

GEORGE GORDON FIRST NATIONS WOMEN:
PARTNERS IN SURVIVAL

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the work of the women of George Gordon First Nation in southern Saskatchewan from the earliest historical references until about the end of World War II. Many aspects of their experience are covered in an attempt to illustrate the vital importance of women's work to their families' survival and wellbeing over the period after Treaty 4, in 1874, from settling on reserve, adapting to the farming way of life of the early reserve period, and gradually to developing new responses to changing economic conditions after the turn of the century. Utilizing archival, documentary, and oral sources, this research brings forth the voices of the people to tell their own stories. Those stories reveal that women and men both worked hard to make a living under the difficult circumstances of the Indian Affairs-administered reserve. While George Gordon's band was composed of Cree, Saulteaux, and Halfbreeds, as they were termed in the Indian Affairs records, and as settlers began to surround the reserve, many dynamics impinged on women and their work, but overall, a number of traditions can be seen to continue from the earliest times. Among them, the complementarity of roles, the fact that women worked hard, and the adaptability to hardships, are evident. "An Indian is never stuck," is still a popular adage on the reserve today.

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kinanāskomitināwāw, *I thank you all.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
ABBREVIATIONS.....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE	
“Introduction: George Gordon’s Women’s Work”.....	1
CHAPTER TWO	
“Early History of Gordon’s People”.....	27
CHAPTER THREE	
“Women’s Traditional Roles and Work”.....	54
CHAPTER FOUR	
“Making a Living on Reserve”.....	68
CHAPTER FIVE	
“Making a Living After the Turn of the Century: 1900-1945”.....	96
CHAPTER SIX	
“The Church and the School”.....	123

CHAPTER SEVEN	
“Three Women’s Lives”	151
CHAPTER EIGHT	
“Conclusion”	177
BIBLIOGRAPHY	186
APPENDIX A – Table of Elders	199
APPENDIX B – David Anderson’s letter and response	200

ABBREVIATIONS

DIA	Department of Indian Affairs
HBC	Hudson's Bay Company
HBCA	Hudson's Bay Company Archives
FSIN	Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations
LAC	Library and Archives Canada
SAB	Saskatchewan Archives Board

LIST OF FIGURES

- FIGURE 1.1 Map showing Gordon's Reserve and surroundings
- FIGURE 2.1 Map showing George Gordon's Reserve and Traditional Territory
- FIGURE 2.2 Drawing of Daybird and Depit (David Anderson?) by Henri Julien, 1874
- FIGURE 4.1 "Touchwood Hills Farm – Candidates for Honours," by S.P. Hall
- FIGURE 4.2 "Indian Wigwams at Little Touchwood HBC," by S.P. Hall
- FIGURE 4.3 A Seneca Root Digger found in the author's family yard
- FIGURE 4.4 Examples of beaded bags and frames in Punnichy Museum
- FIGURE 4.5 Beaded mats as described by Nancy Bitternose.
- FIGURE 6.1 Photo of St. Luke's Churches
- FIGURE 6.2 Recent photo of St. Luke's Church
- FIGURE 6.3 Interior of St. Luke's Church, Gordon's Reserve
- FIGURE 6.4 Gordon Indian Residential School, c. Late 1950s
- FIGURE 7.1 Photo of Walter Anderson, Flora Anderson, and Jenny Anderson
- FIGURE 7.2 Photo of Clara Pratt
- FIGURE 7.3 Photo of Nancy Bitternose
- FIGURE 7.4 Nancy's Plough

Chapter 1

Introduction: George Gordon's Women's Work

Purpose

This dissertation is a social history of the people of the George Gordon First Nation of the Touchwood Hills in southern Saskatchewan, with a particular focus on the economic contributions made by women to the survival and well being of the people of the First Nation over the years. The period examined spans from before Treaty 4 was signed in 1874 up until about 1945 when my parents were still children. From the buffalo-hunting and trading days to reserve settlement and agriculture, the people underwent drastic changes, periods of famine, and increasing colonial intrusions. Traditional roles were altered, both men's and women's. Using old and new methods, women adapted to the changing conditions and preserved old roles in the family context. A mixture of Plains Cree, Saulteaux, and Half-breed¹ descent primarily, the people of George Gordon have worked hard under adverse climatic, policy, economic, and social conditions to persevere and thrive. Through numerous historical traumas and struggles, the First Nation has grown from approximately 225 members at Treaty time in the mid-1870s to a currently thriving population of 3,541.²

It is the contention of this research that the work of women, often uncounted at best or denigrated by officials at worst, was just as important as, and sometimes more important than the work of men to the economy of the community and it was certainly vital in the survival and

¹ Half-breed (or Halfbreed) was the term used in the records of the time under study here. It refers to people with mixed ancestry of Scottish or French and Cree and/or Saulteaux, and may be more complex than that. Some might seek to apply the term *Métis* in this case, but others reject the term for cases of "mixedness" with no obvious link to the *Métis* nation deriving out of Red River. While there was a link between the Gordon's Half-breeds and Red River, the term *Métis* is avoided in this work unless used by one of my sources. For more on this distinction, see Chris Andersen, *"Métis;" Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2014), xiv. The term "Halfbreed" might be problematic for some readers but it pervades the Indian Affairs records of the time and the writer takes the view that Maria Campbell reclaimed it in her book *Halfbreed*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1973).

² Registered population. George Gordon First Nation. Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. http://pse5-esd5.ainc-inac.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Search/FNRegPopulation.aspx?BAND_NUMBER=391&lang=eng accessed 12 August 2015. Approximately one-third of band membership live on the reserve; the other two-thirds live mainly in the cities of Regina and Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, but are also scattered across Canada.

growth of the people. In the historical record, women's work has been largely invisible.³ The task of uncovering and documenting it requires extrapolation from archival documents, examination of accounts of other First Nations, as well as research into the oral history of the First Nation. This research begins that work while also broadly ranging over the history of the George Gordon First Nation, the economic changes the band faced, the policy climate, and the work that men as well as women had to perform over the years. As much as possible, the voices of the people of Gordon's Reserve, both past and present, are offered here in order to present the history from their (our) point of view. This dissertation demonstrates the benefits of including and highlighting women's contributions alongside men's as it provides a fuller picture of the socio-cultural history of early reserve life.

George Gordon is my First Nation; I'm from there. The challenges and advantages of researching one's own community history are discussed below under the section on methods, after a brief look at some of the theoretical considerations which help to focus the discussion, and before a look at some of the literature pertinent to this study.

Theoretical considerations

For the most part, this is a recounting of the history of George Gordon First Nation from the perspective of a female member. Having largely grown up there, I believe I share some of the interest that other members have in our past. It draws on both documentary and oral evidence and seeks to view them from an Indigenous insider's perspective. The advantages and limitations of insider Indigenous research are discussed below; however, the points made by Winona Wheeler about the responsibility assumed, the potential contribution, indeed the "Promise of Native American Studies," are not lost on me. While some of this work may not meet her rigorous demands, Wheeler's prescription for "Decolonizing Indigenous Histories" by moving towards an oral tradition-based model of history is acknowledged and a humble attempt on a small scale made here. Documentary sources fill out the earlier periods and community-based oral research the latter.⁴ I admit to the same kinds of difficulties many Indigenous scholars face when attempting to meet conflicting expectations of community and culture and

³Christine Smillie, "The Invisible Workforce: Women Workers in Saskatchewan from 1905 to World War II," *Saskatchewan History* 39.2 (1986); Erin Millions, "Breaking the Mould: A Historiographical Review of Saskatchewan Women's History, 1880-1930," *Saskatchewan History*, 54 (Fall 2002); Marilyn Waring, *Counting for Nothing: What Men Value and What Women are Worth*, 2nd edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

⁴ Winona Stevenson (Wheeler), "Decolonizing Tribal Histories" (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2000).

those of academe. The methodological error of treating “oral history like any other documentary source,” extracting the “facts” and “plundering the bundle” of oral history given to me, is difficult to avoid when the words need to appear in black and white to support a thesis or describe a problem. I attempt to mitigate the effects by including long passages of word-for-word transcribed narratives by the elders I have interviewed. I also hope to atone for this in the video records that I will produce and return to the community.

To undertake an historical study of women in a southern Saskatchewan First Nation, one must acknowledge several theoretical considerations with which to view and think about the experiences of Indigenous women. The colonial past is the inevitable context, with ‘race,’ gender, and culture as factors that all intersect and impinge on the experiences and relative power of women in their communities and outside of them. One must consider the transitions from the traditional, pre-colonial social and economic environment through involvement in the fur trade, the intensive buffalo hunting period, and then removal from the land and settlement on the reserves at the mercy of the government authorities and all that that entailed. To understand the impacts on women within the protection of their families on reserves or while working outside the community amongst settlers in the “contact zone” perhaps, one must take into account the broader context and human and economic environment through these stages of colonial experience.⁵

It is necessary to consider the debate on the relative status and power of Indigenous women, their roles in relation to men and their families, the sources of their power or what diminished it, and the effects of policy and economic pressures on their lives, in terms of both opportunities and limitations. Some studies see a decline of women’s positions vis-à-vis men, whereas others consider that women benefited from colonization overall.⁶ One must examine the very definitions themselves: men; women. These are often used as well-defined and discrete categories. However not only can we find that there is cross-over or a blurring of the boundaries, but also we find that the roles associated with them are not completely rigid or exclusive. (While trans-gendered people did not come up in my research, they more than likely existed among the

⁵ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge Press, 1992); John Sutton Lutz, ed., *Myth and Memory: Stories of Indigenous-European Contact* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 4.

⁶ Sarah Carter, “First Nations Women of Prairie Canada in the Early Reserve Years, the 1870s to the 1920s: A Preliminary Inquiry,” in Christine Miller and Patricia Chuchryk, eds., *Women of the First Nations: Power, Wisdom, and Strength* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996), 51-75.

people, as I have observed even in my own lifetime.) Women's roles and obligations, both from within and without their cultural frame of reference, have been examined more than those of men in the literature.⁷ Only recently in literature have scholars begun to deconstruct the socially-constructed category of the Indigenous "male" and assess its historical, colonial development, but Indigenous women's roles have had much more attention, taking up from early writers like Eleanor Leacock and Beatrice Medicine, for instance.⁸ Furthermore, the roles associated with Algonkian men and women were not rigidly exclusive, as Leacock has observed, and both men and women were either required or preferred to perform work associated with the other gender at times.⁹

Children, as a category, are not dealt with separately here, but the gender roles are on a continuum where the boys and girls begin to learn their roles and work early and make valuable contributions. In the period studied here, as in pre-colonial times, their work would have been essential and valuable, and they are mentioned here and there in the historical record as contributing. Most of my interviewees began their stories with their childhoods and gave evidence of the work they did. While motherhood and grandmotherhood are looked at in terms of women's experiences and work, the life stages of women or men are otherwise not closely investigated here.¹⁰

The women on Gordon's are not all the same and resist being lumped together when the history is examined closely. Women's responses to conditions vary just as women vary, but as some Indigenous writers such as Joseph Dion contend, women may have borne the brunt of the

⁷ Eleanor Leacock, *Myths of Male Dominance: Collected Articles on Women Cross-Culturally* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981); Patricia Albers & Beatrice Medicine, *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983); Somer Brodribb, 'The Traditional Roles of Native Women in Canada and the Impact of Colonization,' *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 4.1 (1984): 85-103; Laura Klein & Lillian Ackerman, eds., *Women and Power in Native North America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995); Nancy Shoemaker, ed., *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Janet Mancini-Billson, "Standing Tradition on its Head: Role Reversal among Blood Indian Couples," *Great Plains Quarterly* 11.1 (1991):3-21; John Lutz, 'Gender and Work in Lekwammen Families, 1843-1970,' in *In the Days of Our Grandmothers: A Reader in Aboriginal Women's History in Canada*, eds. Mary-Ellen Kelm and Lorna Townsend (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 216-250.

⁸ See for example, Sam McKegney, *Masculinities: Conversations about Indigenous Manhood* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2014); see also a number of chapters in Robert A. Innes & Kim Anderson, eds., *Indigenous Men and Masculinities: Legacies, Identities, Regeneration* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015); and John Lutz's discussion of the Lazy Man, a corollary to the Squaw-drudge, needs to be examined.

⁹ Eleanor Leacock, *Myths of Male Dominance: Collected Articles on Women Cross-Culturally* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981).

¹⁰ See Kim Anderson, *Life Stages and Native Women: Memory, Teachings, and Story Medicine* (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 2011), for an excellent study utilizing oral teachings.

burden and many carried their families through the difficult periods by their hard work and perseverance.¹¹ Rob Innes writes of the multi-cultural bands in southern Saskatchewan and George Gordon's is certainly one, containing Cree, Saulteaux, and 'Halfbreeds.'¹² The women deriving from these three distinct peoples were not all the same either. Government policy may have levelled the playing field, however, over time, creating homogeneous conditions which then led to more similar adaptive strategies.

I believe my research brings some interesting things to light regarding the strength and endurance of our ancestors that we may learn from today. The hardships they endured during the early reserve life have no comparison in contemporary times. They are almost unimaginable to today's younger generations. This research also has the potential to contribute to a better understanding of the important roles that First Nations women carried out despite the government policies and the negative views of government agents, and sheds light on the nature of the roles and status of Indigenous women vis-à-vis men during this historic period.

That women have always worked hard is undeniable, but how much of their work was under their own power? Did they have any choices, any opportunities for agency in making change or resisting the powers that shaped their everyday experiences? Or were they just "beasts of burden," veritable slaves in their families? The question of these early stereotypes and whether women's status was improved or declined after contact and after reserve settlement, is necessarily dealt with. Imputing motive to actions in the past can be difficult, especially for the earliest periods when we have no first-hand accounts. These are some of the issues touched upon in this work.

Methods

This study is a social history that seeks to elicit from historical, archival, and oral records an understanding of my ancestors' lives over a great swath of time and during what were difficult stages of our people's history. The historical materials include primary published and unpublished materials, including first-hand accounts of our people originating in the community, as well as secondary published materials. The archival materials represent largely Indian Affairs' correspondence and reports (RG 10), gleaned from various places including online, and

¹¹ Joseph F. Dion, *My Tribe the Crees* (1979; reprint Calgary: Glenbow, 1993), 115.

¹² Robert Alexander Innes, "Multicultural Bands on the Northern Plains and the Notion of 'Tribal' Histories," in Robin Jarvis Brownlie and Valerie J. Korinek, eds., *Finding a Way to the Heart: Feminist Writings on Aboriginal and Women's History in Canada* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012), 122-145.

mostly from the Library and Archives Canada (LAC). In addition, materials from the Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA), the Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB) and the Archives of the St. Boniface Historical Society, the Centre du Patrimoine, were acquired. In carrying out the archival research, the more I delved, the deeper I realized I would have to dig. There are materials in storage for the latter part of the period that I have not accessed and which will require further research at a later date. The RG10 materials for the earlier period have been examined as have the Indian Affairs Annual Reports. The latter are now available online and are searchable, after a fashion. There may be more records in the SAB, under obscure or unpredictable search terms, that I have not discovered. From the St. Boniface archives, I have acquired a copy of a drawing of one of our original headmen from 1874. Further research there will require brushing up my French, as this site was discovered by entering an early French name for Touchwood Hills as a search term, "*la montagne de Tondre*." That is a whole other avenue of research that is worth following up.

The oral history used here is a combined effort: interviews that I conducted myself for the purpose of this dissertation, as well as interviews that others have done, notably David Mandelbaum in 1934 and others in the 1970s for the (then)Federation of Saskatchewan Indians for the purposes of Treaty interpretation and specific land claims. One important two-part interview with Clara Pratt from 1983 was obtained from the University of Regina's Indian History Film Project.¹³ During 2013 and 2014, after obtaining ethics approval from the University of Saskatchewan's Behavioural Research Ethics Board, I conducted interviews with fifteen different elders on and off the reserve (see appendix A for the list).¹⁴ These were all recorded for audio, digitally, and all but one were also video-recorded. Unrecorded, I had several ongoing conversations with other elders, both from Gordon's and from elsewhere. Notes were not always taken from these discussions.¹⁵ I also conducted one group interview which, while reflecting on a general history, became more of specific interest to my own family as it involved my dad, three aunts, and one uncle and brought in two more elders not included above for a total of eighteen consulted for this project. Several more elders would have shared valuable

¹³ Clara Pratt Interviews #1 and #2, Indian History Film Project, Canadian Plains Research Centre, accessed 20 April 2016, <http://ourspace.uregina.ca/handle/10294/2007> .

¹⁴ The initial ethics approval, Beh 13-173, was obtained on 14 June 2013 and renewed annually.

¹⁵ I shared an office with Danny Musqua and we had a few discussions about my topic. Also Helen McNab, my mother, is considered by some to be an historian of the reserve. Her association with Gordon's began about 1955. She does have a great memory and has recorded some of the history herself.

information and it is hoped will be interviewed at a later date. The recorded interviews for this project were transcribed and some questions which arose were followed up on with subsequent visits and even over the phone.

In using the term “elder” in this work, I am taking some license and simply using the word in place of the more cumbersome “knowledge keeper” or “knowledge holder,” while at the same time indicating that all my respondents were advanced in age. The youngest was 71, the oldest 92. There were two in their 90s, five in their 80s, and eight in their 70s in 2013. Two of those in their 70s have now passed on.

These elders may or may not be holders of esoteric cultural knowledge, as the term “elder” might imply in other contexts. I did not seek out prayer or spiritual guidance or that kind of knowledge, but also did not discourage respondents from making whatever connection they might infer from my bringing them tobacco upon making my request for interviews. Tobacco was offered without any explanation, as I made the request. Tobacco can be seen as a custom and a sign of respect. It may be interpreted as recognition on my part that I was asking for something that they could give if they wished. It may be deemed as minor, as a favour of their time, or it may acknowledge the spirits of our departed ancestors that we bring to the conversation. It may indicate, as an Elder from One Arrow First Nation, Stewart Prosper, recently said, that I wanted something that is within one of the four realms of the spiritual, mental, emotional, or physical.¹⁶ Tobacco may open the way of communication or provide the means to set things right after the interview. In all cases, I believe, it put the interview in the context of our own culture, and even though I carried the trappings of the researcher with recorders, paper, and camera, the tobacco served to bring it down to earth, back to basics. Cigarettes were given instead of pouch tobacco. Again this might indicate that I was not expecting the respondents to make prayers for me, although it would not prevent them from doing so.

Fortunately for me, I was able to conduct all the interviews in English. I believe it is the language that all the respondents are accustomed to using on a daily basis, although Cree or Saulteaux was the first language for several of them. For the type of information I was seeking, English as the medium was sufficient. That is not to say that this kind of historical material is less valuable than other cultural knowledge sought by younger generations of the older. I made

¹⁶ Stewart Prosper, invited lecture in Indigenous Studies 222AB, First Nations University of Canada, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, August 17, 2015.

sure to emphasize that while an honorarium was provided, it was not to pay for their knowledge or stories, but rather to help offset the time spent by the elder. “The stories are priceless,” I would say. “This is in acknowledgement of your time that you’re giving me.”¹⁷

In carrying out the interviews, I kept in mind some of Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s teachings and in particular, the responsibility I had as a researcher towards my respondents. For instance, Smith asks, “What is an interview? [and] what are you trying to achieve with this interview? What are you bringing to the interview? What’s your gift, other than a packet of biscuits? What’s exchanged in the interview? What are you, together, trying to build?”¹⁸ I hoped to make it a collaborative effort even if I was the one initiating it. That is, I wanted these elders to realize this could be an opportunity to say something to their grandchildren and future generations of Gordon band members. My agenda was not to be the only agenda. The video recordings, as well as the audio and transcriptions, would be available to their families and would hopefully be kept at the school on the reserve and used as resources in the education of the younger generations. In some cases, perhaps it worked like this, but after all I was in their homes and in all cases they were willing to please me. This is where Smith’s next advice is to the point:

[T]he simple method of an interview is really a powerful human interaction. It’s not a technical, “I’m gonna do a one-hour interview and video-record it and get their ethics permission and here are my five questions.” **It’s a huge act of respect** and it requires a lot of preparation. You are, in a sense, a guest in someone else’s memories; a guest in someone else’s mind, a guest in someone else’s life. ¹⁹ (Emphasis added).

Whether one is an Indigenous or non-Indigenous researcher, the responsibility Smith perceives is large. Perhaps an Indigenous or insider researcher perceives the responsibility more keenly. I know that I owe a debt to these elders and it will extend beyond the present-day respondents to their families as well. It is one I hope to repay by following through with making the recordings available and accessible. Fulfilling this responsibility is incumbent upon me not just as a researcher who has been blessed by the contributions of the respondents, but also as a daughter of the community myself. This is how I perceive situating myself in the research. It is that position that I examine in the context of the following discussion on insider/outsider research.

¹⁷ An honorarium of \$100 was provided to each respondent for the one-on-one interviews. This money was made available by a grant from the First Nations University of Canada’s Indigenous Studies Research Fund.

¹⁸ Linda T. Smith, ‘Decolonization, Research and Indigenous Peoples Today Hui,’ Seminar, 11 March 2013. <http://mediacentre.maramatanga.ac.nz/content/decolonisation-research-and-indigenous-peoples-today-hui-0> accessed June 16, 2014.

¹⁹Smith, “Decolonization.”

Insider/outsider research

R. G. Collingwood asserts that it is the historian's task to try to understand the thought behind past events and the extent to which one is able to do so says a lot about the historian and his or her intellectual ability.²⁰ What kind of historical imagination would it take to comprehend the behavior and actions of our ancestors today? The whole question of who best can do ethnohistorical research on indigenous questions -- Indigenous or non-Indigenous researchers -- deserves some attention, partly because of the insistence of some Native American scholars that only Indigenous people should do that research.²¹ This contrasts with the view that for cross-cultural comparison, it takes an outsider to gain a fuller appreciation of a culture.²² This section will examine the question whether a researcher of, or descended from, a particular culture or people would have an advantage in understanding the actions and the thoughts of actors who inhabited that culture in the past. The contention is that the "insider" researcher *would* have an advantage over "outsiders," always assuming that the researcher is sufficiently trained in historical and ethnographic techniques. Such training can take the insider outside of the culture, but to the extent that s/he maintains his/her native language and/or connection with the people, s/he will have advantages and potentially gain great insight.

Exotopy and Externality

In his book, *Apologies to Thucydides*, Marshall Sahlins states: "If the past is a foreign country, then it is another culture. *Autre temps, autre mœurs*. And if it is another culture, then discovering it takes some anthropology -- which is always to say, some cultural comparison."²³ Comparison necessarily denotes an outside or other culture by which to make a comparison. Sahlins believes that, "[l]ike ethnography itself, an anthropology of history requires that one get outside the culture at issue, the better to know it. . . . The implication is that it takes another culture to know another culture."²⁴

²⁰ R.G. Collingwood. *The Idea of History*, rev. Ed. (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1993), 217-219.

²¹ Devon A. Mihesuah, ed., *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1988); a later work should be consulted on this issue as well: Rob Innes, "Wait a Second. Who Are You Anyways?": The Insider/Outsider Debate and American Indian Studies," *American Indian Quarterly* 33.4 (Fall 2009): 440-461.

²² Marshall Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides: Understanding History as Culture and Vice Versa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 2-4.

²³ Sahlins, *Apologies*, 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

One of the reasons for this, according to Sahlins, is that

there is no single native viewpoint... only so many different “subject positions” each with their interested take on a phenomenon that is itself intersubjective and greater than any one of them. Hence one reason for an external intelligence. Besides, to recall Ruth Benedict’s remark that the last thing an intelligent fish would be likely to name is the water in which it swims, how much can the participants know of the culture by which they know?²⁵

While Sahlins recognizes the importance of grasping the Natives’ viewpoints, he states that “to do so requires what Mikhail Bakhtin commended as ‘the creative understanding’ of the anthropologically savvy outsider. It requires what Bakhtin called “exotopy,” an external vantage on the culture.²⁶ Fundamentally, Bakhtin advocates seeing the world through the eyes of the Native of the culture, but then moving beyond that and bringing a “creative understanding” to bear on the culture from the outside: “In the realm of culture, exotopy is the most powerful lever of understanding. It is only to the eyes of an *other* culture that the [studied] culture reveals itself more completely and more deeply....”²⁷ The ethnographer, then, must be external and “what thus is brought to bear on the culture under observation is the experience of other cultures -- notably including the observer’s own. A given form of life becomes comprehensible by its calibration in the array of other cultural schemes.”²⁸

In this same vein, elsewhere Sahlins states that it is *all* cultures that are brought to bear on understanding a culture under the focus of a good ethnographer.

No good ethnography is self-contained. Implicitly or explicitly ethnography is an act of comparison. By virtue of comparison ethnographic description becomes objective. Not in the naïve positivist sense of an unmediated perception -- just the opposite: it becomes a universal understanding to the extent it brings to bear on the perception of any society the conceptions of all the others.²⁹

Sahlins iterates the high expectations for practitioners in this discipline to be able to achieve this in the study of a culture; they would have to be highly trained and well versed in the studies of other cultures and the accumulated knowledge therefrom. It is my contention that it would also

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*; trans. By Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 110. An examination of Todorov’s treatment of Bakhtin myself confirms Sahlins’ interpretation.

²⁸ Sahlins, 5.

²⁹ Ibid., 12.

help if they are able to gain a deep understanding of the culture they are studying, as might an Indigenous member of the culture itself.

Insider Ethnography

To consider the Indigenous researcher, let us begin with anthropology. As anthropology is the discipline which sought to get at the Natives' understandings and meaning behind observed action, it is the field where initially members of Other cultures, trained in ethnographic methods, rendered insider interpretations. African-American Anthropologist Delmos J. Jones pointed out that this goes back to Franz Boas, who, in his zeal to collect raw cultural data, "encouraged the training of native anthropologists on the assumption that in describing the total way of life of a people from the point of view of the people themselves, it was the trained native who could best interpret native life from within."³⁰ Boas trained Indigenous researchers, such as Ella Deloria, to record stories from among their own people. Jones cited Robert Lowie as stating, "[m]aterial of this sort has the immeasurable advantage of trustworthiness, authentically revealing precisely the elusive thoughts and sentiments of the native, who spontaneously reveals himself in these outpourings."³¹

Lowie's statement might seem extraordinarily hopeful, but it must be argued that, under the right conditions, the "insider" anthropologist should have advantages in terms of acceptance, authentic renderings of underlying thought and sentiment, and easy rapport with his/her subjects of study over the "outsider." As James Clifford says of the "indigenous ethnographer ... Insiders studying their own cultures offer new angles of vision and depths of understanding. Their accounts are empowered and restricted in unique ways."³²

Both empowerment and restriction are evident in some "Native" anthropologists' accounts. Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney wrote a critical commentary for the *American Ethnologist* about "native" anthropologists, which she is when she is studying Japanese people.³³ "Studying one's own culture," she says, "is indeed very different from studying a foreign culture, and theoretical and even epistemological implications of such study are profound."³⁴ At that time social scientists were addressing the positivist need to be "objective," and Ohnuki-Tierney

³⁰ Delmos J. Jones, "Towards a Native Anthropology" *Human Organization* 29.4 (Winter 1970), 252.

³¹ Jones, 252; Robert Lowie, *The History of Ethnological Theory* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1937), 133. I went to the original Lowie to find Jones' interpretation satisfactory.

³² James Clifford & George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography: A School of American Research Advanced Seminar* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 9.

³³ Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, "'Native' Anthropologists," *American Ethnologist* 11.3 (1984): 584-6.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 584.

pointed out that even when we think we are objectively collecting and interpreting ethnographic data, we are still organizing what we observe “primarily according to the framework of our own cultural categories and meanings.”³⁵ Therefore, she saw the need to distance oneself from one’s object of study in order to better perceive it. As a Native anthropologist, this can be difficult.

If studying cultures other than our own represents a journey out from and back to our collective self, as embodied in our own culture, and if “distancing” is critical for this endeavor, then it follows that native anthropologists face an even more difficult task in creating enough distance between themselves and their own cultures. . . .Distancing [after fieldwork/data collection] is required not only in our endeavor for abstraction of models or patterns of and for behavior, which relies on our intellectual capacity; it is also required in abstracting the patterns of and for emotions.³⁶

While Indigenous researchers may have the advantage of understanding Indigenous emotive and psychological dimensions underlying behaviour, Ohnuki-Tierney points out that “the intensity with which native anthropologists recognize and even identify the emotive dimension can be an obstacle for discerning patterns of emotion.”³⁷ This is a rather clinical way of putting what may simply mean that the insider’s feelings might get in the way. Identifying too closely with the subject may hinder an objective view of the larger picture, just as Sahlins suggested.

Another potential problem has to do with how the researcher is perceived. Being a part of the society under study can give an advantage, “unless they are working in a segment of society radically different from their own,” Ohnuki-Tierney cautions.³⁸ Working with different dialects, clans, tribes, or even political factions, can remove or cancel out any insider advantage. On Gordon’s reserve, there are remnants of the division between the original “Half-breed” and “Indian” populations. I undoubtedly derive from the Half-breed side, and this may have been a factor in my not gaining ready entrance for one or two interviews that I wished to get.³⁹ I do not believe, however, that it had an effect on the quality of information I derived from the interviews I did get. I would be willing to revise my thoughts on this aspect with further research.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 585.

³⁹ If I had persevered, however, I might have gained access in those cases, and I might be mistaken in imputing motive. I received a few statements to the effect that there was no real difference among people on the reserve, even if some families were Half-breeds to begin with.

The appearance of the researcher, as an insider or outsider will have immediate impact and lasting importance. A visible outsider may be welcomed and made much of, but the drawback “is that the host people ‘perform’ for them,” while the insider may be less conspicuous and more exposed to natural behavior.⁴⁰ Acceptance is obviously important for any researcher, but, “[e]ven if one can blend into a particular social group without the quest of fieldwork, the very nature of researching what to others is taken-for-granted reality creates an uneasy distance.”⁴¹ Fortunately, these days, there are worse things one can do besides research.

An undeniable advantage of the Native ethnographer is to have an understanding of the culture and the language such that it would not be easy to have the wool pulled over your eyes. “Some informants may not be culturally aware, yet naïve researchers may take their word as truth just because they are Indians.”⁴² Two pitfalls here, the choice of “informant” and the acceptance of material which may not be true, might be avoided by the Insider.

Much more can be said of the advantages of knowing the culture from an insider’s perspective in being able to explain it. “If native anthropologists can gain enough distance between their personal selves and their collective selves – their cultures – they can make an important contribution to anthropology because of their access to intimate knowledge of their own culture.”⁴³ Distance is part of the problem in history.

Indigenous History

Bridging the distance between the past and the present in order to understand either one seems to be an important part of the exercise of doing history. As Collingwood states,

The gulf of time between the historian and his object must be bridged, as I have said, from both ends. The object must be of such a kind that it can revive itself in the historian's mind; the historian's mind must be such as to offer a home for that revival. This does not mean that his mind must be of a certain kind, possessed of an historical temperament; nor that he must be trained in special rules of historical technique. It means that he must be the right man to study that object. What he is studying is a certain thought: to study it involves re-enacting it in himself; and in order that it may take its place in the immediacy of his own thoughts, his thought must be, as it were, *pre-adapted* to become its host.⁴⁴

It almost sounds as though Collingwood were describing an Indigenous historian who is able to

⁴⁰ Ohnuki-Tierney, 585.

⁴¹ Kirin Narayan, “How Native is a ‘Native’ Anthropologist?” *American Anthropologist* 95.3(1993), 682.

⁴² Mihsuah, 3.

⁴³ Ohnuki-Tierney, 585.

⁴⁴ Collingwood, 304.

re-enact a thought, who is “pre-adapted” to do so. Perhaps being of the same gender might give such an advantage. Such a historian, who engages with the past “is able to clothe the [dry bones of history] with the flesh and blood of a thought which is both his own and theirs. This is only a way of saying that the historian’s thought must spring from the organic unity of his total experience, and be a function of his entire personality with its practical as well as its theoretical interests.”⁴⁵

It may be reaching to compare Collingwood’s words with those of Donald Fixico, an American Indian Historian and Professor of History. In his Preface to Cash and Hoover’s 1995 edition of *To Be An Indian: An Oral History*, Fixico posits a metaphysical link between the past and the present through the Native identity. According to Fixico, an “innate quality of Indianness is timeless, extending back to the origins of each Native American person and connecting each one to the earth via legends and myths.”⁴⁶ He discusses the people’s connection to earth, to family, and tribe. “Invisible bonds of sociocultural relations to the community, animals, all family relatives, and the past” constitute membership in the community and belonging.⁴⁷ Furthermore,

this personal sense of being forms a link to the past, extending through time to the point of creation. The history of each tribal person is unbroken, such that the timeless sense of being is more powerful than the present or future. Hence, tribal persons are acutely cognizant of “who” their people are. This understanding of “being” is perceived not as history, nor is it instinctively viewed in measured intervals of time. “Being” is a continuum; therefore, “being” and “identity” are synonymous. This sense of being and identity is forever, enduring as long as your community exists.⁴⁸

In a healthy Indigenous community this may be true, but in many of our Indigenous First Nations various historical traumas and colonial policies have broken that history, separated the individual from his land and community, and interrupted the continuum. The effects of colonization are discussed elsewhere, but the point here is that Fixico’s tribal person should be able to bridge the gulf of time and clothe the bare bones of history with flesh and blood if s/he is consciously seeking to recreate the thought behind past actions.

⁴⁵ Collingwood, 305.

⁴⁶ Donald Fixico, “Preface,” In *To Be an Indian: An Oral History*, eds. Joseph H. Cash and Herbert T. Hoover (St. Paul, MN: The Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1995), xi.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Today's tribal person, even if a trained historian, is still not an inhabitant of that foreign country that is the past. Twenty-first-century historians must view the past from our contemporary world, understanding it through the lenses of our present-day cultures. Still, some who are able, do seek to provide an inside view, an interpretation informed by the many voices and views of Indigenous societies. Dr. Nwando Achebe, a Nigerian Igbo woman, is an historian who seems to take ethnohistorical fieldwork for granted in doing history. She found that being an insider afforded her opportunities, however, she also encountered some problems while researching her own people.⁴⁹ These parallel the issues faced by Native ethnographers. On the positive side, she was accepted as an insider, able to identify collaborators quickly, had the advantage of language, (an invaluable asset), and she had much firsthand knowledge of such things as geography, institutions, and cultural values. All this previous knowledge and experience saved her much time and trouble.

On the downside, however, some issues arose. There were certain topics, for instance, "that her cultural sensitivity would not allow her to broach."⁵⁰ Further, she found that "the insider may also ignore evidence that appears to be commonplace in her culture, but nevertheless, relevant to understanding its history."⁵¹ This may result from being too familiar with the subject and taking aspects of it for granted. Another problem is that she "may over-identify with her people and, therefore, attempt to conceal information that she thinks may be hurtful to them."⁵² This was borne out in my own research. I was reluctant to pursue sensitive lines of questioning, to make the journey down memory lane too unpleasant for my respondents, because I realize that many of our people have suffered enough. My work barely touches on the hurt and heartbreak, some of which is just the human condition, other of which is the result of the years of oppression and particular government policies. As a result, some issues such as alcoholism, violence and the effects of the residential school just down the road, although these affected men, women, and children, are only touched upon superficially. If my interviewees wanted to go there, I followed but mostly I did not prod.

As an Indigenous researcher, Achebe faced a dilemma and she chose her course of action on the side of the educated historian, not, some would argue, on the side of Igbo women. She

⁴⁹ Nwando Achebe, "Nwando Achebe – Daughter, Wife, and Guest – A Researcher at the Crossroads" *Journal of Women's History* 14.3 (2002): 9-31.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

notes, however, that all researchers must select the data that they will use based on their own judgement, and therefore this is not a problem unique to insiders.

A Daughter? Or a Fish Out of Water?

Dr. Achebe also struggled with another issue. She wondered about how she would be received “at home” after she had gone away to be educated. Would she still be regarded as “a returned Igbo daughter?”⁵³ This is a legitimate concern for the Indigenous researcher because the process of removal and education can significantly transform a person, and this change is perceivable on both sides. If a Native researcher has successfully met the demands of the academy, she will have undergone intensive training in other ways of thinking. It can be said of her that she *is* coming from another culture if she applies the standards and theoretical constructs of the disciplines of anthropology or history. Simply carrying out a “research project” means meeting the demands of a foreign institution. As mentioned above, going around asking questions about “taken-for-granted reality creates an uneasy distance.”⁵⁴ To conduct research and write it in English, the colonizers’ language, within the parameters of the various academic disciplines, means carrying out an endeavour that is shaped by the demands of the academy; from start to finish, it is outside the culture. It is therefore possible to meet Sahlins’ requirements of externality while being a member of the culture and utilizing both internal and external knowledge. S/he can be both, but is this enough?

Another Indigenous anthropologist, Kirin Narayan, wrote, “How Native is a ‘Native’ Anthropologist?” (1993), in which he argued against the “fixity of a distinction between ‘native’ and ‘non-native’ anthropologists” because it makes more sense to view each researcher “in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations. The loci along which we are aligned with or set apart from those whom we study are multiple and in flux.”⁵⁵ Other factors, such as education, gender, and length of time spent with our “informants” might all outweigh the insider status. Instead, Narayan says, “we must focus our attention on ... the quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our texts: are they viewed as mere fodder for professionally self-serving statements about a generalized Other, or are they accepted as subjects with voices, views, and dilemmas -- people to whom we are bonded through ties of

⁵³ Achebe, 13.

⁵⁴ Narayan, 682.

⁵⁵ Narayan, 671.

reciprocity and who may even be critical of our professional enterprise?”⁵⁶ He argues for “the enactment of hybridity in our texts; that is writing that depicts authors as minimally bicultural in terms of belonging simultaneously to the world of engaged scholarship and the world of everyday life.”⁵⁷ Harking back to Sahlins, while there is no one single subject-position that is the right one, neither is there one monolithic culture of which we are a part. This “insider/’outsider” business, a colonial construct, has passed its usefulness, Narayan suggests, and we should today acknowledge “the hybrid and positioned nature of our identities.”⁵⁸ As an Indigenous researcher, Narayan feels the need to depart from professional jargon and make his writings accessible to ordinary people in a narrative form that may help change attitudes.

Just as Indigenous researchers find challenges to acceptance in the field, so they face numerous challenges in the halls of academe, where the criteria of acceptance may be the exact opposite of what they find in the field. Indigenous scholars have begun to mark off a bit of academic turf for themselves, primarily situated in Native American and Indigenous Studies departments, but the Indigenous academic finds that in addition to overcoming stereotypes, beginning with those deriving from the original “Native insider” status qualifying one’s role in academe, s/he also finds that the way may be blocked by the non-Indigenous academic establishment, as the title of Philip Deloria’s *Indians in Unexpected Places* suggests.⁵⁹ Devon Mihesuah and Angela Wilson (2004) have edited a collection of articles, *Indigenizing the Academy*, in which the challenges of Native American scholars in dealing with academic gatekeeping and other roadblocks are documented.⁶⁰

While identifying the obstacles for Indigenous scholars, these writers, notably including Winona Wheeler as well, are themselves setting a high bar for anyone doing research on Indigenous questions.⁶¹ The standards of both the western academic tradition and the Indigenous communities must be met with a view toward decolonizing the methodologies and making our inherited knowledge accessible and useful to our future generations. A strict approach seems to

⁵⁶ Ibid., 672.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 682.

⁵⁹ Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 16-30.

⁶⁰ Devon A. Mihesuah and Angela C. Wilson, eds., *Indigenizing the Academy: Transforming Scholarship and Empowering Communities* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

⁶¹ Winona Stevenson (Wheeler), “Decolonizing,” Winona Wheeler, “Thoughts on the Responsibilities for Indigenous/Native Studies,” *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* XXI.1 (2001): 97-104; Mihesuah; Mihesuah and Wilson.

preclude frivolous topics these days. What kinds of historical questions are acceptable to spend time and money on? This brings me back to the question of my ancestors and their actions and thoughts in the past. Answering this question may not serve practical needs today, but understanding a little bit more of what our ancestors were all about will bridge that gap that is filled with the turmoil of colonialism strung out over time, our own dark ages. It is to be hoped that our future generations will be freed from the day-to-day drudgery of poverty and able to turn their minds to visiting the past again.

Being Indigenous alone will not help one understand Indigenous history. One must speak the language, have a good grounding in the culture and community, and be receptive to the thoughts behind the actions of the past (in other words, be a good historian). Anyone can cultivate these skills.⁶² Being “Native,” however, and having these skills adds the likelihood of an already accumulated body of knowledge that will assist the collection of data in historical and ethnographic methods. Acceptance is not a given, but is more likely for an Indigenous researcher and particularly one who is seen as a daughter of the community.

Literature Review

In terms of the historiography of Indigenous women and work, nothing has been written focused on this particular geographic area. The closest thing one can find are documentary histories and published oral sources about Plains Cree and other Indigenous women in nearby areas. The stories and interviews captured by Freda Ahenakew among primarily Plains Cree women published in Cree and English, shed light on the lives and work of women from First Nations in the Plains Cree area.⁶³ The volume *Our Grandmothers' Lives* is most useful as it reveals the various kinds of work carried out by earlier generations of women, including wage labour. However, some of these women are from more distant northern Cree reserves, for example, the Woods Cree Lac la Ronge band, and therefore their stories are a bit out of the general geographic area. Freda Ahenakew's recorded life history of Emma Minde, born in 1907 in Saddle Lake, AB,⁶⁴ speaks directly to the work that a woman learned from her older

⁶² See for example, Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), and Julie Cruikshank, *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Native Elders* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

⁶³ Freda Ahenakew & H.C. Wolfart, eds & trans. *Kōhkominawak Otācimowiniwāwa: Our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in Their Own Words* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1992).

⁶⁴ Emma Minde with Ahenakew, Freda and H.C. Wolfart, eds & trans. *Kwayask ē-kī-pē-kiskinowāpahtihicik, Their Example Showed Me the Way: a Cree Woman's Life Shaped by Two Cultures told by Emma Minde*, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1997).

mentors and shows that continuity of roles over generations. Another of Ahenakew's volumes is pertinent although disappointingly short, and that is *The La Ronge Lectures of Sarah Whitecalf*.

⁶⁵ I knew this Elder before she passed away in 1991, and, being Plains Cree from the Battle River area, her experiences would more closely resemble ours than the Woods Crees, as the Battle River Crees were much more closely linked to the Touchwood Cree. Other Cree authors' published works that have more direct bearing on the experiences at Touchwood include Eleanor Brass's *I Walk in Two Worlds*, and Joseph Dion's *My Tribe the Crees*.⁶⁶ Dion's, in particular, details much about Cree women's lives and work and how vital they were for the survival and wellbeing of their families. In fact, a particular passage was most inspiring for this project:

During the winter of 1885 and '86, much of the inspiration for the Crees came from the old ladies, for they set to work with a will that impressed everybody. ... The elderly women in the majority of cases were an example of industry and thrift. They could always be depended on, especially in times of stress during that winter, and although theirs was not an easy life they seemed to thrive in working for and helping others. ... The many different [gathering] excursions organized by the women were as happy picnics, leaving no time for moping or self pity.... Everything that the elderly ladies gathered and stored away during the summer months was for the enjoyment and benefit of others. Theirs was the satisfaction of making their loved ones happy. Their cheerfulness could not help but be infectious, thus everyone was soon striving to do his share and the Crees were able to look on the bright side of things. As it turned out, the winter of 1885 and '86 was not so terrible after all.⁶⁷

This view of Cree women particularly contrasts with Indian department officials' views of them to which I'll return later. Also the phrase, "leaving no time for moping or self pity" stands out despite the denial conveyed in the rest of the passage. No doubt there was a considerable amount of demoralization and depression under such hard circumstances, but with the help of the elderly women, the people were able to carry on. Women's experiences are not all identical and the band itself was composed of a variety that may have contributed to a variety of responses and adaptations. Rob Innes's work on Cowessess not only shows how many bands on the northern Plains were multicultural at the time of Treaty and reserve settlement, but also that these bands remained multicultural, kinship being the paramount consideration crossing the lines of the

⁶⁵ Sarah Whitecalf with Ahenakew, Freda and H.C. Wolfart, eds & trans. *Kinēhiyāwīwininaw nēhiyawēwin / The Cree Language is our Identity: The La Ronge Lectures of Sarah Whitecalf*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1993).

⁶⁶ Eleanor Brass, *I Walk in Two Worlds* (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1987); Dion.

⁶⁷ Dion, 114-116.

different tribal origins and holding the band together.⁶⁸ My research here upholds that but also shows that the application of Indian policy over the years may have had a leveling effect on the women in terms of their economic situations, gradually erasing the differentiations which might have derived from their differing origins.

Historical works about non-Indigenous women in Saskatchewan might have been helpful for similar experiences or another contemporaneous viewpoint particularly in the area of paid labour outside the home. Erin Millions points out in her 2002 review essay, however, that there is a dearth of literature specifically on Saskatchewan women's experience.⁶⁹ Christine Smillie's article on the invisibility of women's paid labour in Saskatchewan from 1905 to World War II is one exception.⁷⁰ However, the colonial situation of Cree women as well as various cultural and historical circumstances makes their experiences quite different from other Saskatchewan women, as historian Sarah Carter shows.

Just as Freda Ahenakew has made a huge contribution by gathering and disseminating Cree women's stories about their own and their grandmothers' lives, Sarah Carter has made a similarly extraordinary contribution by making a large dent in the documentary -- especially archival -- historical research of Prairie Indigenous women's lives. Carter has brought much to light. In numerous works, she exposes archival materials and other records which illustrate the situations and conditions as well as the actions and sometimes even voices of women on reserves in the Prairie Provinces, many of them Plains Cree.⁷¹ Her works *Lost Harvests*, *The Importance of Being Monogamous*, and the article 'Categories and Terrains of Exclusion' stand out as most

⁶⁸ Innes, "Multicultural Bands."

⁶⁹ Millions, 46.

⁷⁰ Smillie.

⁷¹ Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990); Sarah Carter, "Categories and Terrains of Exclusion: Constructing the 'Indian Woman' in the Early Settlement Era in Western Canada," in *Out of the Background: Readings on Canadian Native History*, eds. Ken S. Coates and Robin Fisher (1993, reprint Toronto: Copp Clark Ltd., 1996); Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: the Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997); Sarah Carter, "First Nations Women and Colonization on the Canadian Prairies, 1870s-1920s," in *Rethinking Canada: the Promise of Women's History*, eds. Veronica Strong-Boag, et al. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2002), 135-148; Sarah Carter, "'Complicated and Clouded': The Federal Administration of Marriage and Divorce among the First Nations of Western Canada, 1887-1906," in *Unsettled Pasts: Reconceiving the West through Women's History*, eds. Sarah Carter, L. Erickson, P. Roome, & C. Smith (Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press, 2005), 151-178; Sarah Carter, "Creating 'Semi-Widows' and 'Supernumerary Wives': Prohibiting Polygamy in Prairie Canada's Aboriginal Communities to 1900," in *Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada's Colonial Past*, eds. Katie Pickles and Myra Rutherdale (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), 131-159; Sarah Carter, *The Importance of being Monogamous: Marriage and Nation Building in Western Canada to 1915* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008). These represent most of Carter's works that offer something in the area.

helpful for this work. Among the materials Carter highlights is a PhD dissertation by Pamela White in Geography at McGill in 1987: “Restructuring the Domestic Sphere – Prairie Indian Women on Reserves: Image, Ideology and State Policy 1880-1930.”⁷² This is helpful for my examination of policy. White may have been the first researcher to examine the government archives for glimpses of First Nations women in my area. Her social history focuses on how the government targeted the domestic sphere, that area which purportedly belongs to women,⁷³ for transformation and directed culture change. Hers is an early example of a gendered look at government policy and its effects. In particular, White links government policy to the images of Indian women held by government officials and Agents and shows how officials blamed their own failure to address the health and economic problems on reserves on the women and their family structures.

Both White and Carter provide examples of women’s work on- and off-reserve as, for a time, “the sale of domestic labour to settlers was ... advocated by Indian Agents as a way for Indian women to earn cash” which could help offset costs of relief for the Department. “Indian Agents recorded dutifully the income generation projects undertaken by Indian women,” according to White.⁷⁴ While I did not find them to be as informative as White seems to think, there was some information gleaned from those records, while a whole lot more is subsumed in the work of the family.

Among the types of work we see women doing - and this contradicts the officials’ image of Indian women that White reports - was in the area of health, healing, and obstetrics. Kristen Burnett, in an article in a recent historical anthology, shows that First Nations women in Western Canada were useful in their own communities and to surrounding settlers as midwives. Their obstetrical skills were sought after by White women and they “played an important role in reproducing European-Canadian communities.”⁷⁵ Burnett gives more than a dozen examples of White women who utilized the services of Indian women midwives but rarely mentions how such women were recompensed for their help. It may have been the custom to refuse payment,

⁷² Pamela M. White, “Restructuring the Domestic Sphere – Prairie Indian Women on Reserves: Image, Ideology and State Policy 1880-1930” (Ph.D. diss, McGill University, 1987).

⁷³ Michelle Z. Rosaldo *et al*, eds., *Woman, Culture and Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974); Ruth Landes, *The Ojibwa Woman* (1938; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

⁷⁴ White, 148-9.

⁷⁵ Kristen Burnett, “Obscured Obstetrics: Indigenous Midwives in Western Canada,” in *Recollecting: Lives of Aboriginal Women of the Canadian Northwest and Borderlands*, eds. Sarah Carter and Patricia A. McCormack (Edmonton, AB: Athabasca University Press, 2011), 157-171.

but gifts likely changed hands anyway.⁷⁶ Maureen Lux goes into more detail about the uses the settler families, even doctors, had for First Nations healers, usually herbalists, often women. Their medicines were apparently very effective and their help was sought for all kinds of ailments, but Lux states, “The knowledge and experience of Native healers and midwives seems to have always been given as a gift, with no payment expected...goods might be received in payment, but they were never demanded.”⁷⁷

A related occupation was the production of Seneca root which was used for a cough medicine. This was a popular item for sale from at least the 1890s and can still be sold today. Lux says that Indigenous women adapted quickly to the cash economy and produced all kinds of traditional and new goods for sale.⁷⁸ Whether payment was in cash or kind, women apparently made a significant economic contribution to their families in this way. The communities surrounding the reserves did require certain things of First Nations women and produced some opportunities. Fairs and exhibitions were, at certain times, important venues for the sale of handmade goods and produce by women of the reserve. There may have been some interaction between settler women and First Nations women occurring in the homes of settler women where First Nations women visited bringing goods for sale or barter. Kathryn McPherson describes some of these encounters in her article, “Home Tales: Gender, Domesticity, and Colonialism in the Prairie West, 1870-1900.”⁷⁹

Images of First Nations Women

Opportunities and challenges are linked with the settlers’ views of First Nations women. Dissonant views of Prairie First Nations women continue to compete with one another from the distant past down to the present day. Scholars such as White and Carter have shown that Native women suffered the multiple jeopardies of race, class, and gender discrimination. Carter in particular, in her article, “Categories and Terrains of Exclusion,” shows how pejorative images were constructed and propagated, most often by officials of the state particularly after 1885. Cree women were chased out of North Battleford in 1886 and 1888 under threat of arrest and having their hair cut off because they were considered to be “immoral and corrupting influences”

⁷⁶ Burnett, 166-168.

⁷⁷ Maureen Lux, *Medicine that Walks: Disease, Medicine, and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 99.

⁷⁸ Lux, 100.

⁷⁹ Kathryn McPherson, “Home Tales: Gender, Domesticity, and Colonialism in the Prairie West, 1870-1900,” in Robin Jarvis Brownlie and Valerie J. Korinek, eds., *Finding a Way to the Heart: Feminist Writings on Aboriginal and Women’s History in Canada* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012), 222-240.

by the non-Aboriginal authorities there.⁸⁰ This was related to prostitution that took place and about which Cree Chiefs had some concerns. “Cree chiefs of the Edmonton district complained to the prime minister in 1883 that their young women were reduced by starvation to prostitution, something unheard of among their people before.”⁸¹ The Prostitute or wanton is one image that non-Aboriginal newcomers had of Indian women, alongside the seemingly contradictory Princess idea, but another view held by early European observers was that of the “Beast of Burden,” doing all the hard work while the men just hunted and engaged in recreation.⁸² This was considered a sign of the primitive nature of the Indigenous people and of the low status of women among them. White’s dissertation explores how this view influenced government policy and efforts to train Indian women in domestic skills in order to recreate the domestic sphere in the image of Euro-Canadian family life. The First Nations have a different view, naturally.

Women’s position

Among First Nations people today, it is commonly repeated that women are the backbone of the nation, the heart and strength of our people, and it is mostly assumed that, as a result, women enjoyed a high status and respected position in their families and communities in the pre-colonial past. Native American historian Nancy Shoemaker states that traditionally a woman’s status derived from three things: personal autonomy, production, and reproduction. Therefore her hard work can be seen as one of the three bases of the esteem in which she was held by her people.⁸³ This is certainly upheld by Ahenakew’s gathered stories where women’s work is celebrated and also by Dion’s comments above. Dion’s assessment of the value of women to the people seems to rest largely in their hard work and their cheerful way of going about it. Interestingly, this corresponds with David Thompson’s report from the late 18th century, that the greatest praise of the Cree women was that they were “active and good humoured.”⁸⁴ That Dion particularly cites the elderly women as responsible for setting the tone upholds an age distinction in the value of women and their abilities, as well the respect and affection for the elderly

⁸⁰ Carter, “Categories,” 187-8

⁸¹ Carter, “Categories,” 187 where she cites the *Bulletin* (Edmonton), 7 Jan. 1883, NA, RG 10, vol. 3673, file 10 986

⁸² Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 18; Katherine M. Weist, “Beasts of Burden and Menial Slaves” in Patricia Albers & Beatrice Medicine, eds., *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 29-52.

⁸³ Nancy Shoemaker, “Introduction,” in *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women*, ed. Nancy Shoemaker (New York: Routledge, 1995), 7.

⁸⁴ J.B. Tyrell, (ed.), *David Thompson’s Narrative of his Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 93.

nocikwēsiwak.⁸⁵

As mentioned above, Leacock, as well as Albers and Medicine in their volume, *The Hidden Half* (1983), were among the early female anthropologists to have broached the topic of women's status and power in hunting societies. Leacock, among Eastern Subarctic Cree, concluded that there was a kind of equality between genders brought about by the value of women's production or work, despite what outsiders might think.⁸⁶ Later, historian Nancy Shoemaker suggests that, based on more recent studies, it appears that while the world is divided between male and female, the separate spheres were non-hierarchical social categories and men and women generally occupied statuses "of equal importance, power, and prestige."⁸⁷

Katherine Weist has posited several indicators of status/power, among them, political participation, economic control (of one's own produce, and possibly that of others), personal autonomy, and interpersonal equality.⁸⁸ Many factors which would affect women's status no doubt changed through the colonial period, but did the absolute and relative position of women improve or decline overall? Did men's position improve or decline? These questions continue and appear to have variable answers. John Lutz found with respect to British Columbia's Lekwammen families and gendered work that "gendered economic power depended on local factors like labour supply and demand, technological change, and pre-existing gender ratios in both indigenous and immigrant populations, as well as more general factors such as racial attitudes and government policies."⁸⁹ And returning to the question of who lost more through colonization, men or women, Janet Mancini Billson, in her article, "Standing Tradition on its Head: Role Reversal among Blood Indian Couples," posits that while men were dispossessed of their primary traditional roles of hunting and protection/warfare, women were able to retain much of their traditional roles in the home, as well as take on additional roles of breadwinner outside the home.⁹⁰ This role reversal, she says, led to backlash against women, with violence

⁸⁵ Old women.

⁸⁶ Eleanor Leacock, "Montagnais Women and the Jesuit Program for Colonization," in Eleanor B. Leacock, ed., *Myths of Male Dominance: Collected Articles on Women Cross-Culturally* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981), 61.

⁸⁷ Shoemaker, 5.

⁸⁸ Weist, 41.

⁸⁹ John Lutz, "Gender and Work," 240.

⁹⁰ Janet Mancini Billson, "Standing Tradition on its Head: Role Reversal among Blood Indian Couples," *Great Plains Quarterly* 11. 1 (Winter 1991), 3-21.

and resentment from the men. Sorting out gendered division of labour is much easier than understanding the balances of power in families, which is a much more complicated issue.

The economic value of women's work

As we began this literature review, we find there are few, but a growing number of, studies of Indigenous women's work in the last century. According to Mary Jane McCallum, "The scarcity of histories of Indigenous women's work, particularly in the post-fur trade era, has resulted in part from the erroneous middle-class assumption that Aboriginal men were the main or sole family breadwinners and that their work counted for more than that of women."⁹¹ Women's work is relegated to the "informal economies" and deemed less important. This contrasts with the view that women were the backbone of the families.

Furthermore, studies of the economic history of First Nations people in this area are few, particularly for the period after Treaty. Carl Beal's detailed study of "Money, Markets and Economic Development," is an exception, and he makes reference to Noel Dyck (1986), Sarah Carter (1990), and Helen Buckley (1992), as well as making extensive use of the Indian Affairs' Annual Reports for economic data.⁹² Drawing from Beal, the dual nature of the reserve economies in this period will at least be acknowledged, keeping in mind that Beal himself sees them as inextricably linked. It is almost impossible to filter out the value of production for use from that of production for the market. Beal's valuable summaries of the rise of market participation and cash flow on the reserves over the years were instructive, as were his analyses of the economic position of First Nations. As he notes, "[t]he characterization of Indians as pauperized and marginalized from the outset and forever after does not reflect the actual course of events from 1870 through the 1930s."⁹³ These analyses shed light on the situation for Gordon's where men and women worked hard for decades to improve their situation. Beal's data, however, are presented at the Agency level, rather than individual reserves. Also, he does not differentiate between genders in his calculations of household economies. This seems to be

⁹¹ Mary Jane Logan McCallum, *Indigenous Women, Work, and History: 1940-1980* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2014), 6.

⁹² Carl Beal, "Money, Markets and Economic Development in Saskatchewan Indian Reserve Communities, 1870-1930s" (PhD dissertation, University of Manitoba, Dept. of Economics, 1994); Noel Dyck, "An Opportunity Lost: The Initiative of the Reserve Agricultural Programme in the Prairie West," in F. Laurie Barron and James B. Waldram, eds., *1885 and After: Native Society in Transition* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1986); Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990); Helen Buckley, *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992).

⁹³ Beal, 389.

the case with most studies of reserve economies. When First Nations and work are considered, it is usually men who are the focus of the writing. Women's work is usually unremarked and obscured. When women's experience is not purposely brought to light, "we risk reproducing a history in which women are absent," as Mary Jane McCallum states in her notable exception to that rule.⁹⁴ It is McCallum's intention to bring out this history for a specific period in her book *Indigenous Women, Work, and History 1946-1980*. The earliest portion of this work overlaps with the latter part of mine.

What follows, then, is an examination that brings to light what the women of Gordon's Reserve had to contend with, in the context of the history of the First Nation through the loss of freedom and the struggle to survive the reserve system. It begins with an attempt to go way back, into time immemorial to place the people of present-day Gordon's reserve in the place called Touchwood Hills. The documentary history, from the earliest sources, is examined to find traces of the people and the roles of women. There are fur trade records from the local Hudson's Bay Company post. These are covered in Chapter 2 and 3, with the latter paying particular attention to the early observations of the roles of women. Gradually the documents increase, particularly with the advent of the first Anglican Missionaries, the Treaty 4 party, the government surveyor of Indian reserves, and then the myriad of Indian Agents and Farm Instructors who came and went. Very little remains from the Farm Instructors, but each Indian Agent left a trail of written words some of which are accessible through the Library and Archives Canada records. Then, after the turn of the century, some of the people of Gordon's themselves left record of their own words in letters and interviews. Finally, my own interviews form a large part of the data presented here. Chapters 4 and 5 examine how the people made a living, always highlighting women's contributions where possible, and they depend upon both Indian Affairs archival materials and, especially for the later period, oral history interviews with the people. Chapter 6 looks at the history of the Anglican Church and school, which became one of the infamous residential schools. Chapter 7 takes a closer look at the overlapping lives of three women of Gordon's, the earliest one being my great grandmother. Finally, the conclusion follows in Chapter 8.

⁹⁴ McCallum, 5.

Chapter 2

Early History of Gordon's People

Earliest History of the Touchwood Hills People

George Gordon's band has often been characterized as "Cree," ignoring other cultural presences. This characterization does not entirely reflect reality but instead perhaps exemplifies a recent trend towards "tribal specific nationalism" which simplifies and overlooks "multilayered histories" of communities where Cree is spoken, as discussed by Neal McLeod in relation to his own reserves in Saskatchewan.

¹ A history of the Touchwood Hills people does include the Plains Cree (nēhiyawak),² as well as the Plains Saulteaux (nahkawiyniwak) and the Half-breeds (or Métis), both French and Scottish mixed-bloods, as the main groups. There were also some Swampy Cree (omaškēkowak) as well as Assiniboine (Nakota) and the Young Dogs, or Cree-Assiniboine (nēhiyawpwātak) in the mix.³ Most of these were part of the band well before the 1874 Treaty when the people were required to gather in and settle on reserves.

In fact, the Treaty and reserve settlement in the 1870s is relatively recent history for this area. Archaeologists find evidence of people having lived in what is now southern Saskatchewan dating from approximately 11,200 years ago.⁴ Who they were is lost in the past, and it is not until much later periods that particular cultures are attributed to the various artifacts found. The archaeological record appears to generally support the best historical guesses about the identities of the people who lived in what is now east-central Saskatchewan, in particular the Assiniboine and Cree.

¹ Neal McLeod, "Plains Cree Identity: Borderlands, Ambiguous Genealogies and Narrative Irony," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* XX.2(2000), 437.

² Where possible, I will use the Cree spelling based on the standard orthography used by Arok Wolvengrey, compiler, *nēhiyawēwin: itwēwina* (Cree dictionary, Vols. 1 & 2) (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 2001), unless an unconventional spelling is widely used in publication or commonly accepted, e.g., Kawacatoose.

³ Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 46; Winona (Stevenson) Wheeler's works on her great-great grandfather, Charles Cowley Pratt

⁴ Ernest G. Walker, "Precontact Archaeology of Southern Saskatchewan," In *Atlas of Saskatchewan*, 2nd ed., edited by Ka-iu Fung (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 1999), 25.

The Touchwood Hills was an important place for people, being located in the protected parkland-like area close to the northern Plains, making ideal wintering spots where the buffalo and other game sought shelter. The place was also frequented for its touchwood or tinder, posākan⁵ in Cree. The hills were well wooded with birch and poplar which made a good habitat for the fungus, “*fomes fomentarius*,” commonly known as tinder fungus.⁶ When shredded and dry, this fungus is easily ignited and fire can be started with just a touch, making it valuable to people with a stone technology. The Hills were known to the Cree for this feature and called posākanacy. Early accounts refer to this in both French and English. French Métis called the hills, “*Montagnes de(s) Tondre*,” or “*Montagne du Tondre*,” Tinder Mountain or Touchwood Mountain or Hills in English. The posākan may have been important for hundreds or thousands of years. According to the local history, “An Indian lady tells us that her people used to come from File Hills to this area to get ‘touchwood’ to start their fires.”⁷ Another use for the posākan appears to have been as a medicine.

The time of first occupation of the Touchwood Hills by the Cree is difficult to pinpoint with accuracy. In fact, there is debate among scholars about the migration of the Cree westward from the location first documented by the Jesuits and fur traders in the mid-seventeenth century.⁸ First mentioned in the historical record in 1640, their geographical subdivisions were described and situated by the Jesuits in the *Relations* of 1656-1658 as being in the region of James Bay and as far west as Lake Nipigon, north of Lake Superior.⁹ Arthur Ray plots the extent and movements of the Cree and their long-time allies, the Assiniboine, from the woodlands of what

⁵ Following Winona Stevenson (Wheeler), who finds it disagreeable to italicize Indigenous language words indicating they are “foreign,” I, too, will not italicize Cree words in this text. While Wheeler then italicizes the English translation to emphasize which language is actually foreign to these lands, I have not gone to that length throughout this work. Stevenson (Wheeler), “Decolonizing Tribal Histories,” 17-18.

⁶ Anon. “Fomes Fomentarius,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fomes_fomentarius, accessed 24 July 2014. Wolvengrey’s dictionary includes this Latin term for the tinder, posākan, but the distinction between it and “chaga” or *inonotus obliquus* deserves to be followed up further.

⁷ Marion Jeal, “Touchwood Siding,” In *Between the Touchwoods: A History of Punnichy and Districts* (Punnichy, SK: Punnichy and Districts History Book Committee, 1983), 23.

⁸ James G. E. Smith, “The Western Woods Cree: Anthropological Myth and Historical Reality,” *American Ethnologist* 14.3(1987): 434-448; Dale Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours* (Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, Archaeological Survey of Canada, Mercury Series Paper 143, 1991); David G. Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1979); and Arthur J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974, rpt 1998). The debate about westward migration of the Cree will not be summarized here and will only be touched on in relation to the Touchwood Hills area.

⁹ Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and allied documents: travels and explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791* (Cleveland: Burrows, 1896, accessed online <https://openlibrary.org>) July 28, 2014; cited in Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree*, 15, 46; and in Russell, *Eighteenth-Century*, 51.

are now western Ontario and eastern Manitoba westward into what is now central Saskatchewan, the Cree keeping pace generally to the north of the Assiniboine.¹⁰

Ray, David Mandelbaum, and others rely on early fur traders' journals and explorers' accounts to locate the Cree historically. The earliest White man to visit the Touchwood Hills area and write about it was Henry Kelsey.¹¹ Kelsey travelled inland from the Hudson's Bay Company's York Factory on Hudson Bay with some Assiniboine in 1690 and stayed inland, returning in 1692. Kelsey clearly indicates that the Touchwood Hills was the southernmost boundary of the Assiniboine people at that time, and further that "[t]his probably marked the western limits of their territory [as well] since the Gros Ventre held the upper Qu'Appelle valley and the lower South Saskatchewan River at that time."¹² In 1690, then, the Assiniboine inhabited a large area of land to the north and east of Touchwood. The Cree were considered to be further north, but it is curious, as Dale Russell points out, that Kelsey used Cree terms for locations and for people he encountered on his journey.¹³

Kelsey's records have been examined by many scholars who speculate about the identities of some of the people he talks about, for example, the Naywattame Poets, the Ashkee, and the Mountain Indians. According to his journals, Kelsey met a people called the Naywattame Poets in the Touchwood Hills area and they were not Assiniboine, despite the "poet" ("pwat") suffix indicating a Siouxan-speaking affiliation in the Cree language. Identifying the Naywattame Poets from the historic record is difficult, and in fact Russell states that the "Naywatame Poets, especially, have been identified with nearly every group on the northern Plains: Mandan, Sioux, Blackfoot, Snake, and Gros Ventre."¹⁴ John Milloy, in his book *The Plains Cree*, says the Gros Ventre were referred to as Naywattame Poets (and also as Atsina, Big Belly, Fall, and Rapid Indians). On the same page he lists the Hidatsa as Gros Ventre and Big Belly among other names and states that the only way to distinguish between the two is to examine their "totally different ways of life."¹⁵ Russell states that there "is little doubt that the

¹⁰ Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 4-23.

¹¹ Ray, 12; Mandelbaum, 21.

¹² Ray, 12.

¹³ Dale Russell, "The puzzle of Henry Kelsey and His Journey to the West" IN Henry Epp, ed., *Three Hundred Prairie Years: Henry Kelsey's "Inland Country of Good Report"* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center/Saskatchewan Archaeological Society, 1991), 79.

¹⁴ Russell, "The puzzle," 74, 76.

¹⁵ John S. Milloy, *The Plains Cree: Trade, Diplomacy and War, 1790 to 1870* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1988), viii.

Naywatamee Poets seen by Henry Kelsey in the Touchwood Hills area in 1691 were Hidatsa, although they have been identified as Atsina [Gros Ventre], Blackfoot, and Mandan.”¹⁶ He bases this conclusion on the “pwat” suffix and that the need of an interpreter meant they were neither Cree nor Assiniboine; that they were identified as enemies of the Cree and Assiniboine; and that Naywattame sounds like the name the Cree had for the Hidatsa who used holes dug in the earth for their semi-subterranean homes.¹⁷ His more thorough treatment is convincing.

By 1720 the Touchwood Hills was still considered the southern and westernmost limits of Assiniboine territory by Ray. However, he states, “[i]mmmediately to the west, and perhaps also occupying part of the Touchwood Hills with the Assiniboine, were the Ashkee, or Plains Indians as they were called.”¹⁸ This is known because a leading chief from the Ashkee had come to York Factory in 1718 or 1719, and according to the York Factory journals, this Chief was said to have come from “about the Mountain Near Red Deer River,” which Ray figures was either Nut Mountain or Touchwood Hills.¹⁹ The Red Deer River flows eastward, past Hudson Bay, Saskatchewan, into Red Deer Lake, Manitoba. Ray concludes that the Ashkee were likely the Gros Ventre.²⁰ According to Ray, then, occupying this area at least as late as 1720 were the Assiniboine and Gros Ventres.

Dale Russell, in his carefully-researched work on the Western Cree, raises doubts as to the reliability of these suppositions. From a close look at York Factory journal entries and the observations of fur traders, David Thompson, Andrew Graham, and James Isham, as well as a bit more linguistic analysis, Russell discounts Ray’s conclusion and suggests instead that the Ashkee were actually Cree, ruling out Gros Ventres and Mandan/Hidatsa. He conflates Ashkee and Muskotay Indians, stating that both were Plains Indians and likely Cree, in the process mentioning that they came down to the Bay along with the Mountain Indians.²¹ Russell makes the point that “uske” (“askiy” by accepted orthography today²²) in Cree means land, country, or earth; that “Plains Indians” was another contemporaneous term used for them, and therefore they were probably Cree and Plains dwellers. This seems a reasonable conclusion given his evidence,

¹⁶ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century*, 210.

¹⁷ Russell, “The Puzzle,” 82-84.

¹⁸ Ray, 21.

¹⁹ York Factory Account Books, HBC B.239/d/10, p. 3 cited by Ray, *Indians*, 21.

²⁰ Ray, *Indians*, 21.

²¹ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century*, 133.

²² Wolvengrey, 10.

but it is also possible, since the Gros Ventres were also an Algonkian-speaking people, this could have been their own name for themselves.

The Mountain Indians, Russell also identifies as Cree and not Assiniboine, but he does not believe the Mountain from whence came “Ashkee ithinee” (the Ashkee Chief referred to as “Land person” in Woodland Cree dialect) refers to the Touchwood Hills or Nut Mountain, but more likely the Manitoba Escarpment.²³ This would put the “Ashkee” people a bit further from the Plains, their apparent namesake. Ray, however, supports the idea that the Mountain was either Nut Mountain or Touchwood Hills, as both of these can be considered next to the Plains, as the term “Ashkee” denotes. Nut Mountain may be the more likely due to its closer proximity to the Red Deer River. Further evidence in the post journals convinces Russell that the Mountain Indian designation was used for a Cree group further south as well, “perhaps including the group identified by LaVerendrye as the Cristinaux des Prairies west of Fort Dauphin.”²⁴ The Touchwood Hills are straight west of present-day Dauphin, Manitoba. So possibly the Ashkee and the Mountain people, aside from Kelsey’s Mountain Poets (Assiniboine), were the first Cree to occupy the Touchwood Hills.

This would put some Cree, in 1720, well south of their territory as described by Alexander Mackenzie in 1790;²⁵ however, Dale Russell believes that Mackenzie’s assertions about Cree westward migration have been misinterpreted by scholars. Russell supports an earlier westward and, apparently, southward expansion of the Cree than other scholars. It is well documented, however, that the Assiniboine and Cree had been gradually moving south and west, and the Saulteaux moved west later in their wake. All the First Nations groups identified by the fur traders and explorers in the mid-1700s underwent a cataclysmic shift due to a devastating smallpox epidemic in 1781. As a result, many of the names for the inland groups changed. Russell identifies the groups who remained stable and continued to trade with the Hudson’s Bay Company. This was when the Assiniboine of Touchwood Hills were almost wiped out and, as Daschuk states, “they would never fully recover from their losses.”²⁶

By 1821 there were three recognized bands of Cree trading with posts in the south easternmost part of Cree territory. “The largest numbered 75 lodges ... hunted in the Beaver,

²³ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century*, 135.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.

²⁵ See map in Ray, 100.

²⁶ James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (Regina, SK: University of Regina Press, 2013), 37.

Touchwood, Strongwood, and Nut hills [sic],” and traded at the Northwest Company’s Fort Alexandria, a post on the Assiniboine River straight north of present-day Yorkton.²⁷ Some of these people are likely the ancestors of the present-day Touchwood Hills residents. Alexandria was in operation from 1795 to 1821 when the Northwest Company merged with the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC).²⁸ The HBC must have closed the post then and opened Pelly a few miles east in 1824. Between 1821 and 1849 the Touchwood people may have continued to take their furs to posts on the Assiniboine River but in 1849 the first post opened at Touchwood Hills. From 1849 to 1909, there was continuous operation of the HBC in the Touchwood Hills, as follows:

Touchwood Hills I	1849-61
Touchwood Hills II	1861-66
Touchwood Hills III	1867-79
Touchwood Hills IV	1879-1909 ²⁹

The first post was located on what would later become Kawacatoose’s (Poor Man’s) Reserve, while the second one was located on what would later become Gordon’s Reserve.³⁰ Marion Jeal, citing James Gwynn of Punnichy, suggests that the post on Gordon’s burned down and was replaced there and continued to operate until the 1867 post was built a few miles away. The fact that there are two large sloughs, called Big Fort and Little Fort Lakes on the northeast quadrant of the reserve today seems to support that idea.³¹ It appears the Touchwood Hills III and IV were situated on roughly the same spot, the site known to old timers today and on which there may still be a depression or pieces of foundation in the soil to mark the spot, not far from the Highway 15 a few miles east of Punnichy. This site of the last post has been identified as W ½ 29-27-15-W2nd, “adjacent to the main trail to the North and between the Indian Reserves.”³² HBC records have preserved the names of the people who worked at these posts,³³ but I have not yet discovered the names of individual First Nations people who traded there.

²⁷ Ray, 99; this was the year the Hudson’s Bay Company merged with the Northwest Company and the post was subsequently abandoned.

²⁸ Dale Russell and David Meyer, “The History of the Fur trade ca 1682-post 1821,” In Ka-iu Fung, ed., *Atlas of Saskatchewan* (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 1999), 33-35.

²⁹ Russell and Meyer, 34-35.

³⁰ Mary Cossar and Marion J. Jeal, compilers, *Tales of the Touchwoods, from 1880-1955*. Celebrate Saskatchewan edition (Regina: Western Printers Association, 1955, rpt 1980), 3.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Marion Jeal, “Touchwood Hills Hudson’s Bay Posts,” In *Between the Touchwoods*, 15.

³³ Jeal, “Touchwood Hills,” 15; also Hudson’s Bay Company Biographical Sheets consulted, while following up

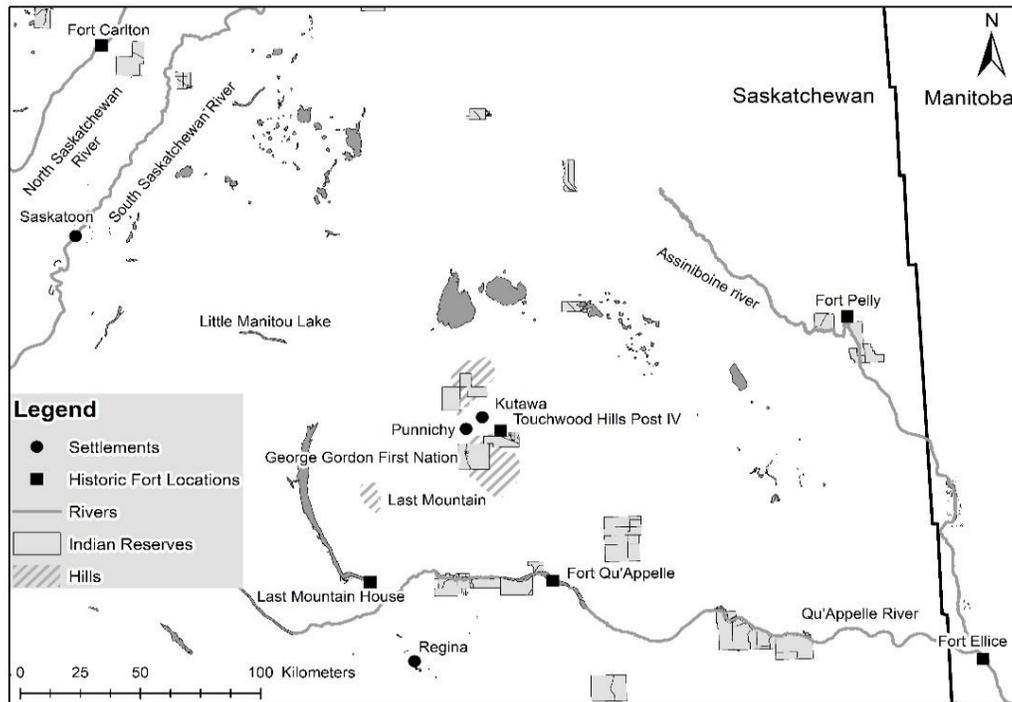


Figure 2.1 Map of George Gordon's Reserve and Traditional Territory³⁴

The posts constituted an important source of goods for local First Nations, and Chief Kawacatoose was reportedly “very happy when the Fur Trade Post was established because it would save both the Cree and Assiniboine Indians many miles of travel with their heavy buffalo hides and other furs.”³⁵ 1849 was still twenty-five years before the Treaty, but the Touchwood Hills post was apparently closer to the home of Kawacatoose's people, at least. In fact it was located right on what became their Reserve. In an interview with Kawacatoose's grandson, Ed Poorman (“Asiniwikijik” or “Rocky Sky”), in 1934, Mandelbaum was informed that his band were known as the “Pusagausticiu wiyuiwuk [posākanacī wiýiniwak³⁶] ‘Touchwood [Hills]

Jeal's list, at <https://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical/> accessed on August 24, 2014.

³⁴ Map by Steven Langlois, Department of History, GIS Lab, University of Saskatchewan.

³⁵ Jeal, 16; as the spelling Kawacatoose is used for the official band and reserve name, I will use that version. Kawāhkatos is the spelling following the Cree orthography.

³⁶ Wolvengrey, 579; however the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre has a different spelling on their History of Kawacatoose web page: “pusakawatciwiyiniwak.” <http://www.sicc.sk.ca/archive/bands/bkawac1.html>. This is also a good place to point out that Kawacatoose people claim another name, one given in historical times because of their location beside two important trails, the Pelly-Last Mountain Trail and the Qu'Appelle-Carlton Trail. They were

People' [who] used to hunt from the north end of Long Lake to Moose Jaw, north to Watrous and Saskatoon, south to Maple Creek and Rocky B[o]y."³⁷ Although he doesn't stipulate the eastern limits, Touchwood Hills may well have been the base, and it is there that Kawacatoose chose his reserve after Treaty. Mandelbaum mentions that among other information provided by Francis Cyr, a Gordon band member, in an interview the previous day, Cyr stated that both Gordon's and Kawacatoose's bands "lived at Long Lake."³⁸ Both locations appear to have been important for the people seasonally, as later information attests.

Other references to the inhabitants of the Touchwood Hills in the mid-1850s come from further afield and are a bit vague. Carter cites a fur trader, Edwin T. Denig, who was at Fort Union, the American fur trading post on the Missouri River where it crosses from Montana into North Dakota, from 1833 to 1856. He wrote of a band of Cree who were settled and farming Indian corn and potatoes at the Tinder Mountains.³⁹ Another account by geologist F.V. Hayden surveys the Cree bands that he was aware of, although it is doubtful either of these two men ever visited the Touchwood Hills. Hayden wrote:

At this time (1856) [the Cree] number about ten or eleven hundred lodges, averaging four souls to a lodgethey are separated into clans or bands, and live in different districts for greater advantages in hunting. The names and number of these bands are as follows: ... Pe-i-sí-e-kan, or "Striped," is composed of forty or fifty lodges; rove and hunt near Tinder Mountains; live in skin tents, and trade with the same Company. Pis-ka-káu-a-kis, or "Magpies,"⁴⁰ are about thirty lodges; are stationed at Tinder Mountain; live in dirt lodges and log-cabins; cultivate the soil to some extent, and raise considerable quantities of corn and potatoes; hunt buffalo during the winter, and trade also with the Hudson's Bay Company.⁴¹

These accounts came to be the authoritative versions and subsequent ethnologists referred to them. In fact, it appears that Clark Wissler sent David Mandelbaum into the field with

called Meskanawiyiniwak, the road people.

³⁷ David G. Mandelbaum, "Touchwood Agency # 2," Interview (13 July 1934), accessed at <http://ourspace.uregina.ca/bitstream/handle/10294/1747/IH-DM.18.pdf?sequence=1> , 4 July 2014.

³⁸ David G. Mandelbaum, "Touchwood Agency #1," Interview (12 July 1934) accessed at <http://ourspace.uregina.ca/bitstream/handle/10294/1747/IH-DM.18.pdf?sequence=1> , 4 July 2014.

³⁹ Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 42.

⁴⁰ Another line of speculation is related to the name, Pis-ka-káu-a-kis, or in today's orthography, "apisci-kahkâkis." Could it be related to the name for the Crow people, Kâhkâkiwacên? See Wolvengrey, 321, 436.

⁴¹ F.V. Hayden, *Contributions to the Ethnography and Philology of the Indian Tribes of the Missouri Valley* (Philadelphia: C. Sherman & Son, 1862), 237, accessed at <https://archive.org/details/contributionstoe00haydrich> , 20 August 2014.

Hayden's list to investigate the Cree bands on the northern Plains.⁴² It seems likely that Pe-i-sí-ek-an's band eventually came to be led by Kawacatoose, while the Magpies or Pis-ka-káu-a-kis band by George Gordon. Here the Magpies are definitely identified as Cree, but one cannot help but speculate whether the mud hut, semi-subterranean dwellers of Kelsey's day, identified by Russell as certainly Hidatsa, left a legacy or memory of growing food in this area. No other band of Plains Cree was settled and cultivating this far north this early. From other sources, it is apparent that there was already a Saulteaux and Métis presence here in 1856 which may have influenced this development of agriculture.

Many contemporary people in the Touchwood Hills have deep roots there. The 1901 census lists several elderly people on Gordon's Reserve as having been born in the Touchwood Hills, along with almost all of the younger people.⁴³ The eldest, "Keesepeeass," whose descendants have the family name Ochoo, was a man of 95, which would have put his birth at Touchwood Hills around 1806. In addition to Keesepeeass, Day Bird, 80, Weequan, 80, and Omekunatamish, 80, were all listed as having been born at Touchwood Hills.⁴⁴ The latter three would have been born around 1821. The accuracy of this census is a bit doubtful, however, because it also lists every member, except for a few Scottish and French Half-breeds, as being Saulteaux and it states that Saulteaux was *everyone's* mother tongue. (It also lists everyone's colour as being "Red.") Later censuses corrected that sweeping assertion and distinguished between Cree and Saulteaux. If the census-taker, overseen by the Indian Agent H. Martineau, was that careless about language and nationality, it is quite possible that he glossed over the particulars of people's place of birth as well. Martineau was only Indian Agent there for a short period of about four years before he was removed, so he may not have been sufficiently acquainted with, or caring about, the people. It appears, however, that most of the people were born either actually in the Touchwood Hills or with the people who made the Hills their home for part of the year. This census lists some other locations as places of birth for certain individuals on the reserve, so it must have been a standard question asked of each person.

⁴² Mandelbaum, "Wissler Memo," 1934. Accessed at <http://ourspace.uregina.ca/bitstream/handle/10294/1798/IH-DM.110.pdf?sequence=1>, 20 August 2014.

⁴³ The 1901, 1906, and 1911 censuses, while held at the LAC, were accessed through www.automatedgenealogy.com; the 1916 census through the LAC <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1906/Pages/about-census.aspx>, accessed 12 June 2014.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Before Indian Affairs began keeping lists of the people, it is difficult to trace who was a member of which band. Band membership was somewhat fluid and flexible traditionally. Interviews recorded by David G. Mandelbaum give some clues for Gordon's Band. He visited Gordon's Reserve in 1934 and interviewed a man named "Kas-kawauipiec – 'Thunder Mist' whom he identified as "Chief of the Reserve."⁴⁵ Chief Kaskawanipiýēs (in standard orthography), 70 years old, told Mandelbaum that his grandfather, "wataxkaxkwana, 'Wing,'" [more likely otahtahkwana, Wings, plural], had first come to the Cree from the "Kaxkakiwatcayanuuk, "Crow" (?)⁴⁶ Mandelbaum wrote, "According to the informant, his great grandfather had fled from the Crow because two of his sons were bad actors. He came to the Cree with four other men and their families."⁴⁷ Undoubtedly these four other men included his two sons, one of whom came to be considered "ukimau" (okimāw or chief) of the band. This son was "uskitcewa-piu," or 'Pipe Stem,' according to Mandelbaum, although it sounds like it should be oskičiwāpēw, "Pipe Stem Man."⁴⁸ Mandelbaum's notes do not indicate that the great grandfather, Wings, was ever the Chief of the band as Carter suggests, but he was regarded as having been "a famous warrior among his own people and was immediately recognized by the Cree as an oghičitau ukimau" (okihcičāw okimāw or warrior chief).⁴⁹ As a warrior chief of such influence, he may well have come to be regarded as overall chief in his time. Apparently his son, Pipe Stem Man, became the chief and then his son, George Gordon, and later, his son, Kaskawanipiýēs, Mandelbaum's "informant," were all Chiefs of Gordon's band.

Pipe Stem Man's son's English name was George Gordon. His Cree name meant "Four Claws"⁵⁰ or "Four Claw Walker" and appears with various spellings which would affect the pronunciation. Figuring out the definitive version of this name is more problematic.

Mandelbaum: kaniuwuskwatau

⁴⁵ Mandelbaum, Touchwood Agency # 1; Arok Wolvengrey and Jean Okemāsis consider this is probably misspelled, as kaskawanipiýēs, with an /n/ instead of a /u/ makes more sense. Other instances of an /u/ where /n/ should be are noted in these two Touchwood interviews.

⁴⁶ Mandelbaum, Touchwood #1. Other possible translations are "Thundercloud" or "Misty Thunderbird." Wolvengrey, p. 321, has kāhkākiwaciýin[iwak] for Crow Indian[s], and this looks the same, even though Mandelbaum, or the transcriber, did apparently question that interpretation indicated by the question mark.

⁴⁷ Mandelbaum, Touchwood Agency # 2.

⁴⁸ In-person consultation with Arok Wolvengrey and Jean Okimāsis, 2 September 2014.

⁴⁹ Mandelbaum, Touchwood #2; Carter, *Losses Harvests*, 46. For a distinction between the two kinds of okimāwak, or Chiefs, see Mandelbaum, 106-108 and 113, Deanna Christensen, *Ahtahkakoop: The Epic Account of a Plains Cree Head Chief, His People, and Their Struggle for Survival, 1816-1896* (Shell Lake, SK: Ahtahkakoop Publishing, 2000), 63-64, who seems to follow Mandelbaum, and Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser, *Loyal till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion* (Saskatoon, SK: Fifth House, 1997), 138, 142.

⁵⁰ Mandelbaum, Touchwood # 2.

Morris's Proceedings of Treaty 4: Ka-ha-oo-kus-ka-too (he who walks on four claws)

Treaty 4 itself: Ka-ne-on-us-ka-tew, or One that walks on four claws

Peter Cyre (1977): Ka nawe kusk kwa tawe (four claw walker) and also
Kanawcusquatau⁵¹

The latter are two different spellings derived from an interview with Peter Cyre by Mervin Dressyman of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians. From these five different versions, one might conclude that the name was either Ka-nēwo-kaskwatēw or Ka-nēwo-waskwatēw, or possibly Ka-nēwo-kaskohtēw and not Ka-nēwo-Naskatēw as is so widely copied from the text and list of signatories of Treaty 4.⁵² Isaac Cowie, in his account of meeting and travelling with George Gordon in 1868, called him and several of his men “freemen, all of Touchwood Hills.”⁵³ According to Cowie, as Carter explains, George Gordon “was well regarded...as, among other things, a first-rate guide, and was responsible for leading cart brigades from the plains back to company posts.”⁵⁴

The people of Touchwood evidently utilized a much wider territory. Some made the journey to York Factory in earlier fur trade days, and possibly also to the Mandan/Hidatsa trade centre. Mandelbaum describes the Gordon band's territory as “from Fort Pelly westward, south of the Saskatchewan to the Rockies. They went south as far as Turtle Mt. and Cypress Hills.”⁵⁵ In fact it was in the Great Sand Hills near Cypress Hills in the summer of 1868 that Isaac Cowie met up with the Touchwood Hills HBC Post interpreter, La Pierre and his men, “Thomas Sinclair, George Gordon and his two sons; Andrew and Charles McNab and Josiah Pratt, freemen, all of Touchwood Hills,” all apparently working for the Touchwood Hills Post and out trading with the buffalo-hunters.⁵⁶ Together they left the mixed camp of Crees, Assiniboines, Young Dogs, and Saulteaux and made their way back east, relying on George Gordon's guiding abilities, stopping at various places, until they parted ways, Cowie and his men heading to Fort

⁵¹ Ibid.; Alexander Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West territories, Including the Negotiations on Which They Were Based, 1880* rpt. (Saskatoon, SK: Fifth House Publishers, 1991), 116, 330, 334; Peter Cyre in what appears to be two separate interviews, or two separate transcriptions/translations of the same interview by Mervin Dressyman, one undated, the other dated 5 October 1977. At the time Cyre was 77 years old and Dressyman worked for the Indian Rights and Treaties Research Program of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians. Both spellings would seem to give the same pronunciation.

⁵² The nēwo meaning ‘four.’ Arok Wolvengrey and Jean Okemasis consider that the version Ka-nēwo-kaskohtēw contains the reference to walking.

⁵³ Cowie, 336.

⁵⁴ Cowie, Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 46.

⁵⁵ Mandelbaum, Touchwood # 2.

⁵⁶ Cowie, 335-6.

Qu'Appelle while La Pierre, Gordon, and the others left for Touchwood.⁵⁷ That these men were travelling on behalf of the HBC is not lost on me, but they were following the buffalo hunters who also made Touchwood Hills their home.

Within my oral history, the people utilized a large area including the Last Mountain area, the Qu'Appelle Valley, and the Manitou Lake. My grandfather, Hilliard McNab, once told me that his uncle had told him about those days when they would travel among the general areas of Last Mountain, Kinookimaw (Regina Beach) at the south end of Last Mountain Lake, the Qu'Appelle Valley, and the Touchwood Hills. Our interest in the fishing grounds at Kinookimaw on Long (Last Mountain) Lake was acknowledged by the government and a reserve was set aside there for fishing for seven First Nations including Gordon's. Further, after reserve settlement, the people still traveled there. A story about a couple of "young bucks from the Gordon Reserve" visiting the area in the early 1880s is found in the Long Lake (Last Mountain Lake) district history.⁵⁸

Another uncle mentioned in an interview that our people also traveled to Manitou Lake, near present-day Watrous, Saskatchewan, to bathe in the healing waters.⁵⁹ The *Touchwood Times* recalls a Gordon, (noted as Amos, but probably Moses), son of the original Chief, speaking at a funeral. He stated that his people were the first to actually discover the healing properties of the Manitou Lake.⁶⁰ Historically, the people from the Touchwood Hills did travel considerably farther and during the hardship of great starvation in 1876-9, some of our people were said to be near, and were paid annuities at, Fort Walsh.⁶¹

Although Mandelbaum tried to get a band name for Gordon's people, all Kaskawanipiyēs told him was that they were Nehiawuk (nēhiyawak), or Cree, in the Plains dialect. He did find out the names of other Chiefs that "were close to their people:" "Kicigausatcaxkwus, "Day Star," kawaxkatcuu, "Poor Man," kanwises, "Little Boy," kauahaxtca-peu, "Bow Fixer." They said

⁵⁷ Ibid., 342.

⁵⁸ Victor Swanston, "Short Western Tales" in *From Buffalo Grass to Wheat: a history of Long Lake District*, Leonard A. Shiels, ed., (Craven, Saskatchewan: Leonard A. Shiels, 1980), pp. 130-1; Long Lake is now known as Last Mountain Lake.

⁵⁹ McNab, Michael, interview on 8 August 2013.

⁶⁰ "St. Luke's Mission – 100 Years: Charles Pratt First Anglican Missionary in 1859" *Touchwood Times*, October 21, 1959.

⁶¹ Anne Seymour, *Treaty Land Entitlement Review: Gordon First Nation*, Draft Report (Vancouver, n.p., 2002), 31.

that the greatest ukimau [okimāw, chief] of all was tcima-skis, “Short Stick.”⁶² Ties with these other bands can be documented, but none was as close as Kawacatoose, apparently.

Kawacatoose (kawāhkatos, the Poor Man, or Lean Man) was recognized as the prominent chief, the “head chief of the Touchwood Hills People,” both by the HBC and the government officials.⁶³ Mandelbaum identifies George Gordon and Kawacatoose, as being “uitciwaus,” which seems to indicate partners or travelling partners.⁶⁴ Although pressured by an impatient surveyor William Wagner in 1875, George Gordon did not want to go ahead with the survey of his reserve until he had conferred with Kawacatoose and other Chiefs who wanted their reserves in the Touchwood Hills.⁶⁵ Although some people were farming already in the area, it seemed that Gordon would consult with Kawacatoose before choosing.

Those who were settled and farming, some of them Métis or Half-breeds, were already in the area by the mid-1850s. As An obituary for Andrew McNab published in the *Touchwood Times* on February 28, 1929 indicates that he had been born on Gordon Reserve on October 11, 1856. Of course the reserve was not surveyed yet, but apparently Andrew would have been one of the people who were settled and farming in the Little Touchwood Hills before the reserve was surveyed in 1875-6. While he did not enter the Treaty immediately, his father and two of his brothers apparently did.

Winona Wheeler has documented the life of Askenootow, Askīnōhtow, or Charles Cowley Pratt, her great-great grandfather, who was born in 1816 at the Qu’appelle Valley, trained as an Anglican catechist and school teacher, worked for a time with the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Fort Pelly Post before resuming work with the Church Missionary Society (CMS).⁶⁶ His father was a Métis buffalo hunter and son of a French fur trader, and his mother was a Cree-

⁶² Ibid. I did not correct Mandelbaum’s spelling for these and there is plainly an error in Kawacatoose’s name. Also, ukimau would be okimāw or *chief*.

⁶³ Cowie; Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 46.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Anne Seymour, “Review of First Survey of Gordon I.R. 86, Saskatchewan,” (unpublished report for Treaty Land Entitlement purposes, October 2001), 13.

⁶⁶ Winona Wheeler, “Pratt, Charles Cowley (1816-1888)” *The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan*, accessed at http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/pratt_charles_cowley_1816-88.html July 24, 2014; and under her former name, Winona Stevenson, “The Church Missionary Society Red River Mission and the Emergence of a Native Ministry 1820-1860, with a Case Study of Charles Pratt of Touchwood Hills” (MA Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1988); “The Journals and Voices of a Church of England Native Catechist: Askenootow (Charles Pratt), 1851-1884,” in Jennifer S.H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, eds., *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1996).

Assiniboine of the Nēhiyawipwat people.⁶⁷ Askīnōhtow was raised with his mother's people until they sent him away for schooling, where he entered into a relationship with the Anglican Church Missionary Society that would last a very long time with little benefit to himself.⁶⁸ It was Charles Pratt who established the first Anglican missions in what is now southern Saskatchewan during the winter of 1852-1853. "Pratt wintered at Qu'Appelle Lakes with his own people. It was there that his life-long friendship with Chief George Gordon began. Gordon was himself a Mixed-blood raised Cree who made his living hunting buffalo. The Gordon and Pratt families did not always travel and live together, but when they did, they shared everything: tents, cabins, horses, guns, tools, and food," Stevenson relates.⁶⁹

Pratt established and ran the CMS Indian Mission, St. Luke's, at Little Touchwood Hills from 1859 to 1877.⁷⁰ Stevenson explains that,

In 1859 Pratt convinced a few Plains families to settle at his mission in Little Touchwood hills to farm. To encourage their efforts he took as much responsibility for their welfare as he could. In fact his prospective farmers expected him to help them out while they prepared their gardens because he was the one who talked them into moving to a region where buffalo were no longer readily available.⁷¹

Stevenson states that George Gordon was one of those he had helped to get started by giving him a young heifer. This would indicate that Gordon was attempting to farm in 1859, while ten years later, Isaac Cowie saw him guiding and working for the Touchwood Hills HBC post out on the Plains. This was partially explained by a letter to Alexander Morris, Lieutenant-Governor of the North West Territories, from the Reverend Joseph Reader, who succeeded Pratt at the Little Touchwood Hills mission. Among other purposes, the letter sought an early survey of a reserve (which would become George Gordon's reserve) as well as seed to assist the people to remain and farm in the area.⁷² Reader wrote that on July 25, 1874 he arrived at Little Touchwood Hills for the first time.

At that time I found only two or three families. Only a few years ago I believe there was quite a little settlement of Halfbreeds and Indians there, among whom our Indian Catechist Mr. Charles Pratt had laboured for many years. They lived in houses and cultivated the soil, but alas! The grasshopper compelled most of them to seek refuge

⁶⁷ Stevenson (Wheeler), "The Church Missionary," 133-4;

⁶⁸ Stevenson, "The Church Missionary," 117.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁷² Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 43; LAC, RG 10, vol. 3622, file 4945, Reader to Alexander Morris, 17 May 1875.

elsewhere, and many of their houses were burnt by ill disposed persons. Although driven away, the Crees and many of the Saulteaux always look upon the Touchwood Hills as their home, and speak of them as such. There are, I believe, a large number of Indians connected with the Touchwood Hills, now scattered abroad, yet willing and desirous to farm.⁷³

As following chapters will show, the people did settle and begin to farm on the reserves in Touchwood, encountering many problems but having little choice but to continue. Charles Pratt himself, after establishing missions at Round Lake in 1877 and then back in the Touchwood Hills on Day Star's Reserve in 1878, returned to live and work on George Gordon's reserve until his death in 1888.⁷⁴ It was not until after the Treaty was signed and reserves surveyed that the earliest White settlers came to the Touchwood area. These families' experiences beginning in 1880 are documented in *Tales of the Touchwoods* and in the local history book, *Between the Touchwoods*.⁷⁵ Some of the earliest White settlers came to the area on business connected with the Indians – either the fur trade or the administration of Indians by the Government of Canada. Some of them stayed to homestead.

The Treaty 4 Negotiations and Signing

In the two decades leading up to the 1874 Treaty signing, the long years of the fur trade and increasing population in the area with resultant pressure on the food and fur resources meant that the resources were dwindling drastically. Milloy has termed this era of competition for the dwindling buffalo among Plains tribes the era of the “buffalo wars, which mark the sorrowful trail to the reserves.”⁷⁶ He gives figures to show the thousands upon thousands of buffalo robes being taken off the Plains by the Hudson's Bay Company and indicates that seven to ten times that amount was being taken by American fur traders down south on the Upper Missouri.⁷⁷ He mentions measures the First Nations attempted to prevent the decline and manage the resource, including limiting and fining European and Métis buffalo hunters.⁷⁸ The necessity of following the dwindling herds meant moving in closer quarters with the Blackfoot enemies and risking lives. Isaac Cowie described a camp of allied Plains groups, numbering 2,500 or 3,000 men,

⁷³ LAC, RG 10, vol. 3622, file 4945, Reader to Alexander Morris, 17 May 1875.

⁷⁴ Stevenson, “Case Study of Charles Pratt,” 159.

⁷⁵ Mary Cossar and Marion J. Jeal, compilers, *Tales of the Touchwoods, from 1880-1955*. Celebrate Saskatchewan edition (Regina: Western Printers Association, 1955, rpt 1980); *Between the Touchwoods: A History of Punnichy and Districts* (Punnichy, SK: Punnichy and Districts History Book Committee, 1983).

⁷⁶ Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, xv.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 93, 105.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 107-108.

women and children travelling together for protection well into Blackfoot territory where there were still buffalo to be found. This is the camp he visited for trading purposes in 1868, where he met with the freemen/traders working for Touchwood Hills Post.⁷⁹ His description of the camp illustrates the conditions of the time, in which the people lived in constant distrust of one another, being thrown together in fear of attack by the Blackfoot, while whisky traders came and went with impunity.⁸⁰ Cowie's description of these years just prior to Treaty indicates increasing hardship and desperation among the First Nations as their food resources began to fail.

Increasingly, the people found themselves caught up in a paradoxical situation with the HBC, needing to continue trading for necessary supplies, while at the same time recognizing that the HBC and other Europeans were responsible for creating the destruction. Under these conditions, Cowie recounts certain events which show that the First Nations held the Company accountable. In particular, he had a run-in with a Touchwood Hills man, Pee-wa-kay-win-in. Pee-wa-kay-win-in was known to La Pierre, the Touchwood Hills interpreter, for having tried to break into that post. On this occasion, he had been drinking and his garb and hair "showed that he was in mourning."⁸¹ He made a speech to Cowie, interpreted by La Pierre,

that, in order to feed the few white people in the world, whom the Indians vastly exceeded in numbers, the allied tribes in camp had been compelled to follow the buffalo here far inside the hunting grounds of the Blackfeet and their allies. In consequence, two of the sons of Pee-wa-kay-win-in had been slain, with the other fifty-eight young men, in the recent battle, therefore he demanded of me a large present in ammunition, tea and tobacco. I told him that I was very sorry for the poor young men who had been killed and for their relatives, but [his supplies were for sale not for gifts]. At this he became angry and said: "What would become of the Great White Queen and her people if we did not send them our pemmican? Of course, they would all starve to death," he conclusively replied to himself. I told him he was quite mistaken, that Queen Victoria had probably never seen pemmican, no more than most of her numberless people. "That is a lie," he said. "We Indians are the most numerous people on earth. Why, in all this big camp of three hundred and fifty tents, you are the only European, and we never see, even at the forts, more than five or six of you."⁸²

⁷⁹ A "freeman" was a former employee of the HBC who had completed his contract and was "free" to pursue other employment. Not infrequently, they would continue to trade with and work casually with the HBC. Pamphlet, "Occupational Groups in the HBC," (May 2001) accessed at https://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical/biographical_sheet_revealed.pdf on September 12, 2015.

⁸⁰ Cowie, 302, 318.

⁸¹ Ibid., 301.

⁸² Ibid.

Keeping in mind that this is a conversation with someone under the influence of alcohol, interpreted from Cree to English, and reported by only one of the parties, there is still something to be gleaned about Pee-wa-kay-win-in's perspective. After all - *in vino veritas*. He may have understood that all the pemmican going out of his country was to feed the poor Queen and her English people and that they must be in great need of it, given the efforts of the traders. Why else would they divert so much of the country's bounty in that direction? On the other hand, he may have been making the point, in his own language and way of putting it, that the division of goods was grossly unfair, the Indians being more numerous, according to his observation, and also in need. He certainly made clear his view that the conflict with the Blackfoot resulting from chasing the buffalo into their territory, the loss of his own sons and the other young men, was directly attributable to the HBC's demand for the provisions and hides and therefore the HBC should pay for it.

Other examples show that some people resented the HBC presence and pressure on the resources. Kan-o-cees, the brother of Kawacatoose, who later came to be on much friendlier terms with Cowie according to the latter, first tricked him out of provisions twice and then, "I did not see him again till he turned up drunk the following summer, again in the absence of both Mr. McDonald and Jerry, demanding tribute for the use of the site on which the fort stood. But I had been chaffed so much about his fooling me on the imaginary fox that I met his demand for tribute in forcible English only."⁸³ And further, an Egg Lake Saulteaux, on being caught trying to take whitefish from the Company's icehouse at Fort Qu'Appelle, "replied insolently that the fish belonged to the Indians, who had a right to take what was their own from the whites, who were mere intruders in the country."⁸⁴

While in 1869, the buffalo herds returned to the Plains between the Touchwood and Last Mountain in great numbers blackening the whole country, the following year the buffalo hunt failed.⁸⁵ According to Cowie, "there was much distress among the Indians that winter owing to the disappearance of buffalo. Band after band made their way to Fort Qu'Appelle for the relief which was always afforded them free under the heading of the provision storebook of 'Charity to Starving Indians.'⁸⁶ By 1872, the people were forced to rely even more on the HBC. At that

⁸³ Cowie, 239.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 419.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 373, 415.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 418.

time, the Company decided to halt the practice of advancing goods to the Indians as the load of “Indian debt” had been growing due to the hardships.⁸⁷

Due to the increasing numbers of traders entering into the West, more pathogens made their way in and epidemics of disease became more frequent. The 1781-82 smallpox epidemic, responsible for decimating the Touchwood Assiniboine, was mentioned already. Smallpox hit again in 1837-38 with particularly severe effects on the Assiniboine again, while this time the Cree and Saulteaux in the region of Fort Pelly, were protected by vaccinations administered by the Hudson’s Bay Company.⁸⁸ Measles, influenza, and dysentery, however, came in waves, and epidemics had such high mortality rates that HBC Governor Simpson “likened the mortality to the devastating cholera pandemic that had spread through Europe and eastern North America” during the previous decade.⁸⁹ Scarlet fever, measles, and smallpox broke out again in the plains in the mid-1850s, and 60s, and were widespread in 1870. Although the Plains Cree were hard hit in 1870, the Touchwood Hills and Qu’Appelle people were protected by vaccination and “not a single case of smallpox was ever heard among them,” during this last epidemic.⁹⁰ This was the epidemic of smallpox that Plains Cree Chief Sweetgrass referred to in his 1871 letter asking for the Queen’s representatives to come and make treaty with the Crees.⁹¹

These were the conditions when the First Nations began to hear of the Hudson’s Bay Company selling “their land” to the Dominion of Canada, and of Treaty-making in Manitoba. The First Nations “were disturbed by various intrusions which were being made into their territory” before anyone was making any arrangements with them.⁹² An HBC reserve was surveyed around the Fort Qu’Appelle HBC Post in the Fall of 1872 and a Geological Survey was turned back by Crees near the Elbow of the South Saskatchewan in the Fall of 1873.⁹³ In the spring of 1874, Kanocees, Kawacatoose’s brother, was sent to meet Alexander Morris, the Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba and the North-West Territories, to “ascertain whether someone was coming to see them about their land.”⁹⁴ As Carter put it, the “Indians of the North-

⁸⁷ Ibid., 440.

⁸⁸ Daschuk, 68.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 73.

⁹⁰ Cowie, 382.

⁹¹ Morris, 171.

⁹² John Leonard Taylor, “Treaty Research Report: Treaty Four (1874)” (Ottawa: Treaties and Historical Research Centre, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1985), 5.

⁹³ Cowie, 454, 457; Arthur Ray, J.R. Miller & Frank Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence: A History of Saskatchewan Treaties* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), 100.

⁹⁴ Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 55.

West were anxious to negotiate treaties as a means of ensuring their economic security in face of a very uncertain future.”⁹⁵

The negotiations and signing of Treaty 4 deserve more consideration than I am going to present here. For more detailed treatment of the lead-up and actual terms, see J.R. Miller’s *Compact, Contract, Covenant: Aboriginal Treaty-Making in Canada*; Ray, Miller, and Tough’s *Bounty and Benevolence: A History of Saskatchewan Treaties*; and of course, Alexander Morris’s *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians*, which contains an account of the talks preceding the signing, as well as those of the following year.⁹⁶ The Saulteaux and Cree First Nations that met in the Valley in September 1874 to hear the Treaty proposal were fewer than half of the bands which would eventually be told that the Treaty was already agreed to and signed, and they may as well just adhere to it (thirteen Chiefs signed initially and a later fifteen signed adhesions).⁹⁷ They were not a unified group at the beginning of the talks and there were several Chiefs who could be considered Hudson’s Bay Company chiefs – that is, they had a special relationship with the Company as important trading chiefs and were given special honours and gifts. Loud Voice, considered a principal Chief at the negotiations, was connected to the Fort Qu’Appelle HBC post and even kept his ceremonial pipe stem there.⁹⁸ Mīmīy or Gabriel Coté was reportedly confined to his tent during some of the negotiations as the Saulteaux mistrusted his intentions because of his good relationship with the Company.⁹⁹ And, as mentioned above, George Gordon was connected to the Touchwood Hills post. This fact does not necessarily disqualify them as legitimate leaders of their own people, as Lise Hansen points out in relation to the Robinson Superior Treaty, and in fact may have qualified them particularly in communicating with the Treaty Commissioners as they were used to communicating with the newcomers.¹⁰⁰ That much of the negotiations stumbled over an impasse concerning the HBC seems to indicate that this troubled relationship with the HBC did not prevent the Chiefs from attempting to get the best deal possible.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ J.R. Miller, *Compact, Contract, Covenant: Aboriginal Treaty-Making in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Ray, Miller, & Tough; Morris.

⁹⁷ Ray, Miller & Tough, 223-224.

⁹⁸ Cowie, 275.

⁹⁹ John L. Tobias, ‘Mīmīy (Gabriel Coté, Mee-may, Pigeon),’ *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, accessed at http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mimiy_11E.html 12 August 2015.

¹⁰⁰ Lise C. Hansen, “Chiefs and Principal Men: A Question of Leadership in Treaty Negotiations,” *Anthropologica* XXIX (1987), 57.

The words of the Treaty Commissioner, Lt.-Gov. Alexander Morris, seem articulate and well reported in the account of negotiations, but the words of the Cree and Saulteaux leaders were translated and their meaning has thus to be pondered, at times. It is clear that the supposed ownership of the land and subsequent sale of it to the Dominion of Canada by the HBC was unpalatable to the Indians. Ray, Miller, and Tough describe the impasse, which prevented talk of the actual treaty for days.¹⁰¹ Clearly the Chiefs wanted compensation for that land deal, the results manifest in the reserve set aside for the HBC where the talks began until the Chiefs were able to move to the side. Morris seemed to feign misunderstanding of their concerns, but eventually and skilfully managed to quash them and promised that the Queen, while owning the land, was prepared to provide the economic security so vital to them.

Chief Loud Voice was vocal during the talks, as was the Gambler and, towards the last day, Kanocees and George Gordon, although his Cree name is used and misspelled. Gordon, perhaps observing the impasse and Morris's pressure, was quoted: "Ka-ha-oo-kus-ka-too (he who walks on four claws) – it is very good to meet together on a fine day, father. When my father used to bring me anything I used to go and meet him, and when my father had given it to me I gave it to my mother to cook it. When we come to join together one half at least will come."¹⁰² Sadly, the interpretations of the Indians' speeches are short and lacking. It seems Gordon was encouraging a compromise or suggesting that it appeared compromise was only going to be reached by one side, the Indians, giving in. Interestingly, though, he is apparently appealing to the Commissioner with a kinship obligation, as has been explained by Jean Friesen and others.¹⁰³ Later, as the Chiefs and spokesmen made known their wishes and Morris refused each one, Gordon again speaks: "Whenever you give to these my children what they desire, then you will get what you want."¹⁰⁴ Here, he appears to be standing firm. However, later that day, according to the record, the assembled Chiefs assented to the terms offered. According to the Morris account of negotiations, "The Chiefs then signed the treaty, after having been assured that they would never be made ashamed of what they then did." The Governor was reportedly satisfied.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Ray, Miller & Tough, 108-110.

¹⁰² Morris, 116.

¹⁰³ Jean Friesen, 'Magnificent Gifts: The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of the Northwest 1869-76,' *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, series 5, Vol. 1 (1986), 44.

¹⁰⁴ Morris, 118.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

The methods used by Alexander Morris were shrewd and calculating. He frequently made veiled threats such as, “I am sorry for you; I am afraid you have been listening to bad voices who have not the interests of the Indians at heart. If because of these things you will not speak to us we will go away with hearts sorry for you and for your children, who thus throw back in our faces the hand of the Queen that she has held out to you.”¹⁰⁶ And, “you will make a mistake if you send us away with a wall between us, when there should be none.”¹⁰⁷ And further,

I am weary hearing about the country. ... I have told you before and tell you again that the Queen cannot and will not undo what she has done. ... We might talk here all year and I could not give you any other answer, and I put it to you now face to face – speak to me about your message, don’t put it aside, if you do the responsibility will rest upon your nation, and during the winter that is coming, many a poor woman and child will be saying, how was it that our councillors and our braves shut their ears to the mouth of the Queen’s messengers and refused to tell them their words.¹⁰⁸

This is a blatant attempt to appeal to or possibly insult their manhood and their abilities as wise providers for their families. Morris also brought up more immediate concerns for their wives:

There are Indians who live here, they have their wives and children around them. It is good for them to be here, and have plenty to eat, but they ought to think of their brothers; they ought to think that there are men here who have come from a distance, from Fort Pelly and beyond, whose wives and children are not here to eat, and they want to be at home with them. It is time now that we began to understand each other.¹⁰⁹

His words verged on insulting and cleverly manipulated the Chiefs into capitulating. Among those who signed that day were all four Chiefs of the bands who presently have reserves in the Touchwood Hills.

That George Gordon might have wished to hold out is reflected in the interview with Peter Cyre conducted by Mervin Dressyman at Gordon’s Reserve in 1977. He said the Chief, “Kanawcusquatau” and “Keyscawpeyas,¹¹⁰ was the name of the policeman,” [by which must mean head soldier or warrior chief, okihcitaw okimāw] attended the Treaty ceremony. Chief

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 100.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 101.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 105.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 108.

¹¹⁰ Perhaps this is Keesepeeas referred to above in the census, who incidentally appears also to be the father of Charles Pratt’s second wife.

Gordon doubted the Queen could provide what was being promised, and in fact, Kanoocces pressed the Commissioner on that very point. In the end, Cyre said, one man accepted and that was the end of it. This man got up, and “‘Me,’ he said doing this, ‘I kiss the Queen.’ That was it. Everybody, even though all the elders got up, they couldn’t do anything. You see, only one gave all this land. His name was Punuchuse.” Cyre went on, “And so they all got up for the ceremony to begin. Oh no, no, this fellow already gave everything away. One, it was only one person that gave our land away. ... This one person ruined it. ... [Our Chief] didn’t give it up. He didn’t give it up, we were cheated.”¹¹¹ Dressyman’s notes on this interview suggest that the interview needed further work in the translation and transcription, but it seems quite clear that Cyre believed the treaty was not fairly negotiated. Furthermore, he relates that he got his information from his father who spoke English and understood everything that was said.

Achieving consent with the Chiefs present while many others were absent, raises the question of the validity of the Treaty. Rev. Reader, in his letter to Alexander Morris in May of 1875 stated, “your Excellency is no doubt aware of the fact that the Indians at the Treaty made at the Lakes of Qu’Appelle last fall, were *but a sprinkling* of the two Tribes which they represented.”¹¹² Indian Commissioner W.J. Christie’s account of meeting the Indians to pay annuities in October 1875 gives evidence that many of the people did not feel represented in the Treaty signing of 1874. On arriving at Qu’Appelle Valley, he twice had to send back for more money to pay the annuities as there were many more people present than anticipated. When he met with them, they wished a day or two delay in which to meet together before speaking with Christie.

They accordingly met us on the 4th, and made several demands, one of which was that the annuities be increased to twelve dollars per head. We replied that the treaty concluded last year was a covenant between them and the Government, and it was impossible to comply with their demands;...An idea seemed prevalent among the Indians who were absent last year that no treaty had been concluded then; that all which had been done at that time was merely preliminary to the making of the treaty in reality, which they thought was to be performed this year.¹¹³

A lot of talking and explaining was done and two days later, they met again with the Indians making the same representations only to be told, “that if they declined to accept the terms of the

¹¹¹ Cyre interview with Dressyman.

¹¹² LAC, RG 10, vol. 3622, file 4945, Reader to Alexander Morris, 17 May 1875, emphasis added.

¹¹³ W.J. Christie & M.G. Dickieson to Secretary of State for the Provinces, 7 October 1875, in Morris, 85-86.

treaty we must return and report to the Government that they had broken the promise made last year.”¹¹⁴ Interestingly, Treaty 4 is one where the pipe ceremony was conspicuously absent.¹¹⁵ Six more Chiefs adhered to Treaty 4 at this time although it already was apparent that the terms were insufficient.

Perhaps they indeed believed no Treaty had yet been signed, or perhaps they believed that the relationship with the Queen was open to continued negotiation and improvement for the benefit of her “red children” in the spirit of providing economic security and ability to make a living.¹¹⁶ Christie did not provide names in this letter, but in 1881 on the occasion of Governor General Lord Lorne’s visit, Kan-o-ceeds was again prominent in representing the concerns with the Treaty, as was Day Bird, a Headman of George Gordon’s band. Both wished to see a “reformation” of the Treaty and in listing the necessary changes or improvements, Headman Day Bird stated “If you do this it is the only way I see that I can live.”¹¹⁷

Searching the internet using the French term for Touchwood Hills, *la montagne des tondre*, I came across a drawing previously unknown to us at Gordon’s of Day Bird (presumably on the left in Figure 2.2) held at the St. Boniface Historical Society.¹¹⁸ The other man, identified as “Depit” could be David Anderson, another headman in George Gordon’s band, listed immediately after Day Bird in the 1875 Treaty pay list. The drawing, by Henri Julien, was done in 1874 while accompanying Colonel G. A. French of the North-West Mounted Police on a trip to the Rocky Mountains.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Morris, 97; Miller, *Compact*, 171; Ray, Miller & Tough, 107.

¹¹⁶ Friesen, “Magnificent Gifts,” 49; see also Rob Innes, “‘I do not keep the lands nor do I give them away’: Did Canada and Plains Cree Come to a Meeting of the Minds in the Negotiations of Treaty Four and Six?” *Journal of Indigenous Thought* 2.2 (1999).

¹¹⁷ Cited in Ray, Miller & Tough, 188. Written here as “Cannosis [Kanasis?],” it must be none other than Kanocees, Kawacatoose’s prominent spokesman and brother.

¹¹⁸ Centre du patrimoine (CP). Archives of the Société historique de Saint-Boniface. Aquarelle d’Henri Julien, 0053/G268/15. <http://shsb.mb.ca/en/node/2117> accessed on August 25, 2015. Through correspondence with Archivist Julie Reid, I learned that the banner at the bottom of the drawing reads: “Type sauteurs : Kijikawpinès (l’oiseau du jour) et Depit (David), sauvages païens Sautoux de la Montagne Tondre (Assa.), diocèse de Saint-Boniface.” Loosely translated, this is: “Saulteaux persons: Kijikawpinès (bird of the day) and Depit (David), pagan Saulteaux savages from Montagne de Tondre (Assiniboia.), diocese of St. Boniface.”

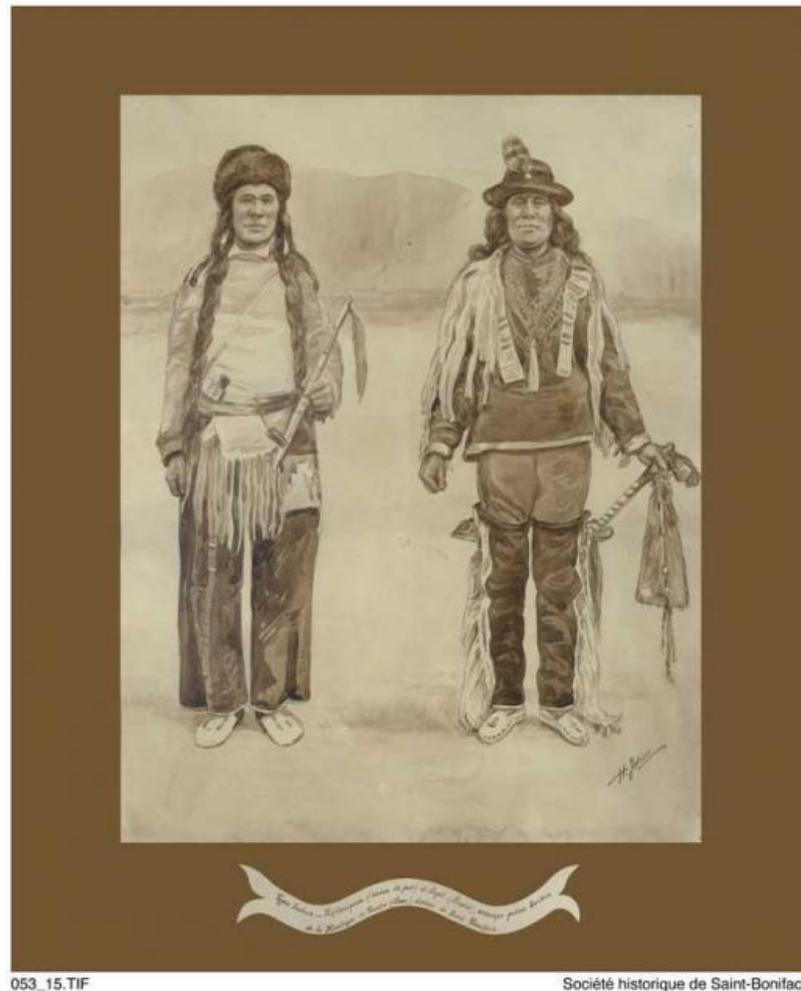


Figure 2.2 Daybird and Depit, 1874 drawing by Henri Julien.

Settling on the Reserve

After Christie's long talks with the Chiefs in 1875, it was decided to proceed with the survey of reserves; George Gordon's being the very first. Dominion Land Surveyor William Wagner commenced very soon, perhaps in response to the Reverend Reader's urging, as mentioned above, to begin a survey for forty-one families. As also mentioned earlier, Gordon did not wish to proceed until he had consulted with Kawacatoose, so Wagner was forced to take a break from surveying and during that time Gordon and Kawacatoose may have consulted, because when Wagner resumed, Gordon had no objection. At any rate, the weather prevented Wagner from finishing that year and he did not conclude his survey of Gordon's Reserve until the following year, 1876. Appended to his report on his work in 1875 were two declarations.

One was from a James McNab, as an old settler, asking for his settler's claim to be added to Gordon's reserve although he was remaining out of treaty (he eventually joined). He had been living on what was to be the reserve for sixteen years, was married to a Gordon's band member, and wished to continue to live there, intending to cultivate his claim. The other was that of five other families listed as belonging to Kawacatoose's band but whose relatives and improvements (farms) were on what was now to be Gordon's Reserve. Andrew McNab and John Cochrine signed the document and Thomas and Alexander McNab¹¹⁹ and Francois Cyr were added by Andrew McNab. Two others, Charles McNab and Henry Bear(d), were noted as being expected to return in 1876. It is unclear why the McNabs, Cochrane (Corcoran, Cochrine), and Cyre, Half-breeds, were noted as members of Kawacatoose's band at the outset because they appear to have been more connected with that of George Gordon prior to the Treaty, based on Cowie's observations. Although Half-breeds, they apparently, along with their Chief, belonged to a class of people "whose forefathers were Whites, [but who] follow the customs and habits of the Indians and have always been recognized as such."¹²⁰ They would also likely have been among the Half-breeds that Rev. Reader had recommended be given seed and assistance along with the Indians. The declarants all claimed that they were married in the band, besides having been living on the Little Touchwood Hills. Of course, as noted earlier, Kawacatoose and George Gordon were close partners and perhaps were all part of Kawacatoose's band formerly. Other European names included on the earliest Treaty pay lists of Gordon's band included Anderson, Bourassa, Pratt, Geddes, Horsefall, McDonald, and Sinclair.¹²¹ Wagner had instructions to survey for 41 families, but in the end surveyed for 47. The total acreage when the survey was complete in 1876 was 48 square miles or 30,720 acres, or enough land for 240 people.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Alexander was my great-great grandfather. Based on genealogical research by Clyde King, 2002, the earliest McNab in this line to come to Rupert's Land was John. He came as a surgeon to Ft. Albany in 1779 and filled various other posts with the HBC for at least 30 years. Dr. McNab married a woman of the country, had a son Thomas who married a Saulteaux woman and had a son James. This James was raising his family in Red River but moved them to the Touchwood Hills by 1859. His sons included the other declarants, Andrew, Charles and my great-great grandfather, Alexander. Francois Cyre is listed as a brother-in-law, therefore was probably a son-in-law of James.

¹²⁰ M.G. Dickieson, Report to Minister of the Interior, 7 October 1876. Indian Affairs Annual Report for the Year Ended 30th June, 1876. Accessed at <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item/?id=1876-IAAR-RAAI&op=pdf&app=indianaffairs> on 27 August 2015.

¹²¹ Seymour, Treaty Land Entitlement.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 7. George Gordon First Nation subsequently sued for outstanding Treaty Land Entitlement and it was agreed that there had been a shortfall of land amounting to 8,960 acres. See George Gordon Treaty Land Entitlement Settlement Agreement, 2009.

Besides the inclusion of Half-breeds in the band, another fact worth noting is that many of those listed as original adherents with George Gordon were apparently widows with children. Sixteen out of 46 heads of families drawing annuities were single women, all but one with dependent children, based on tables compiled by Anne Seymour for the Treaty Land Entitlement claim. This is almost one-third. The first-hand accounts of Isaac Cowie help explain why there were so many widows:

Anyhow, in that day, owing to their frequent loss in war and by other causes (seven hundred braves were killed in battle, by murder and by sudden death, in the circle of our acquaintance at Fort Qu'Appelle between 1867 and 1874), the number of females largely exceeded that of males, and had polygamy not been the custom these surplus women would have had no one to hunt for them, and would have perished from starvation.¹²³

And in his discussion about the growing Indian debt of 1872, Cowie wrote, “after the defeat of the Crees by the Blackfeet at Belly River, [in October 1870], I had to write off the outstanding debts, varying from fifty to a hundred dollars, of a score of the best Indians belonging to Touchwood Hills, who were slain on that occasion.”¹²⁴ And so, the widows had somewhere to go as the people gradually settled down on the Touchwood Reserves. Some back and forth movement continued, suggesting a continuity of the relative fluidity of band membership in the pre-reserve days. At the same time, there were likely band members still in far-flung places, such as Fort Walsh, as indicated by the later paylists.¹²⁵

Conclusion

While it is difficult to follow a continuous line of occupancy of our people in the posākanacy, or Touchwood Hills very far back, it is evident that while those beautiful, wooded hills hold a special meaning for the people settled there, they were only part of the vast area of Plains and Woodlands that our people lived and travelled in. The Hills saw a succession of people since the earliest record, from probably Gros Ventres and Mandan, to Assiniboine and Cree, followed by the gradual addition of the mixed-bloods historically called Half-breeds and Saulteaux. Every group found the Hills to be a source of livelihood. Today the Touchwood reserves are grouped closely together, separated by only a few miles, reflecting the fact that the bands situated in the Touchwoods were closely interconnected, especially Kawacatoose's and Gordon's. The sudden enclosure on the small reserves which was meant to provide the security

¹²³ Cowie, 319.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 441.

¹²⁵ Seymour, Treaty Land Entitlement.

of a new, agricultural way of life meant great hardship and difficulties in the beginning, but the people persevered and gradually grew in number. By digging in the Treaty pay lists, the censuses, and early interviews, one can place a number of families' roots in the Hills at an earlier date well before the treaty. Today the population spills off the reserve into nearby towns and cities, and the Reserve itself is expanding in bits and parcels as the original treaty reserve land entitlement is gradually fulfilled.

Chapter 3

Women's Traditional Roles and Work

Introduction

To get a picture of our ancestors' work and women's traditional roles in the pre-reserve days entails drawing from various sources: early Europeans' observations, anthropological work, and oral history combined with "upstreaming" based on the continuity of women's roles down the generations.¹ Prior to reserve settlement, there were at least two distinct phases that might be remarked upon: the hunting and gathering way of life stretching back before and during the fur trade, and then the period of intensive harvest of animals, especially the buffalo, for trade purposes, which went on for a few decades. On the Plains and with the Algonkian peoples, it is widely accepted that men were the main hunters of big game and protectors of the camps and women did mostly everything else. Women hunted or snared small game, gathered foodstuffs, wood, water, and materials, processed the majority of the food and skins, as well as prepared food, clothing, and shelter for their husbands and families. All of this is in addition to producing and caring for the children. These roles observed by early writers have not only carried on into historical times, but accounts of women's work in my own interviews show that some tasks carried on into the lives of present-day living women as will be shown in a later chapter. This chapter will examine what we can about women's roles and work within the changing lifestyle as the economic base changed particularly during the fur trade.

Early observers

Since these accounts depend on the descriptions by early European observers, we do not often get the viewpoint of the women themselves or even the Indigenous point of view. In fact it

¹ Early commentators on women's heavy burden include Henry Kelsey, Alexander Mackenzie, David Thompson, cited in Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg, MB: Watson & Dyer Publishing Ltd., rpt. 1999), 27; and in Katherine Weist, 'Beasts of Burden and Menial Slaves: Nineteenth Century Observations of Northern Plains Indian Women' in Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine, *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983), 29-52, among others; "Upstreaming" by William N. Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse: A Political History of the Iroquois Confederacy* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998).

takes a good deal of careful reading between the lines to get a sense of what life was like. The tone of the early descriptions varies widely. Stereotypes and images of First Nations women, employing caricatures like the princess or the prostitute, arise.² Another important stereotype was the drudge. Some fur traders and explorers saw the division of labour among the First Nations as extremely exploitative of women, to the point where they believed that First Nations men treated women like dogs and beasts of burden, and that women were made to do all of the hard labour while the men just either walked or rode about freely, shooting and killing, or rested. Sylvia Van Kirk states that early fur traders pitied the plight of Indian women because of their own “bourgeois European notions of how women should be treated;” that they were fragile and dependent upon the protection of men.³ Their chivalrous ideas were assaulted by the realities of life in the hunting bands and the hard work the women did. As Van Kirk states, from Kelsey to Mackenzie and Hearne, accounts of women’s lot in life see them treated by their men as beasts of burden, doing all the hard labour and hauling heavy loads, while men were able to walk about unencumbered.⁴ Van Kirk quotes Alexander Mackenzie who wrote that a woman’s life was “an uninterrupted succession of toil and pain ... subject to every kind of domestic drudgery.”⁵

Van Kirk states that a number of these observations were of the Dene and from those accounts, one would get the impression that the life of the Dene women was hardly worth living. The Cree men of the woodlands, in contrast, were said to be much easier on their wives than the Dene were reported to be. This favourable comparison was reported by David Thompson, who apparently remonstrated with the Dene about their women. “Upon reasoning with the Men, on the severe laborious life of the women, and the early deaths it occasioned; and that it was a disgrace to them; and how very different the Nahathaways [Woodland Cree] treated their women; they always intimated, they [women] were an inferior order of mankind, made for the use of the Men; the Nahathaways were a different people from, and they were not guided by,

² Rayna Green, *Women in American Indian Society* Indians of North America series, Frank W. Porter III, Gen. Ed. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1992. ; Sarah Carter, “Categories and Terrains of Exclusion: Constructing the ‘Indian Woman’ in the Early Settlement Era in Western Canada” *Great Plains Quarterly* 13(Summer 1993), 147-161; Weist, “Beasts of Burden”; Janice Acoose, *Iskwewak Kah’ Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak: Neither Indian Princesses Nor Easy Squaws* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1995).

³ Sylvia Van Kirk, “*Many Tender Ties:*” *Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 1980, rpt 1999, Watson & Dwyer Publishing), 26.

⁴ Van Kirk, 26-31.

⁵ W. Kaye Lamb, ed., *The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie* (Cambridge, England: 1970), 135 cited in Van Kirk, 27.

them... .”⁶ If Thompson is correct, there may have been a difference in the way the Dene and Cree regarded the women or perhaps Thompson’s views were limited in the matter. Besides Thompson’s informant here, an Anglican Missionary at York Factory remarked in 1884 that “Many of the [Cree] Indian women expect their husbands to submit in everything.”⁷ Further west, we have both Isaac Cowie’s and Robert Jefferson’s observations of the Plains Cree women’s authority referred to later in this chapter. The gendered division of labour of the hunting and gathering Cree nevertheless meant that the Cree women also had a considerable load of hard labour.

Women’s Roles in the Hunt

For at least several decades before Treaty 4, the original Cree people of the Touchwood Hills area appear to have been buffalo hunters adapted to a plains/parkland environment which allowed them to hunt buffalo both winter and summer. The large herds came in the summer, allowing hunting groups to gather together with sufficient food to enable cooperative hunting and large ceremonies, such as the Sun Dance, the most important of them all. They travelled over large distances, as we have seen, but the Touchwood Hills and wooded areas sheltered the buffalo and the people alike in winter. The Touchwood people frequented both the plains and the park belt.

Hunting buffalo required a great deal of cooperative effort of all members of a band. This type of work has been described for Plains Cree by early observers from Kelsey on, both before and after the horse. Professor Henry Y. Hind, a geologist who explored the area in 1858, wrote about the people’s buffalo-hunting lifestyle. His depiction of a buffalo pound hunt shows that women took an active role; however, one must filter out his lurid, biased language:

In hunting the buffalo they are wild with excitement, but no scene or incident seems to have such a maddening effect upon them as when the buffalo are successfully driven into a pound. ... The herd once in the pound the scene of diabolical butchery and excitement begins; men, woman and children climb on the fence and shoot their arrows or thrust their spears at the bewildered buffalo, with shouts, screams and yells horrible to hear. But when the young men, and even women jump into the arena amidst the dying and the dead, smear themselves with blood, thrust their arms up to the shoulders into the reeking

⁶ J. B. Tyrrell, ed., *David Thompson’s Narrative of his Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812*. Originally Published as Champlain Society Publication XII (New York: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1968), 130, accessed at https://archive.org/stream/davidthompsonsna00thom/davidthompsonsna00thom_djvu.txt on September 6, 2015.

⁷ G.S. Winter cited by Frank Tough, “*As their Natural Resources Fail:*” *Native Peoples and the Economic History of Northern Manitoba, 1870-1930* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1996), 19-20.

bodies of their victims, the savage barbarity of the wild prairie Indian shows itself in its true colours.⁸

How the people could disembowel, skin, and butcher the animals efficiently *without* getting their arms involved and, inevitably, all bloody is not explained. Butchering on such a large scale is bound to be a messy job and a great deal of work. Hind's observation shows that men as well as women did processing when there was a great amount to be done in a short time, before the meat could begin to rot.

Mandelbaum recorded the elder Maskwa who described the building of such a pound and the work that went into it. The clearing of the area of the chute and the pound, thirty to forty feet in diameter, and the construction of the chute fence and the sturdy log and brush walls of the pound, ten to fifteen feet high, with a tree left standing in the middle, was all done by men. According to Mandelbaum, "[a]s *Maskwa* recounted this he commented, 'That was the only time when men really worked.'"⁹ Again, this might be somewhat of an exaggeration, and perhaps we do not know precisely how Maskwa defined "work," but at the same time it probably indicates the bulk of the labour following the hunt fell to women.

The fur-trade demand for animal products was an established fact for many generations by the time we get detailed accounts of the life of the Touchwood people. By the mid-1800s, trading animal products for European goods would have altered the people's lives substantially. Notably, decreasing animal resources and increasing dependency on the trade were hallmarks of this economic activity in the mid-nineteenth century. Before the HBC set up a trading post in the Touchwood Hills in 1849, the people had to haul their products much farther from the Plains to posts -- initially on the Hudson Bay as discussed in Chapter 1, and later to posts on the upper Assiniboine River straight east of the Quill Lakes. The earliest post on the Assiniboine River that they might have frequented was a North West Company post opened in 1791.¹⁰ Various posts operated in that vicinity over the next hundred years. HBC's Fort Pelly operated from 1824 until 1912.¹¹ Fort Ellice to the South of Pelly, on the Qu'Appelle River, from 1831 until

⁸ H.Y. Hind, "Of Some of the Superstitions and Customs Common among the Indians in the Valley of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan" *The Canadian Journal*. New Series. No. XXII. (July, 1859), 253-262.

⁹ David G. Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical, and Comparative Study* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1979), 54.

¹⁰ The post named Riviere Tremblant mapped by Dale Russell and David Meyer, "The History of the Fur Trade ca 1682-post 1821," in Ka-iu Fung, ed., *Atlas of Saskatchewan* (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 1999), 33-35.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

1892, and Fort Qu'Appelle, about fifty miles south of Touchwood, again on the Qu'Appelle River, from 1853 to 1917.¹² Once established in 1849, the Touchwood Post became an important conduit for furs and buffalo products leaving the northern Plains and Parkland belt, as Kawacatoose had indicated (above). According to Arthur Ray, "the Fort Pelly and Egg Lake journals of 1853-4 and the Fort à la Corne journals of 1851-2, 1863-4, and 1864-5 indicate that the Touchwood Hills area was the northernmost point in central Saskatchewan where bison continued to be relatively plentiful in winter after mid-century. By the late 1860s, they were abundant only in the area to the south of the Qu'Appelle River."¹³

Beginning in the 1850s, according to Ray, Fort Ellice began to receive much of its pemmican from the Touchwood Hills. But as the buffalo retreated to the south, the Touchwood Hills post declined in importance, and while Fort Qu'Appelle grew more important in the early 1860s and Last Mountain outpost opened briefly from 1869-72.¹⁴ By this late in the century, the people of the Plains were already alarmed at the decline of the buffalo.¹⁵ The volume of buffalo hides going off the Plains through this single post is therefore remarkable, although it was apparently an important post for this reason. In a file of miscellaneous items dated 1854-1857, the Hudson's Bay Company Archives has a "List of Furs etc. traded at Touchwood Hills from September up to this date – 7 February 1854," which contains:

- 70 Badgers
- 2 Black Bears
- 4 Brown Bears
- 7 large beaver
- 13 small beaver
- 405 Buffalo Robes
- 1 Fisher
- 20 Cross Foxes
- 354 Red Foxes
- 407 Kitt Foxes
- 3 Hares
- 530 Musquash [muskrats]
- 164 skunks
- 4 otters
- 709 wolves

¹² Ibid., 34-5.

¹³ Arthur J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Trappers, Hunters, and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay, 1660-1870*. Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1974 (rpt 1998), 223-24.

¹⁴ Ibid., 224; Dale Russell and David Meyer, "The History of the Fur trade ca 1682-post 1821," 34-35.

¹⁵ John S. Milloy, *The Plains Cree: Trade, Diplomacy and War, 1790-1870* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1988), 105.

3 wolverines

Also not yet paid for 24 Buffalo Robes and 6 Red foxes.

The list was signed and submitted by Thos. Taylor Jr., who was an Apprentice Clerk but apparently in charge at the Touchwood Post at this time.¹⁶

In 1856, two years later, the “Statement of Returns at the Touchwood Hills” taken January 17th but revised on February 1, 1856 was sent by Post Master William McKay to Wm. Christie in charge of the Swan River District. It listed:

1,247 Buffaloe Robes
340 Buffalo D.t [dressed?] Skins Whole, 166 halves
38 Badgers
Beaver – 11 large, 5 small
4 Bears, brown large and 2 brown cubs
3 Bears black large
5 Bears Grizzlie
4 Fishers
254 Foxes, red
14 Foxes, Cross
294 Foxes, Kitts
10 martens
5 minks
131 Musquash
4 otter large
15 moose skins
21 Deer Skins
585 Skunks
102 lbs? Sinews. [Lbs has been scratched out and an illegible word added]
650 lbs Shaganappy [rawhide rope or thong]¹⁷
10 Tents Leather
456 Wolves
1 Swan
And provisions:
6500 lbs fat hard
400 lbs fat soft
6000 lbs Dry meat
2000 lbs Beat [pounded] Meat
500 Tongues Buffaloe

¹⁶ HBCA B 357/z/1 “Touchwood Hills Miscellaneous Items, 1854-57” Reel IM 894 “List of Furs etc. traded at Touchwood Hills from September up to this date – 7 February 1854”; Thomas Taylor Jr., Biographical Sheet, http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical/t/taylor_thomas-jr.pdf , accessed July 2014.

¹⁷ Arok Wolvengrey states the proper Cree spelling is pīsākanāpiy and that the English spelling is based on a shortened pronunciation, possibly a Métis pronunciation, (personal communication, 21 April 2016); Perhaps it derives from the Saukteaux word for the same thing.

A partial list the next year in January 1857 contained many of these same items but also added new products: green [fresh] meat in the form of 40 buffalo cows, and “40 Cabrie or Antelope Skins.”¹⁸ These are large amounts of animal products and the variety is remarkable. This was in the heyday of the Touchwood Hills post, when it was still getting a good supply of the buffalo products from winter hunting and off the Plains. These products, coming through the Touchwood Hills Post and on to Pelly or Ellice and Eastward from there, were most likely brought to it by members of the bands that were settling and would eventually settle in the Hills. Some quantities may have been purchased from others out on the plains by the freemen, the Half-breeds that Cowie lists as connected with the Touchwood Hills in 1868, including my ancestors.

While these are large amounts of game and animal products, it is extremely likely that most if not all of them would have been processed from the kill by women.¹⁹ The level of processing varied as, according to the lists, some of the buffalo hides were dressed (tanned on both sides, possibly). Thousands were apparently made into robes with the hair still on and the inside tanned. The leather tents would have been tanned, but some of the animal hides, including the smaller ones would have been partially tanned or simply scraped or fleshed on the inside, stretched on boards, and dried with the fur on. Much of the buffalo meat was dried – 6,000 pounds in the last year. The amount of fresh meat to make that many pounds of dried meat would be many times that amount. Much of the meat was dried and pounded also, according to the list, for the making of 2,000 pounds of pimīykān (pemmican). This was all women’s work.

Interestingly, David Thompson states that it was the practice that the women were paid for their work in this regard. Dating from the late 18th century, when the Cree dominated the trade with the HBC, Thompson observed, “the Animals of every kind were in abundance. Provisions of all kinds of meat so plentiful, and forced upon the Traders, that all that could be done, was to take a little from each, to give him a little Tobacco, Ammunition to those that had Guns, and Beads, *Awls &c to the Women, for they claim a right to the dried Provisions as the Men do to the Furs.*”²⁰

¹⁸ HBCA, B 357/z/1 “Touchwood Hills Miscellaneous Items, 1854-57” Reel IM 894 “Recapitulation of the Returns at the Touchwood Hills Post,” January 26, 1857.

¹⁹ Cowie’s assertion above, added to the earlier accounts of the division of labour, supports this.

²⁰ J. B. Tyrell, ed., *David Thompson’s Narrative of his Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968). Accessed 23 April 2014 at https://archive.org/stream/davidthompsonsna00thom/davidthompsonsna00thom_djvu.txt, 319. Emphasis added.

Preparing the fat, the hides and furs of all of these animals, and the meat for sale as well as for domestic use to feed and clothe the labourers and their families, all represents an incredible amount of labour-intensive woman-hours. Day in and day out, year after year, the work carried out by the women must have been staggering.

Impact on Women of the Buffalo Trade: Power and Polygyny

This large-scale animal hunting for the trade, which was an established way of life by the mid-nineteenth century, would have affected other aspects of life. Two changes are notable here for their impact on women. One is that the market demand as well as horses and guns added to the men's motivation and ability to kill many animals in a single hunt, which in turn meant greater quantities of meat and hides to be processed quickly. The social institution for carrying that out was marriage, with the gendered division of labour meaning that the men did the killing while the women did most of the processing. While the Algonkian peoples allowed for polygyny before the fur trade, it became a necessity as men were enabled to kill more and needed help to process the increased volume of meat and hides. It was particularly blown out of all proportion with the example of the Blackfoot, where some prolific hunters were reputed to have had many wives during the height of the buffalo hide trade. Certainly, having additional wives was necessary if a man "were to entertain extensively (as a Chief might), or trade often at the posts. [T]he rapid rise of polygyny among the Blackfeet [was observed] as they became closely tied to a market economy."²¹ A man could kill more buffalo than two wives could easily handle. Cowie observed, "the financial standing of a man was measured in those days on the plains by the number of his horses, also in the case of Indians, by the abundance of his wives."²² The roles had remained roughly the same, but fundamental changes in family life had occurred. American Anthropologist Alan M. Klein is one who believes women's status declined with this pressure and he takes a quantitative approach to changes in labour and control over prized goods.²³ As John Milloy summarizes, "participation in the resource commercialization after 1830 caused the first gradations of class to appear in the community. Families became factories ... Marriage became a labour contract... [The] egalitarian character of gender relations was shattered and

²¹ Weist, 43.

²² Cowie, 280.

²³ Alan M. Klein, "The Political-Economy of Gender: 19th Century Plains Indian Case Study," in Patricia Albers & Beatrice Medicine, eds., *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 143-173.

women's role debased by this new relationship with the buffalo herds."²⁴ This view might hold some water among groups further south, as Klein was generalizing about Plains peoples. It may not apply to the Cree in the northern Plains.

HBC man Cowie was a close observer of events at this time and, albeit in somewhat florid language, he provides evidence that women's productive work brought them a measure of power:

these simple Indian women might have appeared mere down-trodden slaves of man, but the able-bodied squaw despised any woman who allowed her men to do any work of the order ordained for women, and if the work so ordained for the Indian woman might be considered by the new women of civilization as shameful, the redskinned wife gloried in the shame. Nevertheless the Indian's wife or wives (the irreducible minimum at that time and place was two, for any respected family) were far from being mute mates. They always had their say in men's affairs, private and public, too, as is the wont of women the whole world o'er. *And they had a right to do so*, for although the man killed the buffalo, it was the woman who prepared its meat and skin for use and trade. So that, with the buffalo hunting Indians, the more wives a hunter had, the wealthier was he.²⁵

This first-hand view supports Shoemaker's contention that women's productive role was a large source of their power in society, at least for the Cree, Assiniboine, and Saulteaux that Cowie wrote about.

Another brief but significant passage, which might go unnoticed and unremarked since it is not credited to any source, is a comment by J.W. Grant MacEwan in his 1971 publication *Portraits of the Plains*. In his biography of Sweetgrass, whom he styles the "First Western Conservationist," MacEwan suggests that Cree women might even have a say in the hunters' activities: "Buffalo tongues were regarded as delicacies and there was the ever-present temptation to slaughter ruthlessly for the sake of these choice morsels but Cree women – showing the good sense typical of their sex – protested when the number of tongues brought in by the hunters represented more carcass meat than could be saved or utilized."²⁶ It would be interesting to find out where he got this idea from and if it was prevalent among the Cree themselves when MacEwan was in Saskatchewan. It would suggest that women's authority may

²⁴ Klein; and O. Lewis, *The Effects of White Contact upon Blackfoot Culture with Special Reference to the Role of the Fur Trade* (New York: J.J. Augustin, 1942) as cited in John Milloy, "'Our Country': The Significance of the Buffalo Resource for a Plains Cree Sense of Territory," in Kerry Abel and Jean Friesen, eds., *Aboriginal Resource Use in Canada: Historical and Legal Aspects* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1991), 65.

²⁵ Cowie, 318-319. Emphasis added.

²⁶ J.W. Grant MacEwan, *Portraits from the Plains* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1971), 159-60.

have extended even into what is considered men's domain, hunting, or at least that they had the right to protest men's hunting activities.

Another observer, Robert Jefferson, was married to a Cree woman from Red Pheasant's band and reputedly lived "Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan." He commented on polygamy as sometimes fraught with difficulty but that it was necessary: "This difficulty, however, in no way deterred any whose horses were numerous and good buffalo runners, from taking a plurality of wives. The more horses, the more robes; the more robes, the more help required to tan them, and so on. If the women quarreled, each was given a tent of her own;... Numbers of men had two wives; some, even three or four."²⁷ Further, Jefferson weighs in on the subject of women's authority as well as the stereotype of the squaw drudge:

The woman, in her own sphere, is absolute; the man would never think of interfering with her disposition of anything round the tent, except his own peculiar possessions. Nor does the woman seem to work any harder than her white sister; indeed, the relative positions of the woman and the man are not nearly so widely different as is generally supposed. Nominally, the wife is subject to her husband; practically she stands no more in awe of him than do the wives of the white race and, not infrequently, 'bosses him around'.²⁸

The other aspect of polygamy already mentioned was that a shortage of potential husbands was created when battles with enemies on the Plains increased in frequency as the buffalo resource declined. As Milloy described, the shrinking buffalo herds drew enemies closer and closer together in the region of the Cypress Hills, between 1850 and 1870, to continue to find buffalo. This is when the Cree, Assiniboine, and Saulteaux, the "Iron Alliance," moved towards the Cypress Hills.²⁹ Cowie has been quoted above on the necessity of women to have husbands or perish. A few decades earlier, David Thompson also recognized the necessity among the Cree: "Polygamy is allowed, and each may have as many wives as he can maintain, but few indulge themselves in this liberty, yet some have even three; this is seldom a matter of choice, it is frequently from the death of a friend who has left his wife, sister, or daughter to him, for every woman must have a husband."³⁰ It appears, as conventional wisdom holds, that the responsibility for more wives was something only the most successful hunters would bear.

²⁷ Robert Jefferson, *Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan*. (Battleford, SK: Canadian North-West Historical Society Publications. Vol 1, no. v. 1929), 70.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Milloy, 99; see Rob Innes, *Elder Brother and the Law of the People: Contemporary Kinship and Cowessess First Nation* (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 2013), 60-64.

³⁰ Tyrell, 93.

The followers of George Gordon were mainly monogamous at the time of treaty. Only one man was listed on the 1875 treaty pay list as having more than one wife: the headman Day Bird, who had two.³¹ The number of women listed with dependants in that year reflects what Cowie had observed about the recent increase of widows due to the 1869 battle with the Blackfoot. There were seventeen women listed without a male on the first pay lists and only two of them did not have dependants. Those two were probably older widows. Only one man was listed as being single. Possibly other men, both single and perhaps husbands of these women, were still away hoping for successful hunting.

Half-breeds

By mid-century, the supply of buffalo was beginning to dwindle and both Half-breeds and Indians had to look for other means of making a living. Some of the people had already settled and were farming at Touchwood Hills in the mid-1850s, as mentioned earlier. The “Magpie” band had been reported by Edward Denig to be settled and farming here, but as Reverend Joseph Reader pointed out when he arrived in 1875, those efforts had been suspended for the time being. Cowie’s narration in 1868 saw George Gordon, the McNabs, Sinclair, LaPierre, and Josiah Pratt from Touchwood Hills being out on the Plains in the vicinity of Cypress Hills and the Great Sand Hills waiting on the trade in buffalo hides. This reveals what at least some of them were doing in the interim.³² No mention of the women connected with these men is made by Cowie, but he does discuss other Half-breed families in the Qu’Appelle Valley.

According to him, by the 1870s, other forms of making a living were developing. These included farming, gardening, freighting, and trading, in addition to hunting and processing the buffalo for the trade. In 1873, Isaac Cowie estimated the average income of the people, through the HBC trade, in the Qu’Appelle area and we must consider that it may have been similar to the Touchwood people:

As to the condition of the Indians and Metis who are customers of the Company at Qu’Appelle, it is estimated that on an average each Indian family owns three horses and each Metis five, and, besides their food and much of their clothing, obtained from the buffalo, they barter for other supplies with the Company and the traders yearly about \$250 per family. The Indians make less in the summer and more in the winter than the

³¹ George Gordon’s Band Treaty pay lists for 1874 and 1875, FSIN, Specific Claims Office Collection.

³² Cowie, 336.

Metis, because the Metis are better equipped for the summer hunt, but do not continue constantly after the buffalo during winter as the Indians do.³³

This distinction between the Métis and the Indians here suggests that the Métis could afford to take some time off in the winter and were better off. The Indians, on the other hand, were forced to continue to hunt year-round. Would this be because the Métis were in the habit of travelling in large numbers with many Red River carts able to haul larger quantities of product? Or perhaps it relates to the relative wealth with which to furnish the hunting outfit in the first place, thereby avoiding too much debt and being able to put by a store for the winter. Whatever the cause of it, this difference must have meant that the women married to the Métis would have had a reduced workload compared to the Indians' wives.

Greater food security and a better standard of living was probably enjoyed by the Métis. Van Kirk has certainly suggested that this might have been a motivating factor in Indian women choosing to marry fur traders and take up life at the posts in the first place. She states that the mixed-blood "daughters of the country" were less hardy than their Indian mothers but still more suited to the life in the West than White women:

This child of the fur trade was a symbol of the fusion of European and Indian cultures; she knew no other way of life than that of the Indian country. If she was not as hardy as her Indian mother, the mixed-blood woman was still much better able to cope with the not inconsiderable rigours of life at a fur-trade post than a white woman would have been. Even in the late fur-trade period, it required considerable fortitude to be a trader's wife: ...From their Indian mothers, mixed-blood girls learned and in turn passed on those native skills so necessary to the functioning of the fur trade: making moccasins, netting snowshoes and preparing pemmican.³⁴

The Métis in the Qu'Appelle area were descended from the fur trade and many continued to be involved in it. They were not the same as the Half-breeds who were members of George Gordon's Band, however, the latter being considered "Indians" and allowed to join treaty. It seems likely that the Gordon's Half-breeds were connected to the Bungi-speaking communities around Red River. Remnants of the language, described as "an English Creole spoken by Metis of Scots/Orkney and Cree and Ojibway heritage," were still spoken when I grew up at

³³ Cowie, 483. Note he calls them Metis and not Halfbreeds which may speak to a distinction similar perhaps to that described by Dickieson in the next two pages.

³⁴ Van Kirk, 102.

Gordon's.³⁵ "Its base is English, but [the dialect] has a large Scots-English, Scots-Gaelic, French and Cree and Saulteaux (10% of the words) vocabulary [and] often uses Cree syntax."³⁶ As will be shown, the Indian Agents and Farm Instructors frequently distinguished between the Indians and Half-breeds on Gordon's reserve and there was apparently some material difference between them. The distinction may well have been maintained by the government officials but it must have derived from actual perceived differences. Treaty Commissioner Alexander Morris made this observation: "The Half-breeds in the territories are of three classes – 1st, those who, as at St. Laurent, near Prince Albert, the Qu'Appelle Lakes and Edmonton, have their farms and homes; 2nd, those who are entirely identified with the Indians, living with them, and speaking their language; 3rd, those who do not farm, but live after the habits of the Indians, by the pursuit of the buffalo and the chase."³⁷ Morris was concerned about what would become of this latter class now that the buffalo was gone, and recommended they be brought into treaty and assisted to "enter upon agricultural operations."³⁸

In 1876, the Assistant Indian Commissioner, M.G. Dickieson wrote to the Minister a report on his travels in the Treaty 4 area and included a discussion of the Half-breeds.³⁹ In it, he divided the Half-breeds into four classes based on whether they were more like Indians or more like Whites. This whole discussion occurred because some Half-breeds had approached him wanting to form their own band and enter treaty. When that failed, they wished to join bands already in existence, but they were refused that option also. Dickieson wrote: "The question as to who is or who is not an Indian is a difficult one to decide, many whose forefathers were Whites, follow the customs and habits of the Indians and have always been recognized as such. The Chiefs, Côte, George Gordon and others, and likewise a large proportion of their Bands, belonging to this class."⁴⁰ These Half-breeds, he explained, are on the other end of the spectrum from those who "have followed the habits of the Whites and have never been recognized, or accounted themselves as anything but Half-breeds," with at least two gradations in between these

³⁵ Bungi or Bungee derives from the Saulteaux word "panki," meaning a little bit or part of something. Frank Walters has left a considerable collection of audio tapes which can be heard at www.metismuseum.ca.

³⁶ "Bungee Collection," Accessed at www.metismuseum.ca, 7 June 2016.

³⁷ Morris, 294.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 295.

³⁹ M. G. Dickieson Report to the Honourable Minister of the Interior, 7 October, 1876, LAC, Canada *Sessional Papers*, Special Appendix C, accessed 30 August 2015 at <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/aboriginal-heritage/first-nations/indian-affairs-annual-reports/Pages/introduction.aspx>.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

two opposites.⁴¹ As a group, people with known mixed ancestry fell into four categories ranging from living like the Indians to living like the Whites. The Half-breed people of Gordon's, including the Chief, apparently lived a life indistinguishable from the Indians, according to Dickieson. And yet, for decades afterward, Indian Agents and Farm Instructors working at Gordon's noted distinctions between the Indians and Half-breeds and their lifestyles. As late as 1934, Mandelbaum remarked that Gordon band member "Francis Cyr, [was] a halfbreed who is nevertheless a treaty Indian and has lived like an Indian for a good many years."⁴²

Conclusion

This chapter has examined a few factors affecting women, their work, and their relative social power during a specific period characterized by intensive buffalo-hunting and trading. It is the period which saw the people lose their independence and come to rely more on the Hudson's Bay Company, leading up to the treaty time. Women's work during the pedestrian hunter-gatherer days has been illustrated by the detailed lists of the fur packet sent off the Plains by the HBC post at Touchwood Hills. Eye witness accounts of the time intertwine women's status vis-à-vis men with polygamy, all affected by the economic situation. The debate about the relative position of women continues but some evidence suggests Cree women had a great deal of power in their families and that this derived from their productive role.

The transition from the buffalo-hunting/trading life to settlement on the reserve did not happen overnight even though Gordon's was the first reserve surveyed in the Treaty 4 territory, in 1875-6, and the first to be given seed and implement under the terms of the Treaty. Adaptation to the new way of life may have been easier for the Half-breed families than for the Indians in the band, as some of the former were already farming, a skill they may have picked up from their earlier connection to Red River. It still took years before the full membership settled as some people remained away in various parts of the traditional homeland before returning to Touchwood Hills.⁴³ Perhaps they knew what difficulties awaited them there in taking up agriculture as a new economic base. Once they did settle, what ensued was a period of great hardship and privation.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Mandelbaum, Touchwood # 1.

⁴³ Seymour, Treaty Land Entitlement.

Chapter 4

Making a Living on Reserve – The First Twenty-Five Years

Introduction

The early years on reserve are difficult to fathom by present-day descendants. The hardships our grandmothers must have faced when the game was decimated and hunters would come up empty-handed, when their tents and clothing wore out and there were no skins with which to replace them, when they had to live in small, dark houses without enough food or clothing to go around are hard to imagine. The people were placed in the position of having to settle on the reserves and hope the government would follow through on the promises made under treaty. The economic conditions of the people of Gordon's reserve, Touchwood Hills, and the Northwest Territories in general have been discussed by historians to some extent. Studying the archival sources, RG10 correspondence and Indian Affairs Annual Reports, these authors lay a foundation for a closer look at specific agencies, reserves, or individuals to fill out the picture. Sarah Carter examines the early policy environment in relation to farming in Treaty 4 in *Lost Harvests*.¹ She pays attention to women's work and digs up much pertinent information. J. R. Miller presents important articles on this time period in *Sweet Promises* showing how things developed and led up to the events of 1885. Helen Buckley's *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare*, Carl Beal's detailed analysis of "Money, Markets and Economic Development," and James Daschuk's *Clearing the Plains* all shed light on the hurdles the First Nations were facing as they struggled to make the transition.² From the first indication that the promises of the treaty were being subverted in order to effect the removal and subjugation of the First Nations, through the early decades of the reserve life, the people of Gordon's worked hard and saw their economic

¹ Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990).

² J.R. Miller, Ed., *Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian-White Relations in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); Helen Buckley, *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare: Why Indian Policy Failed in the Prairie Provinces* (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 1992); Carl Beal, "Money, Markets and Economic Development in Saskatchewan Indian Reserve Communities, 1870-1930s," PhD Dissertation (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba, 1994); James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (Regina, SK: University of Regina Press, 2013).

fortunes gradually improve. The economic history of the band and women's contributions while living under policy efforts to assimilate the people and "restructure the domestic sphere," are explored in this chapter.³ Some types of work began in the nineteenth century and carried on into the twentieth and even into the twenty-first, in some cases.

The First Years

The demise of the buffalo meant a collapse of the people's economy based on the buffalo and fur trade, and led to a shaky situation until their small gardens and farms began to produce. The treaty was meant to provide the tools and means to make the transition, but the government was not prepared to provide all that was required in a timely manner. As Daschuk stated, "the sudden collapse of bison herds and the immediacy of the ensuing famine caught the dominion government off guard. It was ill prepared to deal with the situation on the ground."⁴ This meant delays in supplying the necessary goods.

When Gordon's reserve was surveyed, a few people had homes already built and some land ploughed, as mentioned in Chapter 2. These were mainly Charles Pratt, George Gordon and the Half-breed families of the "declearents" mentioned above. Forty-one families settled initially, and gradually, more people returned to the band from other areas, probably the south and Fort Walsh area. Most had to start from scratch, building homes and breaking land. With the government slow to provide assistance, getting started was difficult. Carter explained that during the first four years after treaty the government was reluctant to provide cattle to the people who had no hay or implements and who were starving.⁵ In 1876, Gordon's and Pasqua's bands were the first bands in Treaty 4 -- so the first in the NWT -- to receive treaty implements and seed.⁶ Others had to wait and were unable to build houses or cultivate the ground without animals to haul timber and pull ploughs, or to harvest hay without implements. Carter wrote: "Conditions were grim by 1878: distress, suffering, and death were the lot of the starving Indians. Applications for relief were made constantly to government officials, the North-West Mounted Police, and the Hudson's Bay Company. In March 1878 Charles Pratt reported that there was not a morsel of food in the Touchwood Hills, and all were starving."⁷ Furthermore,

³ Pamela White, "Restructuring the Domestic Sphere – Prairie Indian Women on Reserves: Image, Ideology and State Policy 1880-1930." PhD Dissertation (McGill University, 1987).

⁴ Daschuk, xx.

⁵ Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 65.

⁶ Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 65.

⁷ Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 71.

there was no ammunition and a shortage of game. There were many reports of destitute Indians in the prairies; of people having to eat their dogs, mice, or subsist on scraps of hide.⁸ Reports of starvation were received from many parts of the North-west, including the Touchwood Hills. People starved to death.⁹

In 1879, Edgar Dewdney, the new Indian Commissioner in the NWT oversaw the agriculture policy and the issuance of rations to relieve the suffering. He quickly realized the potential of using the rations as a tool to control the people and adopted a policy of “no work, no rations,” combined with efforts to cut back spending in the Northwest Territories. The reserve people were expected to work for any food assistance given them, even without proper clothing and food in their stomachs. “Strict instructions have been given to the agents to require labor from able-bodied Indians for any supplies given them. This principle was laid down for the sake of the moral effect that it would have upon the Indians in showing them that they must give something in return for what they receive, and also for the purpose of preventing them from hereafter expecting gratuitous assistance from the Government.”¹⁰ This was no doubt seen by the people as a terrific betrayal so soon after the “sweet promises” of the treaty and led to greater hardships and inevitably, sporadic violent confrontations over the next few years.¹¹

Farm instructors were appointed and the first reports about Gordon’s Reserve in the Indian Affairs documents are from the Farm Instructor, John Scott, whose early experiences in setting up the farm, implementing the government’s frugal policy on the impoverished people, and learning of the Indians’ view of their entitlements are well described by Sarah Carter in *Lost Harvests*.¹² He began his term late in the summer of 1879 and lasted for two years, becoming increasingly disillusioned, never having enough resources to work with. His first report in 1879 was concerned with potatoes and hay.¹³ In 1880, Treaty 4 Agent McDonald reported that “a good deal of distress existed last winter, at [“Touchwood Hill Reserve” – which reserve was not specified] ... owing to the men going to the plains, and leaving their women and children here;

⁸ Report of L. Vankoughnet, Deputy Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs to J.A. MacDonald, Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, 31 December 1879, Indian Affairs Annual Reports, 12, accessed 25 April 2016, <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item/?id=1879-IAAR-RAAI&op=pdf&app=indianaffairs>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ J.R. Miller, “The Northwest Rebellion of 1885,” in *Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian-White Relations in Canada* ed. J.R. Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991): 246.

¹² Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 86-89.

¹³ J. Scott to Department of Interior, 1 October 1879, LAC, RG10, vol. 3699, file 16,431.

from those who could work some return was got for the provisions supplied them.”¹⁴ He pointed out that winter fishing was not done due to the severe winter and lack of proper clothing, but nonetheless, “very little was given to the Indians without getting something in return, either on the reserves or on the agency farms.”¹⁵ Flour, pemmican, and potatoes were distributed at seeding time, the timing calculated to enable the seeding to take place and forestall anyone from having to leave the reserve to hunt for food.

The image in Figure 4.1 was drawn in 1881 by Sydney Prior Hall, a portraitist/illustrator who accompanied the Marquis of Lorne, the Queen’s Governor General on his western tour. The sketch might depict some of those in the Touchwood Hills who were required to work for rations.



Figure 4.1 Touchwood Hills Farm – Candidates for Honours

It is titled “Candidates for Honours in the government agricultural school, Touchwood Hills, August 20, 1881.”¹⁶ The meaning of the caption or title of the drawing is unclear, but given the

¹⁴ A. McDonald to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 30 September 1880, Indian Affairs Annual Reports.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Sydney Prior Hall, “Candidates for Honours...” 20 August 1881. LAC, Acc. No. 1984-45-146, accessed 20 January 2014. The individuals are identified on another page of smaller sketches by the artist as being, left to right: Going Around, Red Eagle, and Massan.

tone adopted by some of the officials around this time, it could be a tongue-in-cheek remark making light of the difficulties the men had taking up farming. These men are named on another sketch, with more detailed depictions of their faces.

Figure 4.2, another of Hall's 1881 drawings, shows a small campsite featuring tipis, Red River carts, and two women carrying their babies and water towards the campsite. These could be any of the people around Touchwood Hills camping in the vicinity of the HBC Post in its last location in 1881.



Figure 4.2 Indian Wigwams or Tepees (as called here) at Little Touchwood H.B.C. Store¹⁷ As the various Agents frequently mention, the people lived “under canvas” in the summer time and therefore kept mobile for part of the year, even after building permanent homes and settling on the reserve. This was a practice that carried on for many years, as my own grandmother, born in 1916, recalls her grandparents doing that probably around 1920. In this image, the stack of branches on the right likely shades a cooking area, the probable destination of the water-carrying women.¹⁸

Early reports from the Indian Agent in charge of Gordon's were not favourable. In the spring of 1882, the Agent McDonald reported that, “from the chief downwards, [Gordon's people] all seem improvident and worthless Indians.”¹⁹ The 1883 Indian Affairs Annual Report

¹⁷ Sydney Prior Hall, “Indian Wigwams or Tepees...” 20 August 1881. LAC, Acc. No. 1984-45-146, accessed 20 January 2014.

¹⁸ Ivan McNab looked at this image and, when asked what he thought the lodge made of branches was, replied it was probably where they were cooking, having seen similar structures in his youth.

¹⁹ Canada *Sessional Papers*, 1883, no. 5, 204.

subsequently described Gordon's people as "a lazy lot, and I am afraid little good can be got out of them. They have had better chances than any of the other bands here, as for years they had the advice and example of Rev. Mr. Reader, Church of England Missionary."²⁰ This short passage indicates that Reader was perceived as a help to the people in getting started, as it appeared from his first letter in 1875. This does not, however, give Charles Pratt his due for the same.

McDonald was the Agent for a large part of Treaty 4 and not actually residing in the Touchwood area. Once the agency buildings were built at nearby Kutawa, the Indian Agent Hilton Keith settled there. Later reports seem to contradict the view that McDonald had of Gordon's people being "improvident," and his remarks may be coloured by disagreements he may have had with the Gordon's people, probably over non-fulfillment of the treaty expectations. Such disagreements were occurring all over the Northwest.

1885

Ultimately, in 1885, tensions erupted and troops were sent out to put down the Indians and Métis in what is known as the "Northwest Rebellion." Thereafter, Dewdney's "sheer compulsion" policy came to fruition whereby the Indians were effectively subjugated on reserves. The pass system was implemented to keep them there.²¹ Control over the First Nations was almost complete.

The events of 1885 did impinge on George Gordon's band but perhaps not in quite the way one might expect. Middleton marched his troops through both Gordon's and Kawacatoose's reserves on their way to Batoche from the end of railway at Troy (now Indian Head). As the soldiers marched through Kawacatoose's reserve, which was right on the trail, the people fled and their homes were vandalized by the teamsters. Both Kawacatoose's and Day Star's people moved to Gordon's reserve at this time.²² They ran the risk of being labeled 'rebel' bands by doing so, but nothing came of it. The settlers of the area were quite uneasy and gathered together at times in case the Indians might rise up, but there were no incidents.²³ Some Gordon's

²⁰ Ibid., 188.

²¹ John L. Tobias, "Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree in *Sweet Promises*, 212-240. See also J.R. Miller's "The Northwest Rebellion of 1885," and A. Blair Stonechild's, "The Indian View of the 1885 Uprising," in the same volume; and Stonechild, A. B. & Waiser, B. *Loyal till Death: Indians and the North-west Rebellion* (Calgary, AB: Fifth House, 1997).

²² Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 128.

²³ Mary Cossar and Marion J. Jeal, compilers, *Tales of the Touchwoods, from 1880-1955*. Celebrate Saskatchewan edition (Regina: Western Printers Association, 1955, rpt 1980), 18, 32; There is some documentation of a letter sent by Riel to the people at Touchwood which was intercepted and confiscated.

members capitalized on the events, however. M. Frank Cyr remarked that one of his grandfather's brothers, Francis Cyr who became a well-respected and influential leader on the reserve, was a riding scout delivering mail for the armed forces. "He took mail from Fort Qu'Appelle from Captain Harrison's farm to Moose Jaw daily and brought the mail back. He had a saddle horse and he had a pack horse and that's where he'd carry his mail. He'd race down and back every day; he was a scout."²⁴ Others from the reserve engaged in freighting for hire, carrying goods and supplies back and forth as the army made its way to Batoche.

Half-breeds, Indians, and Indian Agents

Following the Rebellion, conditions were hard for the reserve people. Rations were still required, but the people were producing what they could and they utilized every opportunity to make a living. Touchwood Indian Agent Hilton Keith's reports from 1886 to 1892 show various preoccupations, some perhaps his, others perhaps responding to directives from higher up. What becomes clear from the officials' reports and correspondence is that there was a shortage of game and an unwillingness or inability to supply rations. Between the lines one can read the band members' expectations regarding treaty and the frustrations with the government agents over the noncompliance with the treaty promises. The distinction between Indians and Half-breeds on the reserve is repeated again and again.

First, Keith wrote in 1886, "I have been sparing with the rations all through but if we expect them to work they must be fed. My returns will show, for the number of souls and the amount of work done, that I have been economical."²⁵ At the same time he wrote about the children attending the school: "the young ones are very ragged, and a drink of water and a biscuit is all they get in the way of a lunch."²⁶ At least he recommended improving that. In 1888, he wrote, "Although most of the Indians have been away hunting, I regret to say, they have had very poor luck. I tell them they are not as good hunters as of old, they claim, the game is not there."²⁷ Nevertheless, he claims the Indians are in a very good state of health. The next summer dry conditions had damaged the crops and the Indians were "very discouraged." In the same letter, he states that the other three Touchwood bands

are behaving very well working, as many as are able, and as long as their rations last, doing all they are told giving no trouble to me, nor to the Farmers in charge, I am sorry I

²⁴ M. Frank Cyr, Interview, 6 August 2013.

²⁵ H. Keith to E. Dewdney, Indian Commissioner, 31 May 1886, LAC, RG10, vol. 3753, file 30664, reel C10133.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ H. Keith to H. Reed, Indian Commissioner, 8 December 1888, LAC, RG10, vol. 3753, file 30664, reel C10133.

can't say the same for Gordons band, as they are continually quarreling and fighting amongst themselves, and the farmer in charge, some of them certainly do work but they have to be driven. They don't go cheerfully about it, there is a bad feeling between the Halfbreeds and Indians of this band all on the Indian's side I feel sure, so much so, that when two or three of the better-to-do Halfbreeds were working hard getting new fields ploughed some unknown person cut their horses and cattle with a knife, or some sharp instrument, crippling them so as to disable them from work; we are quietly watching, trying to find out the guilty party; the general belief is that it is some of Day Birds work not actually doing it himself, but paying some of the young men to do it for him, out of spite of course.²⁸

While the distinction was made by officials from the beginning between the Indians and the Half-breeds on the reserve, with some suggestion that the Half-breeds were ahead in the farming, this is the first hint of any enmity between the two groups that I have come across. Perhaps there was a rift, or perhaps a smaller dispute between families, or perhaps the Agent and Farm Instructor simply blamed Day Bird, one of the Headmen, for reasons of their own.

By the end of November 1889, Keith still had nothing good to report:

I am sorry I cannot report much improvement in the behaviour of many of the members of George Gordon's band; when an order is given, for instance, when sending down the clothing to the farmer, for issue, I tell him, "the young and able people who wish to get relief in this way, must give value in work for the same"; such as cut and draw firewood to school-house and farm-ration-house, lime-kiln, cut rails for fences, a paddock for farmer's horse and cow is required, saw so many boards for use of farmer; the same with the issue of flour and meat, I tell the farmer to set each one so much work each week. If I see an Indian has a poor stable or house, "stop his relief" until he will do as he is told, and build a better one. This is what they complain at, and some of the half-breeds are often very rude and insulting to their farmer, making it very disagreeable for him. I have warned the chief and his people that unless they change, I shall beg of the Department to stop giving them any relief at all. *I am determined to teach these Indians a lesson.* I don't blame the Indians so much, although they give trouble enough; but the half-breeds, who ought to be full of gratitude for the helping hand the Department gives them, are the worst; they don't set the example they should. At the end of next month, I shall send in a separate report on the behaviour of his band, I shall visit the reserve several times. They think that Indians and half-breeds on reserves in other districts get their relief without having to work for it, and why shouldn't they?²⁹

This quote reveals serious disagreements, not between the Half-breeds and Indians, but between the Half-breeds and the Indian Agent, or perhaps it is mainly the Farm Instructor. This

²⁸ H. Keith to H. Reed, Indian Commissioner, 9 July 1889, LAC, RG10, vol. 3753, file 30664, reel C10133.

²⁹ Indian Agent Keith to H. Reed, Indian Commissioner, 30 November 1889, LAC, RG10, vol. 3753, file 30664, reel C10133, emphasis added.

is one of the examples where, reading between the lines, it appears that the Half-breed members are standing up to the Agent over their treaty entitlements, while the Agent takes the view that the government is doing them some sort of favour for which they should be thankful. Further, the Half-breeds are expected to set an example for others, it seems. The reason for this expectation is unclear, but it may have something to do with cultural differences; the ability of the Half-breeds to speak and possibly read and write, a form of English, advancement in farming, and, possibly, a better understanding of the cultural transformation that was expected of them.

Undoubtedly there were some cultural differences between the Indians and Half-breeds on the reserve. Eleanor Brass, from nearby Peepeekisis's band, remarked that in school, the Half-breed children got in trouble more often. "The full-blooded Indian children were more passive and were far easier to handle than we were. This showed a natural inherited trait from their native background. Politeness was one of the main virtues of their forefathers."³⁰ This comment only begins to reveal a huge chasm of misunderstanding between the Crees/Saulteaux and the White men and women entering the country, a chasm which the Half-breeds might have been expected to bridge with more or less success. The Half-breeds did not seem to shrink from demanding that the treaty expectations be fulfilled, which suggests a firm understanding of their rights.

Unfortunately, the Agent held the cards, and while the December report is not in the file, the 17 January 1890 report reveals that he followed through on his threats to teach them a lesson. After giving good reports about the other three bands again, he writes: "I am sorry I cant speak so well of Geo. Gordon's Band, as many of them are lazy and worthless; the fact is they do not agree with the "Farmer" in charge and take no pleasure at all in carrying out his instructions. I have had to be very firm with them, and many of them during the month went hungry I am sure, for their relief was stopped, they always want to go their own way which somehow is never the way which leads to the end that we are looking for."³¹

On 31 May 1890, Agent Keith's report contains some information reflecting his perceptions of Indians and Half-breeds, at the same time complaining that his request had been refused: "I estimated for a sum of money to pay for burning lime, for it cannot be expected that an Indian can do this work (as a kiln requires very careful attention night and day) and I cant

³⁰ Eleanor Brass, *I Walk in Two Worlds* (Calgary, AB: Glenbow Museum, 1987), 26.

³¹ H. Keith to H. Reed, Indian Commissioner, 17 January 1890, LAC, RG10, vol. 3753, file 30664, reel C10133.

[sic] get a treaty halfbreed to work hard night and day without pay, save an issue of relief in way of flour and meat, same as they all get, and then expect him to give the lime to me, as, if he sits up night and day, works hard, burns the lime, surely it is his property.”³² His view seems to be that the Indian will not be responsible enough to maintain the diligence in burning the lime, while the Half-breed needs to be paid – for which he had proposed a sum of \$80, lowering it to \$60. The “lazy Indian” stereotype does not fully develop in this report, as he also emphasized the marked change in the effort the Indians put forth in the spring work of seeding and how the fences erected were as good as, and better than, many white farmers’ fences. In the same report, he criticizes the families of sick people for eating up the food given to them for the sick, extra rations or gifts from the Instructress. As well, he reveals that he is expected to withhold rations to force the attendance of children at school, although he explained that he was too busy to enforce it during the seeding season.

A special mention is made of the Half-breeds in this report:

The Half-breeds of Geo. Gordon’s Reserve have had a splendid chance this spring, the Blacksmith put all their tools and implements in good repair, they were well supplied with seed grain and well fed during seeding. I have taken upon myself the responsibility of telling them that they will have to shift for themselves after this, that they must not look to the Department for supplies, they all have cattle in their own name, have from 10. to 20. acres of crop in, comfortable houses and stables, and I feel that they should now be struck off our roll of relief.³³

Keith doesn’t mention the issue of stopped rations for a few months, but he does explain how they coped: “[the] Indians pitch off under canvas, as my supplies get short, and I am not able to feed them sufficient to keep them at home all the time.”³⁴ They must leave the reserve to go about hunting and fishing. This seems to be accepted by Keith; he only complains that they take their children out of school when they leave on these trips. At the same time it served a health function as the houses were aired: “The Indians have all left their houses now and are under canvas, as a general rule I like to make them whitewash their houses inside and out and let them remain empty all summer.”³⁵ This was reportedly for the suppression of disease, particularly scrofula and consumption.

³² H. Keith to H. Reed, Indian Commissioner, 31 May 1890, LAC, RG10, vol. 3762, files 32,345, 32,356.

³³ H. Keith to H. Reed, Indian Commissioner, 31 May 1890, LAC, RG10, vol. 3762, files 32,345, 32,356.

³⁴ H. Keith to H. Reed, Indian Commissioner, 31 May 1892, LAC, RG10, vol. 3753, file 30664, reel C10133.

³⁵ H. Keith to H. Reed, Indian Commissioner, 31 May 1890, LAC, RG10, vol. 3762, files 32,345, 32,356.

In 1891, the Agency Inspector Wadsworth also mentioned the Half-breeds on Gordon's and the perceived discrepancy in the standard of living between them and the Indians on the reserve. He was pleased with some advances and considered it was the Half-breeds who were the most successful farmers while the rest were not as well off, suffering for want of clothing and blankets. He wrote that the Half-breeds were "fairly successful farmers. Their houses are comfortably furnished, their wives and families are well clothed and their houses tidy and bright."³⁶ The Commissioner pointed out that since some on the reserve could afford to buy buckboards and machinery, they were not suffering. Wadsworth mentioned that although they produced good crops, there was no market nearby, no jobs off the reserve, and almost no fur animals in the area. The Commissioner said they should be sent to Long Lake to go fishing.³⁷ Wadsworth mentions no disputes between Indians and Half-breeds.

In June of 1892, Keith again makes a comment about the Half-breeds in the context of the report on cattle:

one bull is not sufficient for this Reserve, but I am against asking the Department for another as I must say, I think these people, especially the Halfbreeds, should buy one for themselves, they are always buying and selling horses, but no, just so long as they think there is any chance of the Department giving them anything, they will never lift a finger to help themselves, a few birch bark pans have been made and also a fair quantity of Butter it is a very difficult matter to get the Halfbreed people to make and use bark pans as they must prefer tin ones, which they purchase themselves.³⁸

This quote is dripping with sarcasm and resentment. Clearly matters have progressed and there is outright enmity between the Half-breeds of Gordon's and their Indian Agent, to the point where Keith admitted that the band needed more bulls but would not ask for any, hoping to force the Half-breeds to buy their own. This is his last mention of the matter as he was relocated at the end of October 1892.

A difference in the standard of living between the Indian and Half-breed families would have affected the women and the type of work they would have had to do. Keith's comments above indicate that the women were making milk pans and butter, but the Half-breed women could buy milk pans. This would make it unnecessary to go to the trouble of finding the birch bark, cutting it, and fashioning the pans out of it. That is just one example. In my interviews and

³⁶ Inspector Wadsworth and H. Reed, 1891, LAC, RG10, vol. 3845, file 73,406-4-5-7, from FSIN Specific Claims Collection. H. Keith to H. Reed, Indian Commissioner, 31 May 1890, LAC, RG10, vol. 3762, files 32,345, 32,356.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ H. Keith to H. Reed, Indian Commissioner, 30 June 1892, LAC, RG10, vol. 3753, file 30664, reel C10133.

discussions with people on the reserve, however, the distinction between Indians and Half-breeds was downplayed. References were made to the fact that they were all related somehow or another and also that they were all poor. In the sense that they all were subject to the same policies, no doubt the effects of withdrawing rations meant that the people had to help one another that much more and therefore it backfired against the Agent and his efforts to engender what he and the department considered more responsible behaviour. It served to unite them against him. We see this happen again in the case of Anderson's petition later on.

Although Commissioner Hayter Reed seemed to think Gordon's people were well off, during the 1890s a number of setbacks occurred. Early in 1892, the Agent reported that, "Those few Indians immediately around here who made their living by hunting, not having taken to farming, have had to be relieved this Winter, as there is really nothing to hunt, not a sign of a wolf or a fox or any fur producing animal this Winter, there are a few rabbits but they are not plentiful by any means."³⁹ Drought affected the people of the agency and in 1892 fire swept the reserve destroying half the stables, most of the fences, and the hay. At least one close observer saw through the department's glossed-over reports. In 1893, Rev. Leonard Dawson, a Church of England missionary at St. George's in Kutawa, was quoted in several newspapers saying, "I consider that the Indians at Touchwood are being half-starved. I have carefully calculated what they receive, and their rations will feed them three days out of the seven."⁴⁰

In 1894, the only means of earning anything was by "freighting now and again from different points: we are so far away from market that hay and wood, although plentiful, could not be hauled and sold but at a disadvantage. The Indians are by no means lazy where they have a chance of earning a dollar," Agent Finlayson reports.⁴¹ His view of the Indians is much more favourable although not unqualified, and the idea that Indians like to make a quick dollar but will not sustain long labour for a delayed reward seems entrenched by this time. Conditions were not favourable, according to this Agent. In the summer of 1895 dry conditions again led to fires which wiped out the hay crop on Gordon's.⁴² In addition, there was widespread crop failure.

³⁹ H. Keith to H. Reed, Indian Commissioner, 29 February 1892, LAC, RG10, vol. 3753, file 30664, reel C10133.

⁴⁰ Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 232 cites the *Leader*, (6 July 1893) and the *Mail* (11 July 1893).

⁴¹ J. Finlayson to T.M. Daly, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 9 July 1894, Canada *Sessional Papers* (No. 14, 1895), 67-68.

⁴² Indian Agent to T.M. Daly, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 29 July 1895, Canada *Sessional Papers* (No. 14, 1896), 65.

The Indian Agent, John Wright, comments on the fact that the Indians have been building better homes and whitewashing them, but they still take to their tents in the summer or if travelling. In 1896, he states, “as the majority of this band are intelligent treaty half-breeds, they do not require to be compelled to do these things, and they set a good example to the Indians.”⁴³ A difference between the two groups is noted again by this agent, but at least he shows no animosity. Nevertheless, the Half-breeds were expected to be an example of thrift, hard work, and independence and they were cut off assistance from the Department, as noted, in 1900.⁴⁴

The Case of John Brass

As the century drew to a close, a few pieces of correspondence about the Agency interpreter revealed a “scandal,” while at the same time illustrating the importance of women’s work to the wellbeing of the family unit. Touchwood Indian Agent S. Swinford wrote the Indian Commissioner in May 1899 to ask that his interpreter, John Brass, be given a raise in pay after three years of good service at the remuneration rate of fifteen dollars a month. Swinford describes Brass as “a first class man, not only as an Interpreter, but as a mechanic, repairing machinery and implements, carpenter work, caring for stock, etc.” and well worth a raise to twenty-five dollars a month, closer to what other Interpreters in the Territories were earning.⁴⁵ Given the cost of living in the area, Swinford stated, “it will be easily understood that, *unless his wife earned considerable money in doing washing, making up fur, etc., it would be impossible for them to keep out of debt.*”⁴⁶ The request was initially supported by Indian Commissioner David Laird, but rejected in Ottawa on May 31, 1899 for budget reasons.⁴⁷

The attention to Brass’s circumstance had an unintended result, perhaps. Agent Swinford left Touchwood later that year and the new agent, Martineau began his short stint, but during his time there, it came to light that John Brass was living unlawfully as man and wife with a Margaret Anderson from Gordon’s Reserve. Both apparently had another, legal spouse who was still living. It appears from the correspondence that this was a scandal that the department officials wanted no part of, particularly as the Inspector, McKenna, wrote, “It is more than absurd for the government to have a policy for the uplifting of the Indians and to allow an

⁴³ JNO. P. Wright to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 20 July 1896, Canada *Sessional Papers* (#14, 1897), 209.

⁴⁴ H. Martineau to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 20 August 1900, Canada *Sessional Papers*, (1901),

⁴⁵ S. Swinford to D.Laird, Indian Commissioner, 15 May 1899, LAC, RG 10, vol, 3992, file 184,879, reel C-10169.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

⁴⁷ Secretary to D. Laird, 31 May 1899, LAC, RG 10, vol, 3992, file 184,879, reel C-10169.

employ [sic] to live in open adultery with a member of a band.”⁴⁸ It appears that they considered hiring Margaret Anderson as a cook, “but as soon as I found ~~that~~ *what* she was I refused to employ her and had other arrangements made,” McKenna wrote.⁴⁹ This case is notable because of Swinford’s initial comments about Margaret Anderson’s important economic contribution to her household. Then the assimilative agenda is revealed and she is suddenly cast out due to their non-compliance with the marriage laws of the Christian society. As Brass lost his job and Anderson was not hired, they were both punished financially. To add insult to injury, when a new interpreter was hired, he was paid \$25. a month.⁵⁰

New skills for women

The farming instructors, Indian Agents, and their wives were the models of European civilization as well as the instructors in that civilization that the Indians were supposed to follow. As both Sarah Carter and Pamela White point out, Indian women were quick to pick up skills which advantaged them, but less willing to abandon traditional practices which proved adaptive, such as marital arrangements. Among the skills they learned were how to knit, sew, mend, quilt, dress-make, crochet, and card and spin wool; how to make milk pans and butter and cheese, as well as bread; canning of food, the making of hats, baskets, and mats. They also learned to raise poultry, garden, and milk cows; all the duties of a farm housewife.⁵¹ Pamela White points out women were often targeted in the government’s efforts to change the people’s culture. Touchwood Indian Agents sometimes refer to women or to women’s work in their reports. The making of butter was high on Agent Keith’s list, and he describes the number of pounds produced and the various difficulties in getting butter made. One of the drawbacks seems to have been a shortage of milk pans and acquiring birch bark pans.

In 1889, Agent Keith mentions that many of the people are making small quantities of butter and this was to be encouraged the following spring. Owing to the fires in the spring of 1892, the cattle were not well fed and were giving too little milk to enable the women to make much butter, although they were anxious to do so. He wrote that many birch-bark milk pans would be made, as soon as they could get the birch-bark.⁵² A month later, however, he wrote that

⁴⁸ J.A.J. McKenna, Assistant Indian Commissioner and Chief Inspector of Indian Agencies to J.A. Smart, Deputy Superintendent General, 26 June 1900, LAC, RG 10, vol, 3992, file 184,879, reel C-10169.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, strikethrough original, emphasis added.

⁵⁰ Matheson to Secretary, 5 March 1901, LAC, RG 10, vol, 3992, file 184,879, reel C-10169.

⁵¹ White, 133, 139; Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 14, 18-19, 178.

⁵² H. Keith to H. Reed, Indian Commissioner, 30 April 1892, LAC, RG10, vol. 3753, file 30664, reel C10133.

the people are too lazy to make butter, saying that they prefer the cream.⁵³ At Gordon's, Keith says some birch milk pans have been made, but that the Half-breeds prefer to buy tin ones, while in the margin a note apparently by Commissioner Hayter Reed indicates that the policy was to save the department the expense of buying tin milk pans: "I am endeavouring to force the Indians to make birch bark milk pans, which answer admirably and thus relieve the Department of supplying tin pans."⁵⁴ Milk pans are shallow, round pans in which milk is poured, allowed to sit and separate, and then the cream is scraped off the top and churned into butter. By August 1892 Agent Keith had had more success in getting people to make and use the pans.⁵⁵ In September, he wrote the following:

I have been urging the Indians all I can to make butter, and to milk their cows, the Halfbreeds do this, and get a deal of help in this way, but the Indians make very little use of their cows, except in raising calves, they put up plenty of hay, keep their stables warm and feed them well during the Winter, the women are so lazy and do not work now-a-days anything like they had to of old. I have spoken a deal to the "Farmers" on this matter, and I notice by their reports, some little success has been obtained. I only hope they will keep up the present interest they appear to take.⁵⁶

In making butter, he points out, the Half-breeds "get help" by selling or bartering their butter for other goods. The Indians, in contrast, are not doing this and he apparently blames the women for not making butter. It is unclear whether this was because they preferred the cream, as suggested earlier in the year, or they did not place as much value on butter as the Half-breeds did, suggesting a possible cultural preference. Perhaps not having tin pans and having to use birch bark pans, which must have been inferior, was a discouragement. His comment on the work of women suggests that he considers their lives easier in 1892 than they had been previously. That evaluation appears to be a hallmark of change through the generations. Meanwhile, Keith and the department continued to encourage butter-making and butter was one of the items entered into fairs and exhibitions.

Another important skill, entered in fairs and exhibitions and encouraged by the Indian Department, was the making of bread instead of bannock. Pamela White discusses this effort as part and parcel of the assimilative effort. "A signpost of civilization was the replacement of Indian foods with those of European origin," and yeasted bread became the product used to

⁵³ H. Keith to H. Reed, Indian Commissioner, 31 May 1892, LAC, RG10, vol. 3753, file 30664, reel C10133.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ H. Keith to H. Reed, Indian Commissioner, 1 August 1892, LAC, RG10, vol. 3753, file 30664, reel C10133.

⁵⁶ H. Keith to H. Reed, Indian Commissioner, 30 September 1892, LAC, RG10, vol. 3753, file 30664, reel C10133.

compare the Indian women's skill with those of White women.⁵⁷ Among the problems White states the Indian Department had with bannock were: the public perception of bannock as a simple and inferior staple; that bread not bannock was exhibited at fairs; that bannock was a food well adapted to, and supportive of, a mobile way of life; that it was unwholesome; and that it used too much flour.⁵⁸ This latter seems to have been an important point for Commissioner Hayter Reed, who was interested in saving money by reducing the amount of flour rationed to the people. One of the Indian Agents who evidently supported Reed in this endeavour was H. Keith at Touchwood Hills. In 1889, Keith wrote in his Annual Report: "An effort is being made to induce the Indian women to make yeast bread; and a mud oven has been built on Day Star's reserve. They do not like this bread nearly as well as the "bannock," which is in itself very unwholesome. When they see how much further their allowance of flour will go when used in the way we advise, I am sure in time that they will see the advantage of it. Building mud ovens is a cheap and easy process."⁵⁹

The attack on bannock, White says, showed how far the Department would go to change the domestic life of the people; "bannock had to be eradicated."⁶⁰ Of course it never was eradicated, although the women picked up the new bread- and butter-making skills, to everyone's satisfaction. I did not come across evidence that the women of Gordon's sold bread on any scale, but selling surplus butter apparently enabled people to "help themselves" at times. Today, butter is not made or sold, but some women and even men make a bit of money selling bread and buns on reserve. Men who bake bread are not unusual at Gordon's. Both bread and butter were new to the Plains peoples in the nineteenth century but can be said to have been successfully adopted by the people.

Fairs and Exhibitions

Participation in rural and agricultural fairs and exhibitions began especially after 1885, when the government wished to show progress amongst the Indians. The agricultural fairs in the Northwest Territories were well attended by settlers and First Nations people alike. The Indian women "displayed samples of their preserves, bread, butter, knitting, sewing, and weaving, while

⁵⁷ White, 134.

⁵⁸ White, 134-138.

⁵⁹ H. Keith to E. Dewdney, 23 August 1889, *Canada Sessional Papers* No. 12., 55, also cited by White, 137.

⁶⁰ White, 135.

the men exhibited livestock and farm and garden produce.”⁶¹ The Indians had their own separate category at the exhibitions, with individuals from the various reserves competing for prizes for the best produce or livestock. The department contributed grants to the various agricultural societies for the payment of these prizes to Indian exhibitors. According to Carter, “It was widely believed that if the Indians were to compete in the general categories, against all other contenders, they would find the fairs a disheartening, discouraging experience. When the Indians did compete with the white settlers, however, they appear to have taken their fair share of prizes.”⁶²

In 1887, for example, “the Touchwood Indians carried off some dozen prizes at one of the exhibitions held this fall.”⁶³ The following year again, a number of people from the Agency took exhibits to the Agricultural Exhibition in Regina, “in the shape of wheat, barley, oats, peas, potatoes, mats, baskets, moccasins and bead-work, competing against each other; they secured in all eleven prizes, much to their delight and pride.”⁶⁴ Among other things that women from Gordon’s were encouraged to enter were rush mats and hats, bread, and preserves. Results were published in the newspapers.

Eleanor Brass recalled the exhibitions that she, along with other File Hills Colonists, attended:

Agricultural exhibitions were held annually on the adjoining reserve where the colonists competed by exhibiting cattle, horses, grain, roots, and industrial work. The first one was held in 1899 and continued on for a number of years. Entries increased considerably each year as more reserves entered. ...I remember my sister Janet made buns for the fair and won first prize. She must have been only three or four years old at the time. No money prizes were given to the winners, but articles were presented such as clocks, pictures, dishes and other useful articles.⁶⁵

Sarah Carter makes the important point that “the exhibits at the agricultural fairs indicate that, like all farm women, Indian women were partners in the farm enterprise. The division of labour on prairie reserves was much the same as might be found on neighbouring farms.”⁶⁶ White states that the exhibits were less for showing the women’s accomplishments than those of the

⁶¹ Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 175.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ A. McGibbon, Inspector’s Report, Indian Affairs Annual Reports, Canada *Sessional Papers* (No. 14) 1887.

⁶⁴ H. Keith to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 27 August 1888, Indian Affairs Annual Report, 1889, 61.

⁶⁵ Eleanor Brass, *I Walk in Two Worlds* (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1987), 13.

⁶⁶ Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 176.

Indian Department in civilizing their charges.⁶⁷ From the government's point of view this was probably true, but the women did also benefit from the competitions.

For Gordon's people, attending the exhibition was always a treat, and today many elders fondly remember their trips to Regina by horse and wagon, camping along the way, in order to attend. Once reaching the city, they recall that the Indians arriving there would camp in the vicinity of what is today 4th Avenue between Albert and Broad Street, but in those days was outside of the city not far from the nuisance grounds. Those who did not enter exhibit goods in the 'thirties and 'forties, often took along commodities to sell, such as firewood, hay, or berries which were in demand in the city.⁶⁸ Bernadette Blind remembers travelling to Regina from Piapot Reserve where her parents would sell a big load of hay for thirty or forty-five dollars,

and that was a lot of money long ago. You drove all the way from Piapot's - sometimes my mom, my dad. My mom, she used to drive, too. She'd drive one load and then my dad would drive a load of, a hayrack of hay and go south. And they drove, well there were not that many cars on the street so you drove downtown, way downtown! So that's the way we lived, and sometimes you take a load of wood, you know, at that time Regina, some people were still using wood like for wood stoves and that load of wood only brought you five dollars but then you were able to buy a little something out of that. There was no complaints.⁶⁹

Seneca Root

Like these other commodities, one of the roots picked by the people as early as 1894, was winsikis⁷⁰ or mīnisihkēs,⁷¹ popularly known as seneca root in Saskatchewan or snake root in some parts. Almost everyone interviewed in 2013 acknowledged that they had picked seneca root as children or adults. Seneca root digging was an activity that involved whole families. While certain individuals, like my great-grandmother Flora Anderson, would have added it to their medicinal stores, most people dug it, dried it and sold it for cash. It remained a significant source of income for many years and is mentioned in the Indian Affairs annual reports.

⁶⁷ White, 143.

⁶⁸ Ruby McNab, Interview, 15 August 2013, describes how her dad picked berries to sell on the way to Regina with a load of hay also for sale.

⁶⁹ Bernadette Blind, Interview, 1 August 2013.

⁷⁰ David Howarth and Kahlee Keane, *Seneca Root: Polygala senega L.*, (Alvena, SK: David Howarth and Kahlee Keane, 1995: 1)

⁷¹ Arok Wolvengrey, *nēhiyawēwin: itwēwina* Vol 2 English-Cree, (Regina, SK: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 2001, 523)

N.M.W.J. McKenzie was Clerk in Charge at Touchwood Hills HBC Post from 1895 to 1909 when the post closed. He later authored a book titled, *The Men of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670 A.D. – 1920 A.D.* In it, he takes credit for introducing the trade in Seneca root into southern Saskatchewan. He bought and shipped many tons of it to the United States between 1884 and 1888 while he was the HBC Postmaster at the Crooked Lakes. His description of the economic contribution of the root bears quoting at length:

From reading some magazines that Mr. Setter had kindly given me, I saw that senega or snake root was in great demand in the States. It seemed to be the chief composition in nearly all patent medicines and we had many acres of it growing all over the reserve [at Crooked Lakes]; in fact there was an abundance of it all over the country. I knew the root well, as the Indians always used it for their own medicinal preparations. I saw a good chance here for the Indians to earn something out of the ground, especially the plain Crees, as they could not hunt small furs with any degree of success, and here was a job that they could work at all summer. The root was easy to dig, being only about three inches long. All the diggers had to do was to get a stick about two inches in diameter, sharpen the end of it to a point, then push it down alongside of the root and turn the root out of the ground. The roots had to be washed clean, spread out on a blanket and dried in the sun. Senega root was worth all the way from 25c to 85c per pound. I eventually got all the women and children at this work and some of them made as much as \$5 a day when they worked all day. Snake root digging soon became a great industry all over the country where there were any Indians or half-breeds, and in subsequent years many of the foreigners and white settlers were successful at it, for several years later when I would be travelling by rail, at any of the little stations from which butter and eggs were shipped, you would always see a few sacks of snake root in the shipment.⁷²

McKenzie further reiterated the importance he perceived of the root to the Indians:

The Indians did not require to be short of anything, all they had to do was to go outside of their tent and dig snake root, yet it was surprising how many lazy ones were among them and these could not be induced to make a living this way. Work of any kind was beneath their dignity; they would not hesitate to crib a few pounds of what some old cripple woman had dug, washed, dried and prepared if they saw a favourable opportunity.⁷³

McKenzie's unflattering opinion of the "lazy ones," appears to apply to some Indian men, the contrast being the hard-working old woman (an image that appears in many earlier fur traders' accounts, too). His perception of the value of the root, whereby the Indians did not need to be short of anything, might have been overstating the business, though Carl Beal's

⁷² N.M.W.J. McKenzie, *The Men of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670 A.D. – 1920 A.D.* (Fort William, ON: Times-Journal Presses, 1921), 93-94, accessed 18 August 2014, <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/bibliography/4620.html> .

⁷³ Ibid.

comparisons of earnings on reserves from 1890 to 1896 show that seneca root was quite significant in the Crooked Lakes agency. Perhaps this was a remnant of McKenzie's interest in it, or more regional availability, but it seems to have been more important there than in any other agency in comparison to the other sources.⁷⁴ All of the other agencies reported it as one of the commodities, however, along with beef, miscellaneous manufactures, lime and charcoal, labour, fish, furs and hunting, grain, cattle and sheep, and wood and hay.

On the Peepeekisis Reserve about 50 miles away from Gordon's, in the File Hills, Eleanor Brass described the practice of seneca root digging:

Jobs were at a minimum so we dug seneca roots to sell; it brought a good price at that time and everybody was out digging. I remember one morning we had nothing to eat for breakfast, but we had a big bag of roots for sale. So we hooked up our horses, loaded our bag of roots, and left for Abernethy where the market was good. When we arrived there, we sold the roots and immediately went to a café for breakfast. ... Then we spent some of our money on groceries and saved the rest for my husband's tobacco and papers.⁷⁵

The similarities with Gordon's are strong in this respect and others. In this case, the work was shared among the family as were the profits derived from the sale of the dried roots.

On Gordon's, Seneca root was an important commodity for decades, until eventually it became hard to find and up until today it appears to be all gone. Rena Pelletier describes digging it: "Yes, we dig that. In about July, we dig. It takes lots though, we have to get a good place, find a good place to dig. And you would have to dry it long. Everybody had a little digger. A little wood and a little thing to step on. [I interjected here mentioning that I have one of those diggers, which is missing the cross piece for stepping on (see Figure 4.3). Then I asked, "So, the whole family would go out and dig, men and women both?"] Mostly the women, hardly any men [she replied]. They had their own [things to do] I guess."⁷⁶

Rena's remark, "it takes lots though," indicates that a lot had to be dug to make any money, since it was all dried before being sold by weight.

⁷⁴ Beal, 218.

⁷⁵ Brass, 37.

⁷⁶ Rena Pelletier, Interview, 6 September, 2013.



Figure 4.3. A Seneca root digger found in the author's family yards.⁷⁷

All the families benefited from the sale of seneca root. Michael McNab, when asked if as a child he and his grandparents had picked seneca roots for sale, replied,

Yeah, that's how we used to get to the exhibition sometimes. Great big flour sack full, 100-lb flour sack. I don't know how much she got for them, but we used to be able to go to the exhibition on that anyway.

Did you sell them at Gwynn's store?

At Hudson Bay Fur Marketing Company.

Oh, you'd take it right to Regina?

Yeah. Yeah, we used to have a special thing that the old man made, the grandfather made, it was out of a spring, piece of steel about that long, he'd sharpen it and then he'd put it on a post and put a little cross like a shovel, step on it, dig out the seneca root. There used to be lots that grew back here. I went and showed her there [indicating his wife], what we used to dig. But I had to take a shovel because I don't know whatever happened to them [diggers] when I was gone.⁷⁸

Both men and women dug the root, according to Michael's recollection.

Eliza Swimmer describes growing up at the Saulteaux Reserve at Jackfish Lake in the collection, *Stories from Kohkom* (1995). "My dad showed us how to pick seneca root, which we sold for twenty-five cents a pound, and we usually had about fifty bags at a time."⁷⁹ The amount of fresh root to make a pound of dried root is unclear, but they were sold dried.

What becomes clear is that often women and children were digging it in the '40s but it wasn't strictly a woman's job. It didn't make that much money but it was a help. Girls would not expect to keep the money they made from it. As Ruby McNab stated, it simply went into the

⁷⁷ Photo by author.

⁷⁸ Michael McNab, Interview, 8 August, 2013.

⁷⁹ Eliza Swimmer, 'The Simple Life,' in *Stories from Kohkom: Sharing Our Values, Teaching Our Young* (Saskatoon: READ Saskatoon, 1995), 150.

groceries and you were lucky to get something to eat.⁸⁰ The dried root was transported to Punnichy to the general store there, or was sold at the school, where someone might buy it and in turn later sell it. The heavy use of seneca root for many years eventually led to its decline, and today it is rare to see it anywhere. As a result many people do not know what it looks like today.⁸¹ Frank Cyr discussed the shortage and the protocol of offering tobacco that should be observed when picking seneca root, sweetgrass, or anything from the earth. “[A]nd if you don’t put an offering down for it, it will disappear. But if you put an offering down you will always find it there. So it is something our old people knew how to look after it.”⁸² Somewhere along the way, those practices went by the wayside when it came to seneca root as that is very hard to find today. Sweetgrass is still gathered on the reserve and widely used for ceremonial and prayer purposes, a practice that continues down the generations.

Berries - mīnisa

A number of different kinds of berries were gathered for domestic use on Gordon’s and some of those were gathered and sold or traded to surrounding settlers. The variety of berries included from most important to least, based on quantity available and picked as well as that most used: saskatoons, chokecherries, raspberries, gooseberries, and strawberries. Pincherries and possibly buffalo berries were found there, but were not as prominent in the diet or economy. There was a preference for saskatoons and raspberries for trade/sale. Rena Pelletier describes how local Hungarian women would bring a box of food to trade:

We’d go picking berries. And the ladies from out, they’d come and we’d all go pick berries. And they had their sandwiches, egg sandwiches or jam sandwiches, whatever they’d make. They’d bring out, big box of, sāsikanak, eggs, or chickens, potatoes, whatever they had, they’d bring out.

Who were these women?

The Hungarian women. They’d come and trade for our berries. They’d take, because they did a lot of canning, I guess. And we’d all go out and pick. And that was big - we had pails about this big; fill them up. Saskatoons or else raspberries, but raspberries was less, because they were always, yeah, it was harder to pick. Saskatoons, there was plenty. Or gooseberries! There was gooseberries then. Around the sloughs, eh? A lot. You don’t see them now. We’d pick them. But strawberries, it was hard to pick.

⁸⁰ Ruby McNab, Interview, 15 August, 2013.

⁸¹ Rena Pelletier, Interview, 6 September, 2013. In about 2008, a farming couple drove me to see some Seneca root growing not far out of the town of Punnichy.

⁸² Frank Cyr, Interview, 6 August 2013.

What about chokecherries, did they buy chokecherries, too?

No. *They didn't want them?* No; just saskatoon and raspberries [and gooseberries].

Yeah. And then we'd -- during the war we got little books, rations. And that's what we'd trade, too. There was butter, sugar, what else? We'd trade for, they'd take the sugar, the sugar coupons for their [canning] - They'd give us whatever, chickens, or potatoes or vegetables, whatever they could bring.⁸³

The practice of settler women coming on to the reserve to pick berries and buy berries from the reserve women was not something I had heard from others. Its corollary is the men coming on for wood, which occurred regularly, as discussed in the next chapter. More common was picking and taking the berries to the buyers by the pailful, something that still occurs today.

Besides the bartering opportunities, the importance of berries for domestic use was highlighted by every one of the people I interviewed. Every one explained how the saskatoons were spread out and dried for storage to be used over the winter.

Well, most of them, what they used to do, the women, they would pick saskatoons, there was-- just years ago the old people always said 'blue berries' you know. We would pick some, maybe a whole bag full and we would put them outside. My dad-- men would make tables and the women would put cloths on there and they'd spill their berries there and let them dry off. They would dry out and then you put them in a bag. In the winter time you would take some out and cook them, they were just the same as what they are when you pick them now. [In other words, rehydrated and reconstituted to be as good as fresh.] They weren't any different. And chokecherries, they used to always say 'stone berries' long ago, you know.⁸⁴ And they were chokecherries: we'd sit down and have a big flat stone and another little stone, we used to smash up the chokecherries, put them - and we used to have these [patties]-- that was good to eat, too. It was just like eating meat when you ate those with your potatoes and stuff, you know, vegetables.⁸⁵

Ruby McNab explained:

Like blueberries you spread them out outside let them dry and they would take two-three days to dry and then we would clean them and put them in bags, sugar bags, little canvas bags, white bags, put them in there and put them away for the winter. That's how we saved our berries. Raspberries, grandma used to cook them and put them in sealers whatever sealers [jars] we got, because we would eat them anyway, they never saved

⁸³ Jackie and Rena Pelletier, Interview, 6 September 2013. See Chapter 5 for more on *sāsikanak*.

⁸⁴ "stoneberries" refers to the manner of preparing them by crushing them with stones, rather than the fact that the seed pit resembles a stone. The English term "stoneberries" derives from the Cree term: *takwahimināna* which literally means "*crushed-with-a-stone berries*."

⁸⁵ Nancy Bitternose, Interview, 31 July 2013.

them. ... chokecherries too she would smash them up and make little patties and dry them and put them in bags and put them away for the winter, that's how they stored them.⁸⁶

Crushed chokecherries, which are usually fried up with lard and sugar, are a favourite when cooked with a meal. All berries, but particularly misāskwatōmina (*saskatoons*) and takwahimināna (*crushed chokecherries*) are used for feasts. Bernadette Blind showed me her rocks that she kept for crushing chokecherries, explaining that one of the first things she did when she married on to Gordon's, when driving around with her husband, was to look for a good set of stones for the purpose.⁸⁷

More Gathering

Numerous things were collected by women for domestic use and for sale. Sarah Carter, drawing from Joe Dion of Kehewin, Alberta, recounted much of Cree women's traditional foraging activities in the pre-reserve days. The extent of goods collected is large and varied.

The river and creek valleys provided a variety of wild fruit every spring, including saskatoons, raspberries, strawberries, blackcurrants, and chokecherries. ... Kinnikinnick, a tobacco substitute, was gathered. Wild rhubarb was a favourite in soups. In the early spring sap was gathered from maple and birch trees, boiled down, and, according to Dion, "carefully stored away as a treat and soother for grandmother's pets later on." Roots such as wild turnip were collected, peeled, and dried. There was a market for seneca root, an ingredient in patent medicines, and for wild hops. Women cleaned and smoked fish that came up the creeks in spring and also caught fish through holes in the ice in winter. They snared small animals and birds such as prairie chicken. During moulting season wild fowl were killed in great numbers and women assisted in this. Much of the game was dried, smoked, and stored for the winter. In the fall the more northerly Cree women gathered muskeg tea and quantities of moss, which they dried to make moss bags for babies.⁸⁸

All of this was in addition to hauling water and wood for their households. While not everything might have been in Gordon's women's repertoire, most of it was. I have not heard of wild hops, muskeg tea, or moss being collected, but it may have been in earlier times or when they travelled. The sweet root and wild turnip of earlier days gave way to the garden vegetables. Duck eggs would be gathered in season.

⁸⁶ Ruby McNab, Interview, 15 August 2013.

⁸⁷ Bernadette Blind, Interview, 1 August 2013. She brought out her stones to show me how she used to process the chokecherries.

⁸⁸ Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 177; see also Joe Dion, *My Tribe the Crees* (Calgary: Glenbow-Alberta Institute, 1979).

At Gordon's Reserve, women collected the fluff from bull rushes, also known as cattails, for use as an absorbent substance for babies' mossbags, for instance.⁸⁹ They collected the roots and new shoots of cattails also, for food. My grandmother told me long ago that as a girl, she would use her feet to pick them, since the base of the plant is under water. As Ivan McNab said,

they're good tasting stuff. If you like the taste of that stuff you can still go in there and go and yank a cattail right out of the ground and then you'll find inside there, you just cut it there, and inside there you peel that thing and there'll be just a white centre and that's where the tasty part is. Mom showed us where to find stuff like that when we were kids, eh? ...Oh we used to pick it almost any time, especially if we were out in the bush if there was cattails around someplace, we'd just go over and yank it out of the ground and we'd eat the root, because it is the root, like you know.⁹⁰

Among other things collected for sale was horse hair. In a winter when there was a lot of snow, a person might find a dead horse. Since there was a market for horse hair, it would be useful to cut off the mane and tail.⁹¹ Bernadette Blind remembers collecting white horse hair which could be died and used it for decorating moccasins. For home use, the women collected buckbrush, with which they made brooms. Both women and men collected the mud, chaff, and grass for mudding the houses, but women often did the mudding.

Handcrafted Items for Sale

Besides the things collected, women created items for sale. Some of these were traditional crafts and others were newly adopted handcrafted items. Considered "expert tanners," they were called upon to do tanning of hides for the earliest settlers around Touchwood, who "wore coats and pants made of sow hide or buckskin, besides using sleigh robes of buffalo or cow hides. Indians also made rabbit robes to be sold or traded to settlers."⁹² The Annual Reports for the Agency and for Gordon's in particular, remarked on these over the years 1913 to 1916, although rabbit-skin robes must have been around since long before contact. The blankets were woven from twisted strips of rabbit fur and were reputed to be very warm as well as rain proof.⁹³ They were apparently popular and useful items for trade with the settlers in large parts

⁸⁹ pasāna

⁹⁰ Ivan McNab, Interview, 23 February 2014.

⁹¹ Melvin McNab, Personal Communication, 10 June 2013.

⁹² Cossar & Jeal, *Tales of the Touchwoods*, 21.

⁹³ David Yoder, Jon Blood, & Reid Mason, "How Warm Were They? Thermal Properties of Rabbit Skin Robes and Blankets," *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 25 (1, 2005), 55-68.

of North America. In later years, the people of Gordon's still made rabbit fur blankets, as Betty Favel recounted about the rabbit skins she brought in,

We used to put them out flat and let them dry. And when they were dry we cut them into little squares and sew them together and make a blanket. That's what we used to cover with. ... They were warm. My mother made big quilts, like great big quilts. She'd sew the two pieces together, the fur. Sew those together and make a big quilt. She would line it with some kind of material, whatever she had. Sometimes she'd just sew little pieces of materials together and put it on one side of that fur. Mom was great for sewing. She used to make some for my grandmother too. For my dad's mom.⁹⁴

Besides these arguably vital items, the women were encouraged to create handcrafts for sale to settler women for use in their homes. The rush mats in early years, and braided rag rugs in later years are examples. Also, in the Annual Reports it is often remarked that "Many of the women are very handy at bead-work, for which they find a ready market."⁹⁵

Beadwork was often designed for the market, to meet the needs of the people who would be buying it. Nancy Bitternose was one who did this work:

Oh ya, some of them used to make moccasins, ya. I used to do a lot of beadwork when I was younger, you know. I did.. Somebody would-- my late mother-in-law or somebody would cut me out a jacket or something and I'd sew it all up and I'd put beads down here down here and on the arms. I did a lot. I used to sell a lot of beadwork, too, what they call a place mat, like a little mat people used to set their jugs and things there, like farmers, the women, you know. And things like that. And I used to make necklaces, earrings, you know. And then they'd make what they call a headband, you know, put beads on, put elastic at the back and then they'd put it on, who likes to wear the beads. [So where would you sell those?]

Oh, wherever we could sell them. Whoever wanted to buy them. You know. You go to town or Quinton or someplace like that, see people, and a lot- some of these farmers, the women that we knew like out around here, the farmers used to all take their grain to town. We used to meet a lot. Oh, Punnichy was a busy, busy place years ago.⁹⁶

As evidence that Punnichy was the place to market these perhaps, are the examples of women's beadwork found in the museum on Punnichy's main street today. These two photos of locally collected beadwork were taken there by the author in 2013:

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Favel, Interview, 2 August 2013

⁹⁵ H.A. Carruthers Report, Canada *Sessional Papers*, 1897.

⁹⁶ Nancy Bitternose, Interview, 31 July 2013.



Figure 4.4 Examples of beaded bags and frames in Punnichy Museum

In Figure 4.4 two beaded picture frames can be seen towards the right of the photo as well as a beaded handbag and what might be a cushion cover.



Figure 4.5 Beaded mats as described by Nancy Bitternose

The beaded mats in Figure 4.5 are labelled as having been made by Mrs. John Fisher, (Myrtle), who was from Gordon's Reserve. At the back is a pair of beaded moccasins, the *sine qua non* of First Nations women's handiwork.

Clara Pratt also excelled in sewing and beadwork, as did many other women down the generations even to the present day. Their work was never ending and vital to their families. As Sarah Carter wrote, "Indian women made essential economic contributions, both by drawing on their traditional talents and by learning new skills. They produced food for home consumption and to a limited extent marketed goods they manufactured or processed. In the unstable environment of the plains, women's work was crucial to "risk reduction," as they were largely responsible for diversifying the economic base of the farm."⁹⁷ Sewing, beadwork, and work with cloth, textiles, or soft hide was work that women were adept at and which men did not do. Some women were more adept than others, but most women undertook it.

Conclusion

During the first years on reserve, the people saw great difficulty in making the transition from hunting/trading bison to beginning to farm even with the treaty promises of assistance. There may have been some difference in women's skill sets and in lifestyle attributed to cultural differences between the Half-breeds and Indians on the reserve. The Indian Agents' and Inspectors' reports certainly indicate it. But while one particular Agent came to resent the Half-breeds, his punishments meted out on the reserve by withdrawing any assistance from those better off, may have served to unite the two factions in resistance against him, strengthen the demands for proper treaty implementation, and level the economic playing field on the reserve.

Women's work was essential if barely remarked upon through most of this time. They made the adaptation to settled, farming life by learning new skills. They supplemented their traditional skills and roles with the new ones, taking advantage of the new markets provided by the earliest settlers for their labour and products. From berries to seneca root to beadwork, women found ways to earn a bit extra towards the household. These trends carried on into succeeding generations.

⁹⁷ Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 176.

Chapter 5

Making a Living after the Turn of the Century: 1900 to 1945

Introduction

Change occurred slowly after the initial adaptation to reserve life. The struggle to make a living in hard circumstances under the Indian department's supervision and control gradually improved after the turn of the century. There was continuity in many of the roles that women had and some of the tasks that they undoubtedly handled before settlement on reserve continued, even up to the present day in some cases. This chapter will continue to examine some of the economic activities and conditions of the people of Gordon's Reserve, noting the work that women did, especially in the early twentieth century. The economic activities examined here all began well before 1900.

The voices of the people are highlighted here, where possible using the actual words of the women themselves, both those living today and interviewed for this project, and those found in other collections. As we move into the century, the data coming from the Indian Agents' annual reports become sparse and less detailed, while the oral accounts grow richer. The narrative becomes more of an Indigenous one and fewer of the Indian Agents' perspectives enter into the stories. Good or bad, the Indian Agents and Farm Instructors figured largely after the turn of the century, and their paternal oversight and control of all things economic affected the people, playing a part in the growing gap between the First Nations and the settlers after the Depression and World War II.

The wood industry

The poplar and birch bluffs of Touchwood Hills provided the timber and firewood for building and heating the permanent homes of the people as they settled on the reserve. They also became an important item of trade with surrounding settlers. Collecting wood for heating the home was traditionally a woman's job. But once it became a commodity, and the demand for more and larger wood grew, it became primarily a man's job. Cutting wood for sale was a vital

industry on the reserve which began when the settlers grew more numerous in the 1880s and continued until the 1940s, in the vivid memories of my respondents.

From the 1880s, the people on Gordon's were reported to be in "comfortable circumstances; occupying well built houses and fine farms."¹ This was directly tied to their occupation, "of cutting and hauling from the woods rails for fencing and timber for building purposes."² This was a yearly, mainly winter occupation, where they not only got out the wood for fuel, fencing, and building, but also for making bobsleighs and hayracks. The fences on Gordon's were reportedly "much better than those of the settlers" in 1889.³ In 1892, the men were also expected to make their own axe and fork handles, due to the peasant farming policy in place, "and in one case [in the agency] a man made a set of wooden harrows, which answered very well."⁴ The poplar and birch wood of the Touchwood Hills enabled the people to live there.

Its importance is underscored by a hand-written letter by David Anderson, Jr., one of the men on the reserve who in this instance is taking a spokesman role and who is the son of one of the initial headmen, David Anderson Sr. (the other man likely represented in the Henri Julien drawing in Chapter 2). The letter written by Anderson was addressed to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs in 1904 (see Appendix B). The names of probably all the heads of families on the reserve at this time are listed as represented in the grievance. It illustrates some of the difficulties the people were having in their own words. (A few editorial additions have been inserted to make it clear, otherwise all spelling is preserved in its original form.)

Touchwood Hills
Gordons Reserve
Kutawa P.O.
Feb 29th 1904

Dear Sir

To the Superdented of Indian Aferes

I drop you these few lines to ask you that if we Reserve people can sell logs of any kind, for I have cut 200 logs for sale in our Reserve and their taken from me their taken before I sell them our Indian Agent took them after I pile them and he says that he want to sell them on oxen sell [a note above says "auction"] we don't understand how he can sell them if we cant sell them or use them[.] the reson we ask you those thing we

¹ Report of John A. Macdonald, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs to the Governor General, 1 January 1887, Indian Affairs Annual Report, Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 1886, lvii-lviii.

² Ibid.

³ H. Keith to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 23 August 1889, Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 1889, 54.

⁴ H. Keith to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 10 August 1892, Canada, *Sessional Papers*, (No. 14) 1893, 149.

gone [are going] to ~~stave~~ starve in the Reserve if we cant sell [are? for 'our'] logs for the closest town from us is about 50 miles and we cant sell wood or anything and we cant farm very much in our Reserve for there is nothing but hills sloes [sloughs] and bushes and we would some time have a chance to sell [?] logs if you would allow us to sell them [.] it's all popular [poplar] we have here.

And another thing, the Indian Agent is makeing too many new laws to himself
carried forward

(2)

since the assistant of Indian Agent went off from ~~here~~ Agency[.] we will never be able to make our living as long as this Indian Agent and our farm instructor are here[.] we would sooner have no farm instructor than to have the one we got here now for they both try very hard to pull us down instead of trying to suve [shove?] us a head in the way of making [a] living[.] we even cant go out of our Reserve to get grub for ourselves without a pass or to go and see the Agent an when we do get a pass to go and see the Indian Agent we never can find him in the Indian Office thats about 12 miles from here[.] we obey your law we must get a pass if we want to go off for 2 or 3 day but this we ask you[,] have we to get a pass to go and see the Indian Agent[?] we also ask you to take this farm instructor away from here for we would like to live [and?] dont want a man like him in our Reserve I enclose this letter with our names in this Reserve. And we bage [beg] you to Answer this letter and give us right satisfaction.

I am David Anderson Jr.

Names of Gordon Reserve [appended on third page]

Daybird	kakesekapawetawat
Hanry bird	Atoes [part of above?]
Easaw bird	George Gordon
Jacob bird	Andrew William Anders[on]
Moses Gordon	Joseph Anderson
Benjmen Gordon	Josiah Anderson
Alex McNab	David Anderson Sr.
Albert McNab	David Anderson Jr.
John Sere	
Colin Sere	
White bare	
Charles H. Pratt	
Charles T. Pratt	
Alex Pratt	
Frank child	
John Child	
Asoen	
John Fisher	
James Fisher	

Bittern Nose
Pascal
Ohchoe
Kaysepassis [?]
John Serveright⁵

David Anderson, Jr. and another thirty-one men on the reserve believed they had the right to sell logs/wood without interference from the Indian department and they wished to assert that right with the help of the department's higher-ups. Believing that the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs had their best interests at heart, or simply having no other option, Anderson explained the difficulties of making a living by selling wood and farming when the markets were far away and the best farmland was taken up and in use on the reserve. Further, they found the Indian Agent and Farm Instructor were not helping them, were in fact hindering them and requiring them to have a pass in order to go and see the Indian Agent for a pass!

Agency Inspector William Graham, not a friend of the Indians, was instructed to investigate.⁶ Graham supported Agent Martineau as he reported that the men's protests were unfounded, that there was plenty of good farm land on the reserve, and that the men were just too lazy to farm.⁷ In a reply dated the 4th of July 1905, the Secretary responds, "I have to state that Indians have the right to cut timber for building, fencing and fuel without permission, but they have no right to cut and sell without authority." The letter goes on to add insult with the following: "The Department has ascertained that there is plenty of farming land on the Reserve, and it has been represented that if White men had the same opportunities as the Indians have, they would soon become rich."⁸ It concludes by stating that any further grievances or complaints should be made to the Indian Commissioner at Winnipeg. No sympathy or satisfaction was forthcoming for Anderson and the other men on Gordon's at this time. (See Appendix B for this letter also.) That was not the end of the story, however. A new agent, Murison, was appointed in 1905 and he ascertained that Martineau had been in the wrong; he had permitted Anderson to

⁵ David Anderson to Clifford Sifton, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 29 February 1904, LAC, RG10, Vol. 7842, file 30121-4.

⁶ That he was not popular with the Indians is supported by Brian Titley, *The Indian Commissioners: Agents of the State and Indian Policy in Canada's Prairie West, 1873-1932* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2009), 185; also Walter Gordon an elder of Pasqua's Band once told me that it was said that treaty would never be broken by any man on two legs but that Commissioner Graham had one wooden leg! His reputation carried on in oral history until the 1980s when Mr. Gordon related that story.

⁷ W. Graham to D. Laird, Indian Commissioner, 3 July 1904, LAC RG10, vol. 7842, file 30121-4.

⁸ Secretary McLean to David Anderson, Indian, 4 July 1905. LAC. RG10, Vol. 7842, file 30121-4

sell the logs but that another dispute arose and he withdrew permission and confiscated the logs. Upon Murison's recommendation, the logs were returned to Anderson so that he could build a stable.⁹ Anderson did not achieve full satisfaction even then, demonstrating the extent of the control the Indian Agents had in determining the economic well-being of the people under their charge. Further, the Indian men who had been described as lazy previously were apparently trying to find ways to work in any way they could.

There is no more on that particular subject; however, another related matter was brewing in between these two pieces of correspondence. It appears that complaints about the personnel must have borne fruit as the Indian Agent about whom Anderson had objected, H. Martineau, had been removed and replaced by W. Murison. This new agent, perhaps like the new broom, began to clean up some issues relating to theft by settlers of wood and logs from Gordon's Reserve over the winters of 1903-4 and 1904-5.¹⁰ This is an interesting set of correspondence because it appears to be an instance where the Indian Agent acted in the best interests of the Indians, protecting their resources, or perhaps it is the department's resources that he is interested in protecting.¹¹

To be precise, the Indian Agent Murison, on hearing from the Farm Instructor, "Mr Farmer Finlayson of Gordons reserve," that some of Gordon's people had caught several settlers on the reserve cutting wood, turned the investigation over to the Royal North West Mounted Police detachment at Kutawa early in 1905. It appears to have been quite a large effort as the settlers had built stabling that could accommodate about fifty teams of horses just off the reserve "from which there were several well beaten roads leading into the reserve." Furthermore, at least thirteen settlers were charged with trespass and removal of wood from the reserve.¹² As the closest official with Justice of the Peace powers, Agent Murison himself had to hear the twelve cases and he found seven guilty and fined them. Another six had to be dismissed due to insufficient evidence and four others were postponed.¹³

⁹ Laird to Secretary, 2 September, 1905, LAC RG10, vol. 7842, file 30121-4.

¹⁰ W. Murison to Secretary, 23 March 1905. LAC. RG10, Vol. 7842, file 30121-4

¹¹ W. Murison to Secretary, 23 March 1905; W. Murison to Secretary, 19 April 1905; R. Rimmer, Barrister, to Frank Oliver, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 28 April 1905; G.L. Chitty, Timber Inspector to F. Pedley, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs 9 May 1905; and finally W. Murison to F. Pedley, 31 July 1905. LAC. RG10, Vol. 7852, file 30121-4. This series was found in the collection of the Specific Claims office, Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations.

¹² Initially Murison says information against twelve individuals was laid before him, but his cases add up to thirteen after the findings. W. Murison to Secretary, 19 April 1905, LAC. RG10, Vol. 7842, file 30121-4.

¹³ Ibid.

The lawyer for the defense of a majority of these men, a Reginald Rimmer from Regina, wrote a long complaint to Frank Oliver, the new Minister of the Interior and Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, appealing at the outset to his reputed sympathy for the settlers. He explained how the settlers had to hire his services, travel and lodge fifty miles from where they lived to attend the court, and take a whole week out of their seeding time. He particularly felt that those whose cases were dismissed should be recompensed by the Indian department for their trouble, while suggesting that the Indian Agent was biased and hinting about malicious prosecution. He claimed it was an honest mistake on the part of the trespassers as the boundary was not clearly marked. He further states, "I have reason to know that the opinion is gaining ground amongst the settlers, that the officials in order to show the Indians to be self supporting, are practically taxing the settlers to raise a fund for the purchase of the Indian's seed grain. Such an impression is only likely to lead to a great deal of dissatisfaction."¹⁴ This statement makes one wonder how he has reason to know this and who is sowing such rumours.

No reply to Rimmer's letter was found in the file, but a memorandum by George L. Chitty, the Timber Inspector, takes his argument apart piece by piece and supports Agent Murison. Both Chitty and Murison state that the Agent acted properly within the law, and Chitty does not give credence to the idea that the department is trying to raise money to meet its obligations by directly taxing the settlers.¹⁵

Further research into this matter might shed light on how this relates to Anderson's complaints about the Farm Instructor and the previous Indian Agent above, as it is unclear at this point if it was the same Farm Instructor as the previous year. While Murison is the new Indian Agent, a new Farm Instructor may have come across this practice of trespass and theft, or perhaps the old Farm Instructor had to wait for the new Agent to arrive before doing the right thing. Or perhaps the old Farm Instructor had to spill the goods to the new Farm Instructor lest he be implicated in the scheme. Murison says he arrived at Touchwood to take up his new post on February 26th of that year and on the very next day he was informed by the Farm Instructor of this matter. The Instructor said it was "some of his Indians" who had caught the settlers removing the wood, according to Murison's report, but a considerable amount had already been

¹⁴ LAC. RG10, Vol. 7842, file 30121-4, R. Rimmer to Oliver, 28 April 1905. Rimmer's letter is five pages long and contains material at variance with the accounts of Murison and Chitty, the Indian Department's Timber Inspector.

¹⁵ LAC. RG10, Vol. 7842, file 30121-4, Chitty to F. Pedley, 9 May 1905.

removed by the time they were discovered. Murison stated, “the portion of the reserve from which the wood was stolen is difficult of access from where the Indian houses and farm buildings are situated, and there is no road from them to that part of the reserve.”¹⁶ And it was in the winter that this theft was taking place. That the settlers came fifty miles to Kutawa from a place called Loon Creek suggests they came from around Cupar and Markinch, communities which are definitely on the Plain where the only wooded areas within a reasonable distance would have been in small creek valleys and the Qu’Appelle Valley, likely denuded of any sizable timber very early. This was not the end of the problem apparently, as a short entry in the Farm Instructor’s 1911 journal indicates: “Went around trying to find out what Germans was stealing wood on the Reserve.”¹⁷ More research will be required to find out if these latter were ever caught.

The settler farmers from surrounding communities had a great need for the wood on the reserves and many came from miles around to barter for it with the people of Gordon’s. Whether it was logs for building or heating, they found them on the Touchwood Hills and this provided a major source of income for the reserve residents. My grandfather remembered seeing them early on a winter’s morning; he’d look to the west as the sun rose behind him and happen to see a glint of reflection off the harnesses of the teams that were on their way up to the Reserve situated on the Hills.¹⁸ My father described the experience as he recalled it from later in the 1930s and early 40s:

Especially in the winter time it was sleighs mostly. They’d all come out from the west from around the Govan district, Cymrik, all those little towns on that line, Duval,... Govan and places beyond that. *The farmers?* ...Yeah, they’d come from way out west over there, about 20-25 miles west. But they’d come, four and five, they’d all be lined up coming into the reserve. And they had their favourite people they went to, you know, some would be going to see old Fisher and there’d be some would be seeing, like my dad, us, the Blinds, and the people would help them get wood and stuff like that for them. So we helped back and forth like that, eh? There was no money at that time but there was a lot of bartering so they would bring things to trade and that was always interesting some of the things they would try to palm off to get wood¹⁹

¹⁶ W. Murison to F. Pedley, 31 July 1905, LAC. RG10, Vol. 7842, file 30121-4,

¹⁷ Farm Instructor’s Journal, 9 February 1911, in private collection at Gordon’s Reserve.

¹⁸ Helen McNab, personal communication, 20 May 2014.

¹⁹ Ivan McNab, interview, 23 February 2014; A favourite story is how Hilliard McNab traded wood for his oldest son, Ivan’s first guitar and later in life Ivan made his living playing guitar and singing for many years.

While my grandfather traded for a guitar one time, author Eleanor Brass of Peepeekisis First Nation in the File Hills, approximately fifty miles East of the Touchwood Hills wrote of a similar situation. Like Touchwood, the File Hills also had some timber and the people cut and traded wood to the settler community around there. Brass wrote in her book:

The white farmers didn't have too much cash either so they would trade meat, poultry or other goods for firewood. They would come into the reserve and haul it themselves.

Some of the older Indians spoke no English and the white farmers were able to take advantage of them. I'm not saying that all the white farmers did this, but some of them did. In one case, when a farmer had loaded his sleigh as high as he could, he threw a gunny sack on the ground and took off as fast as he could. When the Indian opened the bag it contained a broken down accordion. The poor Indian's family went hungry.²⁰

Brass goes on to say that, "there didn't seem to be any protection against this kind of treatment. For example, so many pigs' heads were traded to us that I began to think that this was all the white farmers raised, just pigs' heads. They never seemed to bring any other cuts of pork to trade. Anyway, I got to be quite an expert at making head cheese; to this day I can't look it in the eye."²¹ Pigs' heads were also mentioned in my interviews. Evidently, the women on Gordon's also made a lot of head cheese. This was considered a treat for the old people by the time I was growing up, but perhaps not as much as *sāsikanak*, or cracklings, also known as "Indian popcorn." These were made out of pork bellies which they also got from the farmers.

When asked what kinds of things the farmers brought to barter for wood, Ivan McNab responded:

Oh, they'd bring, you know, if they did some butchering or something like that they'd bring pigs' heads, and fat for *sīkosākanak*,²² and Hungarian lard we used to call it. It was lard that was made from rendering fat, beef fat or pork fat, it was mostly pork fat with us over there because we dealt a lot with the farmers and when they would slaughter pigs we'd take the fat and they'd bring meat and pigs' heads and stuff like that and we'd make head cheese out of that and stuff. So there was always something going on, there was always something to trade, you know, they could make deals. Even with horses they would make deals. [And further], there was many things like that guitar, different things they would trade. Sometimes it was a piece of furniture, something like that, a bed, or some- any- you know whatever they could deal. They didn't have money, they would make some kind of deals. "Well I have this at home and I'll bring it the next time." So the deal was there, you know. The deal was there so it was always, an old

²⁰ Eleanor Brass, *I Walk in Two Worlds* (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1987), 38.

²¹ Brass, 38.

²² This is the Cree term for cracklings. *Sāsikanak* was popularly used at Gordon's and possibly derives from the Saulteaux or is a dialectical variation in Cree.

plough or something like that, it was funny about all the different things that they would get.²³

Barter with the surrounding farmers then was a very important part of the economy for both settlers and Indians. It meant much contact and social interaction as well.

Two stories surprised me with the level of friendship and mutual help that occurred between the on-Reserve people and the White settlers. Ivan continued,

but that was their way of getting along and settling their debts and sometimes they brought money, like 4 or 5 dollars for a big sleigh load of wood. So they'd be around for a couple of days, you know, and camp out at the house there. That's when they used to come and stay out at the house and there would be a whole bunch of these farmers all with their bed rolls on the floor and stuff like that, all sleeping around there in the house and then they'd go and cut wood and then they'd load the wood and all of a sudden you'd see them taking off, you know, five sleighs going back together all loaded right down with wood.

And it wouldn't be long and they'd all be back again, buying wood, bartering whatever they could, you know, however we could make a living and that's the way we did it. And the same thing in Fall they would do that with the hay, you know.²⁴

Any visit to their home meant extending the best hospitality possible, a firm custom of the Cree and Saulteaux. For the women, this meant a lot of additional cooking, baking, and cleaning associated with extra guests. This cultural rule of hospitality was ingrained in the children. Even I recall that any time any visitor arrived, especially to my grandparents' house, food was put on the table by the women, and I was told at various times that it was the proper thing to do, especially for elders and visitors.

Another story worth mentioning reflects a departure from the expected state of affairs and indicates that the settlers were also often poor and sometimes in greater need. You could say the shoe was on the other foot in this case:

But my father used to tell some interesting stories because he made some really lifelong friends with these farmers that lived out west, people like Herbie Mann, all those guys. And he remembers Herbie Mann as a young man, a young boy coming out to the reserve with his dad, the old man and the rest of his brothers to cut wood and he had no shoes. And obviously, no shoes his feet were wrapped with blanket things, he had, anything he could put over it, canvas and stuff like that, he had some kind of canvas shoes that he wore, like kind of made like, they were quite high too, but he didn't have real leather boots to work with. So, dad kept him at the reserve, he says "stay with me boy," he says,

²³ Ivan McNab, interview, 23 February 2014.

²⁴ Ibid.

“we’ll go and cut wood and we’ll take it to the school and go and trade it off at the school over there for shoes for you.” So they did that, him and Herbie Mann did that. They sold a few loads of wood at the school. Herbie got his brand new shoes and he was so proud of those shoes, he lay in bed, I guess, all night hugging his shoes like this, sleeping with these shoes. A pair of boots, it’s the first boots he ever had in his whole life. These were White farmers from around east of Govan.

But there was lots of stories like that where a lot of those White farmers were suffering just as bad as we were because it was just coming out of the 1930s and you know things were really tough all the way around.²⁵

These two stories reflect what my grandfather, Ivan’s father in the above story, used to say: that the Indians and the Whites were much on the same level economically during the 1930s Depression. Neither was better off than the other at that time, according to his observations. Whether that was because of localized conditions or not would take more comparative research to know. For example, perhaps the farmers around this area were particularly hard hit during those years. Perhaps the people of Gordon’s were better off than other reserves, as certainly the Indian Affairs Annual Reports indicated for many years. One factor may have been that the people of Gordon’s had the residential school to supply with wood and this was a nearby source of income. To what extent this was by barter or cash is not clear here, although the above example suggests it was barter at least some of the time.

Before the Grand Trunk Pacific Railroad came through in 1908, it was sometimes reported that lack of a close market was a problem.²⁶ Agent Martineau, in 1903 wrote, “In general, the Indians of this agency have very few chances of earning money, as all work done for traders, such as freighting and supplying wood and hay, must always be taken out in trade; we are yet too far from the railways and towns and villages, being from the nearest between sixty and eighty miles.”²⁷ It is unclear whether the railway opened up such opportunities, although in the 1940s, according to Frank Cyr, his father would take his wood to Lestock to sell.

So, do you remember the days that your dad was cutting and selling wood?

Yeah, he cut wood all winter right from the first snow fall right until they couldn’t use the sleigh anymore. That’s all he done. ...It was all pretty well done in the winter time.

Do you remember how much you would sell the load for?

²⁵ Ivan McNab, interview, 23 February 2014.

²⁶ H. Keith to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 10 August 1892, Canada, *Sessional Papers*, (No. 14) 1893, 149.

²⁷ H. Martineau to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 10 August 1903, Canada, *Sessional Papers*, (No. 27) 1904, 193.

A load of wood we used to sell it for.. It was four feet wide, and about twelve feet long and two feet high, we used to sell it for three dollars a load.

It was all cut up for fire wood, or?

No, it was in poles. That's what he used to sell it for.²⁸

A number of people brought up the problem of the Indian Act regulations and requirements for permits to sell. In relation to wood and the sale of wood, it was perhaps the fact that they were bartering that enabled them to get around the rules. In my interview with Ivan, I asked:

So, was this wood selling that was going on, did they have to keep it a secret from the Indian agents?

Pretty much, like Indian Affairs really didn't—well, if they *did* know they turned a blind eye to it, but there was a lot of that because they had to live, you know, and those people out there too needed wood, and they had no wood to burn during the winter months and it used to get damn cold, like now for instance. It would get really, really cold and things like that and they had no wood, so, you know, go to the Indian reserve and deal and that happened all over the place. I remember them talking about-- the guys at Kawakatoose talking about that and the guys at Day Star did the same thing too, Muskowekwan, selling wood and doing what they could to make a living. Times were rough at that time and they worked like hell for what little bit they had to raise a family, to keep their home together. So the men really did a lot of work.

Another response reflected how important cutting wood was for the people. Michael McNab stated:

back in them years it was kind of tough for everybody and there was no such thing as family allowance and welfare if you want to call it that .. there was none of that stuff so everybody from our area here, they all either cut pickets, cut wood, then they'd have to get a permit to sell it. Because I remember throughout the winter months in order to get a little bit of rations and stuff, whatever you want to call it, we used to have to cut cordwood. And I was big enough for that. Cause we used to have three teams, Billy Morris's team, John Blind's team, and Pat McNab's team from our area. And Uncle John James Bitternose, he had a team in there also. And we used to cut greenwood out in the bush here. And David Pratt had a sawing outfit that he cut all the greenwood into cordwood and it used to be piled along the roads here from the south end to the north end. Each group had a certain amount, you were allowed I think two cords of wood per person which was about 9 dollars all told, but you never got the money; they'd give you like a purchase order to one of the stores in Punnichy, and then Indian Affairs would pay for the groceries that you took.²⁹

²⁸ Mervin Frank Cyr, Interview, 6 August 2013.

²⁹ Michael McNab, Interview, 8 August 2013.

It required a lot of back-breaking work to make a living. In the case of cutting wood, logs and pickets, it was all done by axe and mostly by men. While boys would be expected to help with the wood, often girls and women would have to help, too, going into the bush with the men, chopping down the trees, chopping branches off and skidding them out of the bush using horses, cutting pickets, and assisting in all aspects of the wood industry. It may have been hard physical labour, but as Ivan pointed out, women were up to the job. “Some women could swing an axe as good as a man.”³⁰

One of those women was Isabelle Bitternose who was born in 1911 on Gordon’s and interviewed by Mervin Dressyman in 1977 when she was sixty-six years old. Although the interview was about Treaty promises for research undertaken by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians, Isabelle spoke about a variety of things including how they made a living when she was young: “I had to work when I was, before I got married. I had to work for my dad. I worked like a man. I chopped pickets. ... That’s the way our people lived. They worked hard. We didn’t even know, we didn’t even know what’s relief until 19, let’s see, I’ll say about 1940’s.”³¹ Among my interviewees, Ruby McNab mentioned hauling pickets out of the bush with her father, John Cyr.

I stayed with my dad most of the time. I used to go to the bush with him. Haul pickets out for him. ... We very seldom stayed home. Like in the morning, she’d wait for us to get up, we would have our porridge, we’d have to get dressed and get washed up and go with him. We had a choice, either to go to the bush or stay home and clean up. Get wood for the night and things like that and get ready and go. Sometimes we’d go way in the bush, hauling pickets out for my dad, we’d chop pickets. Sometimes bring some big loads.”³²

The work cutting rails, logs, and pickets for sale and barter, and cutting and chopping wood for household heating were extremely important economic activities throughout the period studied. That women were required to help out oftentimes was not surprising. Not every woman did, however; Frank Cyr’s mother always worked inside. My own grandmother was sometimes required to haul wood, although her sister did more often. As Melvin stated, “Auntie Katie used to have to go out and go and haul wood with Uncle Gilbert because they had a bigger house and it took a lot of wood to keep that thing going, to keep it warm. So she used to go and help

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ FSIN Specific Claims Collection. Isabelle Bitternose Interview by Mervin Dressyman, 22 December 1977.

³² Ruby McNab, Interview, 15 August 2013.

hauling wood in. But mom never did, we, like I done it or dad done it. She never had to go outside to go and get wood or anything like that.”³³ It was Melvin who told a story about my grandfather which underscored the importance of this activity.

But dad was mostly the breadwinner in the house; he done- he worked all the time. And he was always out doing something, cutting wood, cutting pickets, and cutting what they called rails and different things like that. I remember one time he went out cutting wood, and like his axe was really quite sharp and somehow or another it nicked him on the knee. It wasn't a big cut but I guess it bled and it bled. And when he got home he got ready and he went to Gordon's school and they took him to the doctor in town and the inside of his boot, his rubber whatever he was wearing was just soaked with blood ... But he still cut, he cut a couple of loads of wood that time, but the entire time his knee was bleeding, the whole time he was out in the bush. And then in the evening they went to Gordon's school and then they took him into town in a vehicle and [the doctor there] sewed him up, put a couple of stitches. *But you know at that time the way you made a living was with your axe and so you kept your axe very sharp, and it was just almost like a razor.* So it wouldn't take very much for him to cut his knee. It wasn't a big cut, it was only about half an inch, but still.

This brings up another important skill: that of being able to swing an axe accurately and with strength, to have your next chop land in the exact same place as your last one, or exactly where you want it. That was recognized and admired as an important skill and therefore to be able to “swing an axe as good as a man” meant not simply having that physical strength to do so, but also the necessary skill to wield an axe with precision. It was considered a man's job overall, but women apparently took pride in doing it as well and were recognized for their skill.

Homes

The wood of the Touchwood Hills was essential to the homes of the people for the whole of my study period. The type of homes the people lived in changed over the years. It is worth noting again the earliest mention of possible earthen homes such as the Mandan had, being used in the Touchwood Hills. No memory of that exists in the area, to my knowledge. More common are the mobile tipis constructed of poles and buffalo hides, as depicted in Sydney Prior Hall's sketch (Figure 4.2) and for which there are tipi rings of stones on Gordon's Reserve today.³⁴ Then from the earliest log houses there is gradual improvement during the reserve period. Throughout, women had a preponderant role.

³³ Melvin McNab, Interview, 14 August 2013. Emphasis added.

³⁴ Jackie Pelletier, Interview, 7 August 2013.

Tipis were mainly women's business.³⁵ Shirley McNab recalls women getting together collectively to sew a tipi in the Qu'Appelle Valley when she was a girl in the 1940s.³⁶ After reserve settlement, the heavy work was done mainly by men, just as they did with the pound-making, but women also helped in finishing the homes. By and large, working with wood was a man's business. Cutting and hauling the rails or logs out of the bush all winter, building homes, barns, stables, and fences was taken up by the men after settling on reserve, although women sometimes assisted.

The type of home the people occupied was taken as a sign of their progress towards civilization, the goal of the Indian Affairs officials, judging by the Agents' and Inspectors' reports over the years. Health and cleanliness were all wrapped up in the dwellings and how they kept them, with the farm instructors' wives initially assisting the women and imparting their knowledge of housekeeping to them. The vacating of their homes in summer has already been mentioned, but the reports for 1887 and 1888 give some further detail about the process and the work involved: "At the first sign of spring all our Indians leave their houses and go under canvas and, during the summer, the rubbish which has collected around the houses in the winter is all gathered together in a heap by the Indians and burnt, and in the fall of the year the houses are all whitewashed inside and out, and in many cases the flooring is removed by the Indians during the summer and is stacked against the house, so that every precaution is taken to remove any chance of a contagious disease arising."³⁷ And in 1888, the Agent added, "the Indians vacate their houses every spring, and go under canvas changing the camping grounds every three or four weeks, the houses are then whitewashed inside and out; all the refuse gathered up round about the house and burnt and a solution of carbolic acid is sprinkled over the walls, sulphur is burnt and the house remains empty all summer, so that when the Indians take to their houses again in the fall of the year, everything sweet, and whole-some."³⁸

In 1889 Keith noted, "a marked improvement amongst the Indians of this district, they stay more at home on their reserves now, are anxious to have better houses, and they keep themselves cleaner. When they do earn a little money by an occasional trip of freighting, it is

³⁵ I have heard the tipi teachings of Mary Lee on more than one occasion, one notable time being May 2007 when my class erected six tipis in the University of Saskatchewan bowl for the Congress of academic conferences.

³⁶ Shirley McNab (nee Strong Eagle), Interview, 7 August 2015.

³⁷ H. Keith to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 25 August 1887, Canada, *Sessional Papers* 1888, 73.

³⁸ H. Keith to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 27 August 1888, Canada, *Sessional Papers*, Indian Affairs Annual Reports 1889, 62.

nearly always spent in buying lumber or window sashes for their houses, in clothing or provisions, instead of being squandered in playing cards and buying beads and feathers, as heretofore.”³⁹ And the following year, 1890, “the Indians are building much better dwelling-houses than formerly. A marked improvement can be noticed in this respect. The mud shanty has given place to the house built of dove-tailed logs with pitched roof, well thatched, and in some cases plastered with lime inside and out.”⁴⁰ Both of these reports are for the agency in general, and not about Gordon’s specifically.

By 1895, the women of Gordon’s were being praised for their good housekeeping and the houses on the reserve were considered “all of a good class, several being exceptionally good. One man, Josiah Pratt has a very comfortable house, which is lathed and plastered and the sitting room papered; there are three rooms down stairs, a kitchen, bed room, sitting and dining rooms, and one large bed room up stairs,” illustrating his thrift and industry, according to the Agent.⁴¹ The Inspector’s report for 1895 was much more detailed, going house to house and reporting on the general furnishings and comfort. A few examples:

Kissipass and son had two houses; closed stable with three divisions. John Anderson has a ... Good house, and a neat little plot in front with a fancy willow border around the walks, which were covered with gravel, all showing good taste. Piles of lumber and shingles were on hand to put a new roof on the house. ... The house contained cook-stove, cupboard with dishes, two tables, bedsteads, child's chair, other chairs, lamps, washstand, washtubs, pictures, curtains on windows, clock, all clean and neat, ornamental fence in front of house. Comfortable looking place. Thos. McNab: ... House divided into two apartments; newly scrubbed; box and cook-stoves, two bedsteads, patched home-made quilts, tables with red table-covers. ... Open chimney in one room, sewing-machine, silverplated kettle, mirrors. ... thrifty-looking place.⁴²

But his description of Day Bird’s place shows the progression of housing over the years up to that date: “Day Bird has a nice house built in 1893, three beds, lounge, settee, tables, cook and box stoves, lean-to kitchen, upstairs rooms. A fair indication of the progress this band has made is well illustrated by the different houses built by this man. First house was a shack, flat mud roof

³⁹ H. Keith to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 23 August 1889, Canada, *Sessional Papers*, Indian Affairs Annual Reports 1890, 55.

⁴⁰ H. Keith to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 30 August 1890, Indian Affairs Annual Reports, Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 1891, 39.

⁴¹ J.P. Wright, IA to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 29 July 1895, Indian Affairs Annual Reports, Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 1891, 66.

⁴² Insp. A. McGibbon to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 12 August 1895 Indian Affairs Annual Reports, Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 1896, No. 14, 296.

8 x 10, second house, 12 x 14, sloped roof of rails and sod, third house or third step of advancement, is 18 x 22, one and a half story, thatched roof and a lean-to kitchen. These three houses are to be seen.”⁴³ The earlier two were now being used as stable and barn.

Gordon’s had some of the best dwellings around, judging by the reports of 1897: “The houses on this reserve will compare very favourably with those of any band in the Territories, the majority of them being a story and a-half high; a number have shingled roofs, the rest all having thatched roofs.”⁴⁴ But the Inspector’s report must surely contain the highest praise possible: “This is the banner reserve of the agency, good homesteads are general all along the line. Two gentlemen who passed through the reserve to attend the sports at Touchwood on 24th May, expressed themselves as simply astonished at the neat homesteads they had seen and could not believe they were passing through an Indian reserve. One gentleman said he thought it was a white settlement, as it was so like those he had seen in the best parts of Ontario.”⁴⁵ Such nice homes reflect well on the women who were caring for them, as well as the men who built them, but further, they bode well for the standard of living of the women and children of the reserve and served as a marker of the level of assimilation, which also pleased the government officials.

In 1901 there were further improvements. A blacksmith shop had been established on the reserve and it was hoped to build a carpenter’s shop next to it. The next year, Henry Bird had a “neat, new house, shingled roof, doors and windows painted green, wooden floor, whitewashed outside and in, curtains on windows, and house comfortably furnished. Francis Cyr, house raised in the roof, shingled, double doors and windows,” and most of the others had similar good houses.⁴⁶ In 1903, Agent Martineau reported “Nearly all the new houses have shingled roofs; they are built of hewn logs, floored, and in many cases with partitions, ceilings and good large windows, the material for which has been purchased from the proceeds of their beef.”⁴⁷

As the houses improved, and the reports for 1907, 1908 and 1912 all remark on that, it was noted that more and more of the people were living in them year round, and no longer taking to their tents for the summer, although as mentioned earlier, my own grandmother remembered

⁴³ Ibid., 297.

⁴⁴ H. Carruthers, A/Indian Agent to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 27 July 1897, Indian Affairs Annual Reports, Canada, *Sessional Papers* (No. 14) 1898, 179.

⁴⁵ A. McGibbon to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 13 November 1897, Ibid., 211.

⁴⁶ A. McGibbon to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 11 October 1902, Indian Affairs Annual Reports, Canada, *Sessional Papers*, (No. 27) 1903, 200.

⁴⁷ H. Martineau to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 10 August 1903. Canada, *Sessional Papers*, (No. 27) 1904, 193.

her grandparents kept up the tradition in the summer into the 1920s.⁴⁸ The houses in the early part of the century were roomy and comfortable, clean and tidy and “compare favourably in appearance and surroundings with those of the better class of white settlers in the district” according to the Agent.⁴⁹

The rosy picture painted by the Agents may have been fairly accurate for the time, but in retrospect, some of the people tell stories that suggest they were less than ideal. Frank Cyr commented, “Our houses weren’t as good as the houses today, we just had mud shacks, the heat wasn’t as good as it is today, a lot of times we would get up and have frozen water and frozen bannock to eat, The houses were cold, hard living.”⁵⁰

The earliest houses that Melvin McNab remembered were built of logs with very few or no windows, and the chinks between the logs were filled with mud and smoothed out. The roofs were often poles with mud. Rain would gradually wash away the mud and it would have to be reapplied annually, probably. “The men made them and the women mudded them,” in the words of Frank Cyr.

Shirley McNab wrote an account much like her memory of the making of tipis:

Years back when a log house was the dwelling place the wife was responsible to see that it was fixed up by renewing the insulating layer on the inside and outside to keep out the winter drafts. The women joined together to help one another. There was mud, straw and water to haul and the mixing of all this. Then the mudding was done and to add a bit of color some even white washed the building inside and outside. This had turned out to be a social event, visiting, exchanging news and sharing meals took place. The women changed this chore into a fun time for themselves and their families.⁵¹

Melvin recalled that one couple, Joe Cyr and his wife Clara, made a business of going around mudding people’s homes. He would mix the mud and she would apply the mud to the walls. The mixture was made with a certain kind of clay mixed with grass or preferably, chaff. People came from miles around to a spot just a couple hundred meters from my family’s home on the

⁴⁸ My grandmother once told me a story about how her grandparents would come and camp outside her parents’ house for a period during the summer. One morning at the end of July or August, she woke to find her grandparents packing up their wagon. “Where are you going?” she asked them, most likely in Saulteaux or possibly Cree. “Oh, we’re going home.” They had their own house to the East. “Why?” the young girl wanted to know. “We’re going to go turn over the calendar,” she was told and this brought about a lot of laughter. I took this to mean that they poked fun simultaneously at both the fact of White people’s slavish obedience to a paper calendar and their own lack of anything better to do.

⁴⁹ W. Murison to Deputy Superintendent General, Frank Pedley, 11 April 1908, Canada, *Sessional Papers*, (No. 27) 1909, 154.

⁵⁰ Mervin Frank Cyr, Interview, 6 August 2013.

⁵¹ Shirley Ann McNab in *Kēhtē-ayak Ohci Kisēpatināhk* (Gordon First Nation, 2016), 113.

reserve where this certain kind of mud could be found. The “mud pit” was quite deep with steep walls apt to cave in. As a youngster, I remember being fascinated with the mud pit and wanting to play there; there were birds living in the walls of it and snakes, we heard. But we were sternly warned to stay away from there and we had heard vague whispers that someone had died there when the wall gave way and buried her. My uncle confirmed the story and he knew who had died there. By the time they were able to dig her out, it was too late to save her.⁵²

The repeated reports that the homes on Gordon’s were better than other reserves, that they were on par with some of the best homes of the settlers, suggests that the people were doing so well economically that they could afford the accoutrements mentioned. Unlike other agencies, it appears the women were rarely faulted for slovenly housekeeping and in fact were praised instead. The girls coming out of the school were considered to be accomplished housekeepers, were sought out for placements as domestic help, and considered a good effect on the reserve in general by the authorities. Women also helped in the farming enterprise.

Farming

In the early part of the twentieth century, farming was still an important source of livelihood for the people of Touchwood, fraught with difficulties as it was. Sarah Carter has revealed a great deal about what the First Nations men and women had to contend with to successfully take up the farming life.⁵³ By all accounts, Gordon’s people, with their head start and their Half-breed contingent, were ahead of many other bands in making a living. Carter shows how the Indian Department’s policies often discouraged rather than encouraged the Indian farmer. On Gordon’s there were challenges to be faced but there seemed to have been a steady if gradual increase in production and earnings from farming well into the 1920s.⁵⁴ The peasant farming policy of the 1890s, by which the government tried to ban labour-saving devices and enforce the use of primitive farming implements, was not successfully implemented at Gordon’s. Carter documented how the Indian Agent for Touchwood, J. Finlayson, was fired because he did

⁵² Melvin McNab, Interview, 23 April 2016.

⁵³ Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990); and for after the turn of the 20th Century, her work “First Nations Women of Prairie Canada in the Early Reserve Years, the 1870s to the 1920s: A Preliminary Inquiry.” In *Women of the First Nations: Power, Wisdom, and Strength*, edited by Christine Miller and Patricia Chuchryk, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996), 51-75.

⁵⁴ Carl Beal, “Money, Markets and Economic Development in Saskatchewan Indian Reserve Communities, 1870-1930s,” PhD Dissertation, (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba, 1994), 223, 382.

not impose the policy.⁵⁵ He was replaced in 1895 by J.P. Wright who also was unable to impose the policy. “Gordon’s and Poorman’s bands each owned a self-binder, and it was useless, the agent claimed, to ask them to cut their grain with sickles and cradles, for they would not do it.”⁵⁶ The people were too advanced and self-sufficient to be completely at the mercy of the authorities.

Nevertheless, the Indian department’s policies were largely resented by the First Nations people. As late as 1938, the Department was despairing of teaching the “Indians how to think of tomorrow” with a view to making them self-supporting. Withholding relief was a big part of it. As Beal points out, it was long the aim mostly in order to take the pressure off the government in administering to them. This policy was also approved by “the better Indians themselves,” according to Dr. Thomas Robertson, Inspector of Indian Agencies for Saskatchewan who was interviewed in an article published in the *Leader Post* and picked up by the *Touchwood Times*.⁵⁷

Our policy of a work and wages program is to make the Indian a self-supporting and self-respecting citizen. We don’t give him cash for his work because there again is the problem because of his thoughtlessness for tomorrow. It is not in his nature to think of tomorrow. ... If we give him money for his work he would soon have it all spent. He would feast one day and starve the next. The department sees to it that he has a living and that he gets the proper things [i.e., doesn’t spend on frivolous items]. While there are many hardships among the Indians this year none of them are suffering.⁵⁸

And yet this year was “unusually difficult” Robertson admitted, “when only two agencies in the province had any crop at all.”⁵⁹ Among the “better” class of Indians would surely be the World War I and II Veteran John Fisher who finally had enough of the management of his money when he went to the Agency one day. The story was related twice to me by Ivan McNab. It would have happened after World War II. According to Ivan, the agency, “used to have a little wicket, high little window,” through which the Agent would deal with the Indians. John Fisher went in there to get his money from the Agent and when the Agent wouldn’t comply, Fisher “grabbed him by the front of his shirt” and “almost pulled him through the barred window because he was mad about money that the Indian Agent wouldn’t give him, either for his cattle or something.”⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 223.

⁵⁶ Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 224.

⁵⁷ Anon. “Aim to Teach Indians How to Think of Morrow” *Touchwood Times* (April 14, 1938).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Ivan McNab, Interview addenda, 5 September 2014 and 28 August 2015. It is interesting that no one mentioned that John Fisher was the Chief at this time. According to his own affidavit concerning Reserve 80A, he was Chief

It is no wonder then that John Fisher is one of the first to ever have an actual bank account, according to Michael McNab, “I think the first one I remember ever having a bank account around here was old John Fisher -- and John Blind. I think they were about the first ones that ever had bank accounts here. That was after the elevators paid you directly, your cheques didn’t go to the agency no more. [Me: Was that after 1951?] Yeah, but then by that time a lot of the people that had farmed went out of it.”⁶¹ The way of life changed as a result, around the time of World War II and afterwards.

Up until then, however, as the people tried to maintain a diversified economy, relying on wood, livestock, some grain, gardens, and women’s productive work, it seems clear that women’s work played a vital role in strengthening the people’s position, particularly when supplementing the work with midwifery, handicrafts, or other products and labour sold outside of the home or community.

From the earliest days of the reserve, women were partners in the farm work. Some did every kind of farm work. “They did much of the work in the vegetable gardens. Women and children also worked in the grainfields, especially during peak seasons such as haying and harvesting. As these operations usually coincided, women helped so that the men lost no time with the hay.”⁶² It was simply expected that women would work alongside men in these endeavours. The Monthly Return of Farm Work for Gordon’s from 1892 to 1894 counted women and boys along with the men as simply “working Indians.”⁶³

A number of the women that I interviewed apparently did a lot of outdoor work that could be considered men’s work. Some did this work on their own parents’ farms while growing up, assisting their fathers, and some did the work while “working out” for settler farmers off reserve. Driving tractors, looking after livestock, stooking, cutting and hauling hay alongside the men were some of their jobs in the earliest days of farming. Nancy Bitternose’s account in Chapter 7 explains what that life was like in the first half of the twentieth century, as she did both work on her father’s farm and outside the reserve for settlers.

from the 1930s until the 1950s. FSIN Specific Claims Collection, Affidavit of John Fisher (8 November 1985).

⁶¹ Michael McNab, Interview, 8 August 2013.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 177.

⁶³ T.E. Baker, Farm Instructor, Monthly Return of Farm Work for Indian Instructor’s Farming Agency at George Gordon Band, 31 January 1892 to 31 August 1894.

Widows' Income

It should be noted that there were a few wives of soldiers and widows of those who never came back from the World Wars on Gordon's. The wives of soldiers were not allowed to receive their pension from the Veterans' Affairs; the Indian Agent kept it for them. However, there is suggestion that they never, ever got it. When asked, Ivan McNab did not remember about the widows' allowances but said that his Uncle Leonard, a WWII soldier, used to send money to his mother, Ivan's grandmother, and she used to get it, "because they wouldn't take any guff from the Indian Agent," as he put it.⁶⁴ In the same way that the Indian Agent oversaw and controlled the cash going into the men's hands, they also deemed it necessary to control the widows' spending as well.

Regarding the hardships of widows, Melvin McNab said, "The only one I remember was Jessie Bitternose. But she used to be able to buy wood from people. And I don't know who used to cut her wood, but I know a couple of times she bought wood from me. And, you know, and there was a lady who lived down the hill from us. Her name was Freda Favel. And she used to buy her wood all the time. Somebody was always bringing her wood. She lived on an army pension."⁶⁵ Others maintained various degrees of independence, some living close to or with their sons' or daughters' families.

Working for Wages

The system of "working out," "outing," or "placing out" the girls (and boys) from the school greatly assisted them in finding employment and also helped their employers find useful labour to assist in their households and farms. This was the earliest paid work that young people might get.

Edna McNab, interviewed in 1977 probably by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian researchers, spoke about how she grew up on Gordon's reserve. Born on November 15, 1899, Edna was adopted here by Esau Bird at the age of four and later sent to Elkhorn School until she was eighteen. "I come home and went back to Regina, got a job there for two years and a half, doing housework. And I got fed up with the city and I come back to the reserve, and I was 20."⁶⁶ This would have been roughly 1917 to 1919, and therefore one of the first whose words have

⁶⁴ Ivan McNab, Interview addendum, 5 September 2014.

⁶⁵ Melvin McNab, Interview, 14 August 2013.

⁶⁶ Edna McNab, Interview, March 7 & 8, 1977. Her interview is held by the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre in audio form.

survived to have pursued school until she was of the age when she had to leave, and then to have found work in Regina.

Clara Pratt's story and others are mentioned in Chapter 7. Lillian (nee Pratt) Morris and Madeline (nee Cyr) Pratt were two elders whom I did not get to interview due to health and age issues; although I did visit them in the summer of 2013. Brief biographies of them appear in the recent *Kēhtē-ayak ohci Kisēpatināhk* (2016) collection. Lillian, Nancy Bitternose's older sister, was born on Gordon's in 1918. Her experience at the Gordon's school must have been a good one as her son William G. Morris remarked, "I had good memories of the Gordon's school. Same as my mom. Mom is ninety-four over at Lestock [care home]. Can't ever run down the school. She was one of the girls was picked to stay for the summer through the holidays to help feed these workers that worked in the fields."⁶⁷ From there Lillian must have been chosen to work out at the Agency. "[I]n her late teens, she did housework for the Indian Agent, and Agency clerks, where she learned British cooking."⁶⁸ Lillian married Wm. T. (Billy) Morris and raised a family on her excellent cooking: "She baked bread every Friday, and Sunday meant roast beef and Yorkshire pudding." Then she went to work at Gordon's school, beginning in the laundry and then becoming custodian, for a total of twenty-five years.⁶⁹ Lillian was also adept at the outside farm work, according to her daughter, as she "stooked sheaves, loaded hay wagons and made haystacks alongside her husband." However, her tractor driving did not always meet with Billy's approval and she had been known to leave the tractor standing in the field and "return to the house in indignation" if her husband criticized her driving!⁷⁰

Madeline Pratt, on the other hand, was adept at tractor driving and all manner of farm work. Her sister Ruby described how Madeline worked and drove tractor for farmers around Govan. Madeline herself stated, "After school I was out working. Out on farms all over. Even during the war I was out in '39. That was my lifestyle. I always worked out. I never was on reserve" [until after she married].⁷¹ Then she found work as a cook at the Gordon's school and worked there for sixteen years.

⁶⁷ William G. Morris in *Kēhtē-ayak ohci Kisēpatināhk*, (Gordon First Nation, 2016), 148.

⁶⁸ Lillian Morris in *Kēhtē-ayak ohci Kisēpatināhk*, 137.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Madeline Pratt in *Kēhtē-ayak ohci Kisēpatināhk*, 165.

Quite a number of women from Gordon's found work at the school over the years, beginning apparently in 1895 with Flora McNab.⁷² Gradually more and more went to work for wages, especially toward the end of the period under study. Shirley McNab recalls that women used to work off the reserve. "Auntie Sarah, and Irene Blind and deceased Violet used to go working too, for different farms. Same with Irene, they'd go working in different places, and a lot of them worked down at the Fort at the hospital. And a lot of them found their husbands there."⁷³ Both Shirley and Bernadette Blind went to work from Lebret School, arranged by the Priest. Shirley went to the St. Vital Sanatorium and Bernadette went to Gravelbourg to work as a house maid in a French home. Women worked for wages outside the reserve just like men did; and just like the men's, their income was often brought home to help their families. Many women stopped working off reserve when they married and began raising a family. It is worth noting that in all the years I studied, there was only one mention of prostitution and that was in 1904 when a woman from the agency – it is not stated which reserve – was sentenced to six months in jail for it.⁷⁴ It seems that women by and large were not so impoverished that they had to resort to prostitution but rather were able to make a living through their considerable resourcefulness and productive activities.

Home Life

The daily life of women raising families was a busy one. Cleaning, gardening, food preparation, laundry were among the tasks Ivan McNab related:

Oh my God, their work -- it seemed like they never finished work! Besides having to clean and look after the house and I was just talking about that the other day, Lillian and I were talking about and remembering our mothers being down on their hands and knees and using a pail of water, a pail and soap like old lye soap or she called it sunlight soap, big bars of soap that you rubbed your scrubbing brush on and then scrubbed all over the floor and they would go back and forth with the scrubbing brush like this on the floors. And those floors would be just absolutely --you could eat off of them, they were so clean. And they would do it all on their hands and knees. Besides looking after the house, looking after kids – we were full time jobs then.

Was it floor boards, like actual boards?

Yeah. Like shiplap, some places didn't have linoleum so it was really hard and they were down there scraping away on these old boards with a scrubbing brush. And then some people got linoleum and it made it a little easier to clean and stuff like that.

But, keeping a clean house was just really important to the people, the old ladies back then. ... But yeah, there was a lot of work for them to do. They had gardens. That's one thing they had that I remember them, they used to work really hard in those big gardens.

⁷² See Chapter 6; McGibbon to Superintendent General, 1895.

⁷³ Shirley McNab, Interview, 7 August 2013.

⁷⁴ H. Martineau to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 4 July 1904, Indian Affairs Annual Reports, Canada, *Sessional Papers* (No. 27) 1905, 186.

They had big gardens! Potatoes and carrots and corn and different kinds of vegetables and stuff like that and they looked after that, and they kept those things-- nice and black soil and they kept them clean, weeded. And then in the fall we had to get them all up and get them into the cellar.

In winter time it was really funny, eh. She'd wash all these clothes, we'd go and hang them out on the – like she had her one line, one clothes line, but we'd just go hang them over a fence, just barb wire fence along the side, close to the house there was a fence there and that's where we'd hang them and these pants and everything like that would be just frozen absolutely stiff just like boards. So it was our job to go get these off the line and bring them in so mom could hang them inside around close to the stove so that they would thaw and then dry out in the house. But that's some of the things that we did.⁷⁵

Rena Pelletier has a fond memory of doing laundry when she was young, and it reflects the communal nature of work that the women preferred and which was evident in other tasks as well:

when we did something we always worked together. And when we would do our washing we would gather up the laundry in big blankets and we'd bring them out here, there used to be a little spring, just out here somewhere. We'd bring it over there and wash all day long. Wash and wash. There'd be about three or four other women would come, maybe two more women would come. I remember old Ada and Agnes Cyr would come, her she had a team of horses, Agnes. By the time we would finish washing we'd load up and come home, wash all day. ... *You would take all your clothes and blankets down to the slough?*

There was a little spring here. And that's where we'd make a big fire, tubs, [Jackie: Bannock and Lard] there was no Javex then and so we'd have to boil our white stuff. They'd boil it and then get this blueing to rinse; white stuff would be nice and clean and white. We would hang them on the trees until they dried, but we had all day. By evening we'd be - everything would be just - all the water was there. That was a lot of work.

In the winter, laundry was not such a pleasant task. Wet clothing would be hung outside where it would freeze stiff to be brought in later to dry around the house from the heat of the woodstove.

The best part of this was the fresh smell of the clothing.

Cooking and feeding the family was a task that fell to the woman primarily. As far as food goes, it seems there may have been quite a variety over the years. Mary Jane Anderson, born in 1895, spoke about the changes in food:

Long ago, the old people used to tell us the way they lived. All they ate [pronounced 'et'] was meat. No bread. Them days, there was no flour. All they ate was meat, and dry meat. They dry it good and then they kind of cook it from the heat of the fire, they don't burn it and then they take it and they pound it fine. That's what – and then they put

⁷⁵ Ivan McNab, Interview, 23 February 2014.

grease. That's what they call pemmican. White people called it pemmican and that's what they lived on long ago and fish.⁷⁶

The old people's preference for wild meat was well known on Gordon's, but not everyone preferred gophers, as Mary Jane Anderson recounted:

That's all we came and live on long ago, is meat. moose meat, deer meat, elk meat. I don't care much--I can't eat much of this cow meat. I'd sooner eat wild meat. Rabbits, rats, we roast rats; they taste very good when they're roast. Muskrats, you know. That's what we ate. Here, some of us eat Grey squirrels, roasted or boiled. They taste good but I don't care for gophers. I don't like them. Some people eat gophers. They used to cook them by kettle- water pail-fulls of, I seen that myself when I first come to this reserve, I'm from away north of Winnipeg, and when I come first that's where I, ayhew, I used to see them cooking them by water pailfuls, hunting them, I used to feel like vomiting. I didn't know I'd like them later on. Chuckles. I used to eat them. But now I don't bother with them. I like a grey squirrel once in awhile when they're fat, when they first come out.⁷⁷

Besides this reference, Michael McNab also remembered grey squirrels as food his grandmother ate when he was a youngster.⁷⁸ His grandfather did not usually eat them. Muskrats and beaver were also eaten.

With the trade with settlers as well as gardens, the earlier reserve residents began to diversify their diets and by the time my father was a child, his parents could purchase store-bought goods as well. Ivan continued his recollections of his mother's daily work, including cooking:

But like the women's work was really, really hard. They worked hard. They weren't slouches or being lazy. They couldn't be lazy; there was always something to do. There was always something to do. Besides that there was cleaning of ducks or rabbits or anything that was brought in, you know, preparing all the meals and everything like that. Trying to make their meals interesting. Making sure there was enough bannock in the house. You know just generally running the ship, keeping a very orderly ship. Making sure that there was enough for everybody and everybody had something. So, I think in a way, their job was one that never ended. At least the men would be able to stop work in the evening or late afternoon or something, it depended. Or if it rained they didn't have to work or something. But the women regardless of rain or shine or anything like that, they would be working, you know. Baking, washing, cleaning, looking after the kids, feeding babies if they had babies in the house and stuff like that. So they were just totally busy all the time.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Mary Jane Anderson, Interview, Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 7 or 8 March, 1977.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Michael McNab, Interview, 8 August 2013.

⁷⁹ Ivan McNab, Interview, 23 February 2014.

Besides bannock, my grandmother made bread quite regularly, in the oven of her old cast-iron cook stove, which was replaced with an electric range when electricity came to the reserve in 1968.

Children

In the days before vaccinations and Family Allowance, having children would have been both a blessing and a curse. They had to be fed and clothed on the one hand; however, they also worked and contributed their labour to the upkeep of the household. Early examples of that come from both Mary Jane Anderson, who grew up in Manitoba, and Clara Pratt who described working in the garden as a child (see Chapter 7). Mary Jane Anderson described her early contributions:

And in the winter, they used to have, when white man got here, hooks. I used to do that when I was nine years old, I used to make a little water hole. They made a little water hole so I couldn't fit in there. If a big fish gets in the hook, it might, they were scared for me to pull [be pulled in the hole]. And they made a little tent where I could set [sit]. I used to go and sit at the river; I was just chopping it out so much for the fish to fit in when I get them. I had to take home the fish; my mother or grandmother would cook it for me, for us to eat.⁸⁰

This example inspires such a mix of pity and pride, that such a small girl, who risked being towed under by a big fish, would be depended upon to supply food for herself, her mother and grandmother.

The value of children's labour must have offset their cost as every one of my respondents worked as children; there was no luxury in the days of their youth to enable them to sit around. Furthermore, adoption was common. The work of caring for the children would fall mainly to the women. Melvin McNab describes having to help his mother care for an infant, do the laundry and hang out the diapers and such because his mother had a broken arm.⁸¹ The implication was that were it not for the broken arm, it would have been her job alone. Children worked hard but also caused a lot of hard work. At Gordon's, we do not see the huge families of Catholic Métis communities such as Ile a la Crosse and others, where a family might have upwards of a dozen children.

⁸⁰ Mary Jane Anderson, Interview, Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 7 or 8 March 1977.

⁸¹ Melvin McNab, Interview, 14 August 2013.

Conclusion

Women did what work they had to do to help make a living. It was not left solely to the men to bring in the income for the family. If it meant working outside the house alongside men carrying out hard or heavy labour, women would do it. Many women were just as capable as men for some of these jobs and it appears that they were expected to do such labour in the early days of farming. With the skills learned in school or at home, women of Gordon's Reserve added to the family's resources by producing goods for sale or barter. All manner of goods might have a value and the women were clever in adapting to the styles of household articles and goods that the settler women might purchase. The fortunes of the First Nations, although always below those of the settlers, waxed and waned according to the economic times of the country. During depression years, they were poorer and during boom years, their fortunes improved. Throughout, women's fortunes were tied to men's and only in the very later period under study did women become quite independent, moving away from the reserve and making their own money.

Chapter 6

The Church and the School

Introduction

The Anglican Church and school had a major impact on the reserve community at Gordon's. Under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), a Mission was established before any significant settlement and well before the reserve was even surveyed. In fact, it apparently influenced the location chosen for the reserve. The Anglican Church was the dominant religious group throughout the years. No other denomination made significant inroads on the reserve until more recent decades. The nearest Roman Catholic Church was connected with the residential school on the adjoining Muskowekwan's reserve where a few children from Gordon's Reserve did attend. Overall, however, it was the Anglican Mission which had the greatest following. This chapter will examine the intertwined history of the Anglican Church and School on the reserve, focusing on early accounts and parish histories for the early years, and oral history provided by interviews for the latter years in this study. The Church and School – both day school and residential -- had a huge impact on the people, and hundreds of children from many other reserves attended the residential school over the years. This chapter examines some of the evidence for that and focuses on the material impacts involving women. Both men and women played important roles in the running of the Church, and the school was an important economic feature of the reserve, imparting valuable skills and hiring a fair number of women over the generations.

History of the Anglican Mission at Gordon's Reserve

The Church Missionary Society had established an Anglican mission in the Little Touchwood Hills before Treaty 4 and before any reserves were surveyed in the area. George Gordon's people were among the first to have the advantage of a Cree-speaking missionary in the form of a good friend of Gordon, the Church Missionary Society's Catechist and Lay Reader, Charles Pratt.¹ As stated earlier, Pratt, or Askīnōhtow, was a son of a French Half-breed buffalo

¹ For a history of Charles Pratt and his mission, see Winona L. Stevenson, 'The Church Missionary Society Red

hunter and a Cree-Assiniboine or Nēhiyawipwat woman. He was born at Qu'Appelle Valley in 1816. He was sent away to Red River for schooling and although he, like other Indigenous catechists, did much work among the people, he was never ordained an Anglican Minister. He could train and prepare people for baptism and other rites, but did not perform them.² As a catechist, he was nonetheless an important harbinger and teacher who founded and occupied several missions in the area, as follows:

1851-1853	Fort Pelly
1854-1858	Qu'Appelle Lakes
1858-1877	Little Touchwood Hills (St. Luke's on Gordon's Reserve)
1877	Round Lake (on Ochapowace's Reserve)
1878-1883	Big Touchwood Hills (on Daystar's Reserve). ³

In 1858, Charles Pratt, along with his wife and children, relocated to the Little Touchwood Hills, the location which would later be selected as a reserve by his friend George Gordon. His September 8th journal entry that year indicates that he sent his wife along with Mary Gordon, George Gordon's wife, to the Hudson's Bay "Co. Fort Mr. T Taylor in charge to let me have an axe. I think it strange to commence a Mission station without an axe to cut down a tree," he said, adding that the distance to the post was about ten miles.⁴ In 1858, the HBC post, Touchwood Hills, was operating on land that would be encompassed by Kawacatoose's reserve in later years.⁵

According to the 1926 account written by Elizabeth Atwater based largely on Josiah Pratt's 1914 history of the St. Luke's Mission, Charles Pratt commenced missionary work amongst the Indians of Touchwood Hills in the following year, 1859.⁶ That would be when he managed to get out enough logs to build a Mission House in which to meet, as well as a small stone house in which to live. The difficulties he and his wife faced are mentioned in his own

River Mission and the Emergence of a Native Ministry 1820-1860, with a Case Study of Charles Pratt of Touchwood Hills' (MA Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1988); also Winona Wheeler, "Pratt, Charles Cowley (1816-88)" *The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan*, accessed at http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/pratt_charles_cowley_1816-88.html, February 14, 2016.

² Stevenson, "Case Study of Charles Pratt," p. 128.

³ Stevenson, "Case Study of Charles Pratt," p. 131; however Autumn 1859 is the date given by Elizabeth Atwater's & Josiah Pratt's "History of St. Luke's Mission," (SAB, Diocese of Qu'Appelle, R280.108, 1926).

⁴ SAB, Diocese of Qu'Appelle, "Charles Pratt's Journal."

⁵ Thomas Taylor Jr. was in charge at this post for two separate stints, 1852-55 and 1857-60, and then two more stints at the post when it relocated to the Little Touchwood Hills, within a mile of the Mission. See his Biographical Sheet, accessed 20 August 2016, <https://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical/>

⁶ Atwater, E. & J. Pratt, "History of St. Luke's Mission," (1926), SAB, Diocese of Qu'Appelle, R280.108.

journal and also that of his successor. Although they managed to grow a small crop of potatoes that summer, their cattle had mostly died that spring from eating bad hay that had been cut after the frost, and they depended on buffalo to survive the season. Evidently, efforts were made to prevent that happening again. His journal entry on October 26, 1859 states, “Tuesday to day the Indian women are getting some of my hay home, upon their dogs on two sticks netted in the middle it was pitiful to see them, they were in fear that my cattle would run short of hay.”⁷ The quote is remarkable as it illustrates the old mode of transport for perhaps a new purpose. The dog travois was ubiquitous in those days, but providing hay for domestic cattle must have been new for the women. Why he found it pitiful to see them is unclear, unless it was because their efforts might have been great for the amount of hay they were able to carry. He refers to it as “my hay,” so perhaps it was already cut by him and they were simply transporting it, or perhaps it was claimed by him, as in later times, and the women cut it as well as transported it.

Apparently, the women in his family also assisted Pratt in the running of the Mission. On October 14th 1859, he wrote that his two oldest daughters ran the Sunday schools for the Indian children during his absences. From his other entries, his absences relate to wood getting and hunting expeditions to the plains along with his thirteen-year-old son Josiah, his friend George Gordon, and others.⁸ That same year, most of the Indians built log houses and Charles Pratt’s settlement was begun. Winona Stevenson documented how Pratt had convinced the others to settle and try to make a living farming, and therefore it behooved him to help them as much as he was able. “In fact his prospective farmers expected him to help them out while they prepared their gardens because he was the one who talked them into moving to a region where buffalo were no longer readily available.”⁹ He butchered his own animals to feed them and gave his own seed and livestock to help them get started.

In 1861, the HBC moved over to within a mile of the Mission House and thereafter “services were well attended by both white people and Indians.”¹⁰ A larger Mission House was built and, according to Josiah Pratt’s memoirs, in February 1866 the Mission received its first

⁷ “Charles Pratt’s Journal”

⁸ “Charles Pratt’s Journal;” Josiah later became the father-in-law of Clara (nee Anderson), featured in my case studies, Chapter 7, this dissertation.

⁹ Stevenson, “Case Study of Charles Pratt,” 154-5. Among those who settled with Pratt were George Gordon, White Horse, and their families.

¹⁰ Atwater & Pratt, 1; the post only lasted there for about five years, however

ever visit by the Bishop.¹¹ What an exciting day that must have been for Charles Pratt and his family. Seventeen candidates prepared by him were confirmed by the Bishop, five children baptized and in all, both Indian and white, thirty-two received communion.¹² Pratt interpreted the Bishop's sermon and farewell address into Cree for his congregation. An auspicious day, to be sure, but it was not the last time a Bishop would visit the reserve. It became a fairly regular occurrence, as was the practice of maintaining the Cree language in the services offered.

In the winter of 1874, Pratt built a new Mission house and a church to replace the first log church. The new church was "30 feet long by 22 feet wide, with chimneys of stone and mud at both ends."¹³ By the summer of that year, Pratt had been joined by the Rev. Joseph Reader who had been sent out by the CMS to take charge of the mission. As an ordained minister, Reader would be able to minister to the thirty-eight Christian Indians in the mission; however, he did not speak Cree and would continue to rely on Pratt for a time.

Later that summer, September 8th to the 15th, the Treaty 4 talks were held at Fort Qu'Appelle and Charles Pratt accompanied George Gordon to the negotiations, undertaking the interpretation of the Treaty document into Cree for the assembled Chiefs. When the Treaty was concluded, Pratt signed on with George Gordon's band as he was now married to a member, his first wife having passed away earlier. After working briefly at Ochapowace's Reserve and then at Day Star's, Pratt moved back to Gordon's, where one Sunday in April 1885, "having concluded service as usual, while sitting at dinner with this family, [he] was suddenly seized with a paralytic stroke" which left him unable to move or speak until he eventually died in 1888.¹⁴ Charles Cowley Pratt is buried in the St. Luke's cemetery, his grave marked by the largest stone monument in the graveyard.

The Mission established by Charles Pratt was destined to carry on and have great influence in the community. The church and the school were part and parcel for most of their history. Reader had managed to build a new school on the southwest edge of the reserve in 1876 but he was relocated in 1881, leaving for the Pas, Manitoba.¹⁵ In 1881, Rev. Reader was replaced by Rev. J.R. Settee for one winter, who in turn was replaced by Rev. Gilbert Cook. But

¹¹ Atwater & Pratt, 1.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 2.

¹⁴ Atwater & Pratt, 3.

¹⁵ Atwater & Pratt, 3; however an article in the *Touchwood Times*, states that Mr. Reader and family left Gordon's in 1879, for Prince Albert, accompanied by Mrs. Cyr and her two sons John and Francis (March 1, 1928).

in 1883 Cook left also, moving to Round Plain from where he likely continued to come to Gordon's once in a while as his name is found in the records for a few years afterward. Charles Pratt, meanwhile, carried on the school and Sunday services until his stroke.

After Pratt became paralyzed, a Mr. Owen Owens came to the reserve in 1886. This was the year that the newly created Diocese of Qu'Appelle assumed control of the Mission.¹⁶ A log schoolhouse was built and day school was taught by Mr. Owens. Two years later, it was expanded to provide room for boarders.

Meanwhile, a new church was being built on the reserve at the location of the present-day one. As the *Touchwood Times* tells it on the 100th anniversary of the Mission:

Built of logs and plastered the new church was completed and dedicated in 1889. Consecration day, August 2, was also the date of the first Baptism in the church. The infant was Ann Catherine Bird. The building had taken four years to erect. In the winter of 1886-87 the logs were cut and trimmed. Next summer the framework was put up and work progressed so that services could be held in it the next summer. Those that could contributed money. Others contributed loads of stone and wood. Others contributed labor. Joshiah (sic) Pratt did the final plastering in 1889.¹⁷

In 1890, the Rev. Owen Owens, Priest-in-Charge of the Indian School and Mission on Gordon's Reserve, wrote that the scattered nature of the settlement on the reserve leads to poor attendance at school. "Young children ill-clad, and ill-fed too sometimes, could not be expected to attend very regularly."¹⁸ And therefore, the case is made for having the children boarding at the school.

We are quite convinced that the Boarding School system is the best, from both religious and secular points of view. The children are kept away, to a great measure, from the evil influence of undesirable homes, and also attend regularly, making better progress possible, and above all, they are kept within reach of religious instruction, which is almost impossible in the day-school. Habits of order and cleanliness are formed at school, which are reflected very soon upon the homes of the children, and thus the boarding-school becomes a sort of beacon light in the Reserve.¹⁹

Mrs. Owens was apparently his assistant in instilling such habits, both on the reserve and in the school, although she likely was not paid for it but simply expected to carry out the work as the

¹⁶ Anglican Church of Canada, "Gordon's School – Punnichy, SK," accessed 14 February, 2016, <http://www.anglican.ca/tr/histories/gordons-school-punnichy/>.

¹⁷ Author Unknown, "St. Luke's Mission – 100 Years. Charles Pratt First Anglican Missionary in 1859." *Touchwood Times* (Wednesday, October 21, 1959).

¹⁸ Owen Owens, "The Indian School and Mission on Gordon's Reserve, Touchwood Hills." *Occasional Paper 20*, Diocese of Qu'Appelle (January, 1890), 13.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

wife of the Minister. She was probably the first to undertake this role. Subsequent reports in the Occasional Papers that same year contain pleas for assistance for materials to assist the women.

A Miss Boyce wrote:

I shall be very much obliged if you could kindly collect a few remnants of cloth, serge, chamois leather, or any-thing almost, so that the Indian women may have something decent to bead on. Everything in the North West Territory is dreadfully expensive, especially on the Reserves . . . Some bright-coloured coarse cheap yarn would be very useful for the women and girls connected with our Missions. Mrs. Owens is doing all she can to help those people to help themselves; -- of course they prefer the beading and *will* do it, therefore it is better to have decent material to work on; -- but Mrs. Owens is doing all she can to teach them knitting and mending. . . . Our Sunday School sent our protegee, Mabel Bear, some yarn and knitting needles for knitting her own stockings and mitts.²⁰

The article went on to ask for donations of clothing, as well, as the parents are too poor to provide the school children with suitable clothes.

Over the next twenty years or so, a number of different men came as ministers and/or principals to the school for varying lengths of time. Throughout, Josiah Pratt continued to offer services in Cree. Clara Pratt remarked that her father-in-law Josiah took over from his father Charles when the latter passed away. "He preached to the whole church for fifty years. And, you know, that old man would go up to the pulpit and talk to us. He'd start off in English and he'd interpret what was said in English into Cree. And they all understood – the Indians that weren't able to understand English got everything, anyway."²¹

In 1894, the Bishop visited again. The service was well attended by the Indians, he wrote, with 25 communicants and twenty children in the school, where he stayed. On the Monday, he met with some of the Indians from the reserve, "chiefly heathen."²²

One "Daybird" was "got up" in most magnificent attire; he came with his two wives, and he acted as spokesman, passing round the 'pipe' which each smoked in turn. He spoke of the good the Mission had done, and how many of his family were Christians. He asked me to get the Government to build the new School, and also begged that I would try and get "clothes, tea, and tobacco" for the old people this year, as they are suffering from loss of hay through fires. He pointed to his grand clothes, and wished me to know that he was not

²⁰ Author unknown, "Work Among the Indians" *Occasional Paper 21*, Diocese of Qu'Appelle (April, 1890), 6-7.

²¹ oURspace Collection. Clara Pratt Interview #1 and #2, by Alex Cywink for the Indian History Film Project (Regina, SK: University of Regina, Canadian Plains Research Center, 30 June 1983, accessed 20 March 2013, <http://ourspace.uregina.ca/handle/10294/2007>).

²² "Letter from the Bishop, Qu'Appelle Station, August 31, 1894" *Occasional Paper 38* Diocese of Qu'Appelle (October, 1894), 7.

always like that. His wives sat near him in rags, smoking short pipes. With thanks for our interview it was at an end. Of course I had an interpreter.”²³

As a Headman, Day Bird was a major spokesperson conveying the wish for a new school to be supplied by the government. This was a Treaty promise and possibly Day Bird was hoping to see the promise fulfilled to its greatest potential or at least to see an improvement on what was currently in operation. His wish for a new school was to be granted; whether it met his hopes, we do not know but rather doubt, given the problems that would unfold in later years.

In 1895, the government built a larger, two-storey building for the school which could accommodate 30 pupils.²⁴ The Reverend Owen Owens presided over the October 11th “opening of the Boarding School for Indian children ... at St. Luke’s, Touchwood Hills.”²⁵

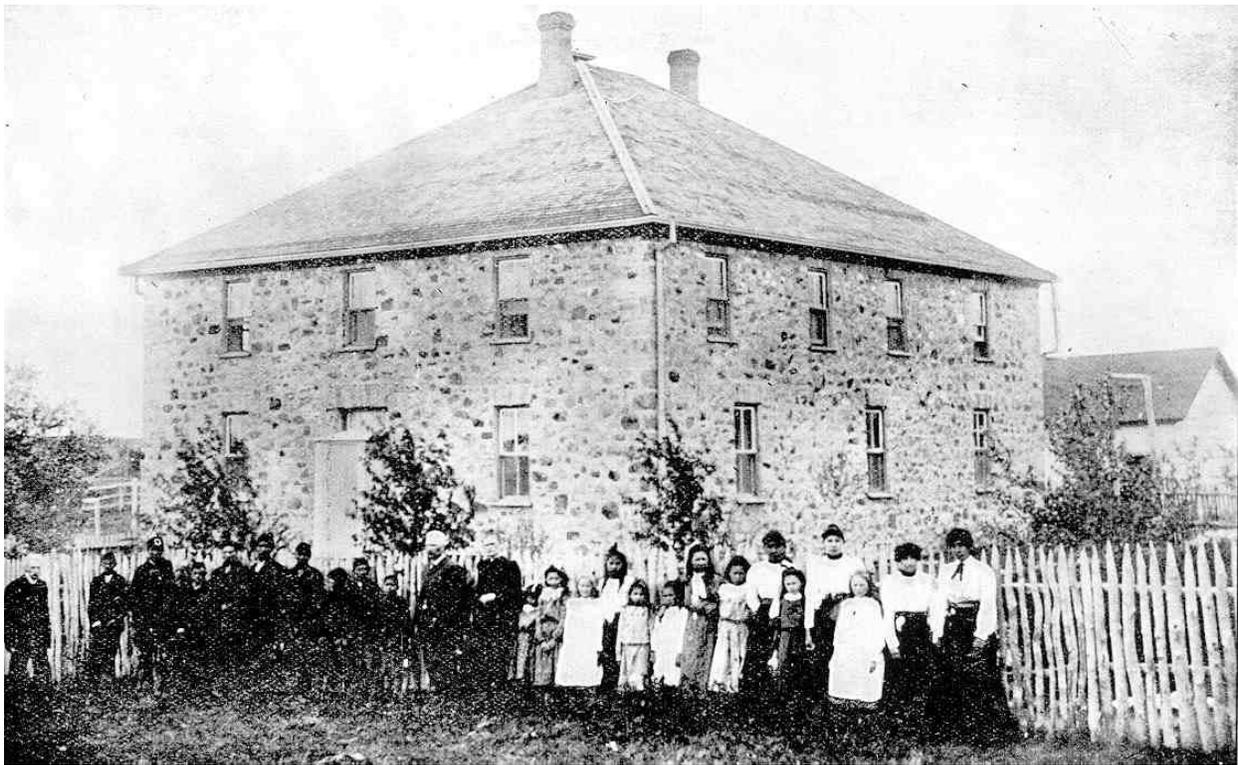


Figure 6.1 Gordon’s Boarding School 1904²⁶

In 1897, a Mr. Williams became Acting Principal and then Principal for eight years while

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Another source says it could accommodate 20 boarders, presumably, 30 day pupils, 20 boarding: Maizy Ford, Gordon Schools in *Between the Touchwoods: A History of Punnichy and Districts* (Punnichy, SK: Punnichy and Districts History Book Committee, 1983), 46.

²⁵ Author Unknown, “Work Among the Indians” *Occasional Paper 43*, Diocese of Qu’Appelle (February, 1896), 10.

²⁶ CSP (No. 27, 1904), 288-9.

his wife, Mrs. Williams served as Matron.²⁷ Rev. C.F. Lallemand was in charge of the Mission. Lallemand wrote in February of that year that there were 32 boarders at the school, including some non-Treaty Half-breeds. He declared, “they are almost more care than the treaty children, as no one looks after them, and they are growing up in ignorance and vice. For these children we get no permanent grant.”²⁸ It is unclear why they were more of a problem and his statement “no one looks after them,” suggests that the parents on the reserve were able to have a hand in the raising and looking after of their own children even while they were boarding. For the Half-breeds’ children, their parents would have lived off the reserve and a bit farther away, although it could have been as close as the road allowance on the edge of the reserve boundary. Or perhaps he meant that since they get no permanent grant for their care, they weren’t being taken care of properly.

Lallemand went on to ask for donations of more boys’ clothing for the school children, but also, on behalf of the people of the reserve. “May I ask for women’s dresses. We have many poor old people who can earn nothing save by berry picking. They have never worked, and are now too old to learn. I have nothing to give them.”²⁹ Rev. Lallemand did not stay long at Gordon’s, returning to England after perhaps only a year, but on his way out, he is reported as saying that the reserve had a population of 165 and the school had fifteen boys and fifteen girls. The girls learned sewing and housework while the boys worked on the farm, but more land and more cows were required for the school. He described how services during the week often take place in the lay-reader’s house or some other house, with the lay-reader (no doubt Josiah Pratt), reading lessons in Cree and providing Cree services on Thursdays and Fridays.³⁰

Despite his short tenure there, Lallemand saw fit to make some pronouncements about the people: “The Cree man makes his wife cut up the wood; his characteristic is laziness. He is fond of money, but, up to a certain point, honest. The children are apt to steal and lie, but if you keep your word to an Indian he will always keep his promise to you. The half-breeds are fairly clean and tidy, but in other respects the half-breed is worse than the Indian.”³¹ These comments

²⁷ Atwater & Pratt, 4.

²⁸ Author Unknown, “Work Among the Indians” *Occasional Paper 47*, Diocese of Qu’Appelle (February, 1897), 11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Author Unknown, “Work Among the Indians” *Occasional Paper 49*, Diocese of Qu’Appelle (August, 1897), 8-9.

³¹ Author Unknown, “Work Among the Indians” *Occasional Paper 49*, Diocese of Qu’Appelle (August, 1897), 9.

are in direct contrast to many of those made by Indian Agents and others on the reserve, referred to in my previous chapters.

Lallemand also remarked that the girls appeared to slide back to their “native habits” more frequently than the boys did. These remarks were published in August 1897 and interestingly, the Rev. Owen Owens, now working at the Fort Pelly Mission, felt compelled to write in the very next *Occasional Paper* in defense of the work that had been done at Gordon’s and the progress he felt had been made. First he wrote about Half-breeds and how “some of the worst have not all been halfbreeds nor all illiterate.”³² One gets the sense that his words are directed to certain White people here and not Indians. Then Owens goes on to address the issue of backsliding at some length:

All the girls who have left Gordon’s school, with one exception, deserve commendation rather than censure. They have not fallen back into heathen ways, and they do not, of their own accord, attend heathen dances and feasts. If being the children of heathen parents, they are compelled to witness these heathen orgies in their own homes, that surely is their great misfortune and not their faults.

On the other hand, the homes to which the girls have returned have been converted from dirty hovels into a degree of cleanliness very creditable to girls. From every point of view the effect of Boarding School training is even more permanent and more far reaching with the girls than with the boys. Napoleon’s saying about mothers should be borne in mind.

Some of the boys, after they leave school, become restless and unsatisfactory for a while -- visiting Indian dances, &c. -- but before long they settle down to regular work and habits. ...

The readers of the *Occasional* will be glad to know that after over ten years of work at Gordon’s School and Mission, and a year and a half here in similar work, I can confidently say that our Indian work is progressive and hopeful. The people, whether Indians or half-breeds, are deserving of all that we can do for their advancement.³³

Of course Rev. Owens was anxious to not alienate the support of the general public and various congregations who supported the Indian missions, and he would also wish to support his wife and her effectiveness in regard to the girls’ education, but it seems he had a much better understanding as well as a real affection for the people after spending so long at Gordon’s. Two years earlier he had written about how the boys hunted rabbits, with bows and arrows after sweeping through a bush, and about their favourite game of hoop shooting. He made no mention

³² Author Unknown, “Work Among the Indians” *Occasional Paper* 50, Diocese of Qu’Appelle (November, 1897), 14.

³³ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

of girls, but stated, “[t]he Indian lads are really nice boys, and after getting into their ways and peculiarities, one gets to like them very much.”³⁴ He certainly attached a great deal of importance to the education and training of girls in achieving the overall culture change of the people that both government and church desired.

After Lallemand left, the Mission then became vacant for a time, but Josiah Pratt and travelling missionaries continued to hold services. In 1906, the relatively new Indian Agent, W. Murison reflected:

These Indians are an intelligent lot, They have their own church on the reserve, where services are conducted by the Church of England clergyman every Sunday. One of their number acts as lay reader and another as organist. They sent one of their number as lay delegate to the synod held at Regina this year. The church and premises is kept in repair, and all business in connection therewith is conducted by the Indians themselves.³⁵

While Mrs. Williams served as Matron, “half an acre of garden was cultivated each year, giving a great variety of vegetables, and the girls were carefully instructed in housework.”³⁶ During the Williams’s years, the Principal consistently remarked in his annual reports that the girls learned very well from Mrs. Williams, with statements such as this one, “The girls are taught all household duties, butter-making, and the care of same. I cannot speak too highly of their work and proficiency.”³⁷ This praise was repeated several times.

During these years, the Bishop visited from time to time, confirming and baptizing the newcomers to the flock. In 1912, the Atwater era began with the arrival at the school of Rev. H. W. Atwater and his two grown daughters. The Misses Atwater, Elizabeth and Lou, “came to Gordon’s with him to act as Matron and Assistant Matron, respectively, the latter receiving the salary of a W.A. Worker.”³⁸ The principal of the school, Mr. Cooper was soon let go and Rev. Atwater took charge of the classroom, followed in due course by his daughter Elizabeth as both were qualified teachers. Various other women from elsewhere were employed or trained as assistant matrons or as cooks while the Atwaters were there. Three were supported by the

³⁴ Author Unstated, “Life on an Indian Mission School,” *Occasional Paper 41*, Diocese of Qu’Appelle (August 1895), 15. Although the author is not stated, the place and time indicates it must be Owens.

³⁵ W. Murison Report to F. Pedley, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 3 July 1906, Indian Affairs Annual Reports, Canada, *Sessional Papers* (No. 27) 1907, 147.

³⁶ Atwater & Pratt, 4.

³⁷ M. Williams, Principal, Gordon’s Boarding School, to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 2 July 1904, CSP (No. 27, 1904), 346-7.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 4-5. Lou’s name was possibly Louisa, but in the oral history she is remembered as Lou.

Women's Auxiliary (W.A.).³⁹ This meant more exposure to examples and more training for the girls at the school.

Reverend Atwater immediately stepped up the self-sufficiency of the school by obtaining a grant for oxen and implements to establish the school farm, enabling the boys to train in farming and to help finance the school, "the per capita grant of \$100.00 not being enough to provide all that was necessary for the children's welfare."⁴⁰ By the next year, Atwater had taken up the responsibilities of the vacant Mission as well, conducting services at St. Luke's as well as at various churches in the district. On a monthly basis he travelled to Kutawa, Raymore, and nearby churches. He travelled around on an old horse, but since the railroad had been built in 1909, he was able to take the train to Raymore in the morning, visit around there, and come back on the evening train one Sunday a month.⁴¹

In 1914, the Bishop of Qu'Appelle visited, confirming thirteen school children and in August of that year he visited Punnichy where he was "presented by the Indians on the reserve with a beautiful beaded mitre, worked by Mrs. James Pratt."⁴² A beaded mitre, being the Bishop's tall, pointed hat, would be something to see and perhaps a photo of it exists that I have not found. This type of reference to women is typical of all we find in the diocesan records that I examined and in the newspaper accounts of the day.

In 1915, the government built an addition to the school so that it could now accommodate fifty pupils. In 1916, the "Christian Indians" asked that plans be made to build a new church, and a subscription list was opened, with pledges of money and cords of stone being made by the band members.⁴³ It took a number of years, however, before the church construction was begun, and Rev. Atwater did not live to see it finished and in use. Mr. Atwater stayed at Gordon's until his death late in 1925, and he is buried in an exclusive part of the graveyard just east of the Church, as are his daughters. The Misses Atwater remained with the school for many years after.

³⁹ Atwater & Pratt, 5-6.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 6.

⁴³ Atwater & Pratt, 7.

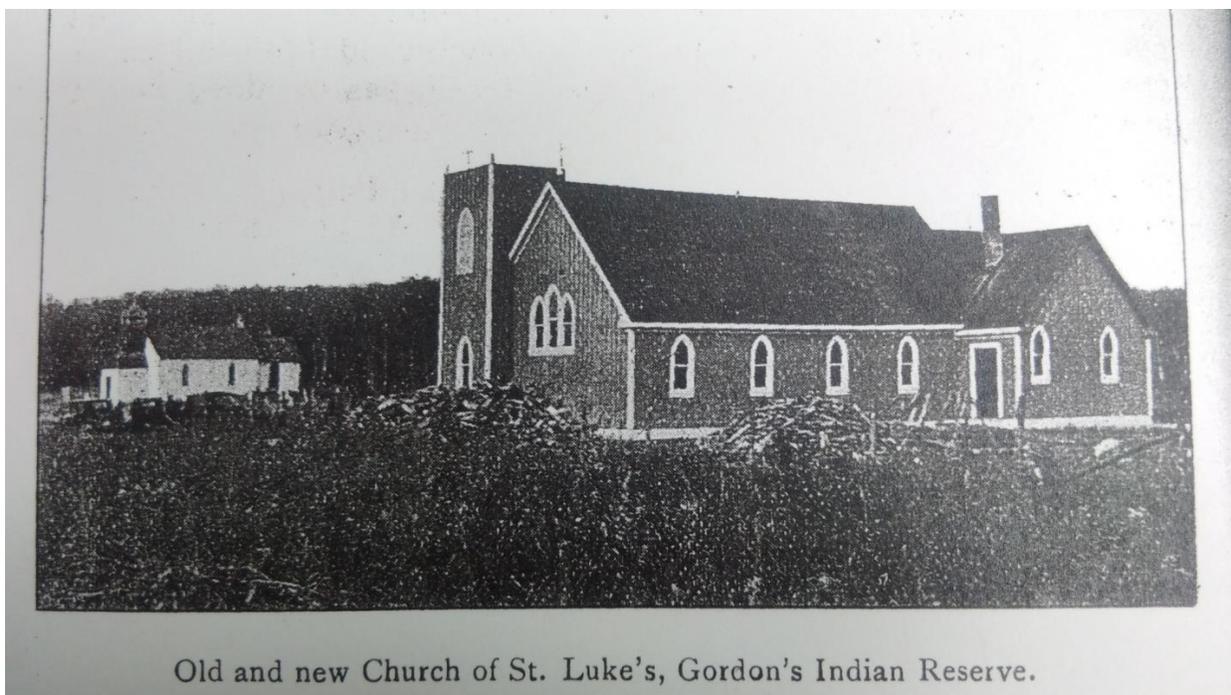


Figure 6.2 Photo of St. Luke's Churches⁴⁴

The new St. Luke's Church, completed in late 1925 or early 1926, is shown here without its spire, with the old church in the background. This photo would have been taken sometime between 1925 and 1934. The original log structure which had been situated a mile or two northeast of this location had been taken down by this time. The white church depicted in this photo is the one completed in 1889, which had been plastered by Josiah Pratt. Betty Favel remembered the old church and moving into the new one; she would have been about four years old.⁴⁵ The new church here is the basic structure of the present St. Luke's, although it has seen work since then (see Figures 6.3 and 6.4).

As the years went on, the school, a couple of miles away, became more and more the centre of activity but the various write-ups in the local newspaper and Parish History notes in the Diocese records indicate that the church was still the site of important visitors such as the Bishop and Archdeacons, when members of the party accompanying were listed and the order of events reported. Sometimes, the names of locals are mentioned. When an important visitor came or a special service, the school children would march from the school to the church for the occasion. The administration of both was closely intertwined, as continuing after Rev. Atwater, the

⁴⁴ SAB, R280-108 Diocese of Qu'Appelle. *Occasional Paper No. 156* (Spring 1934), 46.

⁴⁵ Betty Favel, Interview, August 2, 2013.

Ministers who came to the school also ministered to the Reserve. That included a Rev. T.J. Davies, Canon Irwin, Rev. Percival, and Rev. Stanford. When the school burned and was rebuilt in 1929, Rev. H. Hinkley became the missionary to the reserve while a Mr. Frayling became the school administrator.⁴⁶ Hinkley was followed by Rev. Dewdney around 1934, who in turn was followed by Rev. Buck. When Buck's successor, Mr Woods, came in 1947 or 48, he served as school principal once again and his wife was the matron.⁴⁷ That brings us up to the end of the period under study here, although I include two recent photos of the St. Luke's Church below.



Figure 6.3 Recent photo of St. Luke's Church⁴⁸

These two photos of St. Luke's were taken by the author in 2008. The photo below shows the inside of the church with artwork by local band members; paintings by Sanford Fisher and the beaded frontal of the altar having been done by local women including Nancy Bitternose, who is featured later in this work.

⁴⁶ Helen McNab, untitled portion of "St. Luke's Mission" in *Between the Touchwoods: A History of Punnichy and Districts* (Punnichy, SK: Punnichy and Districts History Book Committee, 1983), 109.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ This photo, taken by the author, appears to be taken from the approximate location of the former church building.



Figure 6.4 Interior of St. Luke's Church, Gordon's Reserve

In August, 2013, a special service was held at St. Luke's for the McNabs who attended a family reunion. Ivan McNab made a speech in which he recalled that when he was a small boy, the men of the reserve, "the mosoms," all stood at the back of the church during Sunday services and they all sang the hymns, their great, booming voices filling the small church.⁴⁹ This made an impression on others interviewed as well.

History of the Anglican School on Gordon's

To recap some of the history of the school that has been alluded to so far, while Charles Pratt began instructing children as early as 1859 for the CMS, Rev. Joseph Reader assumed the responsibility in 1875. Reader built a small school on what became the western boundary of the reserve and taught a day school there from 1876 until his departure in 1881.⁵⁰ When Mr. And Mrs. Owens came in 1886, the new Diocese of Qu'Appelle had assumed responsibility and, with government funding, a new log school house was built and two years later, in 1888, it was enlarged to accommodate boarders. That was the same year that the school was awarded the

⁴⁹ Ivan must have inherited their singing ability because he was noted for his voice and became a celebrity in 1965 when he won a Saskatchewan-wide talent contest, "Gala Night Under the Stars," the first prize of which was to go to Hollywood and appear on the hit show "Bonanza."

⁵⁰ It should be noted that Reader eventually returned to the Touchwood area to live in retirement. He wrote some "Recollections" for the *Touchwood Times* in 1920.

prize for the “best school in the Territories,” while second prize went to Muscowequan’s.⁵¹ That success was followed up the next year with a repeat performance. In 1895, a new two-storey stone building was constructed by the government and operated by the Diocese. It had capacity for thirty boarders. This one appears to have been built in a new location, south of the present school location.⁵² Over the years, buildings were expanded or added and the government grant was increased. By 1915, up to forty-five students could be boarded.

The sources examined up to this point generally show little of how the school might have impacted the students, but a Farm Instructor’s daily journal for the year 1911 indicates that he was called upon several times to go out looking for runaways from the school. The journal records very brief notes every day of the year, and half way through the Farm Instructor changed but the style did not. Pertaining to runaways, we find these entries:

Thursday, February 16, 1911:

Looking up a runaway school girl who refused to go back when found. Christina Brass started this evening for File Hills with Sam Brass

Monday, April 10:

Went to Punnichy and brought a school girl back who has been absent without leave

Tuesday, May 30:

Gathering in the girls that is absent from the school

Saturday, November 18:

Forenoon done chores and took Children back to school that ran away Afternoon cut wood.⁵³

Interestingly, they were all girls except for the last entry when it just states “children.” The first two entries are single girls, but the last two are plural and no total number is given. The first girl refuses to go back and it appears her wishes are honoured as she travels back to File Hills. The entries are so brief and cryptic it is difficult to interpret exactly what is happening. It would be much better to examine some first-hand accounts. The only account I was given was that of William Bitternose who ran away from the school in about 1939 along with another boy and

⁵¹ H. Keith, Indian Agent, Report to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 27 August 1888, Indian Affairs Annual Reports, Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 1889, 61.

⁵² Ford, “Gordon Schools,” 46.

⁵³ Farm Instructor’s Journal, Gordon’s Reserve, 1911. (Original in private collection on Gordon’s Reserve).

travelled all the way to Kamsack and environs where they worked for a bit before being fetched back to the school.⁵⁴

Clara Pratt related some of her school experience on Gordon's, and hers seems to have been fairly positive. She would have entered school in about 1912 when she was ten and she left school at age eighteen, having completed grade seven. "I wanted to go to Grade Eight, but no promotion. They just kept me in Grade Seven," she related. "They wouldn't let us go forward when we wanted – I was ambitious. I went to the office one day when I was Grade Seven and I asked the principal, 'Please may I stay until I get to Grade Eight?' 'There's no Grade Eight here,' he said. 'There's just certain ones that are going to go to Grade Eight.' And this principal and the Indian Agent had picked them out, and I wasn't one of them."⁵⁵ It is probable that only boys were chosen for a higher education, and they would have only had the option to go into the ministry in order to continue their studies. Clara did not have many other complaints about the school in her 1983 interview except that the principal would not let the students speak Cree or Saulteaux. Around 1921 there was a major fire and a new school was built in 1922 in a new location. This new location is the one familiar to all but the very young of the reserve nowadays, because it was the location of the last residential school in operation in Canada, which was closed and demolished in 1996. That is, in the vicinity of the present-day band office and school.

The school that was built in 1922 burned down in 1929. That school was attended by Nancy Bitternose. She may be the only one still alive who attended there.⁵⁶ Betty Favel told me she started school at the day school during the interim while the residential school was being rebuilt. William Bitternose said he began attending when the students went back to the new school after it was rebuilt. Clara Pratt would have attended the former school, as would my grandparents. The other elders I interviewed were too young to have attended it. But Nancy related her early experiences going to school there:

Like I was saying, I was born in January 25, 1921. I went to school in 1937 no, I left school in 1937. 1927 I went to school and I left school in 1937. I was in school for 10 years. [Right here?]

⁵⁴ William Bitternose, Interview, 2 August 2013.

⁵⁵ Clara Pratt Interview #1.

⁵⁶ Nancy Bitternose is the oldest person on the reserve, but there is a woman, Philomene (nee Bird) Moise who lives in Lestock who may have attended this school. She turned 104 on July 11, 2015 and is still alive as of February 21, 2016. See Tiffany Head, "Muskowekwan Elder celebrates her 104th birthday" *Eagle Feather News* (July 21, 2015). Further to this, Mrs. Moise passed away on 16 November 2016 at the age of 105.

Yes. And you've seen the picture of the school that was there before, eh? The old school? That's where I went to school, in that school, and I stayed in school and we went, we'd go back on the 14th of August and we didn't go home for holidays till the end of June, June the 28th or 29th whatever day it was. And we only got to go home once a month on a Saturday from 9-5. That was all we were allowed and we weren't allowed to go home for Christmas or New Year's. Christmas was getting all our toys and stuff and then New Year's, we would have our big New Year's meal, of course Christmas too, we'd have our meals. [At the school?]

Yes, at the school. So that was only the time we were allowed to go home, was once a month on a Saturday.

Nancy remembered the day of the fire, February 1, 1929.⁵⁷ According to the local history, the fire was of unknown origin. "The teacher in the senior room, Miss E. Atwater, sounded the alarm. The students were evacuated, [and] the staff took on the duties of firefighters. The fire spread quickly through the frame building, causing an estimated loss of \$235,000.00."⁵⁸ According to Nancy's recollection,

We were in the classroom after dinner when they told us the school is burning! And it burnt down. I didn't feel nervous or anything but then a lot of people were getting there because they sent word out right away, you know. And the school started burning and that was one of the senior boys, or I think intermediate that time, or a senior, that was one of the boys that burned the school down. [Do you know who it was?]

Jack Starblanket, he was from Peepeekeesis, from Balcarres. 'Cause he used to come and stay with my dad and mother, like my brother Sandy was his friend in school and he used to come and stay with us holidays.... . And he's the one that -- And they were telling us after in the boys' washroom there was a hole on the wall and I guess he stuck some paper in there, they used to always stick paper in there, and I don't know how he got a hold of a match and he lit that match and that's how the school burned down and we were in the classroom that afternoon. [Did they try to put it out?]

Oh, they couldn't do nothing it was too quick but they got everybody out and everything right away. That's why I always say you never know what somebody is going to do and we never thought that school would burn down. ... So I can always remember that, I never forget that school, you know.⁵⁹

The school was rebuilt, a large three-storey high brick building with a chapel and dormitories, laundry, kitchen, dining room which remained in use until 1996. It reopened for school in September 1930, with the children walking to the old day school in the interim. The new school, which officially opened in June of 1931, had room for 120 boarders which included most of the

⁵⁷ "Gordon's Indian Boarding School Destroyed by Fire," *Touchwood Times* (Thursday, February 7, 1929).

⁵⁸ Ford, "Gordon Schools," 46.

⁵⁹ Nancy Bitternose, Interview, July 31, 2013.

elders I interviewed. It operated as a residential school from then until 1996 except for extended periods between 1945 and 1953 when there were problems with the water supply. During those times, children were sent either to Muskowekwan or Elkhorn residential schools, or attended day school on the reserve. Among the latter were my father and his siblings and most of the other people that I interviewed. The following is a photograph of the large red-brick residential school which stood for over 65 years. On the left is the white classroom building built in 1956.



Figure 6.5 Gordon's Indian Residential School, c. late 1950s⁶⁰

Gendered Work in the School

It is not clear exactly when girls began attending the school or if it was a mixed lot right from the beginning. J.R. Miller points out that gender was not remarked upon much as a separate category of relations early on.⁶¹ Initially the boarding schools in the Prairie West were seen as primarily for boys, but very quickly girls were also accepted. Miller provides evidence that the Ministers and government officials recognized that educating women was fundamental

⁶⁰ Photo is copied from Prairie Towns, accessed 3 February 2016, <http://www.prairie-towns.com/punnichy-images.html>.

⁶¹ J.R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 218.

to the project of remaking the Indians' cultures. Much as Rev. Owens, quoted above, states about the "permanent and more far reaching" effects of boarding school training of girls, "[i]n particular, clerics and many others held that women were the centre of the home and the formative character influence on children. Accordingly, to pursue the assimilation of Native society through schooling without educating the females was pointless."⁶² Training boys and not girls was considered 'futile' early on.

As Miller points out, "[d]iffering expectations of female and male students emerged in the earliest stages of the development of post-Confederation residential schools."⁶³ This was partly seen in gender segregation; girls and boys kept strictly separate in many schools. But even more obvious were the differences in "vocationally oriented instruction, or training outside the classroom."⁶⁴ Miller states that curriculum for boys' training described in detail the skills they were to learn while girls' were to be taught "domestic science" or "sewing," "indicating that they were confined in their vocational training almost exclusively to skills suitable for a future as wives, mothers, and homemakers."⁶⁵ There was a gendered division of labour prevalent in the residential school, but one thing boys and girls had in common was that they were all expected to work for their own upkeep and to help sustain the school. For boys this meant all manner of farm work to raise food for the staff and students, and for girls, all the domestic work, cooking, sewing, and cleaning. The boys worked outside and the girls inside. Many have remarked on how they had to work half the day and study half the day. While the men may have learned a lot in the process, it is the women who remarked upon their accomplishments in a positive way more so than the men.

Clara Pratt stated that they taught the girls "washing, ironing, cooking, whatever we could do, sewing, we did a lot of sewing – patching men's and boy's clothing, our own. We learned all that at school, hence we were all good housekeepers, right down to my daughter."⁶⁶ Lillian Morris, as stated in Chapter 5, had a good experience and would not allow anyone to "run down the school."⁶⁷ Her skills were in demand at the school, cooking for the farm workers

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 220.

⁶⁶ Clara Pratt, Interview

⁶⁷ William G. Morris, in *Kēhtē-ayak ohci Kisēpatināhk*, (Gordon First Nation, 2016), 148;

during summers. After she left school, she was employed at the Agency as a domestic worker, and then later at the school again in laundry and custodial work.⁶⁸

Another who appreciated what was learned at the school was Philomene Moise (nee Cyr). In a recent news article, Philomene's daughter stated that her mother, who attained the age of 105 in 2016 and who had attended residential school at Gordon's when young, enjoyed her experience at the school. "She liked it there because she learned how to sew, cook, clean, and she got a lot of skills that later on helped her be a good wife and mother," Marlene Moise stated. Moise recalled that her mother had worked as a seamstress at a residential school (it is not stated whether Gordon's or Muskowekwan's) and subsequently made all her children's clothing as well as growing beautiful gardens. With her many capabilities, she brought up numerous children, two families in addition to her own, taking in others' children as needed.⁶⁹ That the skills they acquired at school were in demand and earned them a living after they left school seems to have been a large part of their positive regard for the school.

Others had less enthusiasm about the role of the school in their training. Nancy Bitternose related:

when I went to school, I only went to grade 5 cause I.. but then when we used to go to school ... after we got into a higher grade and went up to the classroom, then we used to go to school half a day every day, like two and half days a week and two and a half days of working. I started working when I was about 11 years old. I used to have to help making beds, work in the dormitory, work in the playroom and we'd have to scrub – and then they would have different things for us to do off and on, you know. And then when we went to the classroom, like if we did arithmetic or what, in the morning, the first class, when we'd go have recess for 15 minutes, go back to class again, they'd give you something different, they never finished off anything.⁷⁰

In other words, Nancy is explaining that she could not advance beyond grade 5 because of the constant need for work and the interrupted lessons. A year or two behind Nancy, Betty Favel remembers the work she had to do in the big school:

There would be about six girls, mostly senior girls and some of the intermediates would be put for a month to go into the kitchen and help around, do different things like butter bread and different things like that. And then sometimes we have to put the food on your plate and put those out on the table. There was six tables for the girls and six for the boys.

⁶⁸ Lillian Morris, in *Kēhtē-ayak ohci Kisēpatināhk*, (Gordon First Nation, 2016), 137.

⁶⁹ Jeanelle Mandes, "Another visit with our beloved Indigenous centarians [sic]" *Eagle Feather News* (July 2016), 22.

⁷⁰ Nancy Bitternose Interview, July 31, 2013.

Sometimes there were not as many boys as there were girls. So they'd just have just enough tables to accommodate the boys and same for the girls. ...

M: What other jobs did you get?

B: You had to work in the dormitory and in the main hallway. You got that job. She used to come with a list every once a month. She'd have a list and hang it on the door. That's where you worked for a month.

M: So if you worked in the hall that means you had to sweep and wash the floors and stuff like that?

B: Yeah, sweep and damp mop the floors and all of that. That's the main hallway. Because the ones that worked in the dorms worked on the hallways upstairs by the dorms.

M: Do you think that working at the school taught girls any valuable lessons? Did the girls learn any skills from that?

B: Yeah, a lot of them did because they didn't learn it at home. Not like me. I learnt a lot at home.⁷¹

Ivan McNab made related remarks about his mother's generation. He also makes a distinction about what people learned at home and what they learned at the school. Some families already had some of these skills and some added skills to their traditional knowledge:

[A]nd so all it needed to be was just trained to be a housewife and so a lot of them come out of those residential schools with all that so ingrained in them, and you knew some of the ones that didn't go to residential schools or the school didn't have as much influence in their lives; there was some of them that still retained very much and hung on to their traditions and their languages and everything like that. I see that from my mom's generation with all her sisters and it seemed like the only thing they were trained to do was do that; work in the home, cleaning, cooking, sewing, all those kinds of things.⁷²

His mom and her sisters were Flora Anderson's daughters, brought up in the school with a new set of skills (see Flora's story in the case studies in Chapter 7). They may have managed to hold on to their language and traditions, but few passed them down intact to the next generation. One of them, my grandmother Doris, was an avid reader and passed her interest on to her daughter Irene (Walter) who later became the first trained teacher from the reserve. The school at Gordon's assisted the purpose of assimilation, partly by interrupting the traditional socialization and enculturation of children by their own grandparents and parents. The progression of culture change can be seen in most families of Gordon's throughout the years under study.

⁷¹ Betty Favel Interview, August 2, 2013

⁷² Ivan McNab, Interview, 23 February 2014.

Other impacts of the school

The school provided training for women to work in their homes, but some of them learned to work for wages there, too. The girls who were considered well trained were sometimes placed out for domestic work. Those placements might take place right from the school into the settlers' homes, but in some cases, the girls were hired after they had left the school. The school and its training was the source of this type of work, which is discussed further in the case studies. Furthermore, some of the girls who aged out of the school and perhaps were particularly good workers were later hired back at the school in various positions. Some began in the laundry, custodial work, or in the kitchen as assistant cooks, sometimes rising up the ranks. The earliest evidence of this was in 1895 when, among the staff consisting of the principal, his wife the matron, the assistant principal/teacher, and the assistant matron, there was "Flora McNab, a former pupil, laundress and general house servant."⁷³ This is the first woman to be hired at the school that I came across.

Among my interviewees, Betty Favel and her niece Lillian (Pratt) Morris both had worked in the sewing room for stretches. Betty worked at the school three different times, the longest being the last time. Eventually Nancy Bitternose also worked at the school beginning in the late 1950s as a kitchen helper and working her way to second cook, next to Bernadette Blind who worked for many years as head cook. The school was a source of employment for a few men at the reserve, too. My grandfather worked there, looking after the farm and buildings, and my grandmother also worked from time to time in the kitchen, which was a paid position, or at other times informally helping my grandfather when he looked after the farm animals, particularly during periods when the school was shut down due to water shortages. While it may have been only a handful of people at any given time, the earnings would have been important to them.

One other aspect which deserves mention is that the other staff at the school were a potential market for some products and a source of ready cash. Mention has already been made of taking seneca root to sell at the school when it may have been too difficult to get transportation to town. It was not clear who purchased it, but as anyone could take and resell it,

⁷³ A. McGibbon to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 12 August 1895, Indian Affairs Annual Reports, Canada, *Sessional Papers* (No. 14) 1896, 298.

it could have been anyone with cash at the school. Further, the artists on the reserve found a market in the staff at the school; for example, handicrafts were sold by women to school staff.

The school also provided training for girls to learn to take their place in the model community that the school and church hoped to create. A junior Women's Auxiliary (JWA) was established in the school in 1916,⁷⁴ and the girls worked to support the church and to raise money for other causes as well. Some of these are reported in the *Touchwood Times* newspaper during the 1920s.⁷⁵ For example, the JWA successfully raised \$343.75 over four years for the new St. Luke's church, it was reported on July 1, 1920:

The Junior W.A. of Gordon's Indian Boarding School held their annual sale of useful and fancy articles at the school on the afternoon of the 22nd inst, and it is gratifying to learn that it was in every way a decided success.

The net proceeds were as follows:

Girls' Work.....	\$75.00
Boys' Work.....	28.00
Jewelery, photographs, etc. ...	12.05
Ice Cream.....	14.75
Peanuts.....	5.50
Teas.....	<u>11.70</u>
	\$142.00

Of this amount \$27.00 is reserved for material, \$15.00 is sent to the blind school at Gifu, Japan, and \$100.00 deposited in the bank to the credit of the St. Luke's new Church Building Fund, which now amounts to the following:

1917 proceeds of J.W.A. sale	\$50.00
1918 " "	80.00
1919 " "	100.00
1920 " "	100.00
1919 collected at school concert	<u>13.75</u>
J.W.A. Total	\$343.75

Subscriptions paid on Reserve	170.00
Rev. H.W. Atwater	30.00
Grant from Dominion W.A.	250.00
All other sources	98.94
1920 collections at school concert	<u>7.00</u>
	799.69
Unpaid subscriptions	<u>540.00</u>
	\$1889.69

⁷⁴ Atwater & Pratt, 7.

⁷⁵ The *Touchwood Times* newspaper began publishing in 1920. A full collection of the issues are on display at the Punnichy Museum and are also available for viewing on microfilm at the Saskatchewan Archives Board, Regina.

The principal and ladies of the staff of the school desire to express their appreciation of the tangible evidences of good will on the part of many of the people of Punnichy, who contributed cakes, candy and fruit, and to thank most gratefully all who showed their interest in the work in which they are engaged by being present at the sale.

Raymore is always very much to the front in any work for the good of the Indian Children, and it was encouraging to meet people from Kamanatha as well.

The work done by the boys and girls was eagerly bought. The excellence of the needlework by the girls, and the fretwork by boys were especially creditable, and the sale of the work gave evidence of much painstaking care on the part of their instructors. Miss E. Atwater has charge of this department in addition to her duties as teacher.⁷⁶

The Junior, or Girls' branch of the W.A. was still operating in November of 1932 when they, along with the Church Boys League, held another sale of needlework and fretwork, as reported in the Gordon's School Notes contributed to the *Touchwood Times*.⁷⁷ The children at the school were also apparently well represented at fairs and exhibitions, displaying and winning prizes for the same kinds of work.

The Women's Auxiliary

The members of the Junior W.A. apparently graduated into the adult W.A. and a prominent person mentioned in the Diocese Occasional Papers and in Parish histories was Mrs. C. Pratt, who was Mrs. Colin Pratt, or Clara Pratt, featured as one of my case studies in Chapter 7. Clara Pratt is the first identifiable figure associated with the on-reserve W.A. In 1929, she was apparently the Secretary and gave a report indicating that the W.A. had been formed the previous June, and that the eighteen members had held six meetings thus far. A box social was being planned in order to assist them to work towards a bazaar. Meetings had been held in various homes, but then it was found more convenient to have them at the school in the playroom.⁷⁸

In 1931, Mrs. C. Pratt was the W.A. President, according to the *Touchwood Times*, and a social was held at the reserve by the W.A. to "welcome Miss Atwater back."⁷⁹ In 1932 and 33 Mrs. Frayling, the Principal's wife, appears to take a lead role, but in 1934 she is listed along with Mrs. C. Pratt, who now appears to be the Secretary in either 1934 or 35. In 1936, "[t]he

⁷⁶ "Sale of Work a Success," *Touchwood Times* (July 1, 1920).

⁷⁷ "Gordon School Notes," *Touchwood Times* (November 24, 1932).

⁷⁸ "Annual Meeting of the St. Luke's Church – Gordon Reserve," *Vestry Minutes and Proceedings*, Diocese of Qu'Appelle, (January 28, 1929).

⁷⁹ "Social at Gordon's," *Touchwood Times* (September 24, 1931).

Vicar explained the changes in the W.A. This year (1935) the first time the officers have all been Indians.⁸⁰ The members for the 1935 to 1937 are as follows:

The following members of the St. Luke's W.A. have been publicly admitted in Church.

September 19 th 1935	Mrs. Joe Anderson	Badge blessed
	Mrs. W. Bird	x
	Mrs. Gilbert McNab	
	Mrs. Alfred McNab	x
	Mrs. Hilliard McNab	
	Mrs. John Blind	
October 13 th 1935	Mrs. Dewdney	x
	Mrs. Victor Sinclair	x
	Mrs. Walter Anderson	
	Mrs. Joe Daniel	
	Cecilia Anderson	
March 1 st 1936	Mrs. Jim McNab	
Jan 17 th 1937	Mrs. Willie McNab	
March 14 th 1937	Mrs. Geo. BitternNose	x ⁸¹

It is not clear why Mrs. Colin Pratt's name is not on this list. Possibly it was on an earlier list.

In the Vestry minutes, the W.A. is mentioned in relation to cleaning and sweeping of the church, varnishing the furniture, and other "various services" from 1935 to 1941. There is an oral historical record of the W.A. in the memory of the generation which succeeded them.

Nancy Bitternose remembered that her mother was a member of the W.A. and that they would raise money for useful purposes. Ivan McNab, son of the Mrs. Hilliard McNab listed above, recalls in some detail what the W.A. looked like from inside the home:

And they had these clubs on the reserve called W.A., at one time, Women's Auxiliary, and they were part of the church, supposed to be part of the church. And that's what they did. They would get together and have big quilting parties and they'd make a bunch of quilts and ship them off someplace to the men in the war. And they'd take apart old sweaters and save the yarn, and old things like that, all kinds of rags and stuff that they would need to make blankets and stuff like that that they would keep, and they would have big sewing circles and do that. Sometimes some of the churches would send in boxes of stuff and so some of the women in W.A. would be in there digging through, finding this and that, what they could salvage and use. No, it was really good, I remember having to, you know, while mom pulled apart an old sweater or something like that to

⁸⁰ "Annual Meeting of the St. Luke's Church – Gordon Reserve," *Vestry Minutes and Proceedings*, Diocese of Qu'Appelle, (January 15, 1936).

⁸¹ SAB, Members of St. Luke's Women's Auxiliary, R280.108, Diocese of Qu'Appelle, Service Register 1931-1970. The x's appear to indicate who had had their WA badge blessed.

save the yarn, I'd have to sit there like this holding my hands up like this and she'd run, you know, round and round and round my fingers until it was all done. And then she'd make it into a ball, you know, roll it all up. So, we'd have a big ball of yarn and she'd use that for making mittens or socks or something like that, and she'd knit them all. Because they all knew how to knit and how to sew and things like that and that's the stuff, those practical kinds of things that they learned in residential school.⁸²

This vivid memory must have been from the mid-1940s, since Ivan was only born in 1939.

The Women's Auxiliary was succeeded by the Homemakers' Club, formed by many of the daughters of the WA members. Nancy Bitternose fondly recalls the activities of the Homemakers' Club and the fun they used to have in the 1950s, raising money for picnics and having sports days and picnics on the reserve.

The darker side of the school

One cannot close the topic of residential schools without mentioning the effect of removing the children. Of course the school was a source of heartbreak for mothers and families as children were taken, sometimes forcibly from their homes. John Milloy quotes instructions to the Touchwood Hills Agent Martineau:

David Laird, the Indian Commissioner for Manitoba and the Northwest Territories, set the standard when responding to a query from the Touchwood Hills agent in 1904. Laird thought "it inadvisable in ... present circumstances" to employ the power of seizing neglected children but rather "to use ... personal influence and explain the advantages to be derived from attendance at school." In particularly stubborn cases, the agent might consider withholding "from unwilling parents all help that you have at your disposal, provisions, tea, tobacco, etc."⁸³

At this time of poverty, to employ the tactic of withholding provisions to force parents to send their children to school might be effective, particularly with the added knowledge that the children would be able to eat at the school. And later there were threats of imprisoning parents for withholding their children.

Ivan McNab reflected on the toll it took on parents and children. "It must have been extremely difficult on the women to lose their children like that, you know, to the residential school. I often think about that and I wonder how it affected my mother at that time because we were just so isolated and I used to say that it felt like I might as well have been on the moon for

⁸² Ivan McNab Interview, February 23, 2013.

⁸³ N.A.C. RG 10, Vol. 6032, File 150-40A, MR C 8149, D. Laird to H. Martineau, Agent, Touchwood Hills, 29 April 1904, cited by John Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System: 1879 to 1986* (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 1999), 70.

any contact that I had for my family anymore because I'd lost it all. It was really, it was tough in the early years, those early years of being in school."⁸⁴ Ivan's family only lived a couple of miles from the school and yet he felt totally cut off, remarking on the chain link fence on all the windows and the strangeness of the situation.

It was not my purpose to pursue painful stories about being a child in the school or losing your child to the school, beyond the questions about work, but when it was discussed by my elders, often the quality of voice or silence betrayed a strong emotion. I did not ask who had or had not received a settlement under the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (beginning in 2007), and I deliberately tried to avoid provoking bad memories and hard feelings in relation to the school. It was, however, an overwhelming force of change and dysfunction on the reserve. In a summary of incidents documented for the purposes of the class action suit, from 1945 to 1993, (therefore only those which affected living former students), there were numerous complaints and convictions of everything from a slap in the face to sexual assault of students by staff in positions of authority. There are many angry and sorrowful feelings associated with the residential school, and when it closed in 1996, it was demolished seemingly within days. However, one can observe that a great many of the older women who attended the school still have a pride in the skills and practices that were instilled in them there. Real bonds were formed with some of the personnel who came to work there. The Misses Atwater, for instance, were remembered fondly by my grandmother's generation. Meanwhile, the humble church continues to operate. As the congregation gets smaller, the graveyard grows every year.

Conclusion

The church and the school were both important institutions on the reserve from the very beginning, not only to the women, but to the whole community. The Church was an institution which belonged to the people – they were involved in its construction, running, and upkeep, taking an ownership and interest in it throughout. The men built it, the women kept it clean and painstakingly beaded the altar covers. The school was another matter and regarded with more ambivalence, I suspect, throughout, depending upon who was in charge. While it undoubtedly caused much turmoil, it also introduced new skills into the community which benefited them. Girls attended the school very early on and were taught the skills of homemaking that Euro-Canadian settlers utilized. Many learned skills they were able to put to use at home and also

⁸⁴ Ivan McNab Interview February 23, 2013.

which they could market. Handmade goods were sold or bartered at the school. Both men and women utilized their learning after leaving the schools. Gaining employment both at the school and outside the reserve was an important outcome.

Chapter 7

Three Women's Lives

Introduction

What follows is a closer look at the lives and work of three individuals, beginning with the oldest, Flora (nee Severight) Anderson, then slightly younger, Clara (Anderson) Pratt, who lived until the 1990s, followed by Nancy (Pratt) Bitternose, younger still and who still resides at Gordon's Reserve. These women all knew one another; their lives overlapped. Flora has a large number of descendants and impressed many of them with her unique capabilities and character. Clara also left a memory of a strong personality and Nancy is well-loved and respected as the oldest person on the reserve and still active as possible. Their stories are covered briefly here and each one is part of a legacy of hard-working women doing their best to provide for their families.

Flora (nee Severight) Anderson, 18??-195?



Flora Anderson, centre, in the 1950s at the Punnichy Fair¹

¹ This photo is available on our family's Facebook group and the owner is probably Irene Walter. Flora is shown here in the centre between her son Walter Anderson and his wife Jenny (nee McNab). Incidentally, Walter's sister Doris married Jenny's brother Hilliard, and they are my grandparents.

Flora Anderson was my *cāpān*, or great-grandmother, my father's maternal grandmother. Her life may have been typical of many Cree-Saulteaux women at the time, but the vivid memories impressed in the minds of my dad, uncles, and aunts reveal an irrepressible personality as well as a capable woman with many traditional skills. A look at Flora's life through the interviews with some of her grandchildren provides more information about women's work and experiences and their contributions to their families. Since these grandchildren were born around 1940, it means the stories emanate from the '40s and overlap with Clara Pratt's life story.

Flora was not originally from Gordon's, but lived all her adult life there, married to Joseph Anderson. Prominent among the things I learned about Joe Anderson was that he was a freighter in his earlier years and that he used to drive a Red River cart from Fort Qu'Appelle to Fort Carlton and back. He had been married previously, and apparently his first wife died, leaving him with one son, Sam Anderson.

Flora may have come from Cote's reserve or she may have come from Muskowekwan's reserve, next door to Gordon's, or perhaps from Cote's via Muskowekwan's.² A Flora Severight from Cote's is listed as entering the Regina Indian Industrial School in 1891. The age would fit but it is not clear if this is the same person.³ According to Rena Pelletier, (who was 84 in 2013), her mother, Rosie Whitehawk initially came to Gordon's from Cote's reserve to live with her cousin, Flora Anderson.⁴ They were first cousins who had been brought up together, five of them, raised by their grandparents at Cote's Reserve near Kamsack, Sask. Rosie then married George Bitternose (Bittern Nose on the 1901 Census; later shortened). That marriage appears to have occurred sometime between 1921, when George appears on the Census married to a Rebecca, (after having been listed in 1916 as married to Sarah), and 1929 when Rena was born. Rosie may well have come to live with Flora earlier, as Flora must have been married to Joseph Anderson around 1900. Flora's first born, Walter (called John Walter in the 1901 Census), was listed as 1 year old while Flora's step-son was listed as 9.⁵ Other recollections seem to put her

² There is even one suggestion from another grandson that she came from Key's Reserve, near Cote's in Marilyn Poitras (Ed.), "Reverend Arthur Anderson," IN *kēhtē-ayak ohci kisēpatināhk* (Saskatoon, SK: Sweetgrass Records and Gordon First Nation), 10-17.

³ SAB, Register of Students who attended the Regina Indian Industrial School. This list was given to me by April Rosenau ChiefCalf, whose MEd Thesis from the University of Saskatchewan is titled "Victorian Ideologies of Gender and the Curriculum of the Regina Indian Industrial School, 1891-1910." MEd Thesis (Saskatoon, SK: University of Saskatchewan, 2002).

⁴ Rena Pelletier, interview, 6 September 2013.

⁵ 1901 Census for Touchwood Agency, accessed at <http://www.automatedgenealogy.com/census/ProofFrame.jsp?id=115642> on August 14, 2014.

as being from Muskowekwan and within my aunt's memory, Flora still had relatives living at Muskowekwan's reserve.⁶ Her date of birth is undetermined at this point, and her age was listed as 27 in 1901, 28 in 1906, and 34 in 1916.⁷ The memories of her from the early to mid-1940s indicate she was extremely active and able at that time, but she didn't know when her birthday was.⁸

Having been raised by her grandparents might account for her wide range of skills, notable among them that she was an herbal healer and a midwife. The latter was a skill and role she shared with her cousin Rosie, and apparently a number of others on the reserve. She was called upon to deliver babies on Gordon's, Kawacatoose's Reserve, and Muskowekwan's and among the non-status Half-breed population near the reserve as well, as the late Jim Sinclair attested.

Interviewed in 2011, the former Métis leader, Jim Sinclair described how he was assisted into this world on June 3, 1933 by Flora Anderson. A "keeper of medicines" and "a spiritual Medicine woman," Sinclair also called her "'Thunder Lady' as she prayed during thunder storms."⁹ According to the story, at his birth Flora predicted Jim's future fame and that he would become a gifted leader. He certainly did rise to great heights not only in the non-status Indian and Métis circles. His death in 2012 was reported in national media in Canada and he was described as a "towering figure."¹⁰ When he grew up, he married Flora's granddaughter, Agnes, daughter of Katherine and Gilbert McNab.

Flora's midwifery was very useful around the reserve and on neighbouring reserves, particularly Kawacatoose's and Muscowekwan's. According to Melvin McNab:

Well, my kohkom, her name was Flora Anderson and my mósom, was Joe Anderson. They had a number of children, my mother being one of them. She was about the second or third youngest one of the family. And my grandmother, my kohkom, she was what you might call a herbalist, a doctor, Indian doctor, whatever, but she was a very good Indian doctor. She was also a midwife for many, many, many children in and around the

⁶ Irene Walter, Interview, 30 July 2013.

⁷ 1901 Census; 1906 Census of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, accessed at www.automatedgenealogy.com on August 14, 2014; 1916 Census of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, accessed at www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1916 on August 14, 2014.

⁸ Irene Walter, Interview, 30 July 2013.

⁹ Gary Arcand, 'The Life and Times of Jim Sinclair,' *Indian Time* (Christmas Edition, December 2011), 1.

¹⁰ CBC, 'Jim Sinclair, towering figure in Aboriginal history, dies at 79,' CBC. (November 10, 2012), <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/jim-sinclair-towering-figure-in-aboriginal-history-dies-at-79-1.1183811>, accessed on August 31, 2015.

community. She delivered I think most of her grandchildren, and plus a whole bunch of others on the reserve....

This is borne out by others' testimony and also by a copy of a number of "Record of Registration of Birth" forms for Gordon's Reserve from 1942 to 1944.

While this is a small collection of Province of Saskatchewan forms, the primary documents do yield some interesting information. There is no guarantee or indication that these 26 Records of Birth comprise the total number of births in those three years; in fact the last one is dated 4 March of 1944.¹¹ They do, however, give a small glimpse of the use of midwives on the reserve.

The forms had fields for a number of kinds of data, including vital statistics of the birth, (name of baby, sex, alive or not, single or twin, date of birth), the parents' names, marital status, ages, number of other children born and number now living, as well as the 'trade or profession,' or 'business in which employed,' for the father, but no such information for the mother. Of the twenty different men listed, two were 'in the army.' Eight were described as 'farming' or 'farmers,' and the remaining ten were 'labourers' or 'farm labourers.' Of the twenty-six births, one baby died, four of them were the second birth to the same family in 2-and-1/4 year period represented by these forms, two of them had no father listed and the parents were described as unmarried.

The ages of the women having babies vary. Of the twenty-two different women having babies, three were 19 and under, eight were 20-29 years old, eight were 30 to 39, while three were 40 to 44 years old. The youngest was 17 and it was her first child. She had been married for one year. The oldest, 44, had been married for 22 years. She had had thirteen children in all, ten of whom were still living. There was no apparent correlation between the occupation of the fathers and the various ages of moms giving birth.

Fourteen attendants at birth were listed for these twenty-six births. One was a doctor, Dr. A.B. Simes at the Indian Hospital at Fort Qu'Appelle. The late registration did not list anyone as attending the birth. The remaining thirteen attendants listed were First Nations women. Of these, six delivered more than one baby (two delivered two and four delivered three), while the

¹¹ These were copied from the FSIN Specific Claims Office collection on Gordon's materials. One of the births included was dated April 8, 1942 but a note on the form shows it was accompanied by a \$1. late registration fee. Other sources indicate this Gordon's Band member was actually born in 1937 on Muscowpetung's Reserve.

remaining seven attendants delivered one baby apiece. Here is the list of attendants at the births recorded here:

Mrs. George Bitternose [nee Rosie Whitehawk, cousin of Flora. Three babies in this time period]
Mrs. Frank Child [also three babies]
Mrs. S. Oochoo
Mrs. Albert McNab
Mrs. David Gordon
Mrs. Sam Anderson [also three babies]
Mrs. Clara Pratt [two babies, one of whom died]
Mrs. Jacob Bird [two babies]
Mrs. Jos. Pratt
Mrs. Joe Anderson – [This is Flora. Three babies]
Mrs. C. Papequash
Mrs. John Obey
Dr. Simes, Fort Qu'Appelle Indian Hospital
Mrs. Daniel Gordon

That there was such a variety of midwives for just over two dozen births suggests that midwifery was not such a specialized occupation but one that many women were able, and were called upon, to perform. A number of these women were delivering their own grandchildren. It would seem likely that the kohkoms and oldest women in each family would take this vital role and oversee the succeeding generations' entrance into the world. Daughters, nieces, and granddaughters would look to the most trusted and experienced elders in their family to assist them at this time.

Usually the only remuneration made for delivering babies was in the form of food or goods. Rena Pelletier said of Rosie Bitternose, her mom,

they'd just give her whatever they had to give her, it wasn't much, but you know, dishes, material, blankets, you know. Whatever nice they had, then they would just give it to her, no money. *She didn't ask for anything?*

No, she didn't ask for anything. She delivered a lot of babies. She delivered 5 of them in that little house, there, of mine.

She delivered your babies?

Yeah.

How was it when it came to be, when it came to your time, you'd send for your mom?

No, I was with my mom all the time, eh? Close by. But, whoever was-- when they were in labour then they'd come and get her right away. And she would be there for 2 nights with them. [*Staying awake?*] Yeah. She was quite the girl. Oh, I don't know how many she delivered, lots.

Well, Flora too delivered babies. They must have learned that from--

Yeah, they must have, I don't know where they learned. Yeah. And then down south was that little Agnes Gordon, she was a small, little lady. Some of the ladies from the south got her.

What about off reserve? Did they go off reserve and help?

Yes, sometimes my mom would go to Poorman's. I remember she went to Muscowekwan's there, a couple of times, maybe more. I don't know. Just there. She never went to Daystar's. But around here mostly.

What about for white women?

No. No. Just in the reserve.¹²

Notably, the only male attendant to any birth was the doctor at the Indian hospital in Fort Qu'Appelle. This instance would have been one of the earliest of the trend of the younger generations to go to the hospital for childbirth. In this case, there may have been other reasons perhaps involving the lack of a grandmother or female relative to attend the birth with the family away from the reserve, proximity to the hospital at the due date, or maybe, by this time, advances in modern medicine seemed attractive to the young First Nations people. There were still some people at Gordon's, however, who sought out traditional medical skills.

Besides midwifery, Flora's herbal knowledge was also considerable, according to her grandson, Melvin McNab:

But my grandmother was very knowledgeable as far as herbs and stuff like that she used for her Indian medicine.. As kids she used to take us out and take us and she would say-- I never knew what she really--whether she talked Cree, Saulteaux or English to us, but she was always, we would go along -- two or three of us would go along following her. She'd say, "it's time to gather this." So off we would go, following her along. She took her little .22 along in case she saw a rabbit that she would shoot. And we would go, walk sometimes two or three miles to go and look for what kind of herb she was wanting, and then when she found them she would gather them up in her apron, she would have her apron and she'd put them into that. And then came back, and sometimes she would have them in her apron, walking all the way back holding them, other times she would put them into another bag. Come back and dry them out and put them into what she called her medicine bag. But she gathered many different types of roots and flowers and I don't know what all, but she gathered a bunch of these things and she would always put in her medicine bag that she used for her medicines.

And she was really quite the Indian doctor, you might say. I remember when we were little kids, we were quite small, Herb was already born, he was already about a year and a half old, But anyway, my dad was out cutting pickets and my aunt Cecilia – we called her Mam – and her husband were at the house, and my dad went out east to cut wood, uncle Charlie was around close, cutting pickets, anyway while we were all playing there around, Herb start taking a seizure, fit they called it, seizure. Anyway mom and them all got uptight because there was no one around to-- So they sent us over to Francis

¹² Jackie and Rena Pelletier, Interview, 6 September 2013.

Cyr's, Ivan and I, to go and eat – or to go and get, see if there was anybody there with a wagon and horses to take them over to --- but we got over there and as the tradition was, usually they usually fed people who walked into their house and what it was -- fried bologna and boiled potatoes. But I remember, and just as we were going to sit down and eat, my mother, uncle Charlie and a man [or Mam?] came driving up, just as we were sitting down to eat. And they had Herb and he was still having seizures. So, they - we had to rush out now and I was looking at this fried bologna and potatoes, gee I was wishing to eat! I didn't even take one along, I was always sorry I didn't take a piece of bologna along with me (chuckle). We had to race out and ... We went over to kohkom's and as soon as we got there, kohkom got out her medicine bag, took out some medicines and made a kind of a drink out of it. And I remember it must have been hot because they put it in a saucer and they made Herb drink out of this saucer, and you see, he drank a cup full and his seizures stopped and I don't remember him ever having seizures after that. I don't remember that, but he had seizures all along when we were coming, for about an hour and a half or so, two hours. But you know that was the type of medicines she had.

More surprising was the next thing Melvin stated:

And she also had medicines for STDs [sexually-transmitted diseases] because I remember them talking, like my mother and her sisters talking about so-and-so coming over, some young guy coming over to get medicines for STDs. Not only them but the white boys from out along the reserve used to come over there too and get medicine from her for their STDs (chuckle). I know that ___ and ___, they got STDs, ... Kohkom heard about it and boy she went and go and dragged them over to her house and she gave them medicine (chuckle) and but she cured them! You know, her medicine was able to cure that. And people would come from all over, come and get medicine from her or get her to doctor [them] .. I remember different people from up at Kawacatoose and different places.¹³

Irene Walter also spoke of her grandmother:

Well none of us ever went to a doctor when she was still alive and everything, anybody got sick, they got taken to her house. 'Cause I remember being there in bed sick and drinking her medicine that she made, tasted like bark or something and I remember her looking after one of my older cousins who was sick; she had made some kind of a poultice. Yeah, she doctored everyone; delivered all the babies. She used to go walking around collecting her bark and her, I don't know what else. ... Sometimes we would go with her. Too bad we didn't learn anything from her.¹⁴

It is unclear why the children did not pick up on the types of herbs and their healing properties that their grandmother showed them. The grandchildren were quite young when they accompanied her and school must have interrupted their traditional teachings. This is upheld by

¹³ Melvin McNab, Interview, 14 August 2013. I've chosen to omit the names here.

¹⁴ Irene Walter, Interview, 30 July 2013.

the words of another granddaughter, Alice Pratt, who said of Flora: “My kohkom was medicine woman [sic]. She had medicine that she used to help people. She was a medicine doctor, but she never passed it down. We weren’t there for her to teach. We were in boarding school. Mm-hmm. Flora Anderson. We weren’t there for her.”¹⁵ They also did not live in the immediate vicinity, although in their earlier years it appears they would walk over there a lot, and both Irene and Melvin recounted how they would spend their days with their grandparents, especially Melvin.

Quite a number of the grandchildren would be found in the vicinity of their grandparents’ home and another story from Melvin shows how some of the cultural lessons were imparted:

And she used to make us, like – one time here we gathered a bunch of crow eggs and we took them back, and then she boiled them. She boiled these – we had a big bunch of crow eggs. But she boiled them all and she sat us all down, I remember, it was at a table outside. She always had this table outside for the summer time, because ... it was always too hot in that little ¹⁶ - and so she sat us all down outside and made us eat these crow eggs! Haha! Bunch of kids.

Another time, we caught a bunch of young crows and took them home, and didn’t she go and cook all these crows, and made soup out of them and fed it to us. But I remember, like there was a whole bunch of us, I don’t know how many, must have been about ten of us there. But my cousin Shirley Daniels was one of them and she was way at the far end of the table. I remember her looking down the table and saying, “pass the crow,” she was saying, she was wanting more crow! [laughter] Some of us were not wanting to eat it, but she made us eat them anyway, these young crows she cooked for us. Aw, she was -and that’s the kind of a person she was, I guess, I don’t know.

If the boys happened to kill an owl or a crow or anything, their grandmother would prepare it and they would be expected to eat it. If they didn’t like the food, they would think twice before killing something. That might discourage any wanton killing on their part. The kids had collected the young crows alive and their kohkom killed and cooked them for them. It is unclear whether his grandparents also ate some of the crow. Irene spoke of how they usually had salt pork and on one of these occasions, when Irene missed out on some delicacy, (cooked owl, she thinks with laughter), she was given pork and told it was better for her. Eating whatever was

¹⁵ Marilyn Poitras (Ed.), “Alice Pratt & Clarence Pratt,” IN *kēhtē-ayak ohci kisēpatināhk* (Saskatoon, SK: Sweetgrass Records and Gordon First Nation), 156-159.

¹⁶ According to Irene Walter, her grandparents would also take their tent and go set it up various places on the reserve during the summer, also taking a stove along. This was a continuation of a practice remarked on by the earliest Indian Agents.

killed is probably also a practice of the people through the toughest years of scarcity and starvation when gophers and other small game not usually sought would be eaten.

Irene and Melvin both recall that the grandparents always had food and that they received rations because of their advanced age. “Seems to me that my grandparents used to get flour, these great big bags of flour, beans, and pork. Rations.”¹⁷ They did not just rely on the Indian department’s rations, however, as they kept a garden, milked a cow, and raised chickens. Fresh vegetables in the Fall, potatoes through the Winter, fresh milk, cream, and sometimes butter, eggs, chickens and wild meat. It is no wonder the grandchildren liked to go and visit. “Let’s see, what are some of the things I remember eating there... Well, potatoes, and beans, pork, rabbit soup, duck soup, deer, and chokecherries.”¹⁸ “I know they lived on wild game; they always had snares set for rabbits.”¹⁹

In fact, Flora not only snared rabbits but she also shot them with her .22, and she hunted prairie chickens in the traditional way described by David Mandelbaum, by snaring them while they danced.²⁰ Two of my respondents described this method in use on Gordon’s Reserve in times past. Mandelbaum says this form of snaring prairie chickens was done by women. Melvin describes how Flora did it:

My grandmother used to snare prairie chickens. She always had something going. Go and check her snares for rabbits and chickens. I remember doing that, where – up on that hill where Brenda Longman and, along up there, where they live, that’s what we called Prairie Chicken Hill because there was always chickens dancing there and that’s where my grandmother used to set her snares. ... Yeah, in here, [looking at map] is where we were. Prairie Chicken Hill is right in here. But there was other places where the prairie chickens danced and she would go there as well, but I don’t remember where. But that was the main place she would set snares.

And it was quite unique. They would take a stick and they would put it into the ground, bend it over, put the other side in. It was about, oh about that – a foot, maybe a little bit more. And then they would hang the snare. The snare would be only about that big, on it, and the chickens would be dancing around and they’d dance through this hoop and they’d catch- get caught inside the snare. And then what used to happen is that as they got caught, they’d be struggling around there, flapping their wings, and the more they flapped, the harder that the other ones would dance.

¹⁷ Irene Walter, Interview, 30 July 2013.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ David G. Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical, and Comparative Study* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1979), 69.

And then they would have piles of rock, because they used to sneak up to the-- my grandmother used to sneak up and shoot them as well. ... She'd sneak up behind the pile of rocks and she'd shoot at them, and if she killed one, it was the same thing, it would go all over the place on the ground and the other ones would dance to beat hell! (chuckle).

As a youngster, Michael McNab would snare prairie chickens and his grandmother would pluck, clean, and cook them. He related:

Yeah, we used to snare prairie chickens or trap them, in the summer time. They used to dance up on top of the hill here, where Theresa McNab lives here.²¹ We used to set traps for them there. The only thing, you had to get them early otherwise they'd break their legs off and get away. Yeah, early morning you could hear them dancing there. Wherever they'd dance, that's where we'd set the traps or the snares. And all we done is put a hoop like that and a snare wire down and when they're dancing they'd have their heads down and then they'd go in there and strangle themselves there.

So a hoop made out of a willow or something?

Yeah, out of a willow. And then you'd put them in the ground where they can't really pull them out. 'Cause when they dance they have their heads down and they go jigging along like they - and they go into the snare there and that's where they're caught. Cause shells were too expensive to buy.²²

Prairie chickens are nowhere to be found at Gordon's Reserve these days, and are considered "extirpated" in Canada, according to a 2009 Canadian Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife.²³

Prairie chickens were not only animals hunted by women, but Melvin, who seems to have spent the most time with her, told of a trick she played on her husband which also involved a prairie chicken:

One time, another time that she -there's a whole bunch of stories about my grandmother - another time that she - they killed a prairie chicken, or prairie chickens or something and she cleaned out, where the food goes down into, she cleaned that all out, took all of the seeds, everything out of it and then she blew it up and tied it up and she dried it [he would be referring to the crop]. And there was a whole bunch of us that were part of this, and then I don't know whether my old grandfather didn't notice what was going on or what, but anyway she had this dried out for about a day or so and then-- he was always sitting on his bed in the same place all the time, so she had this all blown up and then he

²¹ This is a different location from the Prairie Chicken Hill Melvin remembers.

²² Michael McNab, Interview, 8 August 2013.

²³ CBC. 'Prairie chicken wiped out in Canada,' (December 2, 2009), <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/prairie-chicken-wiped-out-in-canada-1.807261>, accessed 31 August 2015.

went to the bathroom [outhouse] and when he came back, in the meantime my grandmother took, I don't know, part of his, took something and where he sat, she put this balloon, all blown up and she put it there and she covered it up. He came back. He sat down; it made a great big burst! Great big sound, just like somebody farted! "Eeyahow!" He jumped up and everybody ... they all started laughing because he got such a start, he didn't know what was happening. [laughter] And all us kids were around, waiting for this to happen. She was quite the old lady! I always enjoyed her anyway, and thinking about the things that she used to do.²⁴

This story give us a picture of an old lady with a sense of humour who enjoyed playing a practical joke on her old man, but one other actually repeats her words. Again, it was Melvin who remembered this:

Another funny thing I remember is, they went to church, Thanksgiving. Anyway, when they came back the old guy was sitting on his bed and, kohkom was around and then she all of a sudden poked up and said, "Joe, I heard you telling a big lie in church!" "Eeyahow! What?" And she said, "I heard you singing very loud, 'I plough the fields and scatter' she said, 'the good seed on the ground,' and you didn't plough a damn bit of land or scatter any seed around this place!" she was saying to him! [laughter] Oh that was funny!

While we all remember our kohkoms with affection, this particular old lady sounds like quite the character. Irene described her, "I think she was fairly tall and she was always kind of skinny. And she always wore this old blue tam. I never, ever saw her without it. ... She used to smoke a pipe, too."²⁵ As little children, they would follow along in her wake as she strode the hills with her .22 rifle and her bag of small game or roots and bark medicines.

Flora had one step-son, Joe's older son Samuel, while together they had at least eight children, and raised one or two adopted children as well. Their youngest natural daughter Doris, born in 1916, was my grandmother. Joe Anderson died in 1950 or 51 and Flora died in the later 1950s.²⁶ She left a large number of grandchildren at Gordon's and there are many more great-grandchildren and further descendants who will cherish the memories described here and in other oral histories.

²⁴ Melvin McNab, Interview, 14 August 2013.

²⁵ Irene Walter, Interview, 30 July 2013.

²⁶ Ivan McNab, Personal Communication, 20 September 2015.

Clara (Anderson) Pratt, April 19, 1902 - November 4, 1991.



27

Clara Pratt was a remarkable woman whose legacy has been carried on by her daughter Bernelda (Pratt) Wheeler, a pioneer First Nations journalist in both print and radio, and granddaughter Dr. Winona Wheeler, a prominent historian and Indigenous Studies professor, to name only two of her prominent offspring. Clara provides the earliest account of the work that women did at Gordon's from a woman's point of view in an interview conducted in 1983 when she was 81 years old.²⁸

Clara was born Clara Anderson on Gordon's Reserve in 1902. She entered school there in about 1912 when she was ten and left school at age eighteen, having completed grade seven. As she pointed out, "I wanted to go to Grade Eight, but no promotion. They just kept me in Grade Seven."²⁹ Going to school on the same reserve as her home, she may have been more aware of life at home than some others who were far removed from their homes for ten months at

²⁷ Source of photo: Clara's granddaughter, Winona Wheeler. Winona explained that Clara was dressed for attending to her booth at the Expo '67 in Montreal. The World's Fair ran from April to October, 1967. Clara had made or assisted in making the articles in the display.

²⁸ oURspace Collection. Clara Pratt Interview #1 and #2, by Alex Cywink for the Indian History Film Project (Regina, SK: University of Regina, Canadian Plains Research Center, 30 June 1983, accessed at <http://ourspace.uregina.ca/handle/10294/2007>, on March 20, 2013.

²⁹ Clara Pratt Interview #1.

a time. Clara describes the way of life of her family and it appears that hers was fairly comfortable and perhaps among the more affluent families on the reserve. However, she stated that they only had a wagon while “it was only the richer Indians that had democrats and buggies. But we always had a wagon (laughter).” She recalls that her grandfather also had a Red River cart.

She describes her father, Andrew W. Anderson, as a “full-blooded Cree,” who could speak three languages, Cree, Saulteaux, and English, while her mother, Flora Harriet (nee McNabb), she describes as solely English-Speaking, “very broad Scotch,” and “she could only say a few words of Cree.” Clara’s mother was the daughter of a “David Thomas McNabb”, one of the first “declarants” who “had a house right on the Indian reserve, where it was later made in a reserve.”³⁰ Although Clara says that her maternal grandfather came from Scotland, it is likely that it was his grandfather or possibly even great-grandfather who originally came from Scotland, although there was some travelling back and forth.³¹ At any rate, Clara herself did not speak Cree which led to some mild persecution by other children at the school, she states. “The ones that could talk English they were called -- they want to be white people.”³² She soon picked up Cree from her classmates and eventually was relied upon for interpreting, both at the school and later as well, following in the footsteps of her father. Andrew Anderson was well educated and became a school teacher, serving at Fishing Lake and at Gordon’s. The 1911 Census has him at home at Gordon’s that year and lists his occupation as “Interpreter.”³³ This may have been before his teaching stints.

Clara describes her early life and what she remembers about how her parents made a living:

at that time, the Indians were already farming ... And mother made a garden, dad dug it with a shovel, quite a big garden we’d have – all kinds of vegetables; carrots, and turnips, and onions, all those that we know now. ...and potatoes especially. And they were very ambitious, and tried to get their food.

And for meat, a lot of them had cattle. Each Indian was given two cows, I think, and there was sires put on the reserve, bulls on the reserve, too. .. So we lived pretty good

³⁰ Ibid. This is likely the Thomas McNab, one of the McNabs that the surveyor Wagner includes in 1875 as married into the Band, and having already been farming on the Reserve.

³¹ Ibid.; Unpublished genealogical research carried out by Clyde King (2002); “Governor John McNab (1755-1820)” in Red River Ancestry.ca, accessed at <http://www.redriverancestry.ca/McNAB-JOHN-1755.php> on 18 September 2015.

³² This would refer to the English translation of the term used. Clara Pratt, Interview # 1.

³³ Canada. 1911 Census of Canada. Saskatchewan, Humboldt, 110 Indian Reserve, Automated Genealogy, 13. <http://www.automatedgenealogy.com/census11/EnumerationDistrict.jsp?sdid=4507> accessed 18 September 2015.

when we were kids, too. But we didn't have too many animals, we couldn't butcher for quite a few years, you know. And then when we did have a steer that we could sell, they sold it, and that was money for them.³⁴

She explained that her father was not primarily a farmer, but rather a teacher and said, "all we farmed were... gardens." For meat, her family used traditional methods. "We set snares for rabbits. We killed rabbits with bows and arrows. And prairie chickens, partridges, and that, they'd set traps for them or shot them in later years when they were able to use .22s and shot guns and that."³⁵

In case the reader thinks this was much too late in history for bows and arrows, this account is corroborated by others. First of all, a report in the Diocese of Qu'Appelle Occasional Paper in 1895 about the St. Luke's Mission School on Gordon's contains a good description of the boys' rabbit hunt, as well as their favourite hoop game, both of which required bows and arrows.³⁶ Furthermore, Jackie Pelletier (85 in 2013), in my interview with him and his wife, described such a hunt as well:

Rena: What was that in the spring you would go chasing rabbits through the bush?

Jackie: Yeah, sometime all the old guys would get together. They'd have what they called a "rabbit hunt," ah? So everybody had bow and arrows. Some would wait on one side of the bush and some would come through the bush, like you know, and they'd be all shooting these rabbits.

You made your own bows or arrows? Yeah. What kind of tips did you have on your arrows?

Just wood. [Rena: just wood, sharp]

So were you pretty young when you did that? You were just a kid?

Oh yeah, but like the old men, they were pretty good at bows and arrows.³⁷

This was still a practice in the 1930s, then.

In Clara's childhood, in the first decade of the 1900s, wild rabbits, ducks, prairie chickens and partridges supplemented their own raised chickens, eggs, and garden vegetables. In addition, they kept one cow from which they gained milk and butter. She remembers that they used to get fish from Long Lake at the reserve there.³⁸ She didn't pick many berries, she stated,

³⁴ Clara Pratt, Interview # 1.

³⁵ Clara Pratt, Interview #1.

³⁶ SAB, Diocese of Qu'Appelle. Author unknown, "Life on an Indian Mission School," Occasional Paper # 41 (August 1895), 14-15.

³⁷ Jackie and Rena Pelletier, Interview, 6 September 2013.

³⁸ Kinookimaw Reserve 80A at the south end of Long Lake or Last Mountain Lake was set aside partially for Gordon's members in recognition of their regular use of this lake for fishing.

for fear of wild cattle roaming about the reserve, but she would pick saskatoons and chokecherries close to home and “sometimes we’d go in a wagon and go way back in the bush *in the mountain* and we’d find strawberries there.”³⁹ When asked what kind of work she was expected to do, Clara responded:

What did I do in the garden? Step on all the seeds that were growing up. (laughs). I got chased out of the garden, “Don’t ever go in there again.” So, I had to stay out of the garden. I’d look out these wee... growing up, you know; see how many I could put under my foot. But later on I had a little bit more sense and they used to tell me what that was for, and how long we’d have to wait before we could eat them.⁴⁰

When Clara was about 8 years old, she became very sick with tonsillitis and her father and uncles and grandfather got together and gave her a Cree name. “And it was always the elders that gave the name. I was very sick at the time. I think I had tonsillitis -- I used to get that every spring and fall. And the first time I got it I was very, very ill and they thought I was going to die and they said, ‘We better give her a name. Her name will kind of clutch on to her and hang onto her.’ This would help me get better.”⁴¹ While that is one explanation, another is that her Cree name would enable her relatives who had already passed on to recognize her if she herself were to die from this illness.

Clara describes what men and women were doing typically on the reserve in her younger years. Besides farming, many men started working for the White settlers for goods in trade. They got “vegetables, and meat, and stuff like that in trade. They were very, very seldom given money.... They’d buy meat and pork, chickens, hens, eggs. They’d go and hoe gardens, too, and they’d take vegetables for that, and they were cheap with their vegetables. We used to get, I don’t know how many bags of potatoes, enough to do for the winter; cabbage, carrots, turnips, onions – they got all those things in pay for their work.” These men who were not farmers themselves, were still bringing home meat, whether hunted or traded.

Meanwhile, the women stayed home and looked after the children, cooking and caring for large families. “My mother made all our clothing. My brothers and my sisters all had homemade clothing, bought yardage stuff, you know, and she made them, she made coats, jackets for the kids, coats, everything she made. She was really a nice sewer. We used to be

³⁹ Clara Pratt, Interview #1. Emphasis on this location name because it is a term that is going out of use as the older generation passes on and the younger generation has no reason to go there.

⁴⁰ Clara Pratt, Interview #1.

⁴¹ Clara Pratt, Interview #1.

proud of our things when they were finished and we wore them to church, or to school or something, Treaty. Treaty time, we got dressed good as...[She used] to make two or three outfits for the girls and the boys.” Clara herself must have learned needlework from her mother as in later years, she did a great deal of that kind of work herself, even selling beadwork and embroidered “Indian parkas,” as well as quilts and crocheted throws.⁴² Furthermore, she instilled in her daughters the love of all kinds of needlework and they showed great skill and pride in the neat, small stitches and homemade garments that rivalled anything in the stores.

One opportunity that arose for Clara came about because of her exemplary work in the school. She must have been among the first to go out of the reserve to work in domestic service for White people. This resulted from her training in the school. As stated above, she was in school for eight years but did not advance beyond grade 7. She stated, “they wouldn’t let us go forward when we wanted – I was ambitious. I went to the office one day when I was Grade Seven and I asked the principal, “Please may I stay until I get to Grade Eight?” “There’s no Grade Eight here,” he said. “There’s just certain ones that are going to Grade Eight,” chosen by the Principal and Indian Agent, and Clara said she was not chosen.⁴³ As she pointed out, “if you please, regardless of how far we went, we weren’t allowed to go up to Grade Eight. Our education was suppressed by the Department of Indian Affairs. They were afraid of the Indians.” Furthermore, they trained the Indians only as much as to enable them to take up labour positions assisting the settlers. This was the basis of both the “in-school domestic service,” and the “outing system” in the Industrial and Residential schools.⁴⁴ The half-day work and half-day study system operated at Gordon’s as in many other Indian schools, and apparently the “outing” system was tried there or at least something similar. Middle-class settler families sought domestic workers from the reserve, and sometimes directly from the school. Clara was one of those recruited right from the school. It was approximately 1920.

I was about eighteen, when I left school. ... They got me from the school, the people that saw me, they look a liking to me. But somebody else had taken a liking to me and wanted me to come into Regina and work in Regina, which I did. I came into Regina and I worked in Regina from May, June, July, August, September, October I worked. I worked about seven or eight months in Regina. I worked for an inspector – he saw me at school when he was inspecting the school and he liked my manners, I guess, and asked

⁴² Clara Pratt, Interview #2.

⁴³ Clara Pratt, Interview #1.

⁴⁴ J.R. Miller, *Shingwauk’s Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 253.

the matron how I was at household work. And she said, 'Oh, she's very good. She's a good worker.' That's one of the things we were taught in school, how to housekeep, and how to cook, how to sew.⁴⁵

Of all the women who ended up going out to work for a period of time, Clara is the only one I am aware of so far that was recruited directly from the school, although it is possible that others were. Many worked in communities closer to the Reserve, but were probably just as isolated and lonesome as Clara Anderson turned out to be. She worked for about two and a half years before getting married to Colin Pratt and settling down to farm on Gordon's Reserve.⁴⁶

Her married life must have been eventful. Besides farming, she took up midwifery and raised five children of her own. Her husband Colin and son Hector went to war in the 1942 and 1944 respectively. This was not something new to Clara, whose grandfather Archie Anderson had fought in the Boer War and whose father and uncles, in World War I.⁴⁷ Both Colin and Hector returned from the War, but it was a hardship while they were gone, to have to do the men's work as well as her own. "I used to work like a man many a time when my husband was overseas. I used to milk my cows, and I used to make hay, feed my cows, and water my cattle. I used to have to go and pull water out of well with a rope to give my cattle and horses water. Boy, that was tiring. I used to have muscles in those days."⁴⁸ It is not clear what kind of help she would have had, but Melvin McNab described how women whose husbands were away, or widows of fallen soldiers, would usually pay someone to get wood for them and perhaps other heavy chores.⁴⁹ Some of these women would receive a pension or a portion of her husband's pay cheque, always handled by the Indian Agent and paid out to her. Clara's interview is silent on this aspect.

On the subject of midwifery, Clara spoke about her experience and her remarks about remuneration are interesting. Her practice overlapped part of the same period that Flora Anderson and Rosie Bitternose were called upon for midwife services, as indicated by the Records of Birth noted above.

⁴⁵ Clara Pratt, Interview #1.

⁴⁶ Clara Pratt, Interview #1.

⁴⁷ Author unknown. "The Pratt Family," *Saskatchewan Indian* (October 1989), 4, accessed at <http://www.sicc.sk.ca/archive/saskindian/a89oct04b.htm> 20 September 2015.

⁴⁸ Clara Pratt, Interview #2.

⁴⁹ Melvin McNab, Interview, 14 August 2013.

... I used to be a, what do you call them, a practical nurse, on our Indian reserve. And whenever there was any sickness, or the doctor needed help, they'd come and get me and I'd go. Especially with the women. I worked with the women a lot. I brought into the world about, over eighty, between eighty and ninety infants into the world. Most of them were Indian; there were some Germans, there were some Hungarians. And the Hungarians and the Germans paid me the best. The doctor that used to come and get me to go and look after anybody, all those people, over sixty people I looked after on the reserve, women. And those poor people trying to scrape up something to give me for working for them, for nine days – I never asked my patients till nine days after. And one woman gave me a sewing machine. Oh, I hated to take it. I said, "you need it too. You have a lot of children, grandchildren, and grandsons, and your own daughters." I said, "I can't take this sewing machine." "Well, that's the best we have in the house to give you. Something that's the best thing [they would give]. It's a good one mind you." "Oh, definitely," I said. "it's (inaudible) stuff it's made with." But I said, "It would be nice of you to keep it, because you have lots to do with your children. And you have your husband's overalls and stuff to patch on the machine, and you're working all the time, you can't... you cook the meals, too, for all your big family." So I went away without it. Good gracious, about a week after, two weeks after, they came to the house, her husband, and he bring in this sewing machine.

And what did you do?

What could I do? I couldn't make them take it home again. They wouldn't listen. They would unload and they'd leave it on the ground right there. So the man asked my husband to come and help me with the machine, to bring it in the house. So I had it for years. Every time the doctor would come to me, when he'd leave, I'd look at him, hoping and hoping he'd give me a few dollars, you know, for my work on the reserve. I worked that thirty years without one red cent from the Department of Indian Affairs. And the people noticed it – they tried hard to give me things. One man gave me a horse, another man gave me a wagon, somebody else gave me a set of bobsleighs. They gave me a lot of valuable things when I worked with their women. But not the Department of Indian Affairs, mark you.⁵⁰

This is a fascinating account and reflects what Rena Pelletier said above, of the families wishing to recompense the midwife with "whatever nice they had." While Rena says Rosie didn't ask for anything, here Clara finds it proper to ensure she was paid, particularly from the Department of Indian Affairs which always disappointed her. There's a humorous element to the story of the sewing machine, and one wonders who the family was that was sufficiently well-off to have a sewing machine. It appears, however, that by protesting too much, Clara managed to talk them into parting with it. It also appears that Clara insisted that her work, as a woman helping women, was valuable and should be rewarded as such. Each one of these three midwives discussed seems to be quite the character.

⁵⁰ Clara Pratt, Interview #2.

Clara lived to be 89 years old, passing away in late 1991.⁵¹ She did not live her whole life on Gordon's, however, because her husband decided to take the family off the reserve in 1946, moving to Manitoba to go and work away from the oppressive oversight of the Indian Agency and avoiding sending their children to the residential school. Clara lived and travelled in many places, her daughters moving to far-flung parts of the continent and undertaking interesting careers. In the end, she and her husband returned, living out their last years in their homeland. He predeceased her by a few years. Clara made an interesting comment on mortality in her interview with Cywink in 1983, in relation to an illness she had suffered in her younger years: "Well, I guess my time wasn't up, I didn't die. Everyone of us have a certain time that we're going to live. ... I used to think I'd only live till I was forty-five. There used to be a story going around when I was a kid. I'd hear the women talking, 'well, you know I don't expect to live more than forty-five.' All the old people used to say that the mother lived as long as her mother lived, so I thought I'd go when I was forty-five."⁵² Fortunately for us, she lived much longer than that or we would never have had this interview, taken at age 81, to shed so much light on the past for the women and men of Gordon's Reserve.

Nancy Bitternose



⁵¹ Winona Wheeler, Personal Communication, 20 September 2015.

⁵² Clara Pratt, Interview #2.

⁵³ Photo of Nancy Bitternose captured from video taken by the author on July 31, 2013.

Nancy (Pratt) Bitternose was born on January 25, 1921. At 92 years old, she was the oldest person I interviewed in 2013 and the oldest person on the Reserve.⁵⁴ Her parents were Alex Pratt and Catherine (nee McNab). Catherine was a sister to Sam and Albert McNab and a first cousin to Clara's mother. This makes Nancy and Clara first cousins once removed, and Nancy and my grandfather, first cousins. Nancy is considered an aunt by my father, and a kohkom by me. As the oldest person on the reserve, it is not surprising that she was a hard worker all of her life which she described to me with frequent comparisons to the younger generations who no longer know how to work like that today.

Nancy went to Gordon's School when she was about seven and recollects that she spent a good deal of her early years in the school:

I went to school in 1927 and I left school in 1937, so I was in school for ten years. You've seen the picture of the old school, that's where I went to school. And I stayed in school, we'd go back on the 14th of August and we didn't go home for holidays till the end of June, June the 28th or 29th, whatever day it was. And we only got to go home once a month on a Saturday from 9 to 5. That was all we were allowed. And we weren't allowed to go home for Christmas or New Year's. Christmas we were getting all our toys [at the school] and New Year's we were having our big New Year's meal, of course Christmas, too, we'd have our meals.⁵⁵

Nancy was attending the school when it burned down in February 1928.⁵⁶ The next year the new school reopened on the same spot. She recalls learning to do a lot of work at the school but not as much academic learning:

No, when I went to school, I only went to grade 5 cause I.. but then when we used to go to school, first time we had like just the little ones, you know, and then after we got into a higher grade and went up to the classroom, then we used to go to school half a day every day, like two and half days a week and two and a half days of working. I started working when I was about 11 years old. I used to have to help making beds, work in the dormitory, work in the playroom and we'd have to scrub – and then they would have different things for us to do off and on, you know. And then when we went to the classroom, like if we did arithmetic or what, in the morning, the first class, when we'd go have recess for 15 minutes, go back to class again, they'd give you something different, they never finished off anything.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Nancy Bitternose, Interview, 31 July 2013. She celebrated her 95th birthday on January 25, 2016.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ She also told me who she believes was responsible for starting the fire.

⁵⁷ Nancy Bitternose, Interview, 31 July 2013.

Because her father was a farmer, just like any other farmer on or off the reserve in those days, Nancy recalls that they had everything. They raised cattle, pigs, and chickens. She learned to milk cows when she was ten years old. “We had a big farm. My dad and deceased brother Charles, they worked just like these farmers every year, farming, threshing and everything like that. So I have seen a good many different things all these years.”⁵⁸ When asked if they did their own threshing, Nancy replied:

There was a guy that used to come and do that [threshing] for the people because lots of them used to farm years ago. And then they had a guy that used to come in with his outfit, doing for the people, you know? And they would have teams like of horses with a big hay rack, people throwing sheaves into there and they used to thresh. And I used to help my late mother and them ... putting stooks together. Oh I worked lots and I always enjoyed working outside.⁵⁹

Nancy learned to do everything that was required on the farm.

“[We] used to have horses for ploughing, and that old plough on the hill there, that’s an old plough [Figure 7.4]. That’s the kind of ploughs they used to use. They would have about four horses or six horses driving the plough and us little children ... we used to walk behind when the plough would go like this and make a little track there.”



Figure 7.4 Nancy’s plough⁶⁰

In the 1920s, it sounds like her father Alex Pratt was a successful farmer:

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Photo taken by the author, 31 July 2013.

I was always thankful when my dad and my deceased brothers were farmers, you know, we always had everything. We were just the same as what you call these farmers now Oh, they worked hard years ago. I always tell these people there's nothing to complain about now, if you're going to farm, you have everything to use.. Those days you just had horses and those walking ploughs, walking harrows, disking and all. And they used to hire farmers to come in and do the threshing, you know, they had wheat and oats and barley, things like that. Just like real farmers long ago. Today now you don't see anybody like that.⁶¹

Nancy continued describing the farming that she observed and helped with as a child:

And then years ago, too, people had to cut with horses and there was a ayhaw,⁶² what they call them, more like with a big long ayhaw-- and lay down and that's what used to cut the grass, cutting for hay. Cutting hay. [mower? Or scythe? This was not made clear.] And then they used to have what they called a rake, rake the hay up and then they'd pile it up. And then we used to pile it up. I used to always follow my parents around outside. They always liked being out.

Nancy, too, liked working outdoors when she was young, helping her dad

[put] harness on the horses, harnessing them up, and everything like that, driving them, I used to help them chopping pickets, chopping wood, I'd be sawing and he'd be – helping load it up, and everything. Oh I used to like working ... And of course, in the winter time we'd be hauling, big drifts, get there, get a bag, fill it up with snow, bring it inside, making water, you know, when we didn't have water like what we have today now. But my dad used to dig a well in the summer time and we always had to haul water. That's why I always like working around animals, milking cows and harnessing horses, driving horses.⁶³

In addition to helping where she could, Nancy states that they always had a garden growing potatoes, carrots, onions, “everything.”

And we used to clean them all and used to have a- what they call a hoe with a handle and just use that to work up all the mud. My dad would plough it up but after the potatoes and everything were seeded, we used to sit down, pull up all the weeds and then hoe up the mud on each side of them. Oh, we did a lot of work. I often say to these kids I don't know what you people would do if you had to work the same as those years. Nobody likes to do anything. [Laughs].⁶⁴

Nancy's account of berry-picking and preserving appeared in Chapter 4.

⁶¹ Nancy Bitternose, Interview, 31 July 2013.

⁶² “ayhaw” is Saulteaux for “whatchamacallit.”

⁶³ Nancy Bitternose, Interview, 31 July 2013.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Growing up with her varied work experiences and background in farming made her an ideal candidate for going to work out, off the reserve, at various farms. Around 1938-39, after she had left school, Nancy worked on several farms near Last Mountain in the Govan area. She would sometimes help a farmer's wife in the house, doing the housework, and in the garden. Another place, "I remember milking cows,... I used to milk eight cows in the morning by myself. We used to get about almost five pails of milk. ... I used to work on this kind, [separator] I used to put the milk through, you know, separate the cream from the milk."⁶⁵ That was a lot of work for a seventeen-year-old. Some of those farmers apparently expected a lot of these young women. Ruby McNab tells of how her sister Madeline had to drive tractor and carry out men's work on some of those farms in the Govan area.⁶⁶ The responsibilities were sometimes onerous for these young women. Ruby also told of how, as a teenager working for a young couple on a farm near the Number 6 Highway, she was left to care for the couple's six-month old baby alone for a whole week. Working off reserve for wages held various risks, but quite a number of women went anyway.

Nancy married John James Bitternose in 1941 when she was 20. John James was known for his hunting abilities, particularly with his dogs. Nancy necessarily worked hard and assisted John James in his various endeavours – in particular, when he tried to make a go of farming and raising cattle. Since Nancy came from a farming background, where her father and brothers had farmed, she was a great help for her husband. However, this was approaching the time when most of those who had had cattle gradually let go of farming. A number of difficulties beset the younger farmers and Nancy seems to indicate three problems that she and her husband faced, including lack of unclaimed hay grounds, lack of adequate stabling for the cattle, and possibly interference by the Indian Agent: "We had cattle and I used to milk a cow, but then they got, 'oh, you have to do this and you have to do that,' and we didn't have enough ayhow, barns, like they always said 'stables' those years, you know. You'd make one out of logs and put hay on top for a roof because they didn't have lumber. So they worked, I said, people don't have such a hard time today as they had those years."⁶⁷ So they sold their cattle. Instead, Nancy went to work at

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ruby McNab, Interview, 15 August 2013. An interesting story related by Ruby had to do with Madeline coming across "IR" markers of the Indian Reserve on top of Last Mountain in the course of her farm work there. This is a reserve that was lost by the people and subject of an attempted claim by the band. Madeline had told the former Chief about this after the fact.

⁶⁷ Nancy Bitternose, Interview, 31 July 2013.

Gordon's School as a kitchen helper in 1957 making \$75. a month and gradually moving up to the rank of cook, working there for 28 years.

Besides farming work and then wage work, Nancy used to do a lot of beadwork and sewing when she was younger. As noted earlier, she would sew and bead on jackets or items that people wanted, made to order. She helped bead the altar piece in St. Luke's Church. She beaded place mats and items such as those now held in the Museum in Punnichy, which she would take to town to sell. As she explained,

Oh, wherever we could sell them. Whoever wanted to buy them. You know. You go to town or Quinton or someplace like that, see people, and a lot- some of these farmers, the women that we knew like out around here, the farmers used to all take their grain to town. We used to meet a lot. Oh, Punnichy was a busy, busy place years ago. And Saturdays, you'd see all the people, children walking around, women visiting each other; it was a big nice place.⁶⁸

Nostalgia for the days when the local economy was bustling and the people on the reserve were participants seems evident here. Nancy's generation, like the one before it, were busy, hardworking women. They were the daughters of the original W.A. generation, but took up some of the same community work. She describes the sports days they would organize, bringing the community together. In the earlier days, the sports days were held near old David Anderson's place in the North West part of the Reserve, where they used to play ball, play football (soccer?), and the women and children had foot races and sometimes the women would race the men. What Nancy found so much fun was,

they used to give us bags, potato bags, these grain bags and you put that on and you tie it up here, and you'd [race] about five or six of us trying to, and you had to go about from here to the road, jumping along! I used to have lots of fun doing that. And then they used to make a little thing with sticks on each side and a [raised] bar across and they'd put a pillow on each side and the men would sit there and they'd have a pillow each, hitting each other to see who'd get knocked off of the [bar]. "Pillow fight," they used to call it. Oh, they did things; they used to have lots of fun! And one time too, sometimes too in the summertime they'd have a picnic like that, they would get a chicken or a rooster. Now the women, they'd put a place, and the women had to all run to see who would catch the rooster! Oh, they had lots of fun, different things.

Later, the sports grounds were roughly across the road from the today's store and gas station.

We used to always have a little picnic there. The women used to have what we call a homemakers' club, like the women, and in the summer time like that we used to have a

⁶⁸ Nancy Bitternose, Interview, 31 July 2013.

picnic, a sports [day], we would buy all the stuff, we'd raise money and buy all the stuff and we'd sell the stuff there in a booth, have a booth there. Oh, just like when you go to-like they had candies, drinks, food and everything like that. And we used to have a little stove there where they could, somebody would want fried bannock, somebody would make bannock, fry it. And we used to have these big washtubs and we'd have that full of ice, and we'd get ice from the school there and we'd have all the drinks in there to keep them cool. We had candy and everything just like they how they have in these picnics.⁶⁹

This was in the period just after the World War II and into the 1950s. As Nancy stated, "Oh there's lots of things people used to do years ago that you'd never think they would ever do. And they didn't have lots of young people like what they have today. There was lots of married families and yet they used to do a lot of things together, the men and the women."⁷⁰ Stories about sports days, picnics and dances show that Nancy had some fun in addition to all the hard work that she did.

It is widely known around the reserve that Nancy did much outdoor work all her life, even up until the summer of our interview in 2013. She attributes her long life and health to remaining active. She mentioned that only in the last couple of years had she stopped mowing her quite extensive yard with the lawn mower, but would still take the grass whip and go out and trim around her house. This was her fourth year that she had not had a garden. At 92, she, like most others I interviewed, commented about how the younger generations do not know how to work anymore. "The way we were brought up, we were taught to work and we never found it hard. Because I know lots of them, find it hard to do something like that. But we never found it hard."

Conclusion

These three women provide three slightly foggy windows into the past experiences of women on Gordon's Reserve. Their experiences help fill out the picture. There are other women just as deserving to be featured in this chapter, but these three seemed representative to me and their data was amenable to this kind of presentation. Flora Anderson's own words cannot be found except in the memories of her grandchildren, some of whom are quoted in this chapter. Clara Pratt's words survive, thanks to the interview by Alex Cywink in 1983, and a few of Nancy Bitternose's words are presented here, deriving from an interview I did with her in 2013. Nancy still resides at Gordon's. They all would have known each other; their lives overlapped as did some of their experiences. All three of them worked hard. Each

⁶⁹ Nancy Bitternose, Interview, 31 July 2013.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

succeeding generation had more contact and commerce with the increasing settler population. Each of them probably worked harder than their daughters but not as hard as their mothers.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation on the importance of women's work to the economic wellbeing of the people of George Gordon First Nation is now drawing to an end. This final chapter will first summarize the preceding chapters, giving an overview of the range of research done, and then discuss the major findings of the research. It will then look at some avenues for future research on this First Nation or related communities and will conclude with thoughts about the contribution of this work to the historiography, the literature on Indigenous women, and the people of George Gordon First Nation.

The work necessarily began by situating the people of George Gordon First Nation within the broad historical and geographic context of the Touchwood Hills on the edge of the northern Plains. Relying upon the earliest documented accounts for this early history, the involvement of the people in the fur trade, both the earlier beaver-focused, middle-man trade and the later buffalo hide/pemmican trade, was examined. These distinct phases and ways of life had somewhat differing demands on women, but given the nature of travel and economy, the work would have been onerous in both periods. Women's production of furs, hides, robes, and pemmican was extremely important to the economic survival of themselves and their husbands, indeed the entire family. As discussed, their productive work of this nature, added to their traditional gathering and homemaking roles, made women extremely vital, and many early accounts by first-hand observers highlighted the work that women did as a measure of their lack of authority in the family and community. Some early observers preferred to see women as downtrodden slaves of men and their peoples as primitive for that reason. Others saw women with considerable authority and attributed it to their valuable work. Women's status and authority are still discussed to this day, although it seems accepted that complementarity was generally the state of affairs and the only sustainable state of gender relations that could persist, particularly given the labour that was required from all members of the family in making a living throughout all the stages of the band's history.

Touchwood Hills was an important post towards the end of the buffalo days. As the resources declined and dependency on the fur traders increased, women's work was still important, but times got harder. The decline of the buffalo meant the loss of the materials of life for the Touchwood Hills Cree and set the stage for Treaty. For a couple of decades before and after Treaty 4, signed in 1874, the people suffered from great poverty. Evidence of this can be found in the reports from the agents the Department of Indian Affairs put out in the field. Farm instructors and Indian Agents reported hunger and privation resulting from the lack of game in the area and the difficulties getting started in farming. At the same time, the department's officials were cutting back on spending and trying to implement Treaty 4 as stingily as possible. These decades were especially hard.

Some Half-breeds connected with Kawacatoose and George Gordon, and led by Charles Pratt, had taken up farming in the Touchwood Hills in the mid-nineteenth century. They remained with the band after Treaty. The Half-breed element of Gordon's band came to create an interesting mix of people and perhaps views on the Treaty. After settlement on the reserve the Half-breed contingent represented the most advanced farmers. The department farm instructors and agents contrasted the Indians and Half-breeds of Gordon's over and over again in their reports, usually suggesting that the Half-breeds were well off and did not need the support of the Indian Department; they noted that the Half-breeds were responsible for the best crops and most success in the department's plans for the Indians. For their part, it seems the Half-breeds were more vocal in demanding better treatment and implementation of Treaty. Over time, however, the differences gradually diminished, due in part to the application of the Indian Act and therefore a leveling of economic circumstances, but also to kinships and reciprocal relations among families on the reserve. People helped one another, especially in times of hardship.

In the early reserve years, women's fortunes may have varied depending on the relative wealth of their Half-breed or Indian fathers and/or husbands, and the same could be said of the men: that their fortunes often depended upon the work of the women in their families. During the early reserve period, women's work, like in all the ages before, was vital to the family and complementary to that of the men. Roles were flexible when necessary, but over time, as the influence of the Church, school, and surrounding settler culture grew, roles more or less settled into the gendered division of labour which saw men doing the outdoor, heavier labour and women the indoor work. Both roles required a great deal of hard work. The complementarity of

roles continued, and women were very much economic partners to their men, reflecting the partnership Sarah Carter describes in the farming life of the prairies.

The reserve's resources helped the people survive. Wood, berries, and the people's labour were sold to surrounding settlers. Livestock, gardens, and crops of wheat, oats, and barley were grown. Surpluses were sold or bartered, and women's specialized work such as tanning hides, making suitable garments, and midwifery were useful on reserve and off. Some of these occupations are exemplified by the case studies of three women whose lives overlapped spanning the whole of the twentieth century, although chapter 7 only covers roughly the first half of it. A much more nuanced picture of women's experiences emerges when such a micro-historical approach is taken. From the smallest details of their beadwork or the multitudinous daily tasks, the variety as well as the quantity of their labour is revealed. From hunting small game to driving tractor, and from fine beadwork to Women's Auxiliary picnics, these three women's contributions to their families and community show a wide range of activity, all geared toward making a living or making life better. The sale or bartering of berries, beadwork, and seneca roots also helped considerably.

The influences of the Anglican Church and then the residential school situated right on the reserve have been great and have reverberated through the generations. Today there is not a large Anglican congregation, but there are still many Christians. The early ownership that the people took of the Church was a surprising finding in the diocesan records; both men and women were involved and took leadership roles, from Charles Pratt on down. The successive churches were built by the men on the reserve and cleaned and decorated by the women. Besides diocesan records, there is a material reminder in the beaded frontal created by the women of Gordon's which still adorns the altar at St. Luke's Church, while paintings of Jesus and the Last Supper were done by band member Sanford Fisher. While the impacts of the school are often lamented today, a few women deliberately spoke out about the benefits of the school and what they learned there, particularly in terms of domestic work skills. It was the source of many of the earliest homemaking lessons that the Plains Cree, Saulteaux, and Half-breed children picked up and utilized, sometimes with pride in their accomplishments.

From 1895, when the first former student, a young woman, was listed as working at the boarding school on the reserve, there are records of women working for wages either at the school or for settlers in surrounding areas and even for a Regina family. Both men and women

worked for settlers as farmhands or domestic help. Some Gordon's women did farmhand work as well, working outdoors milking cows and driving tractor, cutting and hauling hay. Just as some women could "swing an axe as good as a man," so could they undertake the outdoor farm labour as hired help. Again, a certain pride in their strength and capabilities came through in our interviews. Not only men were valuable to the settlers. Hard physical labour added to the traditional knowledge associated with this land were among the virtues handed down the generations, and which Gordon's women, just as well as the men, drew upon to ensure the survival and success of their families.

This research attempted to find the earliest words of the people of Gordon's as much as possible to allow the people to tell their own history. The earlier period relies on the accounts of non-Indigenous observers, especially those charged with the task of assisting in the settlement and uptake of a new way of life – i.e., the Indian Agents, Agency Inspectors, school principals, and the odd Farm Instructor. To find the First Nations people's perspectives requires an effort to read between the lines of these documents. The views of the people can be found in the complaints of the Indian Agents at times. The Indian Affairs Annual Reports and Indian Agents' correspondence in the RG10 of the Library and Archives Canada were combed for information that might reveal the people's words, but also their daily lived experiences that impinged upon women and their work. Where I could find mention of women, I have included it in this work, only omitting comments that were repeated over and over. Often, it is more the products of women's work that Agents referred to and the actual involvement of women must be inferred. Further into the story, the details of the daily life, even of the specific reserve, dry up and become sparse while the memories of living people begin to fill in the blanks and the oral history becomes richer. In 2013, I undertook to collect my own oral history on the work of women and interviewed fifteen elders/knowledge holders. Much of the information about women and also men's work in the latter half of the period under study came from these interviews. In the oral record, it appears that women were extremely busy and also that there was a continuity in many tasks/jobs from earlier times right up until today in some cases. Gordon's women still carry out tasks that have their roots in tradition and go back before contact, making use of the environment around them to enrich their lives. That environment is the Touchwood Hills and adjacent areas.

Findings and Contributions

This dissertation examines the work of women of the George Gordon First Nation of the Touchwood Hills in southern Saskatchewan, with a view to bringing to light the tremendous contributions made by the women to the survival of the people over the years and engaging a number of related questions. To accomplish this, I set about to bring to light and explain as many aspects of, and different types of, women's work as possible where previously this information has largely been ignored, or overshadowed by attention to men's work. The amount and variety of women's work is formidable and, from pre-Treaty days to the present there are continuities. This research focused on the period ending about 1945, just before more changes occurred.

In the context of the confinement on reserves, under the administration and control of the Department of Indian Affairs, it appears that despite some government officials' poor opinions of the women and their efforts, women did as much as they could under the circumstances. Their efforts were extremely valuable at the time. A close reading of the documents shows that some officials also appreciated that women's work was essential to the families. Women and boys were lumped into the farm instructors' numbers of "working Indians," along with men. Whether one terms it "agency" or women's work, women were not sitting around waiting to be helped. They were just as capable as men; the three women whose life stories are featured here exemplify that.

Implicit and unavoidable in a discussion of Indigenous women's work is the question of women's power vis-à-vis Indigenous men. While women's position and status in some First Nations societies were portrayed by early observers as debased, illustrated by their constant labour and drudgery, this research shows that women did have to work hard, but that under the reserve conditions, men also had to labour and neither is on the whole more important than the other. This finding lends support to the complementarity view of gender relations, rather than a hierarchical construction. Contrary to the early observers who considered women to be veritable slaves to their men, rather, it appears that both men and women were slaves to the economic conditions brought about by the fur trade and then the confinement on reserve under a frugal government.

This complementarity is borne out in the oral history. I went into my fieldwork expecting confirmation of the adage "women are the backbone of the families" that we hear so often in

public speeches. I did hear that from a few of the men that I interviewed, but none of the women would claim that honour. None of the women I interviewed suggested that they worked harder than men or that their work was more valuable than men's. Men also did not claim that women's work was more important, only that they worked longer hours and did all manner of things that men usually did not do. Rather, the evidence shows that men and women worked in partnership to sustain their families. There were undoubtedly some variations, examples of families or periods where the women did more than their share, but overwhelmingly the evidence points to a partnership between couples when it came to work. Families all pulled together: children worked, elderly members worked, but the main core was the hard-working couple at the centre. A balance between the two was ideal, but not always achieved.

Related to this, there were some differences in the amount and kinds of work that women did depending on whether they were Indians or Half-breed band members, at least in the early days. Application of the Indian Act and sometimes the whims of the local Indian Agent, as well as cultural and social factors such as marriages and just helping one another out, levelled the field over the long run, although the distinction between Indians and Half-breeds carried on for quite some time.

While complementarity of roles might be among the Cree attributes and values shared by the Gordon's people, another is being sufficiently adaptable to meet whatever changes came their way. From the buffalo-hunting and trading days to reserve settlement and agriculture, the people underwent drastic changes, periods of famine, and increasing colonial intrusions. Traditional roles were altered. It may be argued that the men's roles changed more than the women's; however, using traditional and new skills, women adapted to the conditions and made the best of the situation. "An Indian is never stuck," is a phrase still used on the reserve today when people find ways to cope in the face of adversity, setback, or shortage. That adage is indicative of a traditional attitude and adaptive approach to change and adversity demonstrated in this research. This is another trait in which the people take a certain pride.

Among its contributions, this research adds a piece to the overall history of First Nations in Saskatchewan. It contributes to the knowledge about Half-breeds who became Treaty Indians in another "multicultural band," in southern Saskatchewan. It also considers culture change at the family level and in the economic realm that occurred over the long history of colonial intrusion. Important also is the contribution towards knowledge about George Gordon First

Nation, both in academe and among the people themselves. The future generations might learn that their ancestors, both men and women, have worked hard under adverse climatic, policy, economic, and social conditions to persevere and thrive. The amount and variety of work done by both men and women is something that the grandchildren and succeeding generations of band members might find very interesting. It expands the potential, the possibilities, when one learns that one's great grandfather or grandmother carried out vital work with their own strength and motivation. Furthermore, it will provide a history of the policies of the government that the people lived under and hopefully expand the younger generations' understanding of not only policy but also of the agency of the people. They were not passive, but acted in their own best interests and were still able to lend a helping hand to others. Lastly, the history of the First Nation takes place in a reserve that is more than the string of dusty road and power lines that today defines the movements of most of the people. The "Mountain," the tipi rings, the prairie-chicken hunting hills, the hay sloughs and the old almost-forgotten sites of trading posts, homes, and schools that existed before will be resurrected, marked, and remembered.

New Questions

Bringing together the documentary and oral history that I have collected here will hopefully be a valuable contribution to the future generations of the First Nation and inspire young people to carry on the effort. For one thing, other First Nations might undertake similar works. These local histories have not been undertaken to any great degree, and every year, we lose more elders who often take their knowledge to the grave without sharing the bulk of it. The other First Nations in the Tribal Council, the Touchwood Agency, could take up aspects of this research and fill out their own histories. The other reserves do not have such a Halfbreed presence, and perhaps comparisons would yield much interesting material. Muskowekwan had a significant portion of their population take scrip, and some returned to treaty after finding scrip was not all it was made out to be. Kawacatoose and Day Star's, while both Cree reserves, have such a different character from each other and also from Gordon's and Muskowekwan. How much has this contributed to their different experiences under Indian policy? Comparisons of the treatment by the Indian Agents as well as responses to them by these different bands could easily be done.

Certainly there are areas exposed in my work that require more research. There are plenty of women I did not interview or whose families were not interviewed. There is greater variety of

experience not covered here. Few women who married out, for example, were consulted. In fact, more women who married in were interviewed.

The whole question of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women appears to have only arisen after my period of study. No one that I asked could remember women being victimized like that and, as mentioned, only one case of prostitution in the whole agency came to light during my period. Apparently women drinking alcohol was also a rare event in the period under study. These questions were only peripheral to the question of women's work, and perhaps, if I had dug down more diligently, I might have found more instances. There is certainly more room for research on women on Gordon's and on economic changes.

Over time, especially since the arrival of White settlers in the district, the fortunes of the First Nations, although always the below those of the settlers, waxed and waned according to the economic times of the country. As the people began to make a better living at farming during the 1890s, their housing and lifestyle improved, reaching a peak in the 1920s. Then it declined considerably. During the depression years, they were poorer and during boom years, their fortunes improved. But that all changed around the time of World War II, even though more people were working for wages. This significant change happened just as this study draws to a close – 1945 – when family allowance was introduced, as soldiers came back from the War, with the mechanization of settlers' farms that Indians could not hope to get the loans to emulate. Indian farmers fell behind and gave up, providing more labour for settlers, helping them develop their farms. The gap between the Indians on reserve and the surrounding White farmers widened from that point on. Only a handful of the people living on the reserve today would remember when there was more of an equal playing field between Gordon's people and surrounding settlers; when in the days of Francis Cyr, the rural municipality council met regularly in his home on the reserve for years; when my own grandfather had such friendly ties with surrounding settlers that they would come and stay at his place; when Gordon's had notable sports teams that surrounding farmers would go out of their way to assist to get to their games because the competition was appreciated. But we fell behind, and the close ties and friendships forged through mutual assistance gradually faded away except for those held together by bonds of marriage. But even then, until relatively recently the Indian Act excluded those women who married non-Indians and discouraged their continued involvement with the reserve, often pushing them and their families away. The relationships and connections between Indians and

Whites, both social and economic, as that gap widened would be worthwhile studying, particularly in this age of Truth and Reconciliation.

It is not a question of who worked harder than whom, who is really the backbone of the family or who had it worse. Both men and women of the past on this reserve have had some terribly hard times. *ē-kīkitimākisicik – they were pitiable*, but they persevered and were stronger because they had each other to depend upon. The strength of couples and families, working interdependently for the survival of their children and their future generations, depended in part on the strength of the women.

In conclusion, this dissertation on George Gordon First Nation's women and economic history has revealed a great deal about the changes that our people have endured. As Michael McNab stated,

Yeah, times have changed. We'll never see them days again. And the old people, they seemed to know what was gonna happen in the future. Us, we can't predict that now, what we're going to see further on. Because a lot of the things that the old people used to talk about has come to pass already, you know, what we were taught. How'd they know them things? You know, who told them? And how did they know that this was going to happen, like in my lifetime, eh? Yeah, they seemed to know what lay ahead.¹

The future is uncertain, but the past can be discovered and some ideas about what our grandmothers and great-grandmothers experienced and contributed can be preserved for the future generations.

¹ Michael McNab, Interview, 8 August 2013.

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APPENDIX A: Table of Elders Interviewed for this project, showing age, date of interview, and date of death if applicable.

	Nancy Bitternose, 92, July 31, 2013		Melvin McNab, 73, August 14, 2013
	Philip Bitternose, 75, September 7, 2013 (d. April 24, 2015)		Michael McNab, 77, August 8, 2013
	William Bitternose, 89, August 2, 2013		Ruby McNab, 79, August 15, 2013
	Bernadette Blind, 85, August 1, 2013		Shirley McNab, 76, August 7, 2013
	Leona Blondeau, 80, November 22, 2013		Joseph (Jackie) Pelletier, 85, September 6, 2013
	Mervin Frank Cyr, 74, August 6, 2013		Rena Pelletier, 84, September 6, 2013
	Elizabeth Favel, 91, August 2, 2013		Irene Walter, 71, July 30, 2013
	Ivan McNab, 75, February 23, 2014 (d. December 10, 2015)		

APPENDIX B: David Anderson's Letter and Response¹

159,552
Touchwood Hills
Gordon's Reserve
Kutawna P.O.
+ auction
JAN
DEPARTMENT OF
1904
Feb 29th 1905

Hear Sir
To the Superintendent of Indian
affairs

I drop you those few lines to
ask you that if we Reserve people
can sell logs of any kind. For I have
cut 200 logs for selling our Reserve
and their taken from me their taken
before I sell them our Indian Agent
took them after I fill them and he
says that he want to sell them on oxen
sell we dont understand how he can sell
them if we cant sell them or use them
the reserve we ask you those thing we gone
to ~~starve~~ starve in the Reserve if we cant
sell logs for the closest town from us
its about 50 miles and we cant sell wood or
any thing and we cant farm very much
in our Reserve for there is nothing but hill
slopes and bushes and we would some time
have chance to sell logs if you would
alow us to sell them its all popular we have
here

And another thing the Indian Agent is
making to many new laws to himself
- carried forward

¹ FSIN, Specific Claims Collection, RG10, Vol. 7842, File 30121-4.

(2)

15485

255413

JAN 2 1974

EXTRACT
OP.

Since the Assistant Indian Agent went off
 from here Agency we will never be able to
 make our living as long as this Indian
 Agent and our farm instructor are here we
 would sooner have no farm instructor than to
 have the one we got here now for they both try very
 hard to pull us down instead of trying to
 save us a head in the way of making living
 we ~~can~~ even cant go out of our Reserve to
 get grub for ourselves without a pass or to go
 and see the Agent an when we do get a pass
 to go and see the Indian Agent we never
 can find him in the Indian Office that's
 about 12 miles from here we obey your law
 we must get a pass if we want to go off for 2 or 3
 day but this we ask you have we to get
 a pass to go and see the Indian ~~Agent~~
 we also ask you to take this farm instructor
 away from here for we would like to live
 dont want a man like him in our
 Reserve I ~~will~~ enclose this letter with our
 names in this Reserve and we beg you
 to answer this letter and give ^{us} right ~~and~~
 satisfaction
 I am David Anderson Jr.

235413

Names of Gordon Reserve

Marybird
 Fanny bird
 Casau bird
 Jacob bird
 Moses Gordon
 Benjamen Gordon
 Alex Mc Mah
 Albert Mc Mah
 John Sere
 Francis Sere
 Colin Sere
 White bare
 Charles A. Pratt
 Charles J. Pratt
 Alex Pratt
 Frank Child
 John Child
 Osoen
 John Fisher
 James Fisher
 Buttern More
 Pappal
 Thchoe
 Kasepasis
 John Everright

Sakesekapawetawat
 Atoes
 George Gordon
 Andrew William Anders
 Joseph Anderson
 Josiah Anderson
 David Anderson Sr
 David Anderson Jr

7 A

109 400

JAN 2 1974

Ottawa, 4th July, 1904.

Sir,

Referring to your letter of the 29th February, 1904, asking whether the Indians will be allowed to sell logs cut on the Reserve, and complaining against the regulations made by the Indian Agent &c. I have to state that Indians have the right to cut timber for building, fencing and such without permission, but they have no right to cut and sell without authority.

The Department has ascertained that there is plenty of farming land on the Reserve, and it has been represented that if white men had the same opportunities as the Indians have, they would soon become rich.

If you have any evidence to make known, or any well founded complaints to make against the Indian Agent, or his assistant, you should communicate with the Indian Commissioner at Winnipeg, on the subject.

Yours obedient servant,

Secretary-

Mr. David Anderson, Jr.
(Indian)
Ottawa P.O.

Gale
WAO
For [unclear]

Typed copy of previous page: Department response to David Anderson.

I99 G55

Ottawa, 4th July, 1905-

Sir,

Referring to your letter of the 29th February, 1904, asking whether the Indians will be allowed to sell logs cut on the Reserve, and complaining against the regulations made by the Indian Agent &c. I have to state that Indians have the right to cut timber for building, fencing and fuel without permission but they have no right to cut and sell without authority.

The Department has ascertained that there is plenty of farming land on the Reserve, and it has been represented that if White men had the same opportunities as the Indians have, they would soon become rich.

If you have any grievance to make known, or any well founded complaints to make against the Indian Agent, or his assistant, you should communicate with the Indian Commissioner at Winnipeg, on the subject.

Your obedient servant,

Secretary-

Mr. David Anderson, Jr.

(Indian)

Kutawa, P.O.