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the first Ukrainian settlers to Canada was crowned with a cross and plow. The third monument depicted Ukrainian clergyman and writer, Rev. Markian Shaskevych on the centennial of his death. It was the first of a number of tributes to Ukrainian literary figures, which would be erected throughout the west, followed by monuments to Taras Shevchenko, Ivan Franko, Vasyl Stefanyk and Lesia Ukrainka.

The author demonstrates on several occasions that reading the stories of the landscape is not always a straightforward matter. Although the Ukrainians were separated over the centuries by numerous political boundaries, there was nonetheless a common overlapping heritage. The major source of Ukrainian immigration to Canada had been part and parcel of the same Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth in which the Kozak state was formed, whose army laid siege to all of western Ukrainian lands and whose Hetmans included Petro Konashevych-Sahaidachny, born in ethnographic territory west of where most Ukrainian prairie settlers arrived from. This Kozak heritage is regarded by Ukrainians as a common patrimony as are Soviet rule and Stalin's assault against the Ukrainian nation during the genocidal Holodomor of 1932–1933 (p.213). None is foreign or out of place among Ukrainians

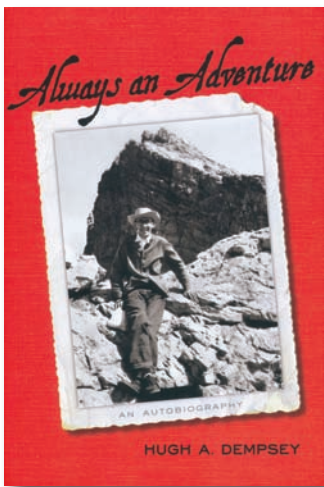
in the prairie west, as implied by the observation that the famine and Soviet tyranny "never personally touched the families of pioneers with origins in western Ukraine."

*Storied Landscapes* relays many fascinating aspects of the ethno-religious experience on the prairies ranging from the venerated German Catholic Marian shrines of Saskatchewan, to the commemoration of the tragic mass burial of forty Ukrainian children and two adult settlers stricken by scarlet fever at Patterson Lake Manitoba in 1899, to the commemoration of farm toponyms and the heartfelt re-enactment of their first landings at Willow Point by Manitoba's Icelanders, to the unique discussions within the Mennonite community on the inherent complicity of prairie immigrant settlers in the dislocation of aboriginal peoples from the western landscape.

Swyripa offers a broad-ranging sweep of analysis which leaves much room for discussion, disagreement on observations or challenging of conclusions, yet all along one is struck by the wealth of material and contemplation presented. This stimulating book should not be judged on its omissions or particular interpretations, but rather for the insights it offers and the invitation it extends for all to explore the intricate tales seeded in the rich and storied landscape, which is the human history of western Canada.

Peter J. Melnycky  
Alberta Culture and Community Services  
Edmonton, Alberta

**Hugh A. Dempsey, *Always an Adventure: An Autobiography*  
Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2011, 405 pages  
ISBN 978-1-55238-522-7, \$34.95 (paperback)**



Late in the spring of 1877 the Sioux leader Sitting Bull and Chief Crowfoot met at a Blackfoot hunting camp north of the Cypress Hills. In his 1972 biography of Crowfoot, Hugh Dempsey describes the encounter:

The warriors were invited into the camp and Crowfoot was surprised to learn that Sitting Bull himself was among them; he had come to visit and make

peace. The two men shook hands and exchanged tobacco. Pipes were produced and, for the first time, Crowfoot consented to speak with the Sioux chief. A long discussion was held between the two men and an immediate friendship was established.<sup>1</sup>

Twenty-some-odd books later, Hugh Dempsey has now written about Hugh Dempsey. In this recently published autobiography he ranks the book on Crowfoot as his best. The excerpt above demonstrates the author's signature style, written as if by an eye-witness. It also reflects his work as a collector and researcher. Who else but Dempsey would have found rare recorded testimony of one who had been present at this historic meeting?

Most people have come to know Hugh Dempsey through his books and from hearing him speak about western Canadian history. He has also been editor of *Alberta History* as long as most of its subscribers can remember. "Story of the Blood Reserve," his first article in what was then known as *Alberta Historical Review*, appeared in 1953. This piece is one of the first of a large and significant body of work that deals with First Nations history, particularly that of the Blackfoot-speaking people of western Canada.

In addition to writing, Dempsey has collected rare historic objects, some of them sacred, and recorded the stories of elders. In his autobiography he describes his objectives, his approach to ethical issues, and how a

network of close friends and in-laws, of scholars and fellow researchers, has supported and guided him. In 1956 Dempsey began his long career with the Glenbow Museum, then known as the Glenbow Foundation, established by wealthy lawyer Eric Harvie. While his new job offered him a wide scope as collector, researcher, writer and exhibit planner, he also faced a number of significant challenges.

Here is how Dempsey describes “the early years at Glenbow”:

If a person was willing to work, they could find themselves involved in just about any aspect of the organization. Yet there were two cardinal rules that had to be followed. The first was the recognition that there was only one boss—Eric Harvie. He owned the Foundation and, in effect, he owned us. Anyone who didn’t accept this fact had a short-lived career with Glenbow. Jack Herbert found this out and so did art director Moncrieff Williamson. The second rule was that the staff collected western Canadian material and Eric Harvie collected whatever he wanted. Another one of our directors, Jim Garner, got that one wrong and he suffered for it.

The Glenbow Museum today is an important institution with a sometimes troubled history, and an uncertain future. Dempsey’s insider’s report of its ups and downs over more than three decades should make interesting reading for Glenbow’s many friends, as well as his former colleagues. There are successes—important archival acquisitions such as the CPR land documents, publications and new displays—as well as traumatic incidents such as the controversy surrounding the 1988 exhibit, *The Spirit Sings*.

In addition to his role at Glenbow, Hugh Dempsey has played a significant part in historic site preservation and commemoration, and in the development of national standards for archives management. He served as member for Alberta on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. Following a 1978 meeting in Newfoundland, the Board’s chairman and several other members and staff were killed in a plane crash. Dempsey was aboard another aircraft. He writes vividly of the traumatic effect of this incident, as he and the other survivors struggled to deal with it.

## Thanks ...

The Editors thank the following people who assisted in the preparation of this issue of *Manitoba History*: Brenda Deamel (Churchill Gateway Development Corporation) and Paul Legris (Parks Canada).

Dempsey’s autobiography is full of names, like a classical Russian novel. Many of them would be unknown to most readers, but there are also encounters with the more famous, such as John Diefenbaker, Margaret Trudeau and Prince Charles. Others include important figures in the Indian Association of Alberta, such as John Laurie and Ruth Gorman, elders and leaders of First Nations, as well as Glenbow managers and staff. Dempsey can be quite forthright, expressing negative opinions as readily as praise and admiration.<sup>2</sup>

One omnipresent “character” is Dempsey’s diary. An important record, certainly, but at times it hijacks the narrative and breaks up the flow of the author’s prose. On the other hand the diary makes up for it by supplying first impressions, observations and expressions of feeling -- the life force of an autobiography.

W. B. Yeo

President, Kootenay Lake Historical Society,  
Kaslo, BC

## Notes

1. Hugh A. Dempsey, *Crowfoot, Chief of the Blackfeet*. (Edmonton, Hurtig, 1972, p.91).
2. Ruth Gorman was the volunteer legal advisor to the Indian Association of Alberta. An alternate view of her role in the Hobbema affair and other matters can be found in Frits Pannekoek, “A Strong-minded Woman,” in *Remembering Chinook County*. (Calgary, Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 2005).

## Greenfield Books Ltd.

We buy and sell books, photographs,  
maps and ephemera on Winnipeg  
and Manitoba history

Appraisals and search service available

View our books online at  
[www.greenfieldbooks.com](http://www.greenfieldbooks.com)

217 Academy Road, Winnipeg, MB R3M 0E3

204-488-2023

[mail@greenfieldbooks.com](mailto:mail@greenfieldbooks.com)

Member: Antiquarian Booksellers' Association of Canada



# Cool Things in the Collection: Spotlight on Northern Manitoba, Photographs in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives

by Debra Moore

Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg

The Hudson's Bay Company Archives photograph holdings are strong in images of the Canadian North, particularly the Arctic, as well as the northern areas of most of the provinces including Manitoba. The photographs provide a visual documentation of not only the history of the Hudson's Bay Company, but the people and places in this region.

Many of the photographs in the collection were taken to document and promote the HBC and its operations. They include images of its fur trade posts, stores, employees,



Photographer: Richard Harrington

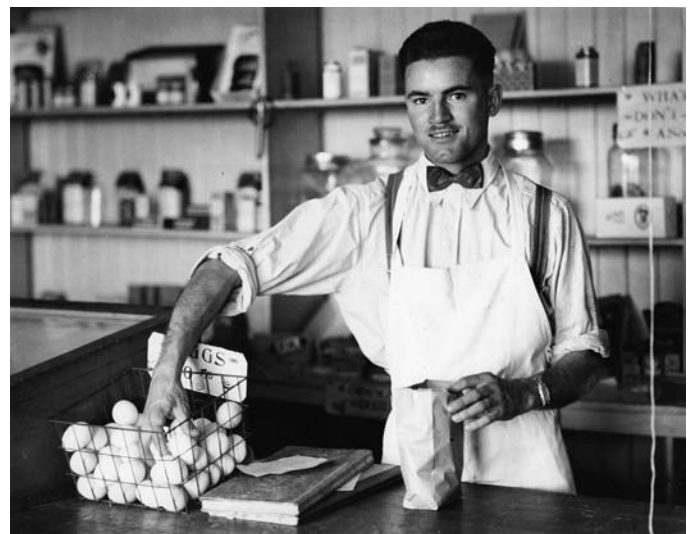
HBCA 1987/363-I-9F/1

Cree woman and young girl hanging laundry, Churchill, 1947.



HBCA 1987/13/29

York Factory, as photographed in 1889 by James McDougall in his capacity as HBC Inspecting Chief Factor.



Photographer: Nicholas Morant

HBCA 1987/363-R-31/9

W. A. McGilvray, HBC post manager at Rossville, 1935.



Photographer: Associated Screen News

HBCA 1987/363-C-76/10A

HBC Governor Sir Patrick Ashley Cooper and Mrs. Cooper outside the company's store at Churchill, during his 1934 Arctic tour.

ships, as well as events and individuals connected with its activities. The photographs range from the 1870s to the 1980s. *The Beaver* magazine, a company publication started in 1920, also hired professional photographers to take photographs for documentary and publicity purposes, which included travelling to northern locations for specific assignments. Photos were submitted by readers of the magazine and others with an interest in the HBC and its history. HBC employees stationed in the north also took

## Northern Manitoba Photographs



Photographer: John Watson

HBCA 1987/363-I-12/33

Men hauling logs for the Island Lake post dwelling house, 1938.



Photographer: Nicholas Morant

HBCA 1987/363-I-82/36

Boys playing in the water near shore, God's Lake, 1935.

their own personal and more candid photographs and often they or their families donated these to the HBC. The result is a rich and diverse visual resource and a collection of images that is consulted and drawn on by researchers from all over the world.

Northern Manitoba locations represented in the collection include York Factory, Churchill and Norway House, where the HBC had key establishments. Other trading posts were often the nucleus of communities that grew up around them, many of which still exist today, for example, God's Lake, Grand Rapids, Oxford House, Cross Lake, Island Lake, Nelson House, Split Lake, among others. The photographs are particularly important for

those communities where there are often few visual records beyond the HBCA's holdings for the early period of their existence.

Along with photographs documenting HBC business activities, there are images of Aboriginal dwellings, hunting, trapping, traditional clothing, treaty gatherings and the northern landscape. The images also record glimpses of daily life and rituals: a picnic on the rocky shore of a river, children at play, hanging laundry, weddings and funerals. On these pages is just a small "snapshot" of the numerous photographic records of Manitoba's north to be found in the HBC Archives. 📷



Photographer: J. F. Dalman, Bullman Bros. Studio

HBCA 1987/363-N-41.1/4A

HBC clerk Joe Keeper (Canadian Olympian long-distance runner) and Cree trapper Isaiah Clark, who is receiving advances for supplies before setting out on his trapline, Norway House, 1943.



HBCA 1987/363-N-45/4

HBC post buildings at Norway House, 1935. A stone monument erected by HBC officers was dedicated to the memory of Chief Factor Horace Belanger and his clerk, Stanley Simpson. In 1892, Belanger drowned in the nearby river and Simpson perished trying to save him.

Visit the Archives' website and search the  
Keystone database for more photos:

<http://pam.minisisinc.com/pam/search.htm>



