

At the Edge:

The North Prince Albert Region of the Saskatchewan Forest Fringe to 1940

A Dissertation Submitted to the College of

Graduate Studies and Research

In partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

In the Department of History

University of Saskatchewan

Saskatoon

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Abstract

Canadians have developed a vocabulary of regionalism, a cultural shorthand that divides Canada into easily-described spaces: the Arctic, the Prairies, the Maritimes, and Central Canada, for example. But these artificial divisions obscure the history of edge places whose identity is drawn from more than one region. The region north of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, is a place on the edge of the boreal forest whose self-representations, local history, and memorials draw heavily on a non-prairie identity. There, the past is associated with the forest in contrast to most Canadians' understanding of Saskatchewan as flat, treeless prairie. This dissertation presents the history of the north Prince Albert region within a framework that challenges common Saskatchewan and Canadian stereotypes. Through deep-time place history, layers of historical occupation in the study region can be compared and contrasted to show both change and continuity. Historical interpretations have consistently separated the history of Saskatchewan's boreal north and prairie south, as if the two have no history of interchange and connection. Using edge theory, this dissertation argues that historical human occupation in the western interior found success in the *combination* of prairie and boreal lifeways.

First Nations groups from both boreal forest and open plain used the forest edge as a refuge, and to enhance resilience through access to resources from the other ecosystem. Newcomer use of the prairie landscape rebranded the boreal north as a place of natural resources to serve the burgeoning prairie market. The prairies could not be settled if there was not also a nearby and extensive source for what the prairies lacked: timber and fuel. Extensive timber harvesting led to deforestation and the rise of agriculture built on the rhetoric of mixed farming, not King Wheat. The mixed farming movement – tied to landscape – underscored the massive internal migrations from the open prairies to the parkland and forest edge.

Soldier settlement, long viewed as a failure, experienced success in the north Prince Albert region and gave a model for future extensive government-supported land settlement schemes. South-to-north migration during the 1920s was based on a combination of push and pull factors: drought in the Palliser Triangle; and a strengthening northern economy built on cordwood, commercial fishing, freighting, prospecting and fur harvesting, as well as mixed farming. The economy at the forest edge supported occupational pluralism, drawing subsistence from both farm and forest, reflecting the First Nations model. As tourism grew to prominence, the Saskatchewan dual identity of prairie/forest led to the re-creation of the north Prince Albert region as a new vacationland, the 'Playground of the Prairies.' The northern forest edge drew thousands of migrants during the Great Depression. Historical analysis has consistently interpreted this movement as frantic, a reactionary idea without precedent. Through a deep-time analysis, the Depression migrations are viewed through a new lens. The forest edge was a historic place of both economic and cultural refuge and resilience predicated on the Saskatchewan contrast of north and south.

Acknowledgements

Financial support for this project came from the University of Saskatchewan, Dean's Scholarship Fund, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Doctoral Fellowship, and the Department of History through both a doctoral scholarship and travel funds to pursue archival and oral research. The Network in Canadian History of the Environment (NiCHE) sponsored a trip to attend the World Congress of Environmental History in Copenhagen, Denmark. The University of Saskatchewan provided funds to attend the Local History in a Globalizing World international conference in Antwerp, Belgium and a specialized conference on local memories and landscape in Plymouth, England. I am grateful to all.

My supervisory committee of Erica Dyck, Maureen Reed, Geoff Cunfer and Jim Miller were incredibly supportive. My supervisor, Bill Waiser, not only kept me organized, but continually pushed me to do better and go further. He provides an unbelievable role model. His productivity, commitment to others, and public presence as a professional historian sets the bar high.

Special thanks go out to the men and women from the north Prince Albert region who spoke to me, formally through interviews or informally, about my project. Their perspective and wisdom helped shape my work. Andrew Dunlop, a fellow PhD candidate, helped me scan some of the maps and photographs using the facilities provided by the Historical GIS lab at the University of Saskatchewan. I am grateful.

Aspects of this dissertation were published as "When You're Not From the Prairie: Place History in the Forest Fringe of Saskatchewan," published in the *Journal of Canadian Studies* Vol. 44, no. 2 (2010): pp. 171-193. My thanks to the editors and peer-review readers for their feedback and support.

Family sustained the project from beginning to end. My in-laws – Ron and Joyce, Glenn and Lesley, Ryan and Jenn and their families – have asked questions and expressed interest and support, reminding me to find a way to explain what I was doing in an understandable way. My brothers and their families – Jamie and Jodie, Kerry and Melanie – offered a warm bed, hot meals, and babysitting services on innumerable research trips north. My mother, Mary McGowan, accompanied me on research and conference trips, participated in oral history research, borrowed books for me and kept me on track with stories from her childhood. Bronwyn and Alric have spent over four years watching their Mom read books, books, and more books, leave on research and conference trips, and stare at a computer screen. We've all had our eye on the prize: a finished dissertation, and a family trip to Disneyworld to celebrate. My husband, Garth, has been the poster boy of 'supportive husband,' nursing me through comprehensive exams, mononucleosis, and dissertation. Moderately surprised at my tenacity and organization, he has nonetheless expressed nothing but pride at my latest academic venture. He is a star.

Dedication

For Sargent Ernest McGowan and

David Sargent McGowan,

Always in my thoughts;

and for Dave De Brou,

because I promised.

Map of Canada

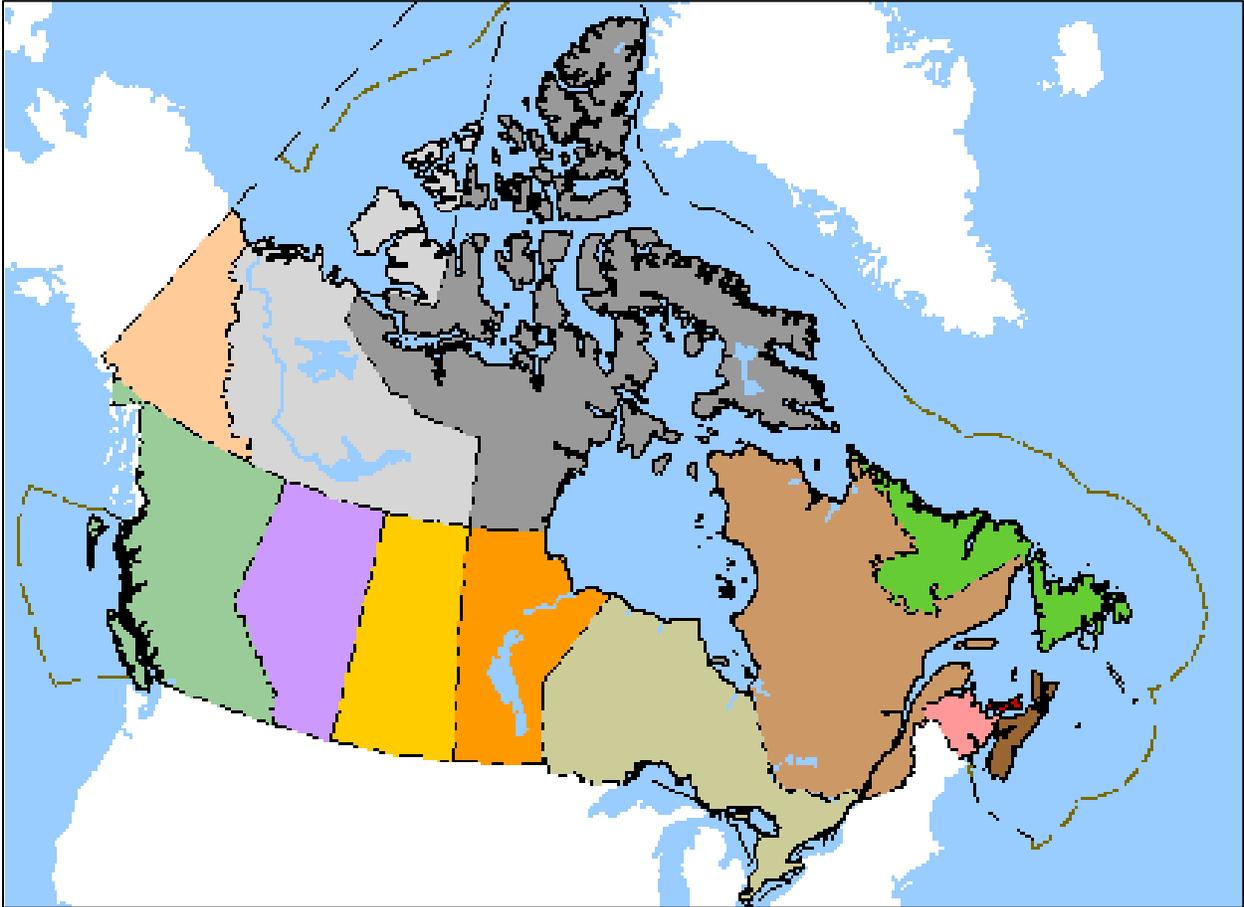


Figure 1. Map of Canada. Government of Canada. <http://atlas.nrcan.gc.ca>. Saskatchewan is in dark yellow.

Map of Saskatchewan



Figure 2. Map of Saskatchewan. Government of Canada. <http://atlas.nrcan.gc.ca>.

Map of The North Prince Albert Region



Figure 3. From *Prince Albert and Northern Lake Country* Vol. 1, no. 1 (May 2008), p. 5.

Introduction: The Power of Place

“I love Canada so much, especially the transfer area, where we leave field and farm and enter the forest area. I was born on the ‘fringe’ and just loved it – to be able to make hay one day and go blueberry picking the next is right up my alley. Drop the manure fork and in minutes...have a fishing rod in your hand, is my idea of heaven.” Sargent McGowan, Paddockwood, Saskatchewan, May 2005.¹

The Canadian penchant for dividing Canada into regions – the Prairies, the Maritimes, and Central Canada, for example – has left Canadian history deeply divided along arbitrary and somewhat artificial divisions. These divisions obscure the history of edge places whose identity is drawn from more than one region. The area north of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, at the transition zone between field and forest in the centre of the province, is a locale whose self-representations, local history, and memorials draw heavily on a non-prairie identity. There, the past is associated with the forest in contrast to most Canadians' understanding of Saskatchewan as flat, treeless prairie. This dissertation presents the history of the north Prince Albert region within a framework that challenges common Saskatchewan and Canadian stereotypes. Historical interpretations that acknowledge Saskatchewan's non-prairie spaces have consistently separated the history of Saskatchewan's boreal north and prairie south, as if the two have no history of interchange and connection. Using edge theory, this dissertation argues that historical human occupation in the western interior found success in the *combination* of prairie and boreal lifeways.

This dissertation provides an environmental perspective that believes in the intrinsic and ongoing connections between nature and human habitation of nature's physical space. Throughout the following pages, the physical landscape is an important character in the story, and the narrative is informed by changes in the land. Within the Saskatchewan transition zone between prairie and forest, the landscape changed over time by circumstances driven by culture, which modified both the physical landscape and human perception of that landscape.

Some readers might dismiss this study as inconsequential, because the study region is small. But the themes that drive the story are embedded in Canadian history and so are familiar.

¹ S. McGowan, “Under the Raven's Nest,” unpublished manuscript 2005. McGowan wrote another manuscript, entitled “The Key is in the Horse,” circa 2001-2002. Both manuscripts are in possession of author.

It is a tale of human environmental adaptation and disturbance. The story sprawls across time and is dotted with characters as diverse as Woods and Plains Cree, foresters and freighters, fishers and farmers, trappers, traders, and tourists. First Nations' traditional habitation and utilization of the transition zone continues across the newcomer landscape. The story follows the rise of urban centers and industrialization and bursts into the twentieth century. Tracks and trails changed to roads and highways, moving humans through the landscape. The mud and blood of the First World War enters the story through soldier resettlement on the land. As the modern age gripped Canada, energy was poured into scientifically, systematically and culturally dividing the landscape. Distinctions between farm land and forest/park land allowed economic and cultural exploitation that was diametrically opposed: cut down the trees to make farmland, or be a tourist and visit the forest. The familiar prairie wheat story will be stripped and rebuilt, not as a monolithic tale of pioneers in sod huts, but as a story of inter-regional migration and a continuing search for stability that drew farmers north to parkland and forest edge landscapes. The storylines converge in the whirlwind of the Great Depression, where the experiences of the local shatter stereotypes of dust and despair to offer a viewpoint centered on optimism, community strength, and economic boom. It is, indeed, a story worth examining.

Regions

Universality is not the only message of the following narrative. Much of the theoretical motivation springs from the classic Canadian concept of regionalism and regionalization. It is usual, almost axiomatic, to assume that Canada as a country can and should be divided into regions. Those regions can be political, ecological, or cultural, but they remain possibly the most common method of controlling and discovering, comparing and contrasting the Canadian story. Canadians have a penchant for referring to Canadian spaces using a cultural shorthand that blithely divides this large country into standardized chunks; the Prairies or the West (with or without BC), the Maritimes, Central Canada or Ontario/Quebec, and the Far North, are examples. It is all too familiar to ascribe common cultural and physical characteristics to large areas that, on closer scrutiny, are not homogenous. Not only are these regions not homogenous, but the concept of regionalism has obscured important aspects of the Canadian story. Regionalism, although a useful tool if used with caution, can and has in fact become too established to the point of myopic assumptions and narrow-minded storytelling. Geographer David Wishart presented an elegant warning that dividing spaces into regions, similar to dividing

time into periods (such as “the roar of the twenties”) brings about a high degree of inertia. This inertia, he argues, will “inhibit new ways of understanding. Reflection on what we take for granted...can yield fresh insights, opening up new possibilities for new narratives.”²

Following Wishart’s lead, the regional characteristics associated with the province of Saskatchewan come under scrutiny, even attack, in this dissertation. Saskatchewan, the central of the three “prairie provinces,” is invariably depicted in photographs, calendar collections, and the Canadian public consciousness as flat and treeless, with an astonishing sunset or skyline framing a golden field of wheat. This one biome, the expanse of simply land and sky, has been appropriated *as if* representative of the entire province. In fact, the prairie ecology, history, and economy has become the essence of Saskatchewan. Influenced by popular culture, the simplistic iconography of flat, treeless ‘prairie province’ replaces accurate but more complex descriptions of Saskatchewan. Even more important than accuracy, prairie iconography has limited historical investigation. Non-prairie spaces, and non-prairie stories, have been virtually invisible.³

Venerable historian G.F.G Stanley justified static “prairie” stories by claiming that historians of western Canada should only be concerned with the treeless prairie and the adjoining parkland: “My terms of reference do not include the forest area... because those regions have their own distinctive geographical features, their own problems and their own future.”⁴ Stanley’s separation of prairie and forest, or south from north, skews the Saskatchewan – and the Canadian – story in important ways. The basic prairie narrative takes readers from open plains filled with

² David Wishart, “Preliminary Thoughts on Region and Period,” Center for Great Plains Studies, www.unl.edu/plains/about/thoughts.shtml. Accessed November 5, 2008.

³ Regional divisions have been a contentious issue for Canadian geographers and historians, but they have continued to be used nonetheless. Historians and others have argued vehemently both for and against the concept of regionalism, primarily bemoaning or supporting the destruction of Canadian historical metanarratives due to the proliferation of regional, class, ethnic, gender, racial and other divisions within the Canadian story. For an overview of the inherent problems of creating a national narrative, see J.L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1998); Doug Owsram, “Narrow Circles: The Historiography of Recent Canadian Historiography...” *National History: A Canadian Journal of Enquiry and Opinion* Vol. 1, No. 1, 1997: pp. 5-21. Regardless of the perceived need for a nationalistic narrative, regionalism remains a key Canadian concept. From J.M.S. Careless’ popularization of Ramsay Cook’s “limited identities’ concept (which included region), to the scholarly work produced by the Western Canadian Studies Conference, *Acadiensis*, and other provincial journals, region has been a major force in the writing and shaping of Canadian history. Recent essay collections that are regionally-based and present some criticism on the concept include: David Wrobel and Michael Steiner (eds.) *Many Wests: Place, Culture, and Regional Identity* (University Press of Kansas, 1997); and Gerald Friesen, *River Road: Essays on Manitoba and Prairie History* (University of Manitoba Press, 1996). Although both geographers and historians have critically engaged with the concept of regionalism, few historians have reflected on what implications regionalization has had on their work, underlying assumptions, or emplotment.

⁴ George F.G. Stanley, “The Western Canadian Mystique.” *Prairie Perspectives: Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conference*. Ed. David P. Gagan. (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), pp. 6-27.

bison to wheat fields, with stops along the way to note treaty-making, the railway, intense immigration, sod shacks and big skies, political and social experimentation, potash and oil. Northern narratives of the fur trade fade away as soon as settlers hit the stage. Certain stories, such as the dust and despair of the Great Depression of the 1930s, have gained the aura of legend, scripted virtually in stone.

This study will break open stereotypical narratives to expose the stories that have been lost or ignored by the overtly prairie mythology. Such stories include: the First Nations' use of boreal *and* prairie landscapes to develop a broader and more stable resource base; the importance of boreal resources in the development of prairie society and vice versa, particularly through the north/south interaction of freighting, fishing, furs and forestry; the critical importance of the mixed farming movement and its ties to landscape and place, an idea particularly manifested during the post-First World War soldier settlement campaign; the rise of tourism and the reinterpretation of the northern landscape on new models of beauty, health, and recreation; and the impact of the Great Depression, where the southern model of dust and despair disintegrates when the north is included in the story to reveal a contrary narrative of boom times and refuge.

The overwhelming cultural force of the prairie mystique has overshadowed the history of what historians Ken Coates and William Morrison have termed “the forgotten north,” the provincial norths of the subarctic boreal forest. “Long-ignored, politically weak, economically unstable, home to substantial aboriginal populations, these areas have played a significant, if relatively unknown, role in Canada’s history,” they contended.⁵ Their work showcased the

⁵ They argue that scholarship is divided between the agricultural south and the ‘true north’ or ‘Far North,’ the Yukon and Northwest Territories (and Nunavut) in the Arctic region ‘north of 60.’ This division has skewed Canadian history, skipping over the provincial norths. Ken Coates and William Morrison, *The Forgotten North: A History of Canada’s Provincial Norths* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1992), p. 1. An important companion book is Kerry Abel and Ken Coates (eds.), *Northern Visions: New Perspectives on the North in Canadian History* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001). An excellent overview of recent writing on the Canadian north, including intriguing suggestions for further study which include a call for more investigation of the provincial norths and their “ties of corporations, governments, families, political parties and others between northern areas and southern regions,” is from Ken Coates and William Morrison, “The New North in Canadian History and Historiography,” *History Compass* 6/2 (2008): 639–658. Kerry Abel followed up her co-editing with the prize-winning *Changing Places: History, Community, and Identity in Northeastern Ontario* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2006). The best example from northern Manitoba is Frank Tough’s *As Their Natural Resources Fail’: Native Peoples and the Economic History of Northern Manitoba, 1870-1930* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996). For northern Alberta, see Donald Wetherell and Irene Kmet, *Alberta’s North: A History, 1890-1950* (Canadian Circumpolar Institute Press, University of Alberta Press and Alberta Community Development, 2000). A recent book by Liza Piper crosses provincial boundaries and redefines western Canada using the historical term “northwest,” reflecting a more northern narrative that combines environmental history with aboriginal and development history on the large lake region of the boreal forest, north of the prairie. See Liza Piper, *The Industrial Transformation of Subarctic Canada* (UBC Press, 2009).

problem of regionalization: breaking Canada into geographically-defined chunks, such as ‘the prairies’ and ‘the Far North,’ has fractionalized Canadian history and left out swaths of territory and important pieces of the story.⁶ Tied to the exponentially growing interest in Aboriginal history, work on the provincial norths has aimed to recover forgotten history as a balance to the decades of scholarly work on the prairies and the Arctic.⁷ One key work that focused on Saskatchewan’s north, from a northern perspective, was David Quiring’s lyrically titled *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan: Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks*. Focused on policy history during the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) period in Saskatchewan (1944-1964), Quiring ably followed Coates and Morrison’s suggestion that the Saskatchewan provincial north (like other provincial norths) was little more than a colony of the south, a *tabula rasa* where the CCF wanted to experiment with socialism.

Colonialism has been an important theme in Aboriginal history, and Quiring pointed to the twenty-year reign of the CCF as a time of overt colonization and exploitation of the north. Although Quiring’s work, and others like it, has provided important pieces of the Saskatchewan and northern story, it reinforced G.F.G Stanley’s arbitrary dividing line. Splitting the province in two allows a better view of certain stories, such as southern colonialism over northern inhabitants and landscape. To achieve this richly detailed and well-documented history, however, Quiring stated that “The ...CCF [was] the first government to bother with the northern half of the province,” suggesting that from a policy and political perspective, there was little government interest in the north prior to 1944. An even more damning, and incorrect, assertion by northern specialist R.M. Bone, claimed that “Indeed, the North was ignored by Euro-Canadians until its

⁶ On a similar note, Kerry Abel argued that a history of the Ontario north would add an important dimension not only to Ontario history, but to Canadian history. See “History and the Provincial Norths: An Ontario Example.” *Northern Visions: New Perspectives on the North in Canadian History*. Ed. Kerry Abel and Ken Coates. (Broadview Press, 2001).

⁷ Work on the Peace River region of Alberta and British Columbia made the physical connection between the west and the Far North (north of the sixtieth parallel) through the Peace and Athabasca River systems and the opening of highways to Alaska, the North West Territories and the Yukon. See Gordon Bowes (editor), *Peace River Chronicles* (Vancouver: Prescott Publishing Company, 1963); David Leonard and Victoria Lemieux, *A Fostered Dream: The Lure of the Peace River Country* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1992).

Others have pushed the western Canadian boundary south with comparative work on the American Great Plains and Canadian Prairies. See *One West, Two Myths: A Comparative Reader* (edited by Carol Higham and Robert Thacker, University of Calgary Press, 2004) and *One West, Two Myths II: Essays on Comparison* (edited by C.L. Higham and Robert Thacker, University of Calgary Press, 2006). These were complimented by another important reader, *Challenging Frontiers: The Canadian West* (edited by Lorry Felske and Beverly Rasporich, University of Calgary Press, 2004). All three operate within an overwhelmingly prairie paradigm; the former two obviously so, the latter disappointingly so.

forest and mineral wealth caught their attention in the post-World War II period.”⁸ Both of these statements, when measured against the historical record, were clearly misleading, even wrong. The north captured a large amount of energy and interest prior to 1944, but its isolation and transportation problems meant that development on a modernization model were difficult, if not impossible. Northern development on the scale and context to which Bone and Quiring refer was only possible with modern mechanization, such as airplanes and tractors, which were more readily available after the Second World War.⁹

The movement to write northern history, from an aboriginal or industrial/development perspective, has been laudable but has still fallen short: recovering the history of the provincial norths may add depth to the northern story, but has continued to create a false separation, reinforcing the contrasts and power imbalances but ignoring the connections. In suggesting that the fundamental differences in ecology and culture between the boreal north and the prairie south have led to what amounts to two separate histories has automatically obscured any historical events, places, or movements where the two solitudes were, in fact, drawn together. The story that follows sets up a new paradigm, exploring connections between the Saskatchewan provincial north and south in the era before the Second World War. By emphasizing connections, the artificial dividing line between the north and the south becomes a point of contact and exchange, rather than division. The two halves of the province will be considered as two ecosystems and cultures that have a history of drawing from and responding to each other. Their point of contact is the ecological and cultural edge. Reinterpreting the Saskatchewan south/north dynamic will, it is hoped, offer a new narrative for Canadian national historians.

Ecological and Cultural Edges

Where, and what, is the forest fringe? The Canadian forest fringe is an intriguing transition zone, a place of connection and interchange, *between* two dominant landscapes: the boreal forest of the north and the agriculturally-defined prairies of the south. The boreal forest, which the Atlas of Canada describes as “draped like a green scarf across the shoulders of North

⁸ David Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan: Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers and Fur Sharks* (UBC Press, 2004), p. X; R.M. Bone, “Saskatchewan’s Forgotten North: 1905 to 2005,” *Perspectives of Saskatchewan*, Edited by Jene M. Porter, (University of Manitoba Press, 2009), p. 13.

⁹ The best recent explanation of northern development is Liza Piper, *The Industrial Transformation of Sub-Arctic Canada*. The classic interpretations of northern development remain Morris Zaslow, *The Opening of the Canadian North 1870-1914* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971); *The Northward Expansion of Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988).

America”¹⁰ is not often remembered as an aspect of the Saskatchewan landscape. The symbolism behind the Saskatchewan flag, however, with the green stripe over the yellow is a heraldic representation of the two main Saskatchewan ecosystems.

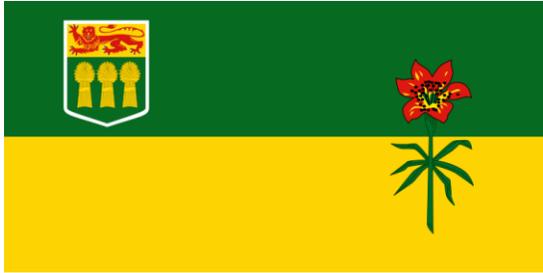


Figure 4. Saskatchewan Flag. www.reference-maps.com.

Where two ecosystems meet is known as an *ecotone*, or ecological edge, a place of transition from one ecosystem to another. For example, the shoreline is the ecotone between the lake and the land. Ecologists have long known that such edges present high levels of biodiversity, or species richness.¹¹ They tend to display soil, flora and fauna drawn from the parent ecosystems, as well as sometimes unique features or species and as a result are even more diverse than the parent ecosystem. The forest fringe or forest edge¹² is an edge ecosystem, displaying the accepted characteristics of an ecotone/edge from an ecological perspective.

Anthropologists have long noted that humans are highly drawn to ecotones and a higher incidence of archaeological sites has been found in these places.¹³ There are three possible reasons for the high incidence of human habitation. One, an ecotone displays “edge effect,” which refers to diversity and species richness within an ecotone, and so offers a diverse landscape upon which to draw. Two, humans living within and across an ecotone enjoy easier exploitation of nearby parent ecosystems, facilitating greater diversity not just within, but

¹⁰ http://atlas.nrcan.gc.ca/site/english/learningresources/theme_modules/borealforest/index.html. Accessed March 20, 2008.

¹¹ E.P. Odum, *Fundamentals of Ecology*, 3rd Edition. (Philadelphia, PA: W.B. Saunders, 1971).

¹² “Forest Fringe” is a term that is well-recognized within the Saskatchewan context. Government reports that refer to the ‘forest fringe’ include <http://www.municipal.gov.sk.ca/Default.aspx?DN=997c35ef-1bf3-4a95-a206-76c7d24cc5a1>. Accessed October 1, 2009. In 1995, the Forest Fringe Sno Riders snowmobile association was formed, taking their name from the common appellation of the region. See <http://www.snoriderswest.com/destinations/sask/forestfringe/> accessed October 1, 2009. “Forest fringe” land is often advertised for sale in the national agricultural newspaper, *The Western Producer*, extolling its proximity to lakes, fishing, and hunting.

¹³ The use of the terms ecotone and edge effect within archaeology was criticized by Robert E. Rhoades, “Archaeological Use and Abuse of Ecological Concepts and Studies: The Ecotone Example,” *American Antiquity* Vol. 43, NO. 4 (1978): pp. 608-614. His point was that the current landscape may not reflect past landscapes; also, borrowing from another discipline without also understanding the nuances and controversies within that discipline provides shaky ground. Rhoades’ criticisms convinced few.

adjacent to the ecotone. Three, if the dominant ecosystems support unique cultures (in this case, cultures adapted to the prairie and the boreal forest) those cultures will meet and interact at the ecotone, facilitating exchange and increasing flexibility and diversity for each cultural group. The first possibility is the least likely, as ecotones are, by their nature, rather narrow in depth – although they have an exceptional linear extent. In Canada, for example, a forest edge/ecotone can be found all across the continent at the natural (or artificial) dividing line between the boreal forest and the southern agricultural regions. Despite its breadth, the narrow depth of the forest edge (which is fluid, constantly changing, and highly affected by both natural and human disturbance¹⁴) means that it is less likely to support a social system or human society solely within the transition zone. It is more likely, for the purposes of this study, that the forest edge provided a relatively luxuriant base *in* which to live (and create) and *from* which to access the parent ecosystems of boreal forest and open plain. The ability of the ecotone to offer resilience and adaptive capacity to human society lay both in its local diversity and its propinquity to other ecosystems.

The forest fringe was also a cultural edge, a dividing line between one way of life and another. Ethnobotanist Nancy Turner, ethnoecologist Iain Davidson-Hunt, and anthropologist Michael O’Flaherty, have suggested that ecological edge zones display characteristics of cultural edge zones, where separate cultures converge. Their work is based primarily on examples drawn from indigenous peoples. At the point of convergence, the resulting cultural edge was “rich and diverse in cultural traits, exhibiting cultural and linguistic features of each of the contributing peoples. This results in an increase in cultural capital and resilience ...especially in times of stress and change.”¹⁵ In other words, at cultural edges, there was not only an exchange of material goods (trade patterns) but also the ability to learn from one another and adapt ideas from the other culture (many of which were drawn from long experience with the other parent ecological system).¹⁶ For the purposes of this study, the cultural characteristics of a forest-based society

¹⁴ For the forest fringe region, human influence regarding fire, logging, and productive farming, as well as conservation and reforestation movements, have wilfully shifted and recreated the forest/prairie interface.

¹⁵ Nancy J. Turner, Iain J. Davidson-Hunt, and Michael O’Flaherty, “Living on the Edge: Ecological and Cultural Edges as Sources of Diversity for Social-Ecological Resilience.” *Human Ecology*, Vol. 31, No. 3, September 2003: pp. 439-461.

¹⁶ Turner, “Living on the Edge,” p. 452. Two pivotal works are relevant here: environmental historian Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge University Press, 1991) and Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, (Routledge, 1992). Both introduce similar concepts of a ‘middle ground’ or a ‘contact zone’ where two distinct cultures meet, interact, exchange ideas, engage, and generally grapple with one another.

tended to draw primarily on resource exploitation: fur, fish, game, berries, timber, and medicinal products, to cite a few examples. The methods of extraction and use became embedded in the culture – firing the forest to encourage blueberry growth, or trapping certain species at certain times of the year. In the prairie ecosystem, pastoral (primarily bison husbanding/hunting and livestock) and agricultural grain growing characteristics have defined human life.¹⁷ At the interface of these two cultural systems, exchange, trading, and knowledge sharing were important components, allowing for diversity and resilience for both parties. Knowledge gained in these interchanges would allow a measure of success and adaptation should a culture need to cross an ecotone and enter the other culture/ecosystem.

Anthropologists have shown that Plains and Woods Cree converged at the forest fringe, using the ecotone during certain times of the year and exchanging cultural knowledge and practices, such as the difference between bison hunting on the plains and tracking moose and elk in the boreal forest. Perhaps the best interpretative understanding of the significance of this ecological and culture edge comes from the work of historical geographer Arthur J. Ray, whose *Indians in the Fur Trade* showed how boreal forest bands and plains bands both used the forest edge (the parkland, in Ray's terminology) as an integral part of yearly economic exploitation cycles.¹⁸ “The ability to exploit all of these zones [forest, parkland, and grassland],” Ray maintained, “gave these groups a great deal of ecological flexibility.” He continued, “This flexibility permitted them to make rapid adjustments to changing economic conditions.”¹⁹ Ray used early journals and diaries written by some of the first white traders through the West to

¹⁷ I consider the cultures primarily supported by bison as pastoral, in a general sense. Such cultures did not follow the bison blindly, but knew and manipulated bison patterns, building jumps and pounds, and firing the prairie to encourage and control feed and pasturage.

¹⁸ A.J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: their role as hunters, trappers and middlemen in the lands southwest of Hudson Bay, 1660-1870* (University of Toronto Press, 1974).

There is a minor appreciable difference between parkland and forest fringe. A parkland bioregion has characteristics of open prairie fields with chernozemic soils and small forests characterized by aspen and birch trees. The forest fringe has fewer open areas, more podzolic (leached grey) soils and its parent forest composition is boreal, with predominantly white and black spruce except in areas of extensive logging or burns, where aspens are the first to repopulate. Forest fringe areas that have seen extensive and long term fires, forestry or agricultural settlement ‘look’ more like the parkland.

¹⁹ Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, p. 46-48. When A.J. Ray published *Indians in the Fur Trade* in 1974, it would have been hard to imagine the dynamic and ongoing importance of this work. It has been a catalyst leading generations of scholars to study First Nations history and explore a variety of research ideas, methods, and sources, including: First Nations people as active participants and ‘middlemen’ in the fur trade; interrogations of fur trade journals and fur trade life; in-depth examinations and explication of trade goods and economics; First Nations environmental history; gender and mixed-blood dynamics; interdisciplinary work that brought together archaeology and anthropology with history and geography; demographic and epidemic studies; and First Nations migration.

support these claims. For instance, the famous French fur trader, La Verendrye, wrote how “many of the tribal bands moved to the parklands or lived in the outer fringes of the forest [in winter]. In these settings they had access to the bison of the parkland and the relatively sizeable moose population of the forest.”²⁰ Despite the fact that Ray’s work has been cited as seminal by countless researchers in First Nations and fur trade history in the last thirty-five years, most have concentrated on the way Ray’s work placed First Nations groups at center stage, as active participants and middlemen in the fur trade. Few have picked up on Ray’s exploration and explanation of ecological and cultural edges.²¹ This dissertation will pick up the dropped thread.

Local societies at edge zones benefit from diversity and resilience, whether the diversity is ecological or cultural. In this context, resilience refers to “flexibility and adaptive capacity.”²² This dissertation will take the concept of diversity and resilience as demonstrated by extensive work on Aboriginal ecological and cultural edges and apply it to successive examples of human occupation within the study region. Edge theory becomes a theoretical tool that allows a thematic reinterpretation of many cultures that have inhabited and used the forest edge, from pre-contact to the end of the Great Depression.

The “Pioneer Fringe” and the “Frontier”

The application of a new theoretical model of edges will encourage a new narrative to emerge, one that takes the forest edge from the “fringe” to the center of the story. Previously, geographers and historians who have studied the forest fringe used the concept of the *ecumene* or edge of human habitation. In this model, the driving concept was ‘the frontier,’ as developed and articulated by nineteenth-century cultural historian Frederick Jackson Turner.²³ The Turnerian argument can be distilled in two ways: one, the frontier as a place, a “thinly-settled ...line where civilization ends, an area where man meets the wilderness;” or two, as a process whereby humans (in Turner’s work, Europeans) became stripped of European sensibilities and were reborn and renewed by the vigorous and dangerous life of the pioneer. Pioneers, in turn, built a

²⁰ Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, p. 36.

²¹ Ray’s work is specifically cited in Turner, “Living on the Edge.”

²² Turner *et al.*, p. 441. It is important to define the concept of resilience, as it has a different, and almost completely opposite meaning within ecology. Resilience is a somewhat negative concept, used often in reference to plant or animal species that take over an area and come back again and again, despite natural or human attempts to control or reduce. Weeds would be an excellent example.

²³ Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” in *The Frontier in American History* (New York, Holt and Company, 1920), pp. 1-38. This paper was first presented in 1893 and continues to draw both admiration and criticism.

new civilization crafted on individual values and democracy.²⁴ Numerous works have referred to the human societies built at the forest edge as frontier and pioneer societies, at the place where civilization meets the wilderness.

The most enduring description of these frontier-defined societies has been the “pioneer fringe” of human settlement.²⁵ The term was crafted by geographer Isaiah Bowman of the American Geographical Society. Bowman was deeply intrigued by the social and economic problems presented specifically by “pioneer settlement,” or human settlement in completely new, uninhabited places at the outer edge of the ecumene.²⁶ He advocated intensive study of such new settlements in pioneer fringe areas around the world in an attempt to determine what conditions, support, problems and solutions might be found to facilitate successful human adaptation and settlement. Bowman termed these possible conclusions the “science of settlement.” The twentieth century was marked by intense human immigration and settlement in new regions worldwide, from the Canadian West to the Andes, southern Africa to Siberia. Bowman’s work was supported by governments anxious to solve the problems dogging successful human settlement in new, “pioneer” regions. His work made the phrase “pioneer fringe” part of the geographical and historical lexicon.²⁷ Pioneer fringe studies were published in two volumes in the United States, *The Pioneer Fringe* by Bowman, and *Pioneer Settlement: Co-operative*

²⁴ Michael Cross, ‘Introduction,’ *The Frontier Thesis and the Canadas: The Debate on the Impact of the Canadian Environment* (Issues in Canadian History series, Toronto, Copp Clark Publishing Company, 1970), p. 1.

²⁵ For examples, see the work of B.G. Vanderhill, “Observations on the Pioneer Fringe in Western Canada,” *Journal of Geography*, Vol. 57, no. 9 (1958): pp. 431-440; Vanderhill, “The Passing of the Pioneer Fringe in Western Canada,” *Geographical Review* Vol. 72, no. 2 (1982): pp. 200-217. Vanderhill directly attributes Bowman with popularizing the term. For examples from around the world, see J.V. Fifer, “Bolivia’s Pioneer Fringe,” *The Geographical Review* Vol. 57, no.1, (1967): pp. 1-23; Jean Gottman, “The Pioneer Fringe in Palestine: Settlement Possibilities South and East of the Holy Land,” *Geographical Review* Vol. 27, no. 4 (1937): pp. 550-565; A.J. Dugmore *et al.*, “An over-optimistic pioneer fringe? Environmental perspectives on medieval settlement abandonment in Dorsmork, South Iceland.” In *Dynamics of Northern Societies: proceedings of the SILA/NABO Conference on Arctic and North Atlantic Archaeology* (Copenhagen: Copenhagen University Press, 2006), pp. 335-345.

²⁶ Following the Great War, Bowman was part of a committee to study geographical and cartographical information (in preparation for the Paris Peace Conference), regarding reconstruction and the drawing of firm national boundaries in Europe. This experience led to Bowman’s ongoing interest in settlement, particularly internal agricultural settlement, efficient planning, and the ability to push the boundaries *within* a country and turn land at the ‘pioneer fringe’ into productive farmland. For a short, but detailed analysis of Bowman, his work and his large sphere of influence, see Neil Smith, “Political Geographers of the Past. Isaiah Bowman: Political Geography and Geopolitics.” *Political Geography Quarterly* 3 (1), January 1984: 69-76.

²⁷ Isaiah Bowman, *The Pioneer Fringe* (New York: American Geographical Society, Special Publication No.13, 1931); Bowman *et al.*, *Pioneer Settlement: Co-operative Studies by twenty-six authors* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1932). Bowman wrote and published several smaller essays that explained aspects of the project. See Isaiah Bowman, “Planning in Pioneer Settlement,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 22 (2) June, 1932, pp. 93-107; “The Scientific Study of Settlement,” *Geographical Review* Vol. 16, No. 4, (October 1926), pp. 647-653; “The Pioneering Process,” *Science* New Series, Vol. 75, No. 1951 (May 1932), pp. 521-528.

Studies, from contributing authors studying pioneer belt regions around the world, including Canada, Rhodesia, Mongolia, South Africa, Tasmania, Siberia, and Argentina.

The Pioneer Projects committee (as it became known) sparked an impressive offshoot in Canada. Recognizing that, relatively speaking, Canada was a young country and by extension, many of its citizens were still within the “pioneering” stage of their settlement process, a group of Canadian economists, sociologists, historians and geographers embarked on an ambitious plan to rigorously investigate life at the pioneer fringe. The Canadian Pioneer Problems Committee prosecuted the Canadian Frontiers of Settlement series in the midst of the Great Depression. Nine volumes were planned, eight published, and their list reads like a veritable ‘who’s who’ of Canadian history classics.²⁸

The concepts of frontier, “pioneer fringe” or *ecumene* suggest that cultures move in only one direction. A colonizing influence, this model believes that an invading culture would reshape the landscape, the economy, and the society in its own parent image. Success or failure is measured against the ideals of the parent culture; concepts such as adaptation or cultural change become subsumed. In the case of the pioneer or forest fringe, the story has consistently been told as one of southern agriculturally-based society moving north. The established narrative arc generally contends that settlement beyond the eaves of the forest was initiated and driven by fear, that the free agricultural land of the prairie/south was all gone. Success, therefore, was defined as the ability of a “pioneer fringe” farm to support a farm family without accessing off-farm sources of income – an ideal built on the prairie wheat model. A reflexive story constructed using problems or needs established elsewhere (the end of free fertile land), this narrative does not allow investigation of the corresponding host ecosystem or its culture – that upon which the first is encroaching – *except* through the lens of agriculture. The significant drawbacks of boreal

²⁸ These books were all published by the Macmillan Co. of Canada between 1932 and 1940: A.R.M. Lower, *Settlement and the Forest Frontier in Eastern Canada* and Harold Innis, *Settlement and the Mining Frontier*. Reprinted together as Volume IX of the *Canadian Frontiers of Settlement* Series edited by W.A. Mackintosh and W.L.G. Joerg; C.A. Dawson and Eva R. Younge, *Pioneering in the Prairie Provinces: The Social Side of the Settlement Process*; C.A. Dawson, *Group Settlement: Ethnic Communities in Western Canada*; C.A. Dawson and R.W. Murchie, *The Settlement of the Peace River Country: A Study of a Pioneer Area*; R.W. Murchie, William Allen and J.F. Booth, *Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier*; W.A. Mackintosh, *Economic Problems of the Prairie Provinces*; A.S. Morton and Chester Martin, *History of Prairie Settlement and Dominion Lands Policy*; and W.A. Mackintosh, *Prairie Settlement: The Geographical Setting*. The unpublished volume, projected but apparently never completed, was D.A. MacArthur and W.A. Carrothers, *History of Immigration Policy and Company Colonization*. If a manuscript was ever created, it has not been located. D.A. McArthur published a shortened version as chapter four, “Immigration and Colonization in Canada, 1900-1930,” in *Pioneer Settlement: Co-operative Studies*, p. 22-30.

agriculture, including higher incidence of frost, poor soil quality, and severe transportation impediments have been well-studied, while the non-agricultural advantages of the boreal forest have been downplayed.

Responding to Turner's frontier thesis, the story of the forest fringe has been told in one of two ways: either as part of the familiar romantic and progressive pioneering image of a homesteader bravely facing the elements to carve a new life out of the forest; or a declensionist narrative, where those who attempted forest fringe agriculture were deliberately misled and deluded, either by their own desire for a farm anywhere at any cost, or by politicians and religious groups who strongly believed in the importance of a continuing farm frontier. Two works which best represent this narrative divide are Denis Patrick Fitzgerald's 1966 geography dissertation, "Pioneer Settlement in Northern Saskatchewan," and retired geographer J. David Wood's recent book, *Places of Last Resort: The Expansion of the Farm Frontier into the Boreal Forest of Canada, c. 1910-1940*.²⁹

Fitzgerald's work, although never published for a broader audience, redefined human life at the pioneer fringe as not just a repeat of the southern pioneer story, but something more: forest fringe pioneers "gird themselves for battle in a land...thrice cursed by Thor."³⁰ The physical landscape was more demanding, Fitzgerald argued, with trees, rocks, muskeg, mosquitoes and fire. The pioneers, therefore, had to be something special. Fitzgerald's narrative was shaped as a classic battle between a harsh landscape and indomitable human will, a process through which human life was expected to emerge strong and victorious. Acknowledging the boreal and non-prairie landscape, Fitzgerald documented non-farm activities and resources found in a forest environment, and showed how pioneers adapted to and used these resources. The lens, however, remained focused on the farmer, the "forest invaders" looking to develop "new and moderately expensive farm homes, modern equipment, purebred cattle, full rich heads of grain on thick sturdy stocks, painted barns, oiled highways and other outward signs [of]...victory..."³¹ Ultimately, by the early 1960s, it had become "difficult to distinguish the oldest areas of settlement, along the southern margins of the pioneer region, from those in the adjacent

²⁹ Denis Patrick Fitzgerald, "Pioneer Settlement in Northern Saskatchewan," unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1966; J. David Wood, *Places of Last Resort: The Expansion of the Farm Frontier into the Boreal Forest in Canada, c. 1910-1940* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006). Interestingly, Wood's book makes no reference to Fitzgerald's seminal thesis.

³⁰ Fitzgerald, "Pioneer Settlement," p. 3-4.

³¹ Fitzgerald, p. 3.

parklands.”³² The physical landscape, the economy, and the culture of the pioneer fringe had blended with that of the adjacent prairie/parkland parent culture, Fitzgerald noted with obvious pride and delight. What was once ‘northern’ and different had grown and changed to become indistinguishable from its southern parent ecosystem.

Where Fitzgerald’s thesis recognized the influence of the landscape on pioneer fringe life and culture (ultimately celebrating a landscape vanquished), J. David Wood’s narrative was much more narrowly defined and prosecuted. Wood emphasized place, particularly the line of farm ‘frontier’ moving ever-further north, he argued, beyond the edge of where it should have been. Interested in the limits of traditional farming and farming practices “that had been perfected over the centuries in northwestern Europe and eastern North America,” Wood’s narrative was built around a supposed universality of farm practices and their subsequent failure on boreal farms.³³ His work was pan-Canadian in focus, which was laudatory but extremely problematic. The experience of boreal forest agriculture in the Clay Belt region in northern Ontario, and the subsequent abandonment of those areas (with which Wood was most familiar), was not necessarily the experience of the Clay Belt region of Quebec, nor the forest fringe regions of the West, particularly the Peace River region of Alberta, which continued (and continues) its agricultural expansion into the twenty-first century.³⁴

In trying to force a national narrative, Wood missed important regional nuances. He also did not delineate between or analyze various migrations to the farm frontier, such as soldier settlement or Depression resettlement, which happened at different times for widely different reasons. As a result, the book tried to compare frontier experiences from 1910 in northern Ontario with those from 1935 in northern Saskatchewan without also comparing the economic, social, and political backgrounds. Wood worked too hard to present a declensionist narrative – “places of last resort” – where poor men were duped into trying to create a life on poor farms, with tragic social and environmental results. The lack of investigation of the boreal landscape or culture meant that Wood did not give adequate recognition to the ‘pull’ factors at work that drew people to the forest fringe, either non-agricultural economic opportunity through lumbering,

³² Fitzgerald, p. 561.

³³ Wood, *Places of Last Resort*, p. 15.

³⁴ Environment Canada, Lands Directorate, working paper No. 38. ‘The Agriculture-Forest Interface: An Overview of Land Use Change’ by Michael Fox and Sandra Macenko, 1985. For an excellent overview of Clay Belt settlement that contrasts Ontario with Quebec, see George McDermott, “Frontiers of Settlement in the Great Clay Belt, Ontario and Quebec,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 51 (3) September 1961, pp. 261-273.

fishing, trapping, hunting, mining, or freighting, or non-economic factors such as a desire to live among the beauty of the trees. It should not simply be a story of what people were running from; it is also imperative to consider, what were they running to? Using a new model based on the concept of ecological and cultural edges, this dissertation aims to fold in both sides of the story.

Refuge, Resilience, and the South/North Divide

Three key concepts will be used to explore the edge: refuge, resilience, and the binary nature of Saskatchewan's two cultural and ecological solitudes. All three had a role in shaping the cultural conception of the forest fringe, ultimately in shaping nature and setting out terms for human uses of the environment.

The forest edge conceptualized as a refuge will examine ideas of shelter and protection, when the edge environment offered a place of safety or sanctuary from threatening, harmful, or unpleasant situations or places elsewhere. An important underlying characteristic of a refuge is its temporal importance: it offers a place of safety usually for a short period of time. It is a place-based concept in that the forest edge became a place *to which humans would go* to find refuge. As that practice became part of the cultural lexicon, the ecological edge of the forest fringe became known as a refuge.

Instead of offering a place of short-term sanctuary, resiliency refers to the ability to recover, to adapt and to be flexible. The focus is not on place as temporary destination to relieve a particular problem, but place as home. Temporally, resilience is a long-term concept, encompassing a broader time frame than refuge. The term resiliency has been applied to both ecotone/edges with their diversity of resources, and to the cultural intentions of the human occupants of that environment. Human society would seek out or use edge places in order to create a more adaptable and resilient way of life. The focus is on the way the landscape is used and integrated over time. Those who have studied ecological and cultural edges in an Aboriginal context note that First Nations people actively created and maintained ecological edges, whether by fire or other means, over successive generations. Edges were tools to maintain diversity as part of adaptive strategies. Newcomers also sought to use or manipulate the forest edge to promote diversity, particularly through mixed farming. The concepts of refuge and resilience, demonstrated by Aboriginal usage of edge places, will be applied and analyzed for each successive culture within the study region.

The final thematic concept is duality, the binary nature of Saskatchewan's boreal north and prairie south. The cultural construction of north/south has had a profound impact on the physical, economic, and social formation of the province. Whereas refuge and resilience are concepts directly related to the forest edge environment, the north/south divide takes a step back, evaluating the contrasts between the prairie south and boreal north and how those contrasts have been shaped and used to create particular economic and cultural landscapes. It is in the contrasts *between* the two ecosystems and cultures that certain characteristics of each landscape can be most clearly understood: the south/prairies as treeless; the north/forest as tree-full. Other comparisons include resources versus agriculture, wet versus dry, wilderness versus civilization. Human descriptions of and uses of these environments have been shaped and reinforced by an acute understanding – even exploitation – of these contrasts.

All of these concepts – refuge, resilience, and the north/south divide – shape and inform the following chapters. Often, more than one concept will be important in any given chapter. For example, all three concepts were strongly found in the south-to-north Depression migration: migrants were physically moving from one environment to the other; some were seeking a short term refuge from the prairie disaster; others were looking for a long-term solution to the drawbacks of one-crop monoculture through resilience and the mixed farming movement. Similarly, although the creation of Prince Albert National Park and the north Prince Albert 'Lakeland' area found its cultural strength in the north/south divide, tourists heading to those places were looking for a short term 'refuge,' a time of rejuvenation and relaxation within a green and humid landscape. These concepts offer a new narrative language drawn from ecological and cultural edges that move beyond the rigid terms of 'frontier' and 'pioneer fringe' and suggest that the forest fringe should be conceptualized as an ecological and cultural edge. The following study, in essence, moves the forest edge from the 'fringe' to the center of the story.

Place History and the Lure of the Local

The story that follows is shaped as a place history.³⁵ Place history refers to something more than just a narrowly-defined local landscape. Rather, place historians are interested in the

³⁵ Timothy Oakes, "Place and the Paradox of Modernity," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 87, No. 3 (September 1997), pp. 509-531. Another excellent study of place history and identity is Cliff Hague and Paul Jenkins, (eds.) *Place Identity, Participation and Planning* (Routledge, 2005). Cliff Hague notes that although place identities are ultimately personal, they are formed in relation to other people, other places and other identities

ongoing and changing connections between landscape and the people who have lived there. Employing place history as the methodological model for this dissertation allows for a deep-time historical investigation that layers, contrasts, and compares many different occupations of the same place.

The physical dimension of this place is the north Prince Albert region. In general terms, the study area extends north from the city of Prince Albert. Bounded by the community of Shellbrook in the west and the small town of Meath Park to the east, the region reaches to the resort community of Waskesiu and the south shore of Montreal Lake at the Montreal Lake Cree Nation reserve.



Figure 5. North Prince Albert Region. From *Prince Albert and Northern Lake Country* Vol. 1, no. 1 (May 2008), p. 5.

and so are filtered, fostered, and formulated through socialization. The concept of the forest fringe, and the place identity of the north Prince Albert region as presented in this dissertation, are ultimately mine but shaped by my association with others. *Place Identity*, p. 7.

In practical delimitation, the focus is somewhat smaller, corresponding roughly to the Cummins Rural Directory map number 258. It includes the farming community of Alingly, the Little Red River First Nation (with reference to its sister community at Sturgeon Lake), the village of Christopher Lake, the community of Tweedsmuir at the south entrance to Prince Albert National Park, the resort communities and cabins surrounding Anglin, Christopher, Emma and Candle Lakes (commonly known as Lakeland), the communities of Spruce Home, Henribourg, Albertville, Paddockwood, and Northside, and the old postal district known as Forest Gate.³⁶ The focused study region is about eighteen miles (29 kms) in width and twenty-four (38.6 kms) in depth, or just over four hundred square miles (one thousand, one hundred and twenty kms) of physical space. It encompasses active farmland, rangeland and pasture, Indian reserves, resort communities, northern provincial forest, recreational forest and is bordered by Prince Albert National Park.

Studying a small region over a long period of time is a common historical tool.³⁷ Historian Dan Flores referred to such investigations as “deep time” history, a specific effort to examine environmental change across sequential cultures. This dissertation responds to Flores’ call for what he terms “bioregional” histories of place. Flores believes that history can be effectively studied in terms of bioregion or “natural geographic systems... [as] the appropriate settings for insightful environmental history.” This dissertation’s study area is not a bioregion but a transition zone between bioregions. Luckily, Flores notes that “given the natural human preference for ecotone edges, interesting settings for human history won’t necessarily be bounded [by] ecoregions.”³⁸

³⁶ Neither Spruce Home nor Tweedsmuir are on this map. Today, Spruce Home is between Alingly and Henribourg; Northside is directly east of Little Red River in line with Paddockwood, and Tweedsmuir is just south and west of Emma Lake.

³⁷ Examples of this technique include William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (Hill and Wang, 1983; revised edition 2003); Richard White, *Land Use, Environment, and Social Change: The Shaping of Island Country, Washington* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980); Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001); and Kerry Abel, *Changing Places: History, Community and Identity in Northeastern Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006). A recent and spectacular addition to this list is William Turkel’s study of the Chilcotin region of British Columbia, *The Archive of Place: Unearthing the Pasts of the Chilcotin Plateau* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007).

³⁸ Dan Flores, “Place: An Argument for Bioregional History,” *Environmental History Review*, Vol. 18, no. 4 (Winter 1994), pp. 1-18.

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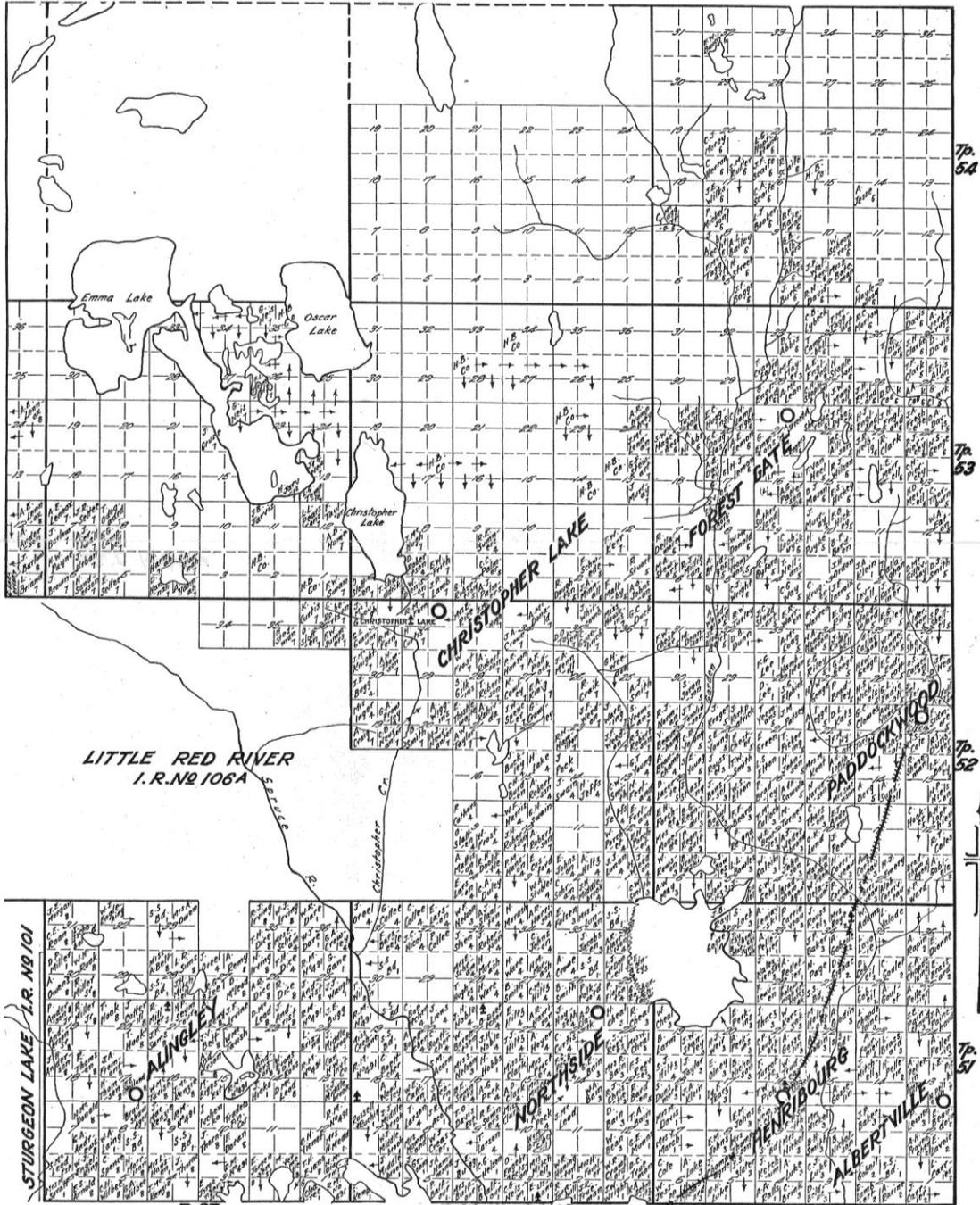
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Figure 6. Cummins Map 258. SAB Cummins files.

In response to edge theory, the study region straddles the transition zone between the open plains ecosystem and the boreal forest. Over time, the region has been physically remade by both natural and human changes and is a place of flux and transition from one to the other and back again. Much of what began as boreal forest was remade into parkland – a form of prairie – through intensive logging, forest fires, and agriculture. As parks were created, fires were suppressed and some agricultural land was abandoned, there has been a long ecological succession back to boreal forest. Throughout its history, human and natural manipulation of landscape has had important resonances in the cultural and economic ramifications of the local region. As well, humans developed north-south trails to move through the landscape, crossing the transition zone and tying the region together on a north/south, rather than east/west, axis.

Although the forest edge is a pan-Canadian phenomenon and has been studied by geographers and historians across Canada,³⁹ the work of geographer J. David Wood should be viewed as a cautionary tale against trying to force a national narrative. Rejecting the persistent call for ‘nationalistic’ history, this dissertation is firmly centered in the lure of the local. In many ways, this dissertation should be viewed as a continuation of my MA work, which analyzed the phenomenon of community history book creation in Saskatchewan between 1955 and the early 1990s. I was, and remain, fascinated by the power of community history books to inform, entertain, and elicit feelings of belonging and pride. The discipline, drive, economics and sheer determination involved in organizing and producing a community history book by a group of volunteers also deserves applause. A visit to the Prairie History Room of the Regina Public Library is an eye-opening event: thousands of history books, published by various communities across western Canada, weigh down the shelves. Several community history books written on the co-operative model from the local study region have been important sources for this dissertation.

³⁹ For other Saskatchewan-based views of the forest fringe, see E.C. Morgan, “Soldier Settlement in the Prairie Provinces” *Saskatchewan History* 21 (2) 1968: 41-55; T.J.D. Powell, “Northern Settlement, 1929-1935” *Saskatchewan History* 30 (3) 1977: 81-98; John McDonald, “Soldier Settlement and Depression Settlement in the Forest Fringe of Saskatchewan.” *Prairie Forum* 6 (1) 1981: 35-55; Bowen, Dawn. “Forward to a Farm: The Back-to-the-Land Movement as a Relief Initiative in Saskatchewan During the Great Depression.” Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Queen’s University, 1998. Sources for Ontario include I.G. Davies, “Agriculture in the Northern Forest: The Case of Northwestern Ontario,” *The Lakehead University Review* Vol. 1 (1968): pp. 129-153; Rober Dille, “Farming on the Margin: Agriculture in Northern Ontario,” in Margaret E. Johnson, ed., *Geographic Perspectives on the Provincial Norths*. (Lakehead University: Center for Northern Studies, Northern and Regional Studies Series Vol. 3, 1994), pp. 180-198. For a view of the significance of the forest edge from prehistory, see G. Malcolm Lewis, “The Recognition and Delimitation of the Northern Interior Grasslands during the Eighteenth Century,” published in *Images of the Plains: The Role of Human Nature in Settlement* (University of Nebraska Press, 1975).

At the same time, there is a subtle, but important, difference between these co-operatively written community histories and what has been termed ‘local’ history. Community histories supported a genealogical ideal that sought an encompassing number of family, corporate, church and school histories and photographs defined by locale. Editing was minimal, contributions were voluntary, and results depended on the writing ability of each author. A local history, by contrast, is generally written by a single author, with a more narrative style. Although also delimited by place, local histories have only occasionally been written by academics. In general, local history has been dismissed as too narrow in focus, narcissistic and limited, of little use to any audience beyond the local.⁴⁰ The exceptions to this rule are “case studies,” driven by questions and theoretical constructs derived from outside the community.⁴¹ An excellent example of the case study approach that folds local history around larger questions is historian Joy Parr’s groundbreaking *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950*.⁴² Dan Flores noted that local history, as something more than a case study, is gaining ground in historical circles. Indeed, he reported with cautious optimism that “histories of

⁴⁰ For a discussion of the views for and against local history as an acceptable venture for academics and others, see *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings on Theory and Practice* edited by Carol Kammen (Walnut Creek, California: Altamira Press, 1996); *Encyclopaedia of Local History* edited by Carol Kammen and Norma Prendergast, (Walnut Creek, California: Altamira Press, 2000). For a passionate call for writing innovative local history, see Joseph Amato, *Rethinking Home: A Case for Writing Local History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

⁴¹ An overview of these local histories, and how they developed over time, can be found in Merle Massie, “Scribes of Stories, Tellers of Tales: The Phenomenon of Community History in Saskatchewan,” unpublished MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1997. For a somewhat damning review of community history production, see Paul Voisey, “Rural Local History and the Prairie West,” reprinted in R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer, *The Prairie West: Historical Readings* (second edition. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1992, pp. 497-510. Voisey argues that the best local histories, if compared across an international standard, “have limited and definite purposes, shuns events and individuals in favour of structures and groups, and is interdisciplinary in theme and method.” He also argues that “the best local histories tackle themes of property, agricultural production, demographic change, family structure, social class, class relations, social mobility, geographic mobility, social order, community conflict, community development and disintegration, and the impact of urban growth on nearby rural areas.” The following dissertation does not delve deeply into many of these themes, but substitutes others. For an example of a local history written along Voisey’s dictates, see his own *Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988). Voisey’s essay on local history was gently castigated by historian William Baker for its narrow-minded approach to community and local history. He argued “local history is not the poor brother of Canadian history.” It is about ‘vantage point’, and none are superior to or more significant than any other. See “So What’s the Importance of the Lethbridge Strike of 1906?: Local History and the Issue of Significance.” *Prairie Forum* Vol.12 no.2, pp. 295-300.

⁴² Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990). The book compares the industrialization of two towns in Ontario through the lens of gender to show that concepts of ‘women’s work’ and ‘men’s work,’ combined with traditional gender-related responsibilities of childrearing, cooking, cleaning and shopping shaped two industrial towns in terms of their social attitudes and attendant merchant and other occupations.

place have already made strides in eroding [the] sniffing condescension [of academic historians].”⁴³

The struggle by some academics to justify and write local history was clear in the introduction of historian Kerry Abel’s award winning *Changing Places: History, Community, and Identity in Northeastern Ontario*.⁴⁴ Abel’s work provided an important precedent for place histories, both for its success (winner of the Clio award for the Ontario region by the Canadian Historical Association in 2007, among other awards) and its layered approach to history. Abel met head-on the implied and expected criticism: “Why look at a place that is completely unknown to many Canadians, a place with fewer residents than the city of Lethbridge, Alberta?” She answered that question three ways. One, her chosen place (which she sometimes called a ‘subregion’) “deserves to be better known, for its history has always been directly connected to events that made Canada what it is today,” (mining dynasties, newspaper magnates, and Shania Twain). Two, it “provides a sort of laboratory in which the big, abstract questions can be answered on a smaller, more manageable scale,” (similar to a case study). Three, it was “a worthy object simply in its own terms. ‘National’ history, or ‘big’ history, or even ‘total’ history is not the only legitimate undertaking for our generation of historians.”⁴⁵ According to Abel, small, local, place histories are legitimate undertakings, too.

Place history combines local history with an environmental perspective. Temporally broad, place histories encompass a diverse range of multidisciplinary source materials, combining archaeology, ethnohistory, botany, ecology, and environmental science with traditional historical sources such as newspapers, oral history, government records, business records and other archival documents. Informed by cultural studies, place histories seek to explore the ongoing dialogue between physical space and the cultural conceptions that form and dissolve, exist, negotiate, and shape nature. As geographer Yi-Fu Tuan eloquently described, space plus culture equals place.⁴⁶ Expressions of place drawn from art, literature, movies, photographs and memoirs are also important to historians who write place history.

⁴³ Flores, “Place,” p. 5.

⁴⁴ Kerry Abel, *Changing Places*. Published by the same press and in the same year as J. David Wood’s *Places of Last Resort*, Abel’s study region (the Iroquois-Porcupine Falls area) is part of the Ontario Clay Belt zone but Abel’s work takes a much broader perspective, folding the agricultural story with that of Aboriginal, mining, and lumber settlement.

⁴⁵ Abel, *Changing Places*, preface, pages xxii-xxiii.

⁴⁶ As quoted in Flores, “Place,” p. 7. See also Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974).

Sources for this dissertation have been diverse. Published scientific research in archaeology and anthropology, climatology and soils, forestry, forest fires, and ecology gave voice to the landscape and its original inhabitants. The Canadian national and Saskatchewan provincial agenda towards the expansion of settlement and the dual boreal/prairie environment of the western interior was found in parliamentary debates, speeches, newspapers, and the records of the railways and the Department of the Interior. The local story is found in the Department of Indian Affairs RG 10 files concerning the Little Red River Reserve, the 1930 Saskatchewan Commission on Immigration and Settlement, Soldier Settlement files, Department of Northern Resources files, the 1955 Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, and regional newspapers (particularly the *Prince Albert Daily Herald* and other Prince Albert-based newspapers). Community history books offered excellent genealogical, ethnic, and social history, and were an important reference for migration and social capital information. Newspapers and local histories were the two most important sources for the work that follows, as these offered the best assessment of the *perception* of the locale. Photographs from regional, provincial, local and private collections have added an important visual component to the story, complemented by historical and contemporary maps. Oral history was an integral part of this study, and local residents were asked to provide sketches and stories of life in the forest fringe. This dissertation is not a policy history, so government sources were used specifically to provide information and commentary that either related directly to the study area or to the broader themes that emerged. Finally, the foundation of this dissertation is rooted in the personal. I was born and raised at Paddockwood and to an extent, what follows is an investigation of my own past. As an ‘insider’ to the region, I have an insider’s knowledge of its stories, its roads and rivers, lakes and trees, its sights, sounds, smells, its people and its identity. This dissertation, through place history, explains how a person can be from Saskatchewan, but decidedly *not* from the prairie.

Despite the limited physical map of the north Prince Albert region – the four hundred square mile area – writing a place history from the forest fringe has proven to be an immense project. The dissertation will start with a physical description of the landscape drawing on botany, climatology, topography and soil patterns in chapter one. Overlaying the physical description will be an analysis of First Nations perception and uses of the forest edge, informed by ideas of refuge and resilience. Drawing on the work of archaeologists and anthropologists, ecological and cultural edge theory allows analysis to move beyond accepted models of First

Nations use of the forest edge as a winter refuge to suggest that both boreal and plains bands used and modified the edge landscape in all seasons. A lobstick tree, a culturally-modified white spruce tree created by Cree bands moving through the region, was created in the north Prince Albert region. Lobsticks were cultural markers often designating meeting places or signposts, marking important trails throughout the boreal forest. The existence of the lobstick tree embodied the north Prince Albert region as an important “home” territory for the Cree.

Moving through the nineteenth century, new layers of occupation will be added, including the permanent founding of a community at Prince Albert. From that point, resource exploitation of the forest edge environment changed. Drawing heavily on the north/south duality of the western interior, chapter two describes how the dominion government and local entrepreneurs articulated a narrative of trees and lumber to contrast and supply a tree-less but growing prairie society. The codification of the north Prince Albert region as a place of resource wealth – particularly lumber, fish, and furs – was predicated on the *absence* of those commodities from the prairie landscape. The boreal north was seen as a resource base to supply the needs of plains settlers. The resource narrative forced the dominion government to respond to the repeated demands of the Montreal Lake and Lac La Ronge Woods Cree nations for adhesion to Treaty Six. From the dominion perspective, treaty adhesion was at first unnecessary as the land was not considered fit for agriculture. But as resource interest grew and industrial exploitation spread north from Prince Albert, a treaty for resource purposes became imperative. From the perspective of the First Nations, however, a treaty simply reinforced long-held practices of local bands accustomed to traversing across the ecotone. The subsequent creation of the Little Red River farming reserve in the north Prince Albert region marked legal physical ownership of a landscape that was an important part of traditional cultural usage.

Despite the existence of the farming reserve, in practice the north Prince Albert region remained the almost exclusive stronghold of foresters, freighters and fishermen until the devastating winter of 1906-1907. The brutal storms initiated a fuel crisis for settlers on the open prairies. The dominion government responded by surveying large tracts of forested land for homesteading purposes, a new departure in dominion policy. The north Prince Albert region became a popular homestead destination. Here, the quest for long-term resilience became tied to the mixed farming movement, an idea deeply rooted in landscape. An ideal mixed farm contained both arable farmland and scrubland for hay or fuel supplies. As such, a mixed farm

was situated within, and deliberately became, an ecological edge landscape. Mixed farms offered agricultural diversity and resilience, as a farmer's assets and liabilities were spread over several marketable crops, livestock, and farm products. Prince Albert promoters (particularly the board of trade) along with dominion land surveyors and newspaper editors advocated the forest/edge landscape as ideal for the development of a successful mixed farm. Chapter three breaks open the classic prairie wheat narrative, adding an important new dimension that explores the significance of landscape, considers the cultural construction of resilience versus success, and assesses the impact of the mixed farming movement to Saskatchewan's development. The mixed farming movement promoted internal migration and farming resettlement long before the 1930s.

In practice, the concept of mixed farming changed within the forest edge environment. Not only were the farms a mix of grain and livestock, but forest edge farmers actively participated in the non-farm economy available at the ecotone, such as the lumber and cordwood industries, fishing, freighting, and trapping. The cultural construction of the forest edge as a landscape of economic resilience will be the theme of chapter four, which examines the practical, occupationally pluralistic aspects of the mixed farming movement. The mixed farm concept and the off-farm opportunities available within forested landscapes appealed strongly to returned Great War soldiers and influenced those who developed Soldier Settlement Board policies. Moreover, a devastating regional drought on the prairies, particularly within the Palliser Triangle that worsened in 1919 just as the soldiers were returning home, initiated an environmentally-driven south-to-north migration of both soldiers and others looking to escape drought-prone regions. Soldier settlement and later land settlement schemes continued to encourage and support the practice of south-to-north migration initiated by the mixed farming movement.

The north/south duality, and its imprint on the cultural landscape of Saskatchewan, will be discussed again in chapter five. The north Prince Albert area was rebranded as a place of recreation, a landscape of lakes anchored by Prince Albert National Park. Much of the cultural impetus for the creation of the National Park, aside from its political creation, can be found in the contrast between the treeless, arid prairie south and the green, forested and well-watered landscape of the north. Improved roads, camping facilities, and the relative simplicity and inexpensive demands of car tourism brought the north Prince Albert region within reach of prairie residents. As the "Playground of the Prairies," the Prince Albert board of trade, in conjunction with the dominion government, initiated a targeted marketing campaign that sprang

from a central narrative of duality and contrast. Archie Belaney, or Grey Owl, lived at Prince Albert National Park. His books extolled wilderness preservation and reinforced a perceived divide between the civilized prairies and the last vestiges of wilderness in the forest. Painter Augustus Kenderdine used the contrast between the dried out prairies and the northern woods to reinforce, dramatize, and advertise his Emma Lake Artist camp, which began in 1936. In addition, a visit to the green forest and cool lake region was portrayed as a healthful interlude, an oasis and refuge from the demands of daily life, not so much from the cities (which was the usual cultural model), but from hot, dusty, prairie farms.

All eyes converged on the forest fringe during the Great Depression, when tens of thousands of refugees from the dual prongs of drought and economic devastation retreated from the prairies to take refuge under the forest canopy. Chapter six details this Great Trek, one of the most important movements of people within the Saskatchewan landscape. The Great Trek story has generally been told from the perspective of the “pioneer fringe,” where frantic settlers relocated to marginal boreal forest farms as a “place of last resort.” Consistently, the Depression migration has been evaluated primarily in terms of agricultural success, and has been found wanting. This dissertation argues that the economic and cultural landscape of the forest fringe prior to the Depression – Woods and Plains Cree ecotone exploitation, the rise of the resource industry, the mixed farming movement, occupational pluralism derived from the non-farm economy, previous in-migration from the prairies, the growth of tourism – played a significant part in the Great Trek. The forest fringe was a landscape of hope and resilience, drawing trekkers *to* the forest edge ecotone as much as they were moving *away from* the devastation of the prairies. For the trekkers, ideals of hope and resilience recreated the forest fringe as a refuge, and they were the refugees. The economy at the forest edge *boomed* during the Great Depression, in astonishing contrast to the iconoclastic stories of dust and despair from the prairie narrative. Northern resources of cordwood, fish, furs, and freight were in demand despite the general economic depression, and forest fringe residents could participate in a booming off-farm economy that mitigated much of the worst effects of that dismal decade.

Storytelling is at the heart of what historians do. As pointed out so eloquently and simply by environmental historian William Cronon, how a historian chooses to tell a story, matters.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ See William Cronon, ‘A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative.’ *Journal of American History* Vol. 78, no. 4 (March 1992): pp. 1347-1376.

The story of the forest fringe, as seen through the events and cultures that have lived within the north Prince Albert region, is more than just ‘marginal’ farming carried too far past the forest edge. When viewed a little differently, taking into account deep-time history, a new narrative of cultural and ecological edges, resilience, refuge and duality offers a broader and deeper perspective. Significant historical events can be viewed from a fresh perspective. New methodological ideas such as edge theory and place history offer a critical approach to bridge the artificial and culturally-constructed gap *between* isolated regions that plagues the Canadian historical record. The Canadian habit of reducing this country into regions has shaped conceptions of nature and region and has promoted inertia and analytical inhibition. It is past time to break open those stereotypical narratives to find some new ways of telling the Canadian story.

Chapter One: “The Good Wintering Place”: Ecohistory and Aboriginal Culture at the Forest Fringe

It was “the Good Wintering Place.”¹ Scientist and explorer Captain John Palliser recorded in 1863 that the Plains Cree customarily spent the winter at or near traditional wintering grounds on the North Saskatchewan River. Today, “the Good Wintering Place” hosts the modern city of Prince Albert. There, Palliser claimed, “the buffalo in winter approach the edge of the woods, and so also do the Indians, seeking fuel and thick-wood animals, in case of the buffalo failing them during the winter.”² The north Prince Albert region was a refuge for the Cree from the vicissitudes of a brutal winter, offering shelter from storms and game to tide bands through until spring should come again. Using the region year after year reflected adaptability and a resilience strategy where First Nations bands combined prairie and boreal habitats to promote success. The Prince Albert region also had a slightly different name, noted by long-time Prince Albert resident John Smith. He claimed that “the Indian tribes, both the Plains Indians and those from the Bush, ...called it “The Meeting Place,” which in Indian was ‘Kestapinik.’”³ Smith explained that here, the northern bands would meet the southern bands to exchange goods, engage in ritual dances and religious rites, make treaties and war pacts. Where Palliser described a place of refuge and resilience, Smith identified cultural exchange. Both interpretations acknowledged the region as an edge place where fundamentally different cultures based on unique ecosystems came together.

What did “The Good Wintering Place” and “The Meeting Place” look like for pre-contact First Nations groups? An ecological description will provide a base model, a foundational layer of information upon which traditional First Nations and successive layers of human and ecological adaptation within this region can be added. Fusing ecological and biological sources

¹ Brock Silversides, *Gateway to the North: A Pictorial History of Prince Albert*, (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989), p. 1.

² John Palliser, *The Journals, Detailed Reports, and Observations Relative to the Exploration* (London: G.E. Eyre and W. Spottiswoode, 1863), p. 92, 202.

³ “John N. Smith,” in *The Voice of the People: Reminiscences of Prince Albert Settlement’s Early Citizens* (Prince Albert: Published by the Prince Albert Historical Society, 1984), p. 117. This book is an edited collection of biographies and reminiscences collected by the Historical Society. Most of the original manuscripts are kept in the Bill Smiley Archives, Prince Albert Historical Museum, Prince Albert.

with inferences drawn from archaeological, anthropological, and ethnohistoric interpretations, the north Prince Albert region has consistently operated as both an ecological and cultural edge.

The connection between the land and the society that develops on that land is complex and crucial, giving new meaning to the old adage, ‘history from the ground up’ or ‘history from below.’ To understand the human history of the north Prince Albert region, it is necessary to have a perspective of the land itself. As Verena Winiwarter and J.R. McNeill argue in their edited collection, *Soils and Societies*, the land is “at the root of human existence.”⁴ Soils, soil types, topography, ecology, and the kinds of food and other commodities (from a human perspective) that can be coaxed or harvested from the land differ greatly from one area to another – the Sahara desert to the boreal forest, for example – and as a consequence, the kinds of communities that develop also differ greatly. Communities are, in turn, influenced by population, methods of resource extraction and agriculture, political regimes, economic drivers, and cultural and religious thought. The interrelation and integration between human life and the ground it lives on presents a fascinating nexus of interchange, possibilities and limitations.

Parkland, Prairie, and Boreal Forest

Although the characterization is perhaps overly simplistic, as the entire Saskatchewan landscape encompasses a breadth of ecological diversity, scholars suggest that two effective ecosystems exist in the central Saskatchewan interior – boreal forest and grassland/prairie. Where the two meet is commonly referred to as the ‘parkland,’ the Aspen Grove section characterized by black soils, trembling aspen, balsam poplar and willows that lie in groves surrounded by medium and tall grasses.⁵ But the parkland is not the ecotone. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, researchers in the Department of Plant Ecology at the University of Saskatchewan, Robert Coupland and T. Christopher Brayshaw, argued that the ecotone is in fact the place where parkland and boreal forest meet.⁶ Ecologist Ralph Bird, whose book *Ecology of the Aspen Parkland in Western Canada* remains a major source of information on the flora and fauna of the middle parts of the western interior, reinforced Coupland and Brayshaw’s

⁴ J.R. McNeill and Verena Winiwarter (editors), *Soils and Societies: Perspectives from Environmental History* (Isle of Harris, UK: White Horse Press, 2006), p. iv.

⁵ Canada Land Inventory. http://www.geostrategis.com/c_cli-prince-albert.htm. Accessed 15/01/2009. For example, Gerald Friesen characterized the parkland as the transition zone between prairie and boreal environments in his introduction to *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 3.

⁶ Robert T. Coupland and T. Christopher Brayshaw, “The Fescue Grassland in Saskatchewan,” *Ecology* Vol. 34, no. 2 (April 1953): pp. 386-405.

assertions.⁷ Bird argued that the effective ecotone was the “point of contact” between the parkland and the boreal forest.

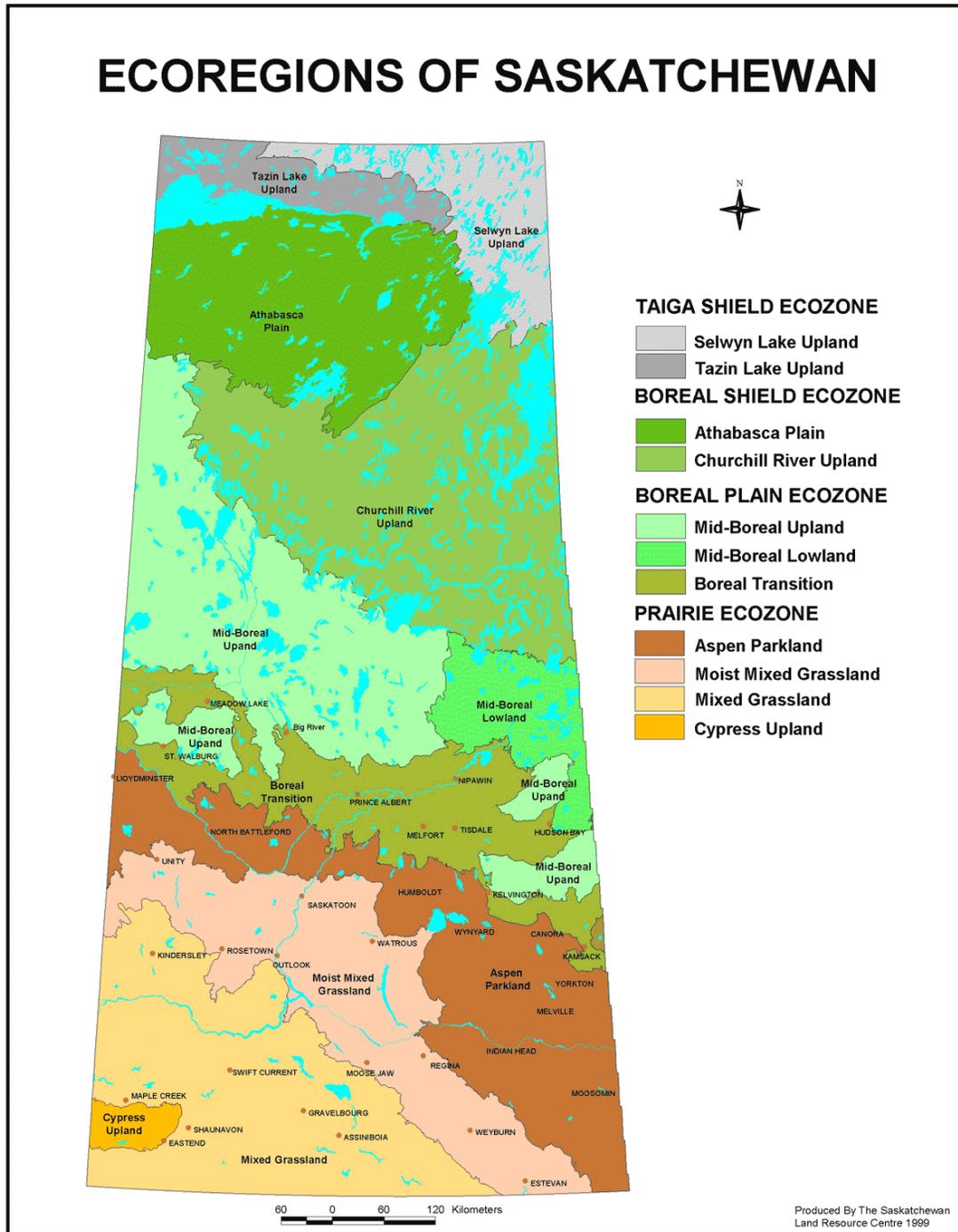


Figure 7. Ecoregion map of Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan Land Resource Center 1989.

⁷ Ralph Bird, *Ecology of the Aspen Parkland of Western Canada, In Relation to Land Use* (Ottawa: Research Branch, Canada Department of Agriculture, 1961), p. 3-4.

Archaeologist David Meyer, based on extensive work in the parkland and boreal forest regions of Saskatchewan, suggested that from an archaeological perspective, the “grassland communities within the parklands are a northern extension of the plains grassland ecosystem” and that grassland and parkland were occupied as a unit by human inhabitants.⁸ The parkland has been incorrectly assumed to be the ecotone between the forest and the prairie and its “importance... has become exaggerated,” Meyer declared.⁹ Given the “vigor of the grasslands bison-oriented cultural groups,” whose numbers have consistently been much higher than forest-adapted groups, data and archaeological sites have been heavily weighted to favour Plains interpretations.¹⁰ The parkland, Meyer asserted, showed a variation and extension of grassland cultures. The meeting place between forest-adapted and prairie-adapted cultures was the forest fringe.

The ecotone is the forest edge. Not only are there two major effective ecosystems, but they are quite different from each other: the prairies have been consistently defined as treeless and arid; the boreal forest as well-treed and moist. It is in the *contrast* between the two that much of the tension and interplay of ecology and culture has evolved.

Fire and the Landscape

Scientist Henry Youle Hind visited the Saskatchewan Forks region – very near The Good Wintering Place – in 1858. Sent to the western interior to determine its suitability for farming, Hind recorded evidence of excellent soil and timber in the North Saskatchewan River valley. “Much of the timber,” Hind noted with dismay, “has been burnt, and the country is fast becoming an open prairie land.”¹¹ The prevalent contemporary scientific thought believed that successive fires would change a forested landscape to open prairie. Those who had travelled over the vast open prairies postulated that their treeless state was due not to aridity but to frequent fires. As renowned fire historian Stephen Pyne explained, fire was “often annual, nearly everywhere, the flames were among the prairies’ defining feature. No other Canadian biota had

⁸ David Meyer and Henry T. Epp, “North-South Interaction in the Late Prehistory of Central Saskatchewan,” *Plains Anthropologist* Vol. 35, no.132 (1995): pp. 321-342.

⁹ Meyer and Epp, p. 338. The ecotone was described by Ralph Bird in *Ecology of the Aspen Parkland* as ‘an area of stress,’ constantly in flux from one state to another. For a further investigation of the problems of using the term ‘ecotone,’ see Robert E. Rhoades, “Archaeological Use and Abuse of Ecological Concepts and Studies: The Ecotone Example.” *American Antiquity* Vol. 43, no. 4 (1978): pp. 608-614.

¹⁰ Meyer and Epp, p. 339. The Boreal Shield and Taiga Shield ecozones are effectively incorporated as boreal.

¹¹ Henry Youle Hind, M.A., F.R.G.S., *Narrative of The Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857 and of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition of 1858* (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1860), p. 392.

so many fires so often and so widely cast.” Pyne went on to question, “but were those fires merely a property of the prairies...or, more boldly, were they a generative agent without which the grasslands could not exist, a flaming axe that hewed back the original forest?”¹² The treeless state of the prairies, scientists suggested, was due to centuries of anthropogenic burning, a cultural landscape as much as a physical one.¹³ There was no doubt, as observers at the time noted, that the suppression of fire within the prairie landscape resulted in a southward surge of the forest.¹⁴ It stood to reason, then, that fire was indeed a “flaming axe” that hewed down or otherwise altered a natural wooded state.

Ecological geographer Celina Campbell has recently postulated that the story of fire as the major factor in prairie creation/forest exclusion is incomplete. The plains region contained both flora and fauna, particularly the bison. Huge herds of animals browsed, ate, wallowed, trampled, and toppled aspen growth and churned the grassland to mud and dust. Hudson’s Bay Company employee, Matthew Cocking, was sent into the western interior in the fall of 1772 to try and convince the Blackfeet to travel to the forts along the Bay to trade with the English traders. He commented on the Saskatchewan valley region, “Indians tell me that in Winter buffalo are plenty here, which is confirmed by the quantity of Dung on the ground.”¹⁵ Using pollen analysis, Campbell and her colleagues argued that it was the removal of the bison that led to the expansion of aspen growth in the northern prairie to create what is now known as the ‘parkland,’ rather than the limited fire suppression practiced by European and Canadian homesteaders towards the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁶ Campbell argued that three factors – drought (aridity), fire and bison – all had a role in creating and maintaining the extent of the open plains, and that “the removal of any one of these limiting factors could have allowed aspen populations to expand.”¹⁷ The removal of two, bison *and* fire, in the past century-and-a-half has allowed for a dramatic increase in the aspen parkland. As a result, the preceding two arguments

¹² Stephen Pyne, *Awful Splendour: A Fire History of Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), p. 37.

¹³ For an overview of the dynamics and historical context of prairie fires and the prairie/forest edge, see Pyne, p. 38-40.

¹⁴ Pyne, p. 39-40.

¹⁵ Lawrence Burpee (ed), *An Adventurer from Hudson Bay: Journal of Matthew Cocking, from York Factory to the Blackfeet Country, 1772-73*. (Ottawa: Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, Section II, 1908), p. 103.

¹⁶ Celina Campbell *et.al.* “Bison Extirpation May Have Caused Aspen Expansion in Western Canada,” *Ecography* Vol. 17, no. 4 (Dec. 1994): pp. 360-362. The existence and extent of the ‘parkland’ region in pre-historic and early historic times is currently under research by archaeologist Alwynne Beaudoin in Edmonton using proxy pollen records. Early results indicate that the parkland did not exist in pre-historic times.

¹⁷ Campbell, ‘Bison Extirpation,’ p. 361.

– one, that the parkland is part of the grassland ecosystem, and two, that the parkland was ‘created’ by the removal of bison and fire from the prairie – reinforce the distinction between boreal forest and prairie.¹⁸

Forest Composition, Succession, and Culture

At the north bank of the North Saskatchewan River at The Meeting Place prior to settler and logging encroachment, dark pines and white spruce stood tall. Their near-impenetrable canopy presented a formidable wall of green stretching hundreds of miles towards the Canadian Shield. It was the southern edge of the Boreal Plain Ecozone, which today accounts for nearly all the commercial forest zone of Saskatchewan.¹⁹ The vegetation is officially classified as Mixedwood Boreal Forest. A mixedwood forest contains a mix of coniferous trees from white spruce to balsam fir on well-drained soils. When burned or logged, the mixedwood forest regenerates with trembling aspen and poplar. Jack pine trees are found in sandy soil zones, and black spruce, mosses, sedges and tamaracks live on poorly drained areas known as muskegs (bogs).²⁰ The kind of tree that inhabits a particular area corresponds directly to physiographic position (hillside, valley, north or south facing, etc.), soil texture (fine to coarse), and drainage. Black spruce, for example, grow best in peaty and wet places, white spruce prefer uplands and hillsides that are well-drained, and jack pine are suited to sandy soils.²¹

It is no longer considered accurate or acceptable to characterize a forest or any other ecosystem as being in a ‘climax’ state. For this reason, all states of the boreal forest, and the factors that produce those states, must be considered as part of the panoply of possibilities of the state of nature.²² Just as fire has been an integral part of the grassland biome, the boreal forest is

¹⁸ Ralph Bird also noted that there were “major fluctuations of the forest and grassland before the white man broke the land for agriculture.” Bird postulated that wet and dry periods were primarily responsible for the advance or retreat of aspen forest on a local or regional level. In general, the aspen forest would expand during a wet season and contract during a dry one, but on the micro level of sloughs, the opposite would be true, as previously slough areas drying up would lead to aspen expansion, but excessive rain accumulation would lead to drowned and killed tree vegetation. See Bird, *Ecology of the Aspen Parkland*, p. 3-4.

¹⁹ For a map of Saskatchewan’s ecoregions, see Ka-ii Fung (editor), *Atlas of Saskatchewan* (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 1999), p. 174-175.

²⁰ Canada Land Inventory classification, http://www.geostrategis.com/c_cli-prince-albert.htm. Accessed 15/01/2009.

²¹ The *Atlas of Saskatchewan* classifies the research region as ‘Boreal Transition’ and is described as “characterized by a mix of forest and farmland, marking both the southern advance of the boreal forest and the northern limit of arable agriculture.” See *Atlas of Saskatchewan*, p. 162-163.

²² Indeed, at around 12000 BP all of Saskatchewan south to the 49th parallel was covered by boreal forest following the glacial retreat. Over time, the boreal forest edge moved north. During the Altithermal period (6000 BP), a time of excessive dryness, the grassland pushed the forest edge to its northern apex at approximately 59 degrees north latitude. The cooling period following the Altithermal allowed an advance southward to more or less contemporary

a fire-based ecological regime. Stephen Pyne, in his recent book on fire in Canada, claims that the breadth, size, and intensity of boreal fires “define Canada as a fire nation. Its boreal forest is to Canada what the arid Outback is to Australia. ...With that flaming landscape, Canada becomes a global presence for earthly fire ecology.”²³ Fire is one of three principal causes of boreal landscape fragmentation and regeneration, the other two being lumbering and farming. The boreal forest, generally a green, cool, and wet biome, builds its reserves of biomass into near apocalyptic proportions. When a dry season hits, the boreal forest can be a mass of flammable timber and debris, peat and moss, shrubs and grass. Factors that contribute to boreal fires include amount of available surface material and combustion properties, atmosphere, wind, moisture, lightning, anthropogenic interference, and fire frequency.²⁴ The result is that boreal forest landscapes are almost always “mosaics of different ages resulting from the overburning of past fires.”²⁵

These mosaic landscapes encourage and support different ages, stages, and types of biota, a pattern called *succession*.²⁶ Within the boreal forest region north of Prince Albert, various patterns of succession have been identified. In general, fire hazard is highest in jack pine stands, intermediate in spruce or fir stands, and low in hardwood (primarily trembling aspen) stands, except in a dry spring when forest floor debris is particularly flammable.²⁷ A mixedwood boreal forest, consisting of both hardwood and softwood, can regenerate in several ways following a fire, depending on the intensity and length of the burn and the state and mixture of the parent stand. A hot burn, especially one that exposes mineral soil and retains access to an adjacent seed source will seed in with conifers, both white and black spruce and jack pine. Jack pine, the most flammable of conifers, is particularly adapted to fire and will regenerate densely. A lower

conditions by about 4000 BP. W.L. Strong and L.V. Hills, “Late-glacial and Holocene palaeovegetation zonal reconstruction for central and north-central North America.” *Journal of Biogeography* Vol. 32 (2005): 1043-1062.

²³ Pyne, *Awful Splendour*, p. 20.

²⁴ Edward Johnson and Kiyoko Miyanishi (editors), *Forest Fires: Behavior and Ecological Effects* (Toronto: Academic Press, 2001), p. v-x.

²⁵ Johnson and Miyanishi, *Forest Fires*, p. 3.

²⁶ An excellent report, created by Jeffery Thorpe of the Plant Ecology Section of the Saskatchewan Research Council for the Prince Albert Model Forest Association, outlined the transitions that lead from one forest canopy type to another (the predominance of one kind of tree over another), the ages at which such transitions can occur, and alternatives and factors that encourage one transition path or another. “Models of Succession in the Southern Boreal Forest,” Prince Albert Model Forest Association report, January 1996.

²⁷ A high-intensity fire that exposes the mineral soil will favour conifer seedling establishment, but a low-intensity fire tends to encourage hardwoods (aspen, birch, and poplar). Moreover, a deep fire that seeps into the peat or organic soil content can damage poplars, which root by suckering. Because aspen and birch tend to spring up in profusion following a fire, large stands of hardwood tend to be the same age, unless a smaller ground fire erupts that does not damage the older trees but encourages a new crop of young trees.

intensity burn leads to aspen seedlings and poplar sprouts.²⁸ If a mixed wood stand is burned and regenerates to aspen without any conifer source, it is possible that the stand will eventually reach its lifespan and degenerate into shrubs and brush (such as hazelnut, speckled alder, or willow in wet areas). To the eye, this landscape would most resemble ‘parkland’ (bluffs separated by open, grassy fields). Thus boreal forest fires, in particular cases, may encourage a reversion to parkland and eventually grassland – a phenomenon that was noted by early explorers and scientists such as Henry Youle Hind, proving that their assumptions were not far from the mark.²⁹

Human activity also changes boreal forest composition. Extensive logging creates an effect similar to low intensity burns, which regenerates with aspen seedlings and, in time, (if a mature seed source remains) conifer re-establishment. Logging, however, does not encourage rejuvenation of the shrubs and plants on the forest floor. Extensive agricultural intervention recreates the landscape more dramatically than logging or fire. In general, conifers are completely eliminated, used as firewood and building material. Poplar and aspen remain almost as weeds, repopulating themselves with ease at pond and river edges, rockpiles, or in fields whenever agricultural pressure ceases. The overall effect of human intervention, either logging or agriculture, is a gradual physical change from mixedwood boreal forest to a parkland/prairie resemblance. The parent boreal forest becomes physically and culturally subsumed.

Although the tendency is to assume that fire is a natural process, it is not always so. Cultural fire ecologists have sought to incorporate a better understanding of the human use of fire in a landscape. Much of this research has been driven from an Aboriginal perspective from Australia and New Zealand to North America and elsewhere. In the boreal forest of the western interior of North America, First Nations cultures burned ‘corridors’ or trails, as well as ‘yards’ or

²⁸ White spruce (although a few years later) seeds well into the low canopy provided by young hardwood trees, which often over-seed and crowd, resulting in a natural thinning process. In this instance, fire succession a few years after a burn shows a dense cover of aspen with white spruce seedlings. Conifers grow more quickly than aspen, and by the time the forest reaches about 60 years following a burn, the trees are co-dominant in the canopy, after which the aspen start to die out and the stand reverts to conifer, although conifers suffer damage from being ‘whipped’ by nearby deciduous trees.

²⁹ Another factor to consider is the age of a stand that burns. If a stand of trees that is not yet mature burns again, the probability of conifer regeneration is limited, although aspen and poplars are less affected. If an area is repeatedly burned, tree cover may revert to shrubland and grasses, with damaged or stunted hardwoods. Forest succession is drawn primarily from Thorpe, “Models of Succession in the Southern Boreal Forest.” See also C.L. Kirby, *Growth and yield of White Spruce-Aspen Stands in Saskatchewan*, (Regina: Department of Natural Resources, Forestry Branch Technical Bulletin No. 4), 1962.

meadows.³⁰ Burning a meadow encouraged fresh green growth of grasses and sedges to entice larger ungulates or create fresh hay for horses. The young grass would also sustain mice and rabbits, which would bring predatory animals such as fox, lynx, and marten. One Beaver Indian woman from northern Alberta claimed that burning around sloughs was good for the muskrat population, who loved the tender new shoots.³¹ Moose and beaver love new aspen growth. A burn in a sandy jack pine forest would encourage a new growth of blueberries, a favourite crop for humans (and bears) in the north.

Aboriginal forest inhabitants would not deliberately burn an organically rich, peaty, or mossy forest, as those fires tended to burn for a long period of time and were difficult to control. The majority of burns would be initiated in the early spring, when there were still pockets of snow on the ground which would act as natural breaks. Burning in summer, with the risk of hot weather, high winds, and destructive crown fires, was not a part of First Nations practice.³² Natural fires, lit by lightening when conditions were ripe, were in general the most destructive and out of control. Anthropogenic fires, unless carelessly lit or by accident, were generally more domestic, intended to groom the forest for certain purposes, particularly to encourage new plant growth for human or animal consumption. Large, destructive fires, however, had their human uses: for example, the young, straight pines found growing thickly a few years after a destructive burn could be harvested for teepee poles. Deliberate anthropogenic fire and harvest practices shaped the tenor of the forest and derived commodities for human purposes. Between anthropogenic and natural fires, a forest would be a mosaic of many burns of different ages and scales. No matter how 'wild' it may appear, the boreal forest developed as a human-induced cultural landscape.

Soils

Soil and soil creation is a complex process between the parent rock (or bedrock) and the vegetation that grows on that rock. This process is in constant flux and can change both from year to year and over centuries. A barren rocky area can be colonized by lichen and moss, which (over time) will decompose to form pockets of soil from which more complex plants, such as grasses and eventually trees, can take root. The parent rock within the north Prince Albert region

³⁰ See Henry Lewis and Theresa Ferguson, "Yards, Corridors, and Mosaics: How to Burn a Boreal Forest." *Human Ecology* Vol. 16, no. 1 (1988): pp. 57-77.

³¹ Lewis and Ferguson, "Yards, Corridors and Mosaics," p. 68-69.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 69-70.

is glacial till, a mixture of boulders, sand, silt, and clay deposited by glacial ice. In places such as the Sand Hills (now known as the Nisbet Provincial Forest) just north of present-day Prince Albert, the parent rock is glaciofluvial, with coarse-textured deposits of sand and gravel. Glaciolacustrine soils are stratified, their layers easily identifiable, with silt, clay, and sand. Formed at the bottom of glacial lakes, this parent rock can encourage soils more suited for agriculture. A wide pocket of glaciolacustrine soils can be found in the Shellbrook-Meath Park plain running in an east-west band just to the north of the Sand Hills. An area that is colonized by coniferous trees tends to have acidic soil, well-leached by the trees. Conifers are evergreen trees, which do not shed their needles and so give little humus back to the soil. Deciduous trees such as trembling aspen and poplar, conversely, prefer a soil high in organic material. They contribute to the soil's high organic content by dropping their leaves in fall. On a microlevel of a few hundred meters, soils can change over time depending on both the parent rock and whether it has been colonized by one vegetation or another.

The three dominant soil profiles in the north Prince Albert region reflect this combination of vegetative colonization and parent rock: brunisolic soil, chernozemic soils and luvisolic soils.³³ In general, the north Prince Albert region has three somewhat distinct bands of soil: brunisolic (sandy) soils just north of the city in the jack pine Nisbet Forest Reserve; chernozemic (dark grey and black agricultural soil) in the Shellbrook-Meath Park plain north of the pines; and the grey luvisolic or leached forest soil, found at the edge of cultivated land at the Northern Provincial Forest, stretching from Emma Lake in the west to Candle Lake in the east. The soil bands show a transition from sand to dark grey/black mixed to, finally, leached grey luvisolic soil, generally considered unsuitable for agriculture.

Physiography and Hydrology

The physiography of the research region belongs to the Saskatchewan Rivers Plain. The ground in the southern portion of the research area (the Nisbet Provincial Forest and the agricultural belt) is gently undulating to rolling. Moving north and west towards Christopher and

³³ Soil taxonomies that are common to the Mixedwood Boreal forest include: brunisolic soils, which are boreal forest soils associated with Jack Pine forest; dark grey chernozemic soils that have a 'salt and pepper' appearance of both light grey and black, common to the boreal transition zone; pockets of black chernozemic soils common in the Aspen Parkland; gleysolic soils, which are found in regions of prolonged water saturation such as sloughs; pockets of organic soils where deep layers of peat are present; and luvisolic soils, which is the classic forest soil that looks grey when disturbed or cultivated, leading to the common term 'grey soil zone.' For a well-written explanation of these and other typical Saskatchewan soils, see <http://www.soilsofsask.ca> which is provided by the Soil Science department of the University of Saskatchewan.

Emma Lakes and Prince Albert National Park, steeper slopes and well-drained soils of the Waskesiu Upland promote tree growth that has been particularly well-suited to forestry exploitation. The majority of upland forest land is still owned by the Crown as part of the Northern Provincial Forest, or the federal government as Prince Albert National Park.³⁴

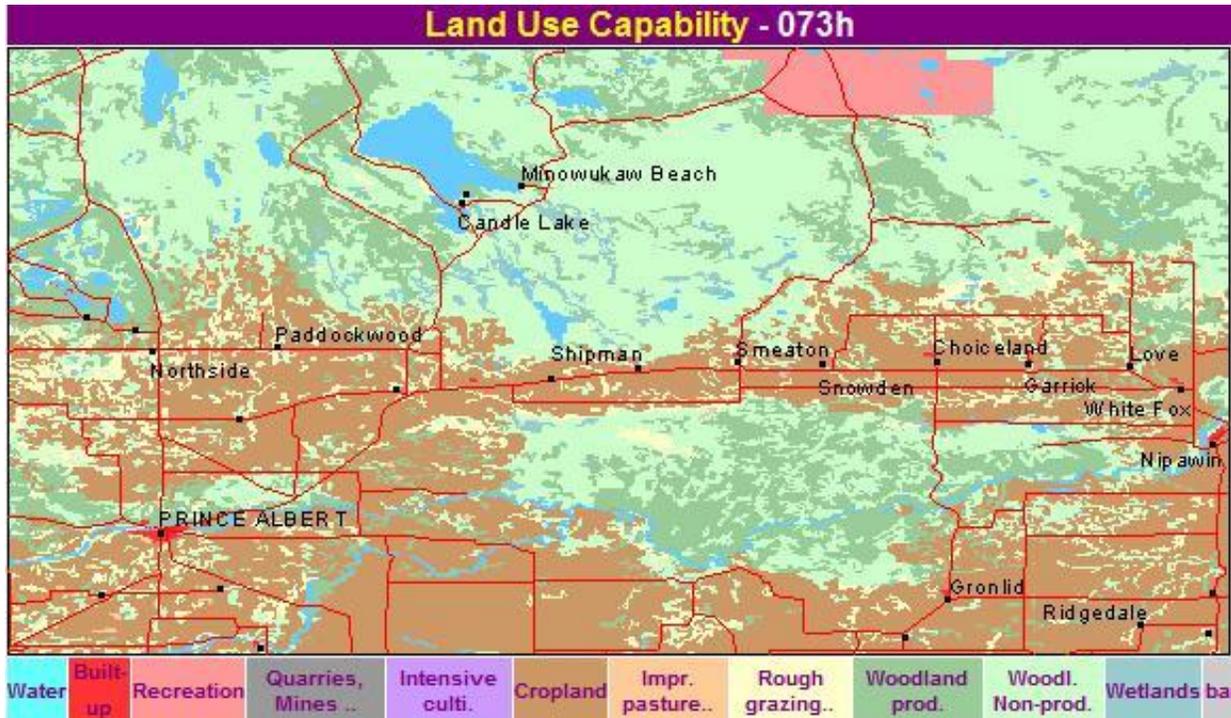


Figure 8. Canada Land Inventory Map 73h. Prince Albert Region. www.geostratis.com. You can see the tongue of settlement that pushed north of Prince Albert through Paddockwood (brown).

The entire region is part of the North Saskatchewan River catchment basin. Three major drainage bodies cut through the research region. The first is the Sturgeon River, on the outer west edge of the area. At the mouth of the Sturgeon (known on fur trade maps as the Net-Setting or Setting River) where it empties into the North Saskatchewan, Peter Pond once operated a fur trading post. The second drainage body is the Spruce River system, now known as the Little Red River, which originates in Prince Albert National Park and moves south to empty into the North Saskatchewan River near Prince Albert. These two rivers, Sturgeon and Little Red, have been important historically for their access to prime lumber forests, and were used and developed extensively to run logs to the mills at Prince Albert.

³⁴ For an overview of land and soil types relevant to this area, and a map, see A. Kabzems, A.L. Kosowan, and W.C. Harris, *Mixedwood Section in an Ecological Perspective* (Regina: Forestry Branch, Department of Tourism and Renewable Resources, Technical Bulletin No. 8, 1976), p. 9-12.

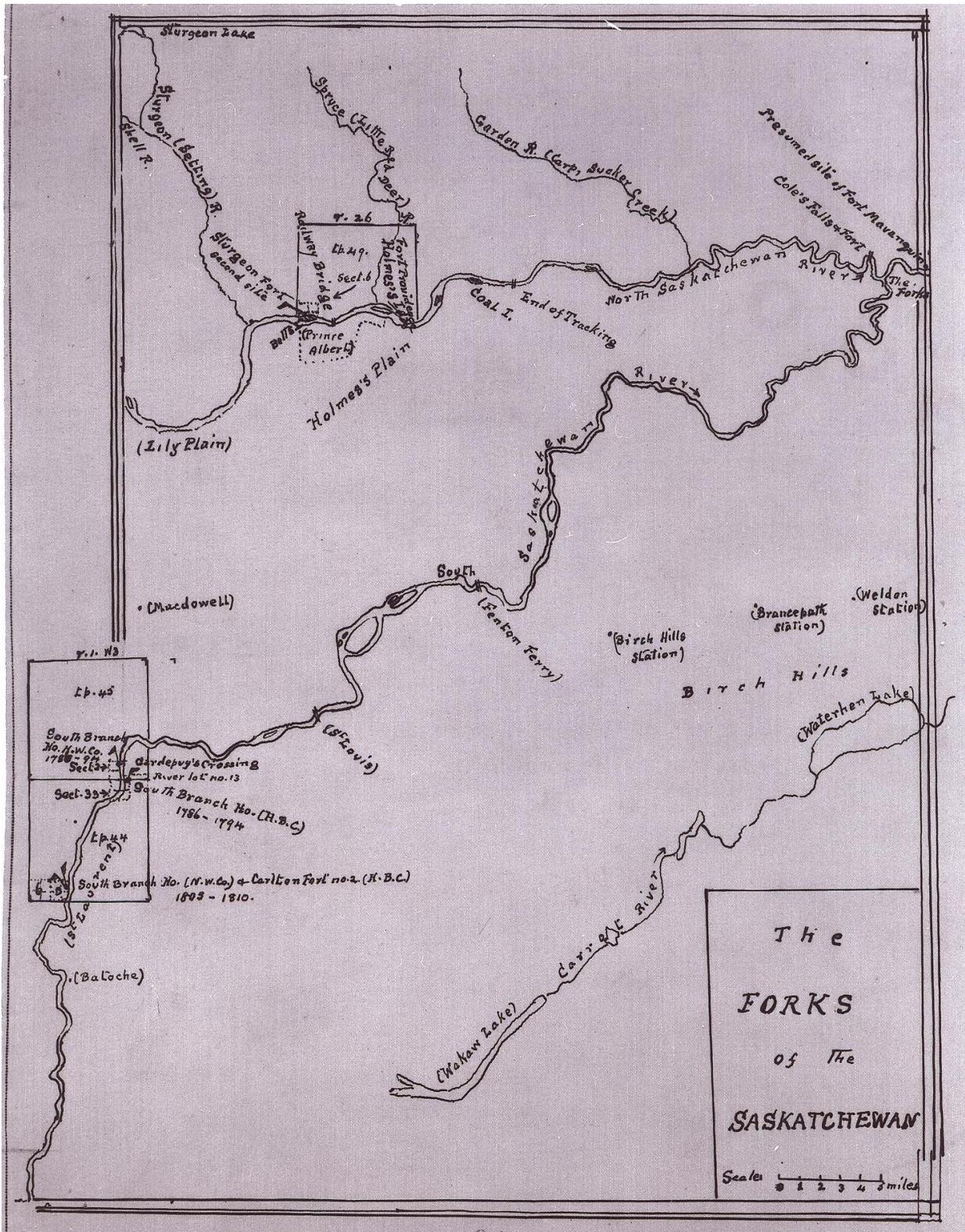


Figure 9. SAB Morton Manuscript Collection, (the files of Professor A.S. Morton), S-A32, Vol. IX, Historical Geography, Map, "The Forks of the Saskatchewan."

The third river is the Garden River, once known as Sucker or Carp Creek prior to agricultural settlement. This river drains from the swamp and muskeg land north of Paddockwood and passes almost straight south before curving east to enter the North Saskatchewan east of Prince Albert near the Forks of the North and South Saskatchewan Rivers. Its drainage, far upstream from Prince Albert and separated from the city by a series of shoals or rapids, hampered its potential use for the timber drive. The southern catchment of the Garden River, however, drains some of the best agricultural land on the north side of the Saskatchewan River, hence the name change to ‘Garden’ River. All three rivers are south of the Continental Divide, and flow into the North Saskatchewan and out through Hudson Bay.³⁵

The river systems are tied to the regional lakes, and the north Prince Albert region is today known as ‘Lakeland.’ Recreational lakes developed for commercial purposes include Round Lake, Sturgeon Lake, Christopher, Emma, Anglin and Candle Lakes, as well as those found within the borders of Prince Albert National Park. Other local lakes of importance, and known for their good fishing, include Bittern and Montreal Lake. Smaller lakes, with no commercial development and difficult access include Oscar Lake (a large slough between Christopher and Anglin Lakes), McConechy Lake and Clearsand Lake. Several other large water bodies, essentially large sloughs, abound throughout the region, including Egg Lake near Spruce Home and Henribourg, and what has recently been christened Erickson’s Pond, on the 14th baseline north of Paddockwood.³⁶ These large sloughs contribute to local hydrology and provide important habitat for waterfowl. Summer temperatures and evapo-transpiration rates affect considerable seasonal and annual changes in water level: some years, these lakes and water bodies are very low; other years, they overflow onto surrounding land.³⁷

The number and extent of water bodies increases sharply going north from Prince Albert, from small rivers and sloughs to lakes, then extensive muskegs deeper into the forest. Bogs, or muskegs, such as Boundary Bog in Prince Albert National Park, become more common. Bogs develop on low-lying land over thousands of years, and their presence is considered an indication of the age of a boreal forest. The northern part of the research region is also within or very near the southern limit of permafrost – small pockets of permafrost can be found as far south as

³⁵ Waters to the north of this research area flow north into the Churchill River system.

³⁶ You may refer to the Cummins Map in the introduction to view these water bodies.

³⁷ J. Howard Richards, *Saskatchewan: A Geographical Appraisal Part 1 The Setting: Land Use, Agriculture and Forest* (Saskatoon: Division of Extension and Community Relations, University of Saskatchewan, 1981).

Prince Albert National Park and may well be present at or near what became the northern limit of agriculture. The presence of permafrost is the standard by which many scientific groups classify the beginning of the Canadian ‘north.’³⁸ Permafrost presents a significant limitation on agricultural capability, but is hard to detect by inexperienced homesteaders with no botanical training.

Flora and Fauna

Trees and water have been the primary defining characteristics of the boreal forest, but First Nations bands also exploited boreal flora and fauna. Perhaps the most important non-human inhabitant of the boreal forest – in terms of its ability to recreate its surroundings – is the beaver. With an insatiable appetite for young aspen and poplar trees and a penchant for building dams which flood acres of forest, the beaver is second only to humans for environmental manipulation. Bison were once a major component of the region, particularly (according to historical documents) in the winter months when the beasts would break into smaller groups and spread throughout the southern edge of the forest, taking shelter from the bitter blizzards of the prairies. Certainly farmers who moved into the region would often find bison skulls while plowing the land. The extermination of the plains bison led to several ecological changes in both the prairie and the boreal forest, where bison were known to graze heavily on both grasses and shrubs, and to damage and kill fully-grown trees. Their disappearance led to gradual, but pervasive, forest regrowth.

Other key boreal species include large ungulates, from moose, elk and deer to the occasional caribou. Large carnivores, such as the timber wolf, black and brown bears, foxes, wolverines, marten, and lynx, thrive. Aquatic animals such as otter, beaver, and muskrat make their home in streams and ponds, and small land animals including mice and rabbits abound. Birds are also abundant, particularly at the forest edge or lake edge where insect populations are at their largest. Woodpeckers, grey jays, chickadees, spruce grouse, and the occasional eagle are common, as are aquatic birds such as heron, cranes, Canada geese, ducks, loons and pelicans. Water bodies have their own vegetation, from cattails to bulrushes, reed grasses, sedges, and mosses and support a plethora of tiny aquatic animals. Minnows and fish species are abundant, and in some of the larger lakes, fish can grow to a tremendous size. Northern pike (commonly

³⁸ See, for example, the various discussions on ‘north’ as defined by NiCHE – The Network in Canadian History of the Environment. www.niche.ca

called jackfish, 'slough sharks' or 'nazi snot fish'), walleyed pike (pickerel), perch, whitefish, and trout (brook, rainbow, and lake) can all be found, as well as a type of ugly catfish commonly called 'mariah.' In the woods, aside from the trees, can be found many plant varieties, including dogwood, low-bush cranberry, ostrich fern, horsetail, fireweed, blueberry, and Labrador tea. All of these animal, plant, bird, and fish species have, at one time or another, been harvested for food, shelter, clothing, utensils, or medicine by humans.

Climate

Saskatchewan has a continental climate with long, cold winters and short, relatively hot summers. It is a dry climate, with the southern prairie classed as semiarid and the northern regions as subhumid. There are considerable climatic differences between southern and northern Saskatchewan which contribute to its two main ecosystems of boreal forest and prairie. The mixedwood forest at the ecological edge is typical of the subhumid or more northern, boreal environment. Although rainfall is not extensive – the yearly average is about sixteen inches, some of which is from winter snowfall – it does not evaporate as quickly as the semi-arid regions of the prairies.³⁹ The growing season for all plants is about 160 days, although there is a higher possibility of late spring or early fall frosts at the forest edge which can hamper plant growth.⁴⁰ The isotherm of zero degrees, marking the southern boundary of discontinuous soil permafrost and the northern extent of agriculture, dissects the research region.⁴¹

The area receives on average 2100 hours of bright sunshine, but is protected from major surface winds by its extensive tree cover. Extreme variations, as on the open plains, can occur but with less frequency. A tornado and accompanying plow winds, with hail and rain, ripped through the research region in the fall of 2008, pulling up trees by the roots, flattening crops and smashing buildings.⁴² Older residents of the area claimed that these kinds of storms were non-existent when the region was first settled, and have become more frequent as the land has been opened for agriculture.⁴³ Opening forest land for agricultural purposes has been proven to have an effect on local climate, temperature, and soil organic content.⁴⁴

³⁹ See www.geostrategis.com/c_cli-prince-albert.htm. Accessed 15/01/2009.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴¹ *Atlas of Saskatchewan*, p. 118.

⁴² See, for example, reports from the Prince Albert *Daily Herald* in late August, 2008. <http://www.paherald.sk.ca/index.cfm?sid=166907&sc=4>.

⁴³ Interview, Merle Massie with Miriam Swenson, November 13, 2008. Author's collection.

⁴⁴ See, for example, the work of the Land Use and Land Cover Change program of the United States Global Change Research Program, <http://www.usgcrp.gov/usgcrp/ProgramElements/land.htm>.

Climate variations and weather events, as well as forest cover change from mixedwood boreal to almost exclusively aspen, have contributed to the sometimes erroneous assertion that the north Prince Albert region is a parkland environment. Scientific researchers, ecologists and archaeologists have argued that the north Prince Albert region straddles the ecotone, the place where the two parent ecological systems of forest and prairie meet. Traditional First Nations use of the forest edge exploited the rich ecotone environment.

Seasonal Use of the Forest Edge

In the mud, water plants and eddies of Christopher Creek near the south shore of Christopher Lake in 1931, two brothers – Tom and Joe Johnson – were knee deep in sand and silt, digging a trench. The two property owners had decided to widen the creek channel to allow the lake to drain down the creek. Despite the increasing hold of drought on the open plains to the south, Christopher Lake had burst its banks that year, overflowing into the trees and washing over its normally generous sandy beaches. The Johnson brothers, looking to alleviate the situation and bring back the summer bathing beach and camping customers, were busy digging when they came across a remarkable artifact. From the depths of the channel, they pulled up what at first they must have assumed was a rotted tree trunk, partially fossilized. On closer inspection, they realized it was a tree that had been deliberately modified. It was a dugout canoe, designed by First Nations people and used on the local lake, probably for foraging, trapping or fishing purposes. They cleaned the sand, mud and debris from their find and loaded it up on their wagon, bound for Prince Albert, where they gave it to the Historical Society.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ For years it was kept in the basement of the old Presbyterian church, before being put on display in the renovated Fire Hall, the present home of the Prince Albert Historical Society. The canoe is on public display at the Prince Albert Historical Society Museum in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. Further details have been added in conversation with Jamie Benson, curator of the museum.



Figure 10. Christopher Creek canoe, Prince Albert Historical Society. Photo courtesy Merle Massie.

The canoe is considered to be a unique artifact in North America. Although it is well-known that First Nations groups on both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts made and used dugout canoes, this practice was little known in the interior.⁴⁶ The most common mode of travel was the more conventional birch bark canoe, known for its lightness, versatility, and ease of repair. From the Algonquin to the Woods Cree, and adapted by the fur traders and voyageurs for their trade, the birchbark canoe plied the inland waters for thousands of years.⁴⁷ The find at Christopher Creek shattered previous assumptions, proving that the boreal forest people had developed a

⁴⁶ A fantastic essay by Edward S. Rogers on “The Dugout Canoe in Ontario,” was published in *American Antiquity* Vol. 30, no. 4 (April 1965): pp. 454-459. Rogers argues that dugout canoes were an idea brought by Europeans to the interior. Using a combination of fire and European tools, both Aborigines and Europeans could carve a canoe from a large tree. As forest fires and logging decimated valuable birch bark trees, Rogers argued that dugout canoes gained favour, but that they were always used in a local situation, never for portaging. This is an intriguing environmental and cultural explanation. The Christopher Creek dugout canoe has never been dated; it is possible that it was created as recently as the nineteenth century. It is unlikely, however, to have been of European make.

⁴⁷ On the open plains of the south or the tundra to the north, where birch could not be found, hides were used to construct serviceable crafts of coracles or kayaks.

yearly exploitation cycle rooted in place. A dugout canoe, meant for strength and endurance but not speed or lightness, could be used year after year on the same body of water. A birchbark canoe, exposed to the harsh winter snows, had to be remade each spring. The presence of a dugout canoe, which would have required many hours to build, suggests a deeper commitment to place, and perhaps less inclination or need for mobility. The waterways in and around Christopher and Emma Lakes, and the fens of nearby Oscar Lake, provided freshwater fish, game birds, furs (particularly muskrat and beaver), and a variety of green plants for food, baskets, and medicine.⁴⁸

Traditional academic interpretations regarding human use of the parkland and boreal forest edge argue that it was a *winter* environment. In the “Parkland Convergence” model, presented most eloquently by Arthur J. Ray in his seminal work, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, the bison would retreat from the plains to the forest edge in winter. First Nations groups from *both* plains and forest would converge at the forest edge following the bison, and spend winters in the relative shelter of the forest – the Good Wintering Place.⁴⁹ The forest edge as winter refuge centered the Aboriginal seasonal cycle. Over time, the forest edge became an integral part of First Nations resilience and adaptation strategies within the western interior of North America.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ The craft was built with a full bow, but no stern. This technology allowed one paddler to sit far forward in the craft, while the back end would rise up out of the water but still be useful for stowing gear, hauling a catch, or collecting items. Two holes bored on either side of the bow were likely used for transportation, as a sturdy stick could be placed through the holes to provide a convenient handle for moving the craft from one close body of water to another, or over a beaver dam or other small obstruction.

⁴⁹ A.J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: Their role as hunters, trappers and middlemen in the lands southwest of Hudson Bay 1660-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), p. 31-33. This model has been accepted by, for example, George Colpitts, as expressed in his essay, “‘Victuals to Put Into Our Mouths’: Environmental Perspectives on Fur Trade Provisioning Activities at Cumberland House, 1775-1782.” *Prairie Forum* Vol. 22, no. 1 (1997): 1-20; and James Daschuk, ‘A Dry Oasis: The Canadian Plains in Late Prehistory,’ *Prairie Forum* Vol. 34, no. 1 (2009): pp. 1-29. Daschuk argued: “One thing was certain; the yearly cycle of humans following bison herds from the grasslands in summer to sheltered areas in the parklands or wooded areas from the fall to the spring was essentially an unchanging and unchangeable phenomenon...” p. 3.

⁵⁰ Ray used the concept of ‘parkland,’ not forest edge, arguing that the parkland was the transition zone between prairie and forest. The most complex problem with this model was that the extent and range of the parkland has changed dramatically. Most researchers, including Ray, operated from the assumption that the parkland is a relatively stable zone that has been in its current position back through the historic and prehistoric past. Modern maps showing the current extent of the parkland are used. Researchers trace the travels of First Nations, voyageurs, fur traders, explorers and scientists, ‘mapping’ their location relative to the current position of prairie, parkland, or forest. This leads to much controversy, as historic records do not coincide well with current conditions. The cessation of First Nations anthropogenic burning practices and the demise of the bison, as well as the introduction of large-scale farming methods have substantially altered the landscape.

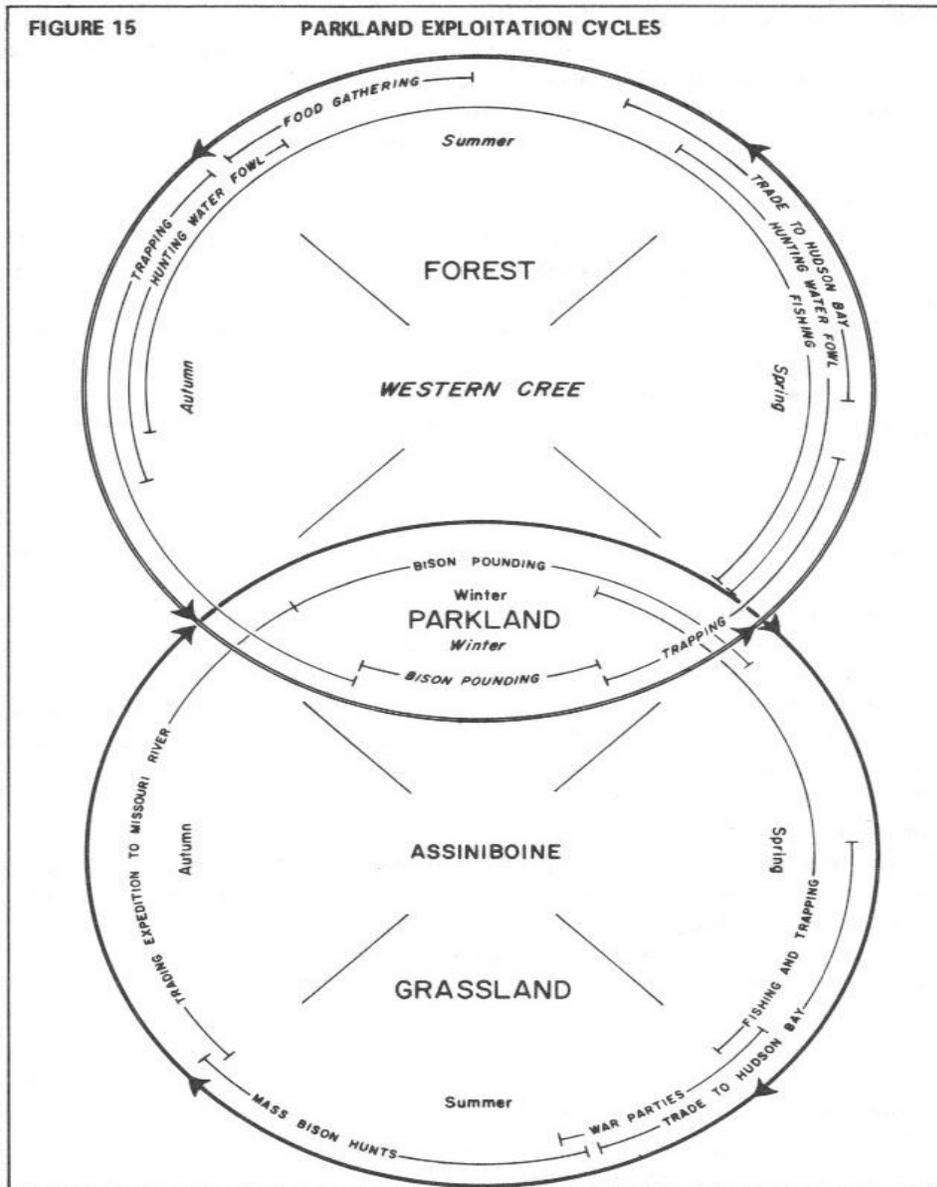


Figure 11. Parkland Convergence Model, A.J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, p. 47.

Geographers and historians have accepted, for the most part, the parkland convergence model.⁵¹ But anthropologists M. Malainey and B. Sherriff suggested that the model was

⁵¹ The Parkland Convergence model suggests that between December and February of each year, the bison would break into smaller groups and migrate to the parkland to take shelter among the trees during the coldest and stormiest winter months. First Nations bands would mimic the bison pattern, breaking into smaller and more mobile units to winter at the forest edge, within reach of the bison. The earliest part of this season, from November into December, was the time of bison pounding. Pounding, or building 'pounds' into which bison were herded before being shot, was a forest phenomenon, as trees were essential for construction. The meat was then frozen or dried for use during the rest of the winter. Those who have studied bison movement and migration have included: George Arthur, "The North American Plains Bison: A Brief History," *Prairie Forum* Vol. 9, no. 2 (1984): pp. 281-290; Douglas Bamforth, "Historical Documents and Bison Ecology on the Great Plains," *Plains Anthropologist* Vol. 32

wrong.⁵² Historical documents and archaeological findings offered ample evidence suggesting that plains tribes lived on the open prairie year round. Bison stayed on the prairie where snow cover was minimal and warm Chinook winds kept temperatures moderate; in the parkland, deep snow covered the grass and the animals had trouble finding sustenance.⁵³ Malainey and Sherriff recounted a prairie-adapted seasonal round where the Cree entered the forest only to travel north and east to Hudson Bay by canoe when the ice was broken on the rivers. They would travel back (an arduous trip involving much tracking and portaging) to meet their families who waited for the trippers at or near the rivers and streams. By then, it would be middle summer to early fall. From there, they would abandon their canoes and travel overland, generally in a southerly and westerly direction, heading for the bison country. Winter was spent on the prairie, trapping wolves and taking bison (often using pounds) until it was time to move once again north and east, toward stands of birch to make canoes, when the cycle would begin again. Malainey and Sherriff argued that bison hunting – and therefore, the plains Cree culture – was a prairie phenomenon.⁵⁴

(1987): pp. 1-16; R. Clow, "Bison Ecology: Brule and Yankton Winter Hunting, and the Starving Winter of 1832-33," *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 15 (1995): pp. 259-270; H.T. Epp, "Way of the Migrant Herds: Dual Dispersion Strategy Among Bison," *Plains Anthropologist* Vol. 33, no. 121 (1988): pp. 309-320; Dan Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850," *The Journal of American History* Vol. 78, no. 2 (1991): pp. 465-485; D.W. Moodie and A.J. Ray, "Buffalo Migrations in the Canadian Plains," *Plains Anthropologist* Vol. 21, no. 71 (1976): pp. 45-52; R.G. Morgan, "Bison Movement Patterns on the Canadian Plains: An Ecological Analysis," *Plains Anthropologist* Vol. 25, no. 88 (1980): pp. 143-160; F.G. Roe, *The North American Buffalo* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951); J.R. Vickers, "Seasonal Round Problems on the Alberta Plains," *Canadian Journal of Archaeology* Vol. 15 (1991): pp. 55-72.

⁵² Another researcher who strongly refuted Ray's parkland co-occupation thesis was Dale Russell, whose important work, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbors* (Ottawa: Archaeological Survey of Canada, Mercury Series Paper 143, Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1991) cited Ray extensively, while pointing out gaps in Ray's research and/or large errors in interpretation. Perhaps his most damning critique of Ray and this model of seasonal exploitation was that "it synthesizes data from various groups, [so] it is not applicable to any specific group, and as a result is misleading."

⁵³ M.E. Malainey and B.L. Sherriff, "Adjusting Our Perspectives: Historical and Archaeological Evidence of Winter on the Plains of Western Canada," *Plains Anthropology* Vol. 41 (1996): pp. 333-357.

⁵⁴ Malainey and Sherriff, p. 336-339. Yet, the use of pounds (which required trees) indicated at least a partial forested setting – parkland bluffs, or possibly the forest edge. Malainey and Sherriff suggested that the delimitation of the 'fertile belt' provided by Palliser and Hind in the late 1850s serves as the best contemporary outline of the 'parkland' zone. What none of these archaeological researchers have noted is that the parkland zone, as noted by ecologists, is difficult to define or proscribe on a map for the simple reason that it blends so easily into the prairie. Ralph Bird insisted that "in the northern part of the parkland the forest cover is broken by only occasional patches of grassland on the drier locations. As one approaches the great plains, the percentage of forest cover diminishes until it occupies only small, isolated groves and is finally restricted..." If bison moved to the more southern portions of the parkland zone, then it would become a matter of debate and interpretation to a casual observer (such as the fur traders or other itinerants) as to whether it was indeed 'parkland' or 'prairie.' A second piece of this puzzle is semantics: both prairie and parkland, when flat, were often termed 'prairie' until the turn of the twentieth century.

Archaeologists J. Rod Vickers and Trevor Peck agreed with Malainey and Sherriff's assertion that there has been a wide variety of interpretations regarding plains bison movements. All have been supported to a greater or lesser extent by both historical and archaeological findings and scientific evaluation.⁵⁵ Knowing that bison movements varied so greatly from year to year, (depending on snow cover, vegetation, and climate), Vickers and Peck contended that it was impossible to construct a single model that accounted for all variables. Researchers, including Malainey and Sherriff, have been unable to forge a consensus. Instead, countered Vickers and Peck, winter occupation should be approached "through a consideration of the limited distribution of non-mobile critical resources such as water and wood."⁵⁶ Wood was the one resource the plains lacked in any large capacity except in particular locations (along riverbeds or in certain upland regions, like the Cypress Hills). Bison dung, although adequate for cooking fires in the summer, could not produce sufficient heat in the winter – moreover, it was hard to find under the snow.⁵⁷ If wood, rather than bison, was the critical resource then the forest edge remained a strategically important place of shelter and refuge for Plains Cree. Travelers tended to plan their winter movements 'from island to island' of bush and forest, throughout the 'sea' of grass.⁵⁸

Debate regarding bison migration patterns focuses on Plains experiences and perceptions. Forest-adapted bands followed a different model, A.J. Ray noted. Traders Joseph Waggoner and Joseph Smith journeyed inland from York Factory in 1756 to winter within the homeland of the Cree Indians who occupied the region surrounding Cedar Lake and the north end of Lake Winnipeg. Their journals explained the forest cycle. The Cree band moved slowly through the

⁵⁵ J. Rod Vickers and Trevor Peck, "Islands in a Sea of Grass: The Significance of Wood in Winter Campsite Selection on the Northwestern Plains," in Brian Kooyman and Jane Kelley (eds.) *Archaeology on the Edge: New Perspectives From the Northern Plains* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004), pp. 95-124.

⁵⁶ Vickers and Peck, "Islands in a Sea of Grass," p. 95.

⁵⁷ Vickers and Peck discussed the merits of dung versus wood as winter fuel. Coal and wood were the only two fuels that can produce sufficient heat in winter and of these two, coal was rarely mentioned as a fuel source by anthropologists or archaeologists of North America. It is possible that coal was taboo for some First Nations. Peter Fidler, during his journey from Buckingham House west across the plains, added some coal he had found to the fire in the tent he shared with the natives. This was, apparently, a 'heinous offence' for which the chief, 'much affronted,' punished Fidler by not visiting the tent for two nights. For the most part, wood was the primary fuel, particularly in winter for domestic use. See Bruce Haig, editor, *A Look at Peter Fidler's Journal: Journal of a Journey over Land from Buckingham House to the Rocky Mountains in 1792 and 1793* (Lethbridge: HRC Limited Edition Series, 1991). Quoted in Stephen Pyne, *Awful Splendour: A Fire History of Canada*, p. 60. For a book-length discussion on energy (fire, wood, coal, oil, nuclear, etc.), see Harold H. Schobert, *Energy and Society: An Introduction* (Taylor and Francis, 2002), particularly chapters four and five.

⁵⁸ Vickers and Peck, 'Islands in a Sea of Grass,' p. 98-99.

region, fishing and hunting moose.⁵⁹ By December they reached the most southern point of their journey, still well within wooded lands. There, they found and killed ‘buffeloo.’⁶⁰ From this point, they journeyed back north and northeasterly, living once again on moose meat until they camped at Swan River, where there was a stand of birch trees. They camped for two months, making canoes and waiting for spring break-up, when the men traveled upriver to the fort to trade. The women and children stayed to spend the spring and summer fishing and hunting small game and waterfowl along the shores of the lakes and rivers until the men returned.⁶¹

Waggoner and Smith’s journals depict three separate but similar journeys that cycled south and west, then back north and east towards the Bay. Ray used the journals to argue that when the bands were at their most southerly point, they accessed the buffalo, at or near the forest edge. It was at the same time, he argued, as plains bands were moving to the forest edge regions, in pursuit of the retreating herds of bison. The two would have occupied the forest edge at the same time, in early- to mid-winter.

Archaeologist David Meyer, a specialist in parkland and forest edge cultures, has pondered Ray’s interpretation of winter co-occupation of the parkland. According to Meyer, this interpretation does not fit the archaeological record.⁶² Between 500 AD and 1000 AD, the northern forests were occupied by the ‘Laurel’ complex, while the plains were inhabited by the ‘Avonlea’ phase. Laurel people moved to the forest edge in spring, to access spring fishing in the spawning grounds of rivers and streams. They stayed well within the northern forests in winter. Avonlea people also occupied the parkland and southern boreal forest in the spring, but spent their winters mainly on the grassland. Archaeologists have used the evidence to hypothesize southern plains Avonlea people would retreat to the forested regions during the winter only if weather on the grasslands was particularly severe. Any co-occupation was during the spring, to access the spawning fish or travel using the opening waterways.⁶³

⁵⁹ It is unclear whether they were Woods or Swampy Cree.

⁶⁰ Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, p. 41.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 45-46. Russell disputed many of Ray’s assumptions regarding the extent of these trips. He argued that Ray assumed this trip was ‘normal’ and that it indicated a forest/parkland cycle that would only utilize the parkland/bison biome for a brief period in mid-winter. Russell argued that other influences, including a late start, illness, and a desire to wait for the French traders to arrive, accounted for their shortened route. See Russell, *Eighteenth Century Western Cree*, p. 111.

⁶² David Meyer and Henry T. Epp, “North-South Interaction in the Late Prehistory of Central Saskatchewan,” *Plains Anthropologist* Vol. 35, no. 132 (1990): pp. 321-342.

⁶³ Malainey’s research on fat/lipid residues on pottery sherds showed that although forest-adapted bands utilized the spring spawning grounds, plains-adapted people could not. They would get sick if they switched from a lean bison

During the Old Woman's Phase on the open plain (1000 AD to 1450 AD), there was no indication of any north-south interaction in the archaeological record.⁶⁴ Between AD 1450 and AD1700, or pre-contact phase in the western interior, the Mortlach Aggregate can be found in the archaeological record across the grasslands, but no sites have been found in the forest edge, and only a few in the parkland. Their northern binary, the Selkirk occupation, was common throughout the boreal forest to the southern edge of the forest and into the parkland. These sites bear evidence of spring and early summer occupation, but no winter sites have been found. These people, Meyer suggested, moved into the boreal forest proper in the winter, subsisting on moose and caribou and ice-fishing. Meyer argued that the archaeological record painted a picture in opposition to Ray's model: the two major groups of inhabitants in the western interior, particularly in central Saskatchewan, would have been furthest away from each other in winter. In the Selkirk phase (which extends roughly to the beginning of the fur trade) the boreal forest bands extended south, indicating increasing strength and influence, possibly coinciding with the beginning of the fur trade for which the boreal landscape offered an abundance of fur.⁶⁵

By the historic period, as recorded in fur trade journals and diaries, forest-adapted hunter-gatherers exploited diverse resources throughout the year. Their hunting and fishing grounds extended to the forest edge and into the parkland.⁶⁶ Archaeological investigation along major river systems points to spring and summer fishing exploitation as a major component of life in the western interior. The Waggoner and Smith journals outlining the boreal cycle mirror Malainey and Sherriff's depiction of a plains yearly cycle split not only by season, but by

meat diet to a fat-rich fish diet in spring. Instead, plains bands adapted fetal and newborn bison into their diet instead of fish. These differences were well-defined in M.E. Malainey, R. Przybylski, and B.L. Sherriff, "One Person's Food: How and Why Fish Avoidance May Affect the Settlement and Subsistence Patterns of Hunter-Gatherers," *American Antiquity* Vol. 66, No. 1 (2001): pp. 141-161. Yet, Malainey noted that when the men canoed to the Bay, the women stayed behind in camps usually near the rivers or lakes, indicating a gender-oriented aquatic exploitation. Perhaps women and children could transition to the fat-rich aquatic diet more easily, or by summer their bodies were more adapted to a more fatty diet. For a fuller investigation of Malainey's work, see "The Reconstruction and Testing of Subsistence and Settlement Strategies for the Plains, Parkland and Southern Boreal Forest," unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Manitoba, 1997.

⁶⁴ The archaeological record for the central boreal forest of Saskatchewan is sketchy for the Old Woman's Phase, in part because the problematic nature of boreal forest excavations, which offer a sparse database. Such interaction might yet be found, when more sites are discovered throughout the boreal forest. Meyer and Epp, "North-South Interaction," p. 334.

⁶⁵ The bison (pemmican) provisioning trade rose to prominence as fur trade forts spread into the western interior, and major canoe brigades operated each year from the Athabasca region to Montreal. Buffalo hide trade only rose to prominence in the nineteenth century as industrialization and the need for bison leather to make industrial belts created a market in the cities along the eastern seashore of North America.

⁶⁶ Malainey *et. al.*, "One Person's Food," p. 143, 154; Meyer and Epp, "North-South Interaction," p. 336.

hydrology and gender. Men would make the arduous trip to the Bay while the women, elderly band members and children would create encampments within strategically rich aquatic environments, usually at streams and lakeshores. The orientation of summer encampments, rooted in place, fall within a distinctly feminine and domestic sphere. A gendered analysis might reveal nuances that have so far been overlooked.⁶⁷ It is possible that the movement to and from the fur trade posts along the waterways was an innovation that shattered and changed older adaptations, changing the use of the forest edge.

But what of the dugout canoe discovered in Christopher Creek? Its existence suggested First Nations use of forest edge resources beyond winter. Both the archaeological record and the existence of the dugout canoe indicate seasonal exploitation at the forest edge geared toward summer. First Nations groups, particularly women, harvested the lush water environment of rivers and lakes at the forest edge. Even so, Ray's original model of winter exploitation should not be forgotten – in severe weather, the forest edge would provide critical fuel resources and shelter. Despite the ongoing debate over which season saw the highest use, the forest fringe was an ecological edge of critical importance for the human occupants of the western interior. It offered diverse resources, from fuel and teepee poles to large ungulates such as bison, moose, deer and elk. Extensive water sources provided habitat for fish and wildfowl. Berries and mosses grew in abundance, and other plants – used for medical or edible purposes – not found elsewhere could be harvested. Resource exploitation at the forest edge allowed for greater ecological adaptation and resilience.

The North Prince Albert Region as Cultural Edge

The Good Wintering Place was a point of convergence and contact for First Nations bands in the western interior for thousands of years. Patterns from pre-historic or archaeological human cultures consistently delineate lines of separation at or very near this place, suggesting that bands defined their areas of influence and adaptive strategies to coincide roughly with the forest boundary. The forest edge marked more than a mere physiographic description, argued geographer G. Malcolm Lewis, a specialist in First Nations mapmaking. Lewis studied early maps of the North American interior, the majority of which were made by or with the extensive

⁶⁷ Fishing was generally within the feminine sphere. Women traded isinglass (dried air bladder from sturgeon) at fur trade posts. For an overview of the importance of isinglass and sturgeon to the fur trade, see Tim Holzkam, Victor Lytwyn, and Leo Waisberg, "Rainy River Sturgeon: An Ojibway Resource in the Fur Trade," *Canadian Geographer* Vol. 32, no. 3 (1988): pp. 194-205. Historical geographer A.J. Ray talked about the gender connection of isinglass at Prairie Summit Conference, Regina, 2010 where Ray was the keynote speaker.

help of First Nations residents. The forest edge represented a cultural as well as an ecological edge, necessitating a different mode of life. “In the absence of mountains, sea coasts, and major lakes, [the treeline was] the main landmark,” Lewis noted. First Nations groups “anticipated, planned for, and even feared” moving from the forest to the plains:

in the absence of trees, kindling wood and tent poles had to be carried; in order to guarantee fresh water at nightly camp sites, circuitous routes had to be followed, such that a day’s journey could be considerably longer or shorter than an ideal march; to afford shelter against sudden blizzards, the ideal route in winter was never far from the shelter of a valley or a clump of trees; in a dry season it was necessary to be wary of grass fires to windward and in a wet season, when naturally induced fires were rare, it was essential to conceal camp fires, which at night would announce the existence of a camp to other Indians within a radius of several tens of miles.⁶⁸

The need to move with some stealth and care throughout the non-forested landscape was mitigated, at least in part, by the strength in numbers of Plains bands. The adaptive strategies of Plains bands versus Wood bands were particular cultural responses to the landscape within which they spent the majority of their time. Plains bands were defined by the bison hunt, which in good years could support large, healthy encampments of one hundred tents or more. The boreal environment supported significantly smaller band units, adapted to smaller animal populations and diversified hunting and gathering strategies.

The historic occupants of the north Prince Albert region have been Cree, but the historical record also notes an extensive co-occupation of the area by a northern group of Assinboine.⁶⁹ Three specific Cree groups used the region: the Pegogamaw, who inhabited the Forks region and area between the branches to the west and south, along the South Saskatchewan (which took in a parkland gradient leading into grassland, or plains Cree orientation); the Keskatchewan or Beaver Cree, who inhabited the North Saskatchewan and Beaver River regions,

⁶⁸ G. Malcolm Lewis, “The Recognition and Delimitation of the Northern Interior Grasslands during the Eighteenth Century,” published in *Images of the Plains: The Role of Human Nature in Settlement* (University of Nebraska Press, 1975). For more of Malcolm Lewis’ work on the connection between First Nations and maps, see *Cartographic Encounters: Perspectives on Native American Mapmaking and Map Use* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

⁶⁹ There has been considerable discussion in ethnographic literature regarding the origin and dispersal of the Cree into the western interior. For an overview, see Russell, *Eighteenth Century Western Cree and their Neighbors*. The Assiniboin (for which group I like the historical term, Assine Poet), are sometimes referred to as Nakota in modern scholarship, and it was from this group that the Cree may have learned the art of bison pounding. See David Meyer and Dale Russell, “‘So Fine and Pleasant, Beyond Description’: The Lands and Lives of the Pegogamaw Crees,” *Plains Anthropologist* Vol. 49, no. 191 (2004): pp. 217-252.

which combined boreal and parkland settings, and the boreal forest or Western Woods Cree, who lived on the north side of the North Saskatchewan basin and along the Churchill River system.⁷⁰

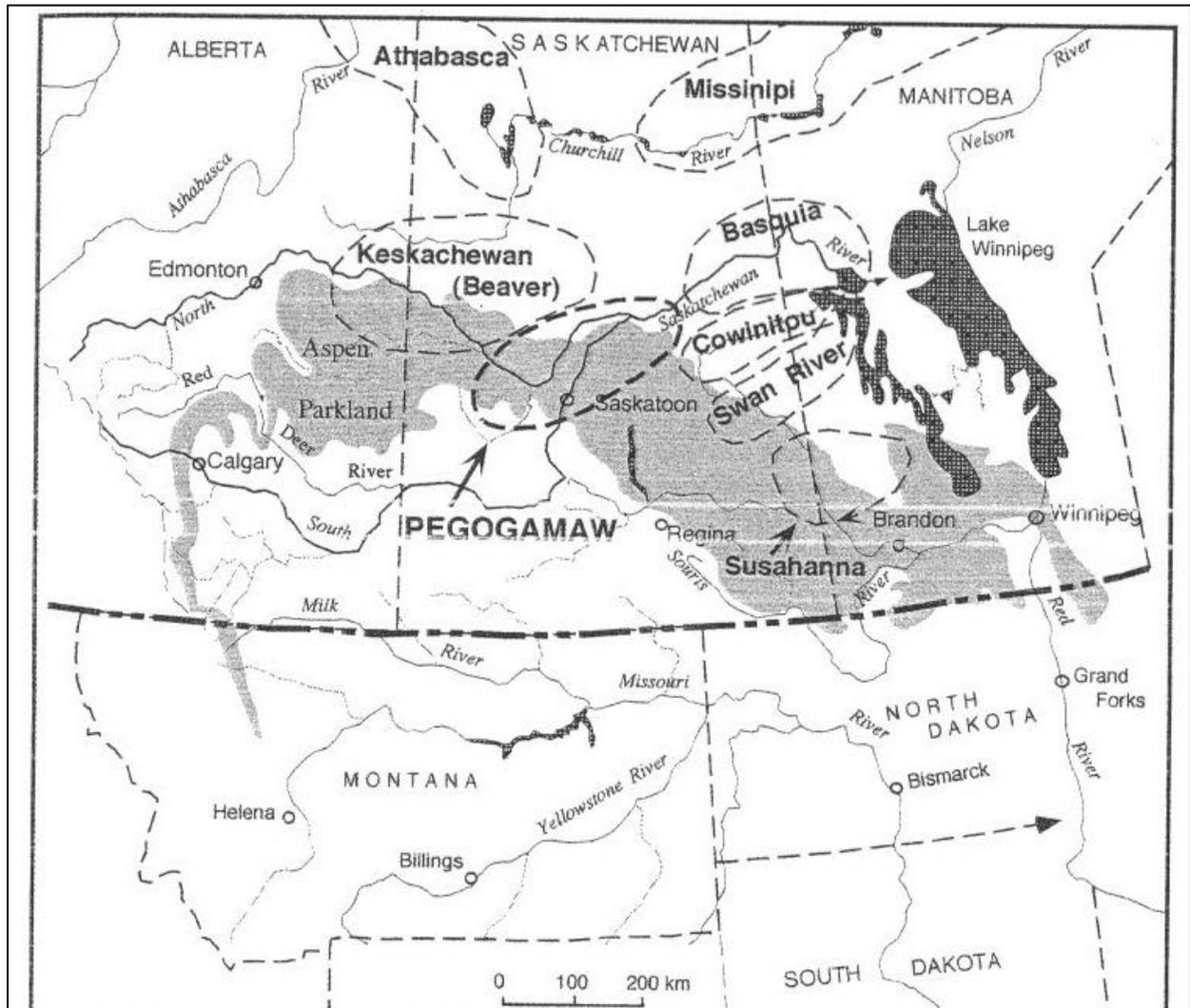


Figure 12. From Meyer and Russell, “Lands and Lives of the Pegogamaw Cree,” p. 227. Note the absence of bands north of the Pegogamaw, in what became the north Prince Albert region.

The territories of influence of these three bands overlapped in the north Prince Albert region. The Pegogamaw Cree were likely a variant of the Selkirk occupation of the boreal forest who probably migrated southward during the early years of the fur trade to dominate the strategic inland water ‘highway’ of the North and South Saskatchewan near the Forks and forcing the Gros Ventre, the region’s previous occupants, out.⁷¹ The migration represented a period of great transition for the group, as not only did their territorial range shift significantly,

⁷⁰ Russell, *Eighteenth Century Western Cree*, p. 146-155.

⁷¹ Meyer and Russell, “The Pegogamaw Cree and Their Ancestors,” p. 307.

but they likely restructured their economic orientation to learn bison hunting (particularly pounding) from the northern Assiniboine, and took on a marked involvement with the European fur trade. As fur trade posts moved into the western interior, the Pegogamaw Cree were oriented more to the south and west of the north Prince Albert region but probably retained their occupation of the Net-Setting (now known as the Sturgeon), Little Red, and Garden river systems, firmly within the transition zone.⁷² Continued occupation of the north Prince Albert region would have allowed access to better moose hunting and excellent beaver and muskrat hunting grounds, fishing in the lakes, sphagnum mosses for diapers, and blueberries and cranberries in addition to the prairie saskatoons.

The Beaver Cree operated to the west of the Net-Setting (Sturgeon) River, but records indicate that they sometimes used that river as an inland highway, and certainly both the Beaver and Pegogamaw were known to trade with the Canadian ‘pedlars’ who had established a fort at the mouth of the Net-Setting River called Sturgeon Fort, just to the west of modern day Prince Albert on the north side of the river.⁷³ These bands also developed an overland road that started near the Forks of the Saskatchewan and went west, parallel to the river, providing an overland route into their home territory.⁷⁴ This road was described by Hudson’s Bay Company inland fur trader and explorer William Pink, who made four trips to the Prince Albert region from 1766 to 1769. According to Pink, the group would abandon their canoes at the Forks, put away a large cache of dried meat and other supplies, then travel overland. They would spend the winter trapping and hunting wolves and marten for the fur trade, as well as beaver and muskrat. At some point – it differed from year to year in his journal, sometimes as early as December, sometimes as late as March – they would travel south to participate in bison pounding. As spring

⁷² These archaeological sites are sometimes known as Late Woodland. One site has been identified not far from the Garden River, as the Hulowski site, FiNi-3. See Meyer and Russell, “Pegogamaw Cree and Their Ancestors,” map p. 311.

⁷³ The journals of the masters of both Cumberland House and its inland supply post, Hudson House, offer extensive references to this post, most of them quite negative in nature. See *The Hudson’s Bay Record Society: Cumberland and Hudson House Journals, 1775-82* First and Second Series, 1952. The site of this fur trade fort has been professionally excavated on several occasions, but the North Saskatchewan River has now eroded all traces of the old Fort. For an intriguing article on the Sturgeon River fort and its role in place, commemoration, and the work of the Historic Site Board of Canada, see Sharon Thompson, “Life on the Edge: The Cultural Value of Disappearing Sites,” <http://crm.cr.nps.gov/archive/20-4/20-4-18.pdf>. Accessed September 8, 2009. The most famous inhabitant of this fort was Peter Pond. A cairn was erected at the old site of the Sturgeon River fort to commemorate Pond.

⁷⁴ The Pink journals are as yet unpublished. See Russell, *Eighteenth Century Cree*, p. 98-105; see also A.S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-1871* Second Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), p. 277-281.

approached, the band would travel back east to a canoe building site, to get ready for the spring trip to the Bay.

There is little clear indication in the fur trader's journals that the Western Woods Cree of the Churchill region came so far south, as they would likely have entered into Hudson's Bay Company trade using the Churchill River system. The archaeological record does show that the north Prince Albert region was well used by both Plains and Woods Cree. Ethnohistorical interpretation, drawn from fur trader records, suggests that all three groups (Pegogamaw, Beaver and Woods Cree) used the area to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the year and circumstances. Of these groups, the Beaver and Pegogamaw were devastated by the smallpox epidemic of 1781-1782. Local fur traders retained some hope for the eventual recovery of these two bands. Indeed, in the summer following the epidemic, the master of Hudson House, William Walker, decided to stay in the region during the summer of 1782 instead of traveling back to Cumberland House and the Bay forts, as was the usual practice. He said:

There is a good few Indians alive up here yet, Some not over the Pox, and a great many young fellows gone to bring their own and the furs of their deceased relations, who had laid them up when they took the Distemper, a great way off, they have most of them promis'd to come here with their furs, So I thought that it would be of more Benefit to our Honble. Masters to stay up here without Orders, than to Carry the Goods down to Cumberland House, where there is hardly an Indian man alive.⁷⁵

The loss of so many people from the smallpox epidemic presented a serious blow to the fur trade in the north Prince Albert region and across the western interior, since the Hudson's Bay Company relied on the inland Indians to trade both furs and provisions, and to make canoes and paddle the canoe brigades up and down the Saskatchewan River system.⁷⁶ Even the short term contraction in numbers in the region made it likely that the Woods Cree, less affected by the

⁷⁵ Russell, p. 144. See also the letters of William Walker of Hudson House to Cumberland House, December through May, 1781-1782 in *The Publications of the Hudson's Bay Record Society; Cumberland and Hudson House Journals, 1775-82 Second Series, 1779-82* (London: The Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1952) and David Meyer and Dale Russell, "The Pegogamaw Cree and Their Ancestors: History and Archaeology in the Saskatchewan Forks Region." *Plains Anthropologist*, Vol. 51, no. 199 (2006): pp. 303-324. From these records, it is clear that the Cree around Cumberland House, who were Swampy Cree (as distinct from Woods Cree) were particularly hard hit by the epidemic. Those who ventured inland from Hudson Bay to encourage bands to trade with the English at the Bay (such as Matthew Cocking, Anthony Henday, and others) were 'imbedded' in existing bands – which Russell identified as primarily Pegogamaw – who had already changed their relationship with the land and their yearly exploitation cycle to accommodate both the long trek to the Bay (or to Cumberland House) and the fur trade. It is important to compare their habits with those from the pre-trade archaeological record.

⁷⁶ William Walker letters and journals, Hudson House, 1781-1782.

epidemic, expanded their territory south to take advantage of what may have been a fluorescence of wildlife and subsistence necessities in the region. Certainly the word, ‘Pegogamaw,’ in reference to a specific band or group, disappeared from the fur trade journals after the epidemic.⁷⁷

In general, there is a gap in the historical record from the area between the Saskatchewan and Churchill systems. This gap is due, in large part, to geography. First Nations and fur traders primarily used water routes as roads: from Cumberland House, canoe routes could go north to the Churchill or west and south down the Saskatchewan. As a variant, they could travel up the Net-Setting/Sturgeon River to its source, then cross overland to Beaver River and from there north to La Loche, Ile a la Crosse, and Methye Portage. This route was only accessible in high water, and was not reliable, hence the overland variation west from the Forks. Early maps of the region, such as that prepared by Peter Pond in 1785, marked the post at Sturgeon River, as well as the overland trail, but neither the Little Red nor the Garden River was delineated. Neither river was large enough to be a water highway.⁷⁸ Interestingly, Prince Albert resident John Smith commented on the difference between southern and northern bands and their primary modes of transportation. He claimed, “Indians from the South were not equipped to travel by water, while those from the North knew of no other way of travelling than by water. The plains Indians used ponies,” he noted, while northern bands either canoed in summer or used dogs and snowshoes in winter.⁷⁹ Smith’s comments reinforce a somewhat arbitrary distinction between prairie and boreal bands, but one that the historical record supports.⁸⁰ At the confluence of cultures within the north Prince Albert region, transportation options from both plains and boreal cultural groups – horses, dogs, birchbark canoes, and dugout canoes – were evident.

In the north Prince Albert region, local subsistence and settlement patterns were much more diverse and diffuse than their southern, bison-adapted neighbors. This diversity meant two things: one, their diet shifted according to seasonal needs, allowing an omnivarian repertoire that included fish, fowl, both large and small fauna (from snowshoe hares to moose and bear, along with the occasional bison), and a variety of flora including blueberries, Labrador tea, and wild

⁷⁷ Meyer, “Lands and Lives of the Pegogamaw Crees,” 217.

⁷⁸ For a depiction of this map, see Harold A. Innis, *Peter Pond: Fur Trader and Adventurer* (Toronto: Irwin and Gordon, 1930).

⁷⁹ Smith, *Voice of the People*, p. 117.

⁸⁰ The best explanation of the impact of horse and gun technology on First Nations groups in the western interior is found in Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001).

parsnips; and two, if one resource was scarce, another was usually plentiful, allowing both seasonal change and a certain measure of resilience over time. Peter Erasmus, the Cree guide and interpreter who was present at the signing of Treaty Six at Fort Carleton, lived in such an environment. He claimed:

It was an ideal life of abundance and good health these northern Indians enjoyed. They were not as the other tribes solely dependent on the buffalo for a living. Their hunting excursions to the prairies gave them additional security and provided a good reason to get together in the social band life that they all loved. They shared the proceeds of these trips with the less-fortunate people at home. ... I make these statements as dealing with the times leading to and prior to the settlement of white people in the country. There were plenty of wild fruits: strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, black and red currants, gooseberries and three different kinds of cranberries. ... Buffalo meat from the prairies was used as a supplement to deer, moose, and bird game in those days... Fish were numerous in the lakes. In the spring, I have seen rough fish, such as jacks, actually push each other out on the shores by the masses that drove up the creeks. I believe that the variety of food was a leading factor in the health and energy enjoyed by the people...⁸¹

Even though these resources were diverse, Erasmus' description was probably overly romantic. Forest resources were not as plentiful as the plains bison. Forest-adapted people were consequently never as numerous as those on the prairie. Bison-adapted groups achieved a cultural florescence not seen in the forest and sustained several economically independent and powerful nation-states. They had, though, as historical geographer A.J. Ray noted, "one fatal flaw." Bison-adapted culture "was based on the exploitation of a single renewable resource [which was depleted] at a rate that exceeded the level required for a sustained yield harvest."⁸² If the bison could not be found, plains bands starved. Forest-adapted bands "were able to continue to support themselves by hunting, fishing, and trapping. Meanwhile their grassland counterparts were reduced to subsisting on ground squirrels and prairie dogs and to relying increasingly on government assistance."⁸³

First Nation bands that lived at or near the ecotone acquired a level of strength and resilience greater than their plains counterparts. Recent work by environmental historian Nancy

⁸¹ Peter Erasmus, *Buffalo Days and Nights (as told to Henry Thompson)* (copyright Glenbow Institute. Calgary: Fifth House, 1999), p. 231-232.

⁸² Arthur J. Ray, "The Northern Great Plains: Pantry of the Northwestern Fur Trade, 1774-1885," *Prairie Forum* Vol. 9, no. 2 (1984): pp. 263-280.

⁸³ Ray, "The Northern Great Plains," p. 278.

Turner *et. al.* supports the connection between ecological and cultural edges and resilience.⁸⁴ Aboriginal people, Turner argued, choose to live near – or to create – ecological edges, in order to exploit the resources of more than one biome in order to promote economic resilience (and good health, if Erasmus was correct). Those who resided at or near ecological edges usually exhibit high levels of cultural interaction that “promote the exchange of knowledge, technologies, and resources in such a way so as to increase the adaptive repertoire available to any one social group.”⁸⁵ The Pegogamaw incursion south and west, where they interacted with the northern Assiniboine and learned how to hunt bison through pounding, was an example of such an interaction.

The resilience of Cree bands living at or near the north Prince Albert region, despite the devastation of the smallpox epidemic, suggests that the ecological and cultural forest edge presented a landscape that could offer livelihood flexibility and resilience, and a wider array of possible adaptive responses.⁸⁶ Ten years after the first smallpox epidemic, fur trader Duncan McGillivray entered the old Pegogamaw lands in 1794, and stated that the people there appeared to be “the most powerful clan in this quarter,” in part due to the rich local resources.⁸⁷ Following the smallpox epidemic of 1781-1782 which reduced the inland First Nations population severely, there were other, smaller epidemics of smallpox, measles, and whooping cough that put further pressure on First Nations population (in particular 1819-1820 and 1837-1838).⁸⁸ It seems probable that there was a corresponding resurgence and richness in local resources, with a reduction in hunting, gathering, trapping and fishing pressure.

From the late 1700s when trading posts were established along the Saskatchewan Rivers through to the mid-1800s, bands with any connection to the southern bison hunting economy were increasingly drawn to the plains in response to the intense and profitable pemmican and

⁸⁴ Nancy J. Turner, Iain J. Davidson-Hunt, and Michael O’Flaherty, “Living on the Edge: Ecological and Cultural Edges as Sources of Diversity for Social-Ecological Resilience,” *Human Ecology* Vol. 31, no. 3 (2003): pp. 439-461.

⁸⁵ Turner *et. al.*, “Living on the Edge,” p. 456.

⁸⁶ Turner *et.al.*, p. 456.

⁸⁷ Arthur Morton, (ed), *The Journal of Duncan McGillivray of the North West Company at Fort George on the Saskatchewan, 1794-1795*, (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1929), 62.

⁸⁸ For an overview of HBC policies and attempts to mitigate the effects of the smallpox epidemic among First Nations, see Paul Hackett, “Averting Disaster: The Hudson’s Bay Company and Smallpox in Western Canada during the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, Vol. 78, no. 3 (2004): pp. 575-609. A recent but unpublished overview of the impact of smallpox on the Plains Cree in the western interior of Canada is Rebecca Brain, “Invisible Demons: Epidemic Disease and the Plains Cree, 1670-1880,” unpublished MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2002.

provisioning trade, and the richness of the horse and gun bison economy and culture.⁸⁹ Northern bands centered on the Churchill River traded at the Churchill posts. With bands pulled south and north, the north Prince Albert region found itself rather lightly touched by human occupation or the demands of the fur trade through the mid-1800s, although certainly nearby traders encouraged bands to harvest local fur populations.⁹⁰ The Hudson's Bay Company established Carlton Post in 1795, on the North Saskatchewan River down from the old Hudson House post. Posts on the Churchill, such as Ile-à-la-Crosse and Stanley were also in operation for parts of this period, as well as Green Lake, an important inland distribution point for pemmican, connected to Carleton Post by an overland trail. There is little indication, though, in either the written historical sources or the oral tradition that these posts drew heavily from the north Prince Albert region.

Sometime in the mid-1800s, a new influx of Cree people arrived. Che We Che Chap or Crooked Finger, whose anglicized name was James Bird, brought his family from Grand Rapids, at the northwest corner of Lake Winnipeg, west following the fur trade routes to La Ronge. It was not uncommon for Cree to move west, following the fur trade and searching for fresh resources.⁹¹ From there, Bird and his family turned south, finding the Thunder Hills and the expanse of Montreal Lake.⁹² Rich in game and resources and seemingly empty, Cree elders

⁸⁹ For an overview of this transition, see Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*.

⁹⁰ It is also possible that the region, at the edge of more than one sphere of influence as demonstrated, operated as a 'neutral zone' or 'borderland' akin to those explored and explained by Binnema in *Common and Contested Ground* or Richard White in *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983). Such places became ecologically rich, particularly in larger ungulates, because they were on the edge of traditional lands and may even have served as 'buffer zones' between hostile groups. The story of a fierce battle between the Cree and Chipeweyan at 'The Lake of the Hanging Hearts' or the Hanging Heart Lakes in Prince Albert National Park suggest that at least at one point, the north Prince Albert region was a 'buffer zone' between the Chipeweyan or Dene, whose territory usually extended north of the Churchill River, and the Cree of the Saskatchewan. However, Allan Bird identified this battle as being from the early 1700s. It is therefore not possible to correlate the Cree/Dene hostility to the local resource richness of the early 1800s. For an overview of the story, see James Shortt, *A Survey of the Human History of Prince Albert National Park, 1887-1945* (Parks Canada Manuscript Report Number 239, 1977) and Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan's Playground* (Saskatoon: Fifth House Printers, 1989), p. 4 and endnotes.

⁹¹ Traditional Cree ethnographers believed that the Cree migrated westward with the fur trade, using their middle man status, guns and technology to push out previous inhabitants. Recently, this view has been questioned, even completely rejected. See Dale Russell, *Eighteenth Century Cree and Their Neighbors*. However, the fact that some small pockets of Cree bands did move west with the fur trade is accepted. Their motivations and movements mirror many Canadian internal migrations.

⁹² Waiser, *Saskatchewan's Playground*, p. 1; P. Goode, "A Historical/Cultural/Natural Resource Study of the Prince Albert Model Forest Region," (A Report Submitted to: The Prince Albert Model Forest Association by Sentar Consultants [now Stantec] of Saskatoon, February 1995), p. 3.1-3.5.

remembered the first years in this region as some of the happiest years of their lives.⁹³ The small, family-based band units lived “a seasonal pattern of movement that took them to camping spots at Candle Lake, Bittern Lake, Red Deer (Waskesiu) Lake, Trout (Crean) Lake, and the north and south ends of Montreal Lake.”⁹⁴ Their territory included much of the northern watered landscape of the north Prince Albert region.

The Cree band at Sturgeon Lake, in the north Prince Albert region, harvested territory that extended north from Sturgeon Lake to include Emma, Christopher, Oscar and Anglin Lakes, as far north as the Narrows of Red Deer (Waskesiu) Lake.⁹⁵ By the 1860s, the Sturgeon band was well established in their home territory, as were the various families around Montreal Lake, Candle Lake, and Waskesiu. The population of the north Prince Albert region, a combination of close and far immigrants, was still relatively small, numbering a few hundred people.⁹⁶ Their lifestyle followed a boreal pattern centered on hunting and fishing, with incursions south to take bison or trade. Fur trade within the region mushroomed throughout the nineteenth century in response to the increased First Nations occupation. By 1851 the Hudson’s Bay Company re-established the post at Fort a la Corne, to the east of the Forks. This post stayed in operation until well into the 1900s, and for a time operated a satellite post at Candle Lake.⁹⁷ Smaller outposts

⁹³ Waiser, *Saskatchewan’s Playground*, p. 9.

⁹⁴ P. Goode, “A Historical/Cultural/Natural Resource Study,” p. 3.5.

⁹⁵ P. Goode, p. 3.5. Note that these lakes did not carry their current names at this time. Maps of the region from 1885 show references to lakes called Little Swan Lake and Little Bittern Lake. Little Bittern was most likely Christopher Lake. When the Little Red River reserve was surveyed, what we now know as “Christopher Creek” was listed as “Little Bittern Creek.” See <http://cartweb.geography.ua.edu/lizartech/iserv/getimage> to view the 1885 map.

⁹⁶ See P. Goode, p. 3.5; “The Journal of the Reverend J.A. Mackay,” *Saskatchewan History*, Vol. XIX (1966), p. 75. The Reverend John A. Mackay, an Anglican missionary who held several roles in the Prince Albert diocese including acting as the missionary in charge of Stanley Mission in the mid-1800s, travelled back and forth through the region from Stanley Mission to Prince Albert. Fluent in Cree, Mackay was an important figure in the region and knew many of the people intimately. Bill Waiser, in his profile of Mackay in the Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online, stated: “His journal demonstrates that his duties at Stanley went well beyond ministering to the local population. Not only did he travel extensively in all seasons through present-day northeastern Saskatchewan in an effort to convert the local aboriginal population, but he ran a 15-acre agricultural operation, including a mill, that made the mission almost self-sufficient. He also used a small printing press to begin to produce Cree translations of the Scriptures and religious services. In fact, there was little that the priest could not turn his hand to, a talent that was surpassed only by his capacity for northern travel. He was an imposing figure. With his flashing eyes, bushy eyebrows, and long clerical garb, he looked every part the prophet and reportedly feared no one but God.” http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=8257&&PHPSESSID=yhzfqkvzape.

⁹⁷ The Hudson Bay Company Archives has HBC post records from 1851-1930 for this post. See <http://isis64.minisisinc.com/scripts/mwimain.dll/72/2/4/3617?RECORD>. The general account book for Candle Lake for the years 1887-1889 is also extant in the archive.

and regional distribution centers were established along Sturgeon Lake, the Narrows area of Waskesiu, and the south end of Montreal Lake, particularly in the late 1800s.⁹⁸

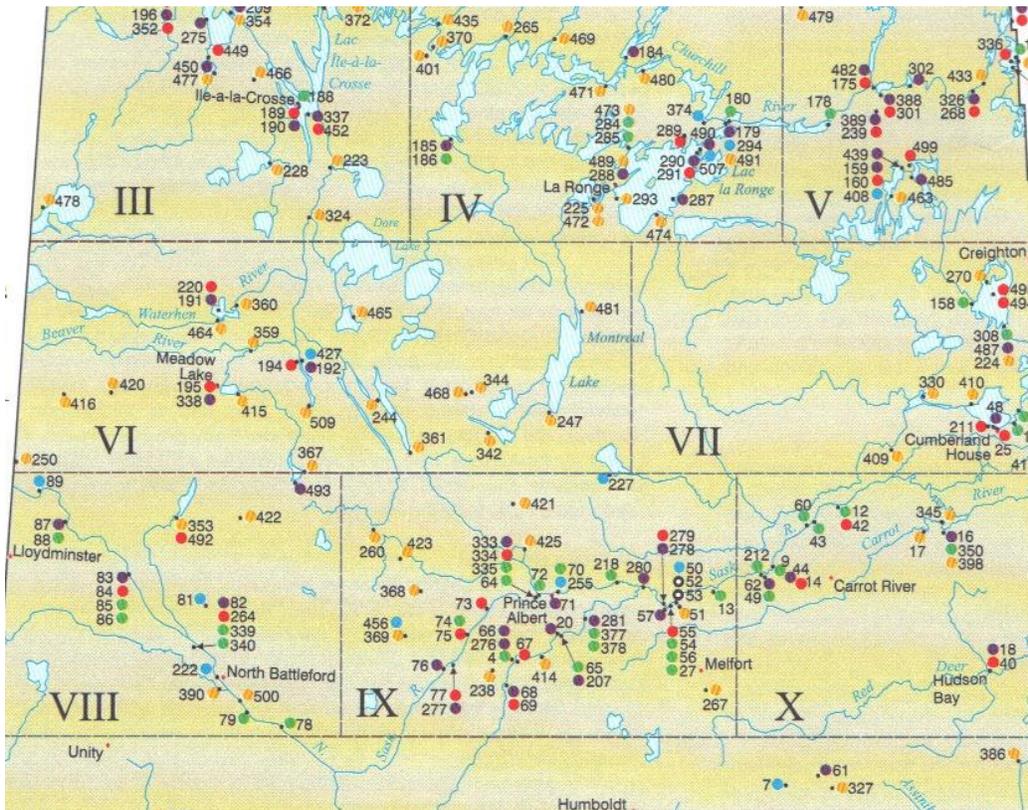


Figure 13. From “Trading Posts Pre-1789 – Post 1930,” *Atlas of Saskatchewan*, p. 34. Note that the majority of posts between Prince Albert and La Ronge (orange dots) were established between 1870 and 1930.

It is clear that these new groups⁹⁹ created a seasonal round based for the most part on the riches of the boreal forest, and less so on the bison hunt of the prairies. As Erasmus noted, Cree groups from the forest would use the bison as an almost extravagant addition to their diet.¹⁰⁰ David Mandelbaum, the eminent Plains Cree ethnographer, noted that there were important differences between hunting bison and hunting moose or elk. Bison hunting, particularly

⁹⁸ See Waiser, *Saskatchewan’s Playground*, pp. 4-9.

⁹⁹ They should be loosely termed a ‘group’ or ‘community’ since they shared an identifiable territory and interests, and similar lifeways. Certainly these loose groups became more and more of a community through interaction at local fur trade posts at the Narrows and Montreal Lake. Although few records exist, it is reasonable to assume that berry picking expeditions, weddings, and other community celebrations were held to which many were invited and attended.

¹⁰⁰ When the Presbyterian Mission at Prince Albert was established in the 1860s, bison could still be hunted near Prince Albert. See James Nisbet letters and papers, published by the Presbyterian Church of Canada. *The Home and Foreign Record of the Canada Presbyterian Church*. (Printed for the Committee by W.C. Chewett, 1865). Some of the letters were reprinted in *The Voice of the People: Reminiscences of Prince Albert Settlement’s Early Citizens, 1866-1895* (Prince Albert Historical Society 1985), Letter from N. Saskatchewan, 30 July 1866 from Rev. J. Nisbet to Rev. R. F. Burns, p. 25.

pounding, jumping, or on horseback, was a communal activity suited to the larger Plains encampments of several hundred people. Moose and elk required tracking and stalking, methods that suited lone and highly experienced hunters or small hunting parties.¹⁰¹ Cree warrior Fine Day told Mandelbaum that “anyone could kill a buffalo but it took a good hunter to get moose or elk,” which was another way of saying that bison hunting was an easier life.¹⁰² Mandelbaum suggested that “the lavish supply of buffalo made for a neglect of forest hunting techniques,” an indication that some of the Plains tribes may have been unable to move back into a forest-adapted economy or even access forest edge animals other than bison.¹⁰³ Forest resources, sufficient for small bands, likely would never have been able to accommodate the hunting pressure required by the much larger Plains bands on an extensive or intensive basis. Plains bands would use forest resources only when necessary, as a refuge or to alleviate food shortages on the open plains.

Throughout the 1860s, it was becoming clear that the bison were in decline, and by the 1870s, Plains bands had to travel south far beyond their traditional hunting grounds to access this precious resource in any substantial capacity.¹⁰⁴ Boreal forest-adapted bands also would have missed this resource, although perhaps to a smaller degree. The decimation of the bison, combined with violent Plains warfare, alcohol, and another extensive smallpox epidemic in the late 1860s and early 1870s, had tremendous effects on the Plains Cree. Cree leader Mistawasis declared, in a heated session with other band leaders during the 1876 Treaty Six negotiations, that: “We are few in numbers compared to former times, by wars and the terrible ravages of smallpox.”¹⁰⁵ The 1870s were a time of want, almost of starvation, that led to the signing of several of the numbered treaties in western Canada.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ David Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical and Comparative Study* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1979), p. 68. This book was based on Mandelbaum’s extensive field work among the Cree, and his doctoral thesis, both of which were completed in the 1930s. See *Preface to the New Edition*, p. xiii.

¹⁰² Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree*, p. 68.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁰⁴ The decline of the bison has been well-documented and extensively explored by historians, ethnographers, and biologists across the entire Great Plains. Excellent works on this subject include: Andrew Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Dan Flores, “Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850;” John Foster, Dick Harrison and I.S. MacLaren (eds.) *Buffalo* (Edmonton, University of Alberta, 1992); William Dobak, “Killing the Canadian Buffalo, 1821-1881,” in *Western Historical Quarterly* Vol. 27, (1996): 33-52.

¹⁰⁵ Erasmus, *Buffalo Days and Nights*, p. 248. Nowhere in this speech did Mistawasis claim that the bison were killed by white people. It was the First Nations, deluded by whiskey, energized by horse-stealing and thoughts of pride and bravery, who engaged in the fur and pemmican trade so heavily to procure guns and ammunition with which to carry out their wars with the Blackfoot nations. Star Blanket concurred with this assessment, saying “If we

Treaty Six: Bison to Agriculture

Treaty Six, signed at Fort Carleton and Fort Pitt in 1876, is generally interpreted as a convergence of interest between the Crown and the First Nations bands. Although the treaty is generally referred to as a “Plains Cree” treaty,¹⁰⁷ it was in fact signed between “Her Majesty the Queen and the Plain and Wood Cree Indians and Other Tribes of Indians.”¹⁰⁸ The Crown advocated a transition to permanent agrarian settlement. First Nations bands, fearing the end of their way of life through the bison hunt, asked for help to transition to a settled, farming way of life. Both Mistawasis and Ahtakakup, considered by historians (citing Cree interpreter Peter Erasmus) to be the most important figures at the treaty signing, pushed hard to establish good terms in the treaty. They wanted help for their people to “learn to gain their livelihood from the earth in a new way.”¹⁰⁹

The treaty terms specifically referred not only to those to whom farming would be a new experience, but also to those already involved: “It is further agreed between Her Majesty and the said Indians, that the following articles shall be supplied to any Band of the said Indians who are now cultivating the soil, or who shall hereafter commence to cultivate the land.”¹¹⁰ Clearly, at the time of treaty, some bands were already cultivating the soil, adding to their subsistence base through agriculture. Those bands requested further agricultural help as promised in the treaties, and worked to ensure cultivated fields were included in their reserve land entitlement.

The Reverend James Nisbet, the Presbyterian missionary at Prince Albert, wrote about the beginning of Native agriculture in the Prince Albert district. He claimed in 1869 that “several families have been induced to cultivate small pieces of land both here and at a lake twenty miles distant.”¹¹¹ Less than ten years later, Chief Ah-yah-tus-kum-ik-im-am (whose anglicized name

had been friends we might now be a host of people of all nations and together have power to demand the things some of you foolishly think you can get and insist on now demanding. No, that is not the road we took, but killed each other in continuous wars and horse-stealing, all for the glory we all speak of so freely,” p. 249.

¹⁰⁶ The signing and implications of the numbered treaties have been well-served by others and will not be repeated here. See, for example, Arthur J. Ray, Jim Miller, and Frank Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence: A History of Saskatchewan Treaties* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000) for the most recent, and comprehensive, Saskatchewan overview.

¹⁰⁷ Ray, Miller and Tough claim “Treaty Six was negotiated primarily with the buffalo-hunting First Nations of the parkland/grassland region.” *Bounty and Benevolence*, p. 143.

¹⁰⁸ See the copy of Treaty Six on the Indian Claims Commission website. <http://www.indianclaims.ca>. Accessed 14 September 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Ray, Miller and Tough, p. 132.

¹¹⁰ Treaty Six, page four. <http://www.indianclaims.ca>.

¹¹¹ James Nisbet, “Three and a Half Years of an Indian Mission,” 31 December 1869. Reprinted in *The Voice of the People*, p. 32.

was William Twatt) signed Treaty 6 in 1876. Twatt and his councilors came to the treaty signing from their home base at Sturgeon Lake, twenty miles from the Prince Albert settlement. They immediately requested the site of their reserve to be established on the north side of the lake. E. Stewart, the Dominion Land Surveyor, later claimed the best farming land was to be found on the north side.¹¹² As well, the acting Indian Agent reported houses, a garden, potatoes and barley already sown, without any help from outside agents.¹¹³ The Sturgeon Lake band was already farming by 1876 and had chosen the best land in their home region. The terms of Treaty Six clearly acknowledged contemporary First Nations farming practices, which quickly became an important aspect of First Nations land usage in the north Prince Albert region.

Treaty Six sought to “extinguish” Aboriginal title for a vast region of western Canada. The northern boundary ceded in the original treaty passed in a straight line running east-west through the north Prince Albert region.¹¹⁴ In today’s terms, the line would run from the source of Mossy River and Macdougall Creek near Nipawin Provincial Park west on a line just north of 54 degrees latitude to the south end of Green Lake. This tract would have included land used by Wood Cree living around Candle Lake, Bittern Lake, Red Deer (Waskesiu) Lake, and the smaller lakes to the south, such as present-day Christopher and Emma Lakes. None of these families were signatories to Treaty Six.

¹¹² The Order-in-Council that outlined the reserve stated: “Sturgeon Lake is a long narrow expansion of Sturgeon or Net-Setting River, and runs easterly, across the reserve. This stretch of water has high bold shores, and abounds with fish and fowl. It is used by lumbermen to get out timber.” This description would have been taken from the surveyor’s notes. See Order-in-Council PC 1151, 17 May 1889, pp. 50–51.

¹¹³ LAC RG10 Vol. 2656, file 9092. James Walker, Acting Indian Agent, Battleford, NWT, to Lt. Governor, NWT, Battleford, 20 August 1877.

¹¹⁴ The official treaty statement stipulated: “Commencing at the mouth of the river emptying into the north-west angle of Cumberland Lake; thence westerly up the said river to its source; thence on a straight line in a westerly direction to the head of Green Lake.” Treaty Six, page two. <http://www.indianclaims.ca/pdf/authorities/6%20eng.pdf> However, Bob Beal suggested “In the record of the treaty negotiations that Alexander Morris submitted to Ottawa, there was no indication that land rights surrender was even discussed or explained. Erasmus read the written treaty, including the legally worded surrender clause, to the assembled First Nations; but the semantic differences between the languages and cultures may well have been too vast for even the best translator to bridge. It also appears likely that a key part of the surrender clause, that defining the limits of the territory actually surrendered, was absent from the written document when Erasmus read it and the chiefs signed it at Fort Carlton and Duck Lake. Because of a small change he made in the territorial limits from the instructions he had received from Ottawa, it is possible Alexander Morris added the boundaries description at or after the subsequent talks at Fort Pitt. During 1877 and 1878, several bands that had not been present at the initial negotiations signed adhesions to Treaty 6.” “Treaty Six,” *Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2005), p. 951-952.

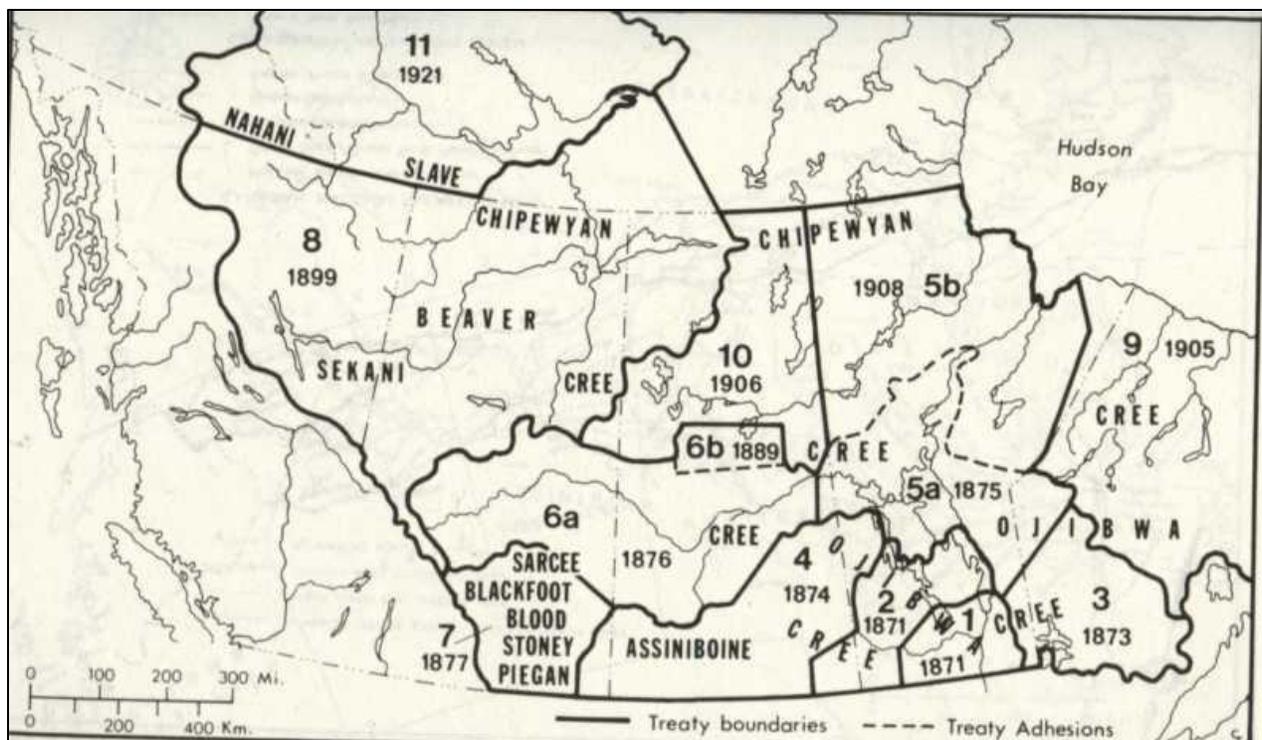


Figure 14. Treaty Map of Western Canada. Treaty 6a covered most of the North Saskatchewan River system, which encompassed both plain/parkland and boreal forest regions. Treaty 6b represented the adhesion of 1889.

According to a contemporary observer, John Sinclair of the Anglican mission at Stanley, several people from the region “presented themselves at Carlton during the time Treaty was being made with those Indians and asked to be paid but they were told that their part of the country was not fit for agricultural purposes and therefore could not get anything.”¹¹⁵ According to reports, they presented themselves again when treaty payments were being made the next year at Sturgeon Lake, but were once again refused. As industrial exploitation, particularly lumbering and commercial fishing in the region north of Prince Albert began to take hold throughout the decade following the treaty, the issue became more and more important. The bands who clearly occupied the region, but were not part of the treaty, complained directly to the surveyor who had come into the region to define timber limits. He replied that the bands were occupying territory that had been ceded in 1876.¹¹⁶ These bands continuously petitioned the Crown for treaty throughout the 1880s.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ LAC, RG 10 Vol. 3601, file 1754, John Sinclair, Prince Albert, to D.H. Macdowall, M.P. Ottawa. 26 May 1891.

¹¹⁶ As noted in P. Goode, “A Historical/Cultural/Natural Resource Study of the Prince Albert Model Forest Region,” p. 3.8. See also LAC RG 10 Vol. 3601, file 1754, John Sinclair to D.H. Macdowall, 26 May 1891.

¹¹⁷ P. Goode, “Historical/Cultural/Natural Resource Study,” p. 3.8.

The comment “not fit for agricultural purposes” was telling, particularly when compared with the experiences of the Sturgeon Lake band members who clearly had already made some transition toward including farming as part of their forest edge lifestyle. Certainly the purpose and intent of all signatories to Treaty Six was to replace the bison lifestyle with farming. For those Wood Cree bands for whom bison was not central but merely one aspect of a mixed boreal way of life, the substitution of agriculture for bison was perhaps not as traumatic as it was for some of the Plains Cree bands. Indeed, other forest lifeways – fishing, trapping, and hunting – were virtually unaffected. The kind of agriculture practiced by (and expected of) the north Prince Albert bands was small-scale, transitional, and supplementary to other ways of making a living. They pursued a highly diversified way of life that moved seasonally throughout the region, accessing game, fish, birds, and trapping, supplemented by farming instead of the bison hunt. The Plains Cree were deprived of the bison hunt and essentially confined to their reserves where they required extensive government assistance. The Wood Cree of the north Prince Albert region largely continued to pursue a diversified way of life drawn from the forest edge environment.

Edge Symbolism: The Lobstick Tree

In 1911, settlers Percy Carter and Pat O’Hea pushed north from Prince Albert following an “old Indian trail.” When they arrived in township 52, they found a remarkable cultural artifact: a large white spruce remade into a lobstick tree, standing in lonely splendor in a small open meadow. According to the Paddockwood history book, Percy Carter located his homestead on the quarter containing the meadow and the lobstick.¹¹⁸ The history book reported: “It is remembered that in the vicinity of that tree, Indians traveling north to hunt and fish, would pitch their camp and rest for a while.” Presumably, those traveling from the north to the south, or east-west, would also use the site.¹¹⁹

Culturally modified trees were common in Nordic countries, among them the lobstick tree of the Canadian boreal forest. For the Cree of the western interior, a lobstick was created by

¹¹⁸ Effie Elliott and Muriel McGowan, “Links with the Past,” *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 2.

¹¹⁹ “Links with the Past,” *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 2. The question then becomes, north from where? North from Prince Albert? There are two other possibilities: both the James Smith and John Smith Reserves are on or near the south branch of the Saskatchewan River, very near the Forks. Perhaps the travelers were from these bands, traveling north to Candle Lake.

There has been very little historical work done on the lobstick tree or its usage and meaning in the Cree, Dene, or Inuit world. The word has become popular for naming restaurants, bars, motels, golf courses and golf tournaments. One exception is Gwen Hayball, “Historic Lobsticks and Others,” *Canadian Geographical Journal* Vol. 86, no. 2 (1973): pp. 62-66.

shaping a tall and conspicuous white spruce or pine tree by ‘lopping’ most of its branches off. The top would then bush out in a tuft, becoming easy to spot. These trees were used in many ways, both practical and symbolic. They were signposts, chosen and designed to mark trails, portages, and pathways through the boreal forest, berry patches or hunting grounds. They were also cultural markers, used to designate meeting places, burial grounds, ceremonial sites, and even personal totems or to honour a guest or visitor.¹²⁰

European explorer Alexander Mackenzie was one of the first Europeans to comment on lobstick trees, and in his assessment they “denoted the immediate abode of the natives and probably served for signals to direct each other to their respective winter quarters.”¹²¹ Warburton Pike, an Englishman who traveled into the far northern tundra in search of big game, also commented on these markers: “many an appointment has been kept at [lobsticks],” suggesting their role as a convenient meeting point that everyone can find.¹²² Throughout prehistory, Cree groups from both the forest and the plain would meet at selected places throughout the western interior to engage in economic, social, and cultural exchange. Archaeologist David Meyer called them “ingathering centers,” and has identified several along the Saskatchewan River, including the Forks.¹²³ The lobstick tree would have been easy to spot for anyone who traveled overland from the Forks using the trail identified by William Pink. If it was indeed the site of an aboriginal ‘ingathering’ center,¹²⁴ then it made sense that the tree stood alone in lonely splendor in a meadow. Any surrounding bush and scrub would have long been used for teepee poles and

¹²⁰ Caroline Podruchny in her book *Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006) documents the physical creation and the symbolic meaning of the lobstick tree within the voyageur world. In that version, all the branches would be removed (except the very topmost), leaving a tall tree often called a ‘maypole.’ Sometimes the bark would be removed, leaving a smooth surface to cut names, dates, or symbols, or simply to shoot patterns into the tree with gunshots and powder. A particularly gay version was created for Frances Simpson, wife of the HBC governor, with feathers and streamers for decoration. A lobstick, according to Podruchny, was created to honour a new leader, particularly if it was his first trip into the northland. To repay the voyageurs for the honour of making a maypole/lobstick tree, the leader was expected to offer presents, or at least a generous measure of rum. It seems clear that in the voyageur world, the trees were created for their symbolic meaning – and, of course, to have a party. For the Cree, Hayball noted in particular their practicality, as signposts.

¹²¹ As quoted in Gwen Hayball, “Historic Lobsticks,” p. 64.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹²³ David Meyer and Paul Thistle, “Saskatchewan River Rendezvous Centers and Trading Posts: Continuity in a Cree Social Geography,” *Ethnohistory* Vol. 42, no. 3 (1995): pp. 403-444. Meyer later rejected the term ‘rendezvous center’ for the term ‘ingathering centers.’ See Meyer and Russell, “The Land and Lives of the Pegogamaw Crees,” p. 234.

¹²⁴ It was probably not a major ingathering center, or it would have been mentioned in local fur trade journals. However, I have not read the Fort a la Corne journals; it may be mentioned there, as the trail to Candle Lake would have passed nearby.

firewood. The meadow may have been kept open through First Nations traditional practice of burning to encourage new growth around the lobster, attracting deer, moose, elk and bison.¹²⁵



Mrs. Mary McLean and Elsie Hicks having a picnic under the "lobstick" tree.

Figure 15. Picnic under the lobster tree, c. 1915. *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 3.

¹²⁵ See Lewis and Ferguson, "Yards, Corridors, and Mosaics." The farmer who owned the land throughout the 1970s and 1980s would often find bison skulls when cultivating. Walter Mendiuk, personal communication to Merle McGowan (later Massie), c. 1985. Burned grass regenerates into new growth up to three weeks faster than natural grass.

The lobstick tree was in a meadow not far from Bigelow Lake and just a few miles from Cheal (Egg) Lake, both well-known as nesting grounds for duck and geese. In addition, the Garden River was nearby. These small watercourses were home to a variety of waterfowl much prized by the Cree, who may have used the site to participate in water-related ceremonial celebrations. The Goose Dance, for example, was popular among the Swampy Cree who lived to the east, from Fort a la Corne to Cumberland House.¹²⁶ It would have been a good place for Cree from Candle Lake, Sturgeon Lake, Christopher and Emma Lakes, the North Saskatchewan River and Fort a la Corne, to meet. A water-based culture would explain the amazing dugout canoe find at Christopher Creek.¹²⁷ The fact that the lobstick was still in existence in 1911 shows the remarkable cultural depth of the north Prince Albert Aboriginal presence. The life span of a white spruce is well over 200 and up to 300 years. The trees are considered mature at between seventy-five and 100 years. In photographs in the Paddockwood history book, the tree was fully mature and very large by the time homesteaders pushed north. It is possible that the lobstick may have been created as much as 100 years or more before Euro-Canadian settlement in 1911, indicating a temporally-deep use of the north Prince Albert region as home, meeting place, and ceremonial site.¹²⁸

Conclusion

The north Prince Albert region sits on the ecological edge between the boreal forest and the open plains. Such edges displayed characteristics of both parent ecosystems and promoted species richness and diversity. The mixedwood boreal forest hosted a wide variety of flora and fauna on a transitional land base that offered both poor and good soil, extensive water resources, and timber. First Nations bands adapted and used the north Prince Albert region in all seasons of the year. Resource exploitation and interaction involved accessing fish,¹²⁹ waterfowl, large and small game, plants, medicine, and fuel. Both plains and boreal bands used the ecological edge. Boreal-adapted bands stayed within the forest, moving to the edge to access plains resources

¹²⁶ See in particular David Meyer, *The Red Earth Crees, 1860-1960* (Canadian Ethnology Service, Paper No. 100, 1985) and “Waterfowl in Cree Ritual—The Goose Dance.” In *Proceedings of the Second Congress of the Canadian Ethnology Society*, Vol. 2. Jim Freedman and Jerome H. Barkow, eds. (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, Mercury Series, Ethnology Service Paper 28, 1975), pp. 433-449.

¹²⁷ A modern comparison would be the Catholic Church steeple at Albertville, on the same open plain not far from where the lobstick tree would have been. This steeple can easily be seen on a clear day from the crest of the Waskesiu Upland near Christopher Lake. The lobstick would have been similarly easy to find.

¹²⁸ If the exact location of the tree could be identified, an archaeological investigation of the site might produce more information on cultural use.

¹²⁹ Net-Setting on Sturgeon River, and Carp River are excellent toponymic examples of local exploitation practices.

(particularly bison) to supplement their lifestyle. Their pattern represented ecological adaptation and resilience. Plains bands would access the forest as a temporary refuge from bison depletion and harsh winter conditions, or spring and summer domestic exploitation. Cultural practices of trading and exchange between the two ecologically-adapted groups reinforced resilience for both groups. Boreal resources and goods were traded or exchanged with plains bands, and cultural knowledge such as hunting practices allowed a measure of adaptation. Boreal transportation methods of birchbark canoe, dugout, dog and snowshoe met Plains Cree horse culture at the ecological edge.

The lobster tree near the Garden River in the north Prince Albert region was an important symbolic marker of “home.” It was perhaps one of several homes for bands adapted to a boreal or plains seasonal exploitation cycle, but nonetheless, the lobster tree marked a significant place within the Cree world boundary. The lobster foreshadowed the formalization and entrenchment of reserve communities within the north Prince Albert region. Whereas Plains bands could no longer migrate to the region to exploit the resources, boreal bands had a long history of using forest edge resources in a cycle that moved from deep within the forest to the forest edge and beyond. As the bison died away, boreal forest bands exchanged the seasonal bison hunt for farming produce to enhance the diversified boreal lifecycle. Plains bands, deprived of bison and confined to reserve land, were dependent on assistance. Nonetheless, many Plains bands sought a measure of ecological resilience through their choice of reserve land. Plains bands often chose reserve land in forested or scrub environments where game, timber, and other forest resources could be found, even though such land was often less fit for agriculture. A forested environment, for Plains Cree bands, represented a place of refuge. First Nations bands from both the plains and the forest used the forest edge as a place of refuge, diversification and resilience, and cultural adaptation and exchange. Successive cultures, built on the edge environment of the forest fringe, developed similar edge characteristics.

Chapter Two: North Prince Albert and the Resource Bonanza

Government explorer, botanist, and Dominion Field Naturalist John Macoun published *Manitoba and the Great North-West: The Field for Investment; The Home of the Emigrant* in 1882.¹ His intention – and his job – was to entice people to immigrate to the vast new Canadian territory in the western interior. He was fighting an uphill battle. Regarded by many as either a vast wasteland of endless prairie desert, or as a wilderness full of wild game and Indians, western settlement had been disappointing. Macoun’s publication set out to correct erroneous assumptions, including the supposed dearth of timber for fuel and building supplies. On the contrary, Macoun countered, timber could be found across the west, although he admitted that “wood is scarce in the southern part of the prairie section.” Settlers who chose to settle in northern districts, though, “will never experience a scarcity.” Investors, too, were encouraged to migrate west. “North of Prince Albert,” Macoun trumpeted, “are fine forests which are easy of access,” and valuable for timber barons. Prophesying profits, Macoun urged exploitation of the north’s physical resources to serve the needs of settlers on the prairies.² Macoun’s words signaled a significant acceleration of landscape usage in the north Prince Albert region.

Resource exploitation on a commercial scale by non-Native newcomers was built on the belief that the treeless open plains could be filled with immigrants *because* there were significant timber resources in the forested regions. Industrialization reinforced and accelerated the binary conception of the western interior, contrasting the tree-less south with the boreal, tree-full north. The north Prince Albert region was culturally remade by newcomers as a site of natural resource extraction to serve the prairie market. Of these, the primary product was timber, with a lesser but still important aquatic landscape that supported rising commercial fisheries. Prince Albert remained a major center of the fur industry, and retained its important north-south links to the communities of the Churchill River system. The binary contrasts of north/south were stitched together by the overland freighters who moved goods in both directions. Prince Albert developed its motto as the “Gateway to the North,” the point at which the resources of one region would be channeled to flow into the demands of the other, the pivot point of the two solitudes of resource boreal north and settled agricultural south in the western interior.

¹ John Macoun, *Manitoba and the Great North-West: The Field for Investment; The Home of the Emigrant* (Guelph: World Publishing Company, 1882).

² Macoun, p. 294-323.

Yet, the region retained resonances of older models. Resource extraction forced the dominion to make treaty with forest edge First Nations. First Nations groups knew that both the prairie *and* the forest provided resources necessary to thrive. Boreal bands moved through and across the forest edge to access prairie resources, particularly bison. When the bison disappeared, the Sturgeon Lake band turned to agriculture to supplement forest resources. The Montreal Lake and Lac La Ronge bands adopted a similar pattern. They requested a farming reserve within the north Prince Albert region, knowing that agriculture had the potential to complement their boreal resource base, just as the bison had once done. Their efforts to secure an agricultural land base brought conflict with commercial timber interests. In time, band members combined farm and forest resources with off-reserve employment in the logging camps. The mix of agriculture and forest resources – as embraced by local First Nations groups – enticed newcomers to the region. Although commercial development focused on the contrast between boreal north and prairie south, those who lived in the north Prince Albert landscape fused the two cultures.

Early Growth of Prince Albert Settlement

In 1875, Captain William Moore brought eight wagons and fifteen carts overland from Winnipeg to Prince Albert. Loaded with millstones, a steam boiler, saws, equipment and tools, the wagons and carts brought the commercial dream of mechanized milling to Prince Albert. Capable of both grinding grain and sawing logs into lumber, Captain Moore's mill ushered in what writer and archivist Brock Silversides suggested has been the most enduring and identifiable business in the Prince Albert region – the commercial lumber industry.³ During the mill's first full year of operation in 1879, Moore took 9000 logs out of the area where the Little Red River meets the North Saskatchewan. By the time Dominion Field Naturalist John Macoun exhorted investors to develop the resources north of Prince Albert, there was a growing movement to exploit the trees. Captain Moore's lumber and grist mill was the opening gambit in

³ Captain Moore first came to Prince Albert in 1874 on a hunting expedition. Snowbound by an early fall, Moore headed for the Prince Albert settlement to secure flour and other supplies. Farmers in the area had successful crops, and grain was available. Flour, though, was scarce and prohibitively expensive. The wind-powered grist mill, dependent on the vagaries of nature, had not been in operation for some time. Moore immediately saw the potential for a steam-powered flour mill. The wealth of timber across the river led Moore to purchase a dual-purpose mill, to both grind wheat into flour and to cut logs into lumber. The story of Captain Moore and his mill can be pieced together through the reminiscences of John Smith and Thomas Miller in *The Voice of the People: Reminiscences of Prince Albert Settlement's Early Citizens* (Prince Albert: Prince Albert Historical Society, 1985), p. 57-59 and 117-124. For the north Prince Albert forest industry, see Bill Smiley, "The Forest Industry in Prince Albert to 1918," (Prince Albert Historical Society, unpublished manuscripts, updated in 2007 by Carmen Bellehumeur and the 2007 Tour Guide Team); and Brock Silversides, *Gateway to the North: A Pictorial History of Prince Albert* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989), p. 12.

what became several ambitious and expansive commercial enterprises that led the early development of the north Prince Albert region.

Long known as The Good Wintering Place, Prince Albert drew intensive and permanent immigration in the mid-nineteenth century. On the south bank of the river, fields of grain and potatoes could be found, planted by ‘les autres Métis’ or English/Scotch half-breed farmers.⁴ These English-speaking Presbyterian and Anglican settlers were drawn by ties of kinship and chain migration to build on the agricultural success of James Isbister, the first farmer in the Prince Albert region. Prince Albert historian Gary Abrams callously dismissed Isbister as merely a “half-breed trapper and former interpreter for the Hudson’s Bay Company,” who, with his Indian wife, “lived on” the land that later became River Lot 62.⁵ Such a dismissal was unwarranted. Historian Paget Code’s recent investigation of the English and Scotch Métis of the Prince Albert settlement revealed a more complex and interesting background. Isbister’s settlement was not only deliberate, but anchored a nucleus of migration out of the Red River area following the transfer of Rupert’s Land to Canada in 1870.⁶ Within a few years, the population exceeded 300 English-speaking settlers “whose houses extended 14 miles along the south bank of the North Saskatchewan,” historian Gary Abrams admitted, in classic river-lot formation.⁷ Captain Moore embedded himself in this fledgling farming community and ground the local grain. Soon, his commercial interest turned to exploiting the white spruce and jack pine forest on the north bank of the river.

The Lumber Industry

Until Captain Moore brought in the steam-powered boiler and sawmill, the majority of timber in the Prince Albert region was cut for domestic use (fuelwood or building logs) or to power the steamboats traveling up and down the Saskatchewan. The Hudson’s Bay Company

⁴ For a recent overview of these settlers, see Paget Code, “Les Autres Metis,” unpublished MA thesis, History, University of Saskatchewan, 2006.

⁵ Gary Abrams, *Prince Albert: The First Century 1866-1966* (Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1966), p. 1-2. Reverend James Nisbet established a Presbyterian mission at Isbister’s Settlement in 1866. Nisbet is popularly referred to as the ‘father’ of Prince Albert. Although he gave the settlement its name, he was not the first to settle there.

⁶ For an overview of the uprising of 1869-1870 that led to extensive Métis migration westward, particularly into the Saskatchewan River region, see Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), Chapter Six “The Métis and the Red River Settlement 1844-70,” pgs. 92-128. For comprehensive studies of the Métis communities in Red River see Gerhard Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Métis in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) and Frits Pannekoek, *A Snug Little Flock: The Social Origins of the Riel Resistance of 1869-70* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer Publishing, 1991); see also Code, “Les Autres Métis,” p. 33-38.

⁷ Abrams, *Prince Albert*, p. 16. See also SAB, Department of the Interior, Dominion Lands Branch, file 753, Rev. James Nisbet to Lt.-Gov. Alexander Morris, 25 January 1874.

completely overhauled its transportation operations in 1871. Steamboats operating on the Saskatchewan represented “capital-intensive transportation technologies” intent on replacing the labour-intensive (and expensive) boat and cart brigades.⁸ Historian James Mochoruk noted that increased local opportunities such as day labour, farming, and work in fishing, cordwood and lumber camps were drawing Aboriginal and mixed-blood labourers away from traditional fur trade employment opportunities. In response, the HBC completely reinvented their inland water transportation system, constructing a railway portage at Grand Rapids (at the north end of Lake Winnipeg) and purchasing or building large-capacity steamboats to haul goods into the Saskatchewan interior.



Figure 16. Steamboat on the Saskatchewan. SAB S-4156.

When the Hudson’s Bay Company sold their interests to the dominion in 1870, they retained one-twentieth of the arable land in the western interior. Without settlers, that land capital was useless. The new transportation policy reflected a shift in purpose for the HBC from a primarily fur trading monopoly to a retail sales and land development company. Passengers, travelers and settlers bound for the western interior would not only purchase passage on the steamboats, but possibly buy land for settlement from the HBC, and provide a new market for HBC goods after they had settled.⁹

⁸ Jim Mochoruk, *Formidable Heritage: Manitoba’s North and the Cost of Development 1870 to 1930* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2004), p. 20.

⁹ Mochoruk, *Formidable Heritage*, p. 20.

The steamboats (which First Nations people often called ‘fire canoes’) required massive loads of cordwood. Demand for cordwood escalated. Wood simply to power engines did not have to be merchantable timber. Any scrub wood, from jack pine to poplar, would do. Men with little capital could operate successful cordwood berths (which were much cheaper to lease than timber berths) on or near the Saskatchewan River to fill this niche market.¹⁰ Extra loads of wood could easily be marketed in the growing commercial center at Prince Albert.

Although steamboats created a burgeoning market for cordwood, the commercial timber industry in the Prince Albert region remained tied to local requirements. The Prince Albert settlement was growing: there were 831 people recorded in the district by 1878, and three years later there were four times that number.¹¹ From the start, Captain Moore’s mill was busy. The phenomenal local growth at Prince Albert showcased the transition from one way of life to another: as the editor of the *Saskatchewan Herald* noted in 1878, “the buffalo hunter is rapidly giving way to the farmer, and the Indian trader to the merchant.”¹² Historian G.F.G. Stanley explained that until the rail line was built across the southern plains, “there were [virtually] no settlements south of the North Saskatchewan valley. Not only were the northern settlements deemed more suitable for agriculture, but they were also more accessible,” in large part because of water transport.¹³ Agricultural settlers and industrial entrepreneurs from Manitoba, Ontario and Britain began to join the mixed-blood community at Prince Albert in larger numbers.

The growing commercial center at Prince Albert experienced a land and real estate boom throughout the early 1880s. The Land Office opened in 1881, welcoming settlers traveling overland on the Carleton Trail or disembarking from steamboats. The railway boom, however, was taking hold. Prince Albert believed that it would soon be joined to all points east and south through this important technological advance. The original proposed route of the Canadian Pacific Railway went through the North Saskatchewan River valley, and Prince Albert was

¹⁰ Bob Ivanochko wrote a short overview of steamboats in Saskatchewan for *The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan* <http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/steamboats.html> accessed October 1, 2009. See also T. Barris, *Fire Canoe: Prairie Steamboat Days Revisited*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977); Bruce Peel *Steamboats on the Saskatchewan*. (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1972); Ballantine, Archie. "Recollections and Reminiscences: Steamboating on the Saskatchewan." *Saskatchewan History* Vol. 18, no. 3 (1965): 99-114.

¹¹ Abrams, p. 18.

¹² As noted in G.F.G. Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), chapter nine, Growth of Settlement in the North West, footnote 17, quoting *The Saskatchewan Herald* 16 December 1878.

¹³ Stanley, p. 184.

assured a bright future.¹⁴ When the railway went west across the open plains, Prince Albert was, at first, not worried. A major branch line had been proposed, and several railway charters had been issued to criss-cross through the Prince Albert region.¹⁵

For many, the Saskatchewan River valley was the logical hub of the western interior. In 1882, the North West Territories were divided into the provisional districts of Assiniboia, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Athabasca.¹⁶ Prince Albert became the center of a provisional district that stretched from the north shore of Lake Winnipeg in the east to the District of Alberta in the west, south to Assiniboia and north to 55 degrees north latitude.¹⁷ Anchored by the Saskatchewan River and tied to Winnipeg by steamboat, much of the traffic into and out of the west passed through the district. In newspaper articles and pamphlets from local boosters, the Saskatchewan identity stood in sharp contrast to the provisional district of Assiniboia to the south, contrasting flat, dry, treeless prairie with rich agricultural lands and the wealth of forest resources. Encouraged to immigrate to Prince Albert, entrepreneurs engaged in commercial investments, such as the burgeoning timber industry. By 1883, though, the boom was over. Prince Albert faced the dual prospect of no railroad in the near future combined with a national economic depression that pushed booster and boom activity to the wayside.¹⁸

Grievances in the Saskatchewan district from First Nations, Métis, and white settlers grew throughout 1883 and 1884 until it reached a conflagration in the spring of 1885.¹⁹ The 1885 rebellion took place primarily within Saskatchewan, and further cemented a particular

¹⁴ For an overview of the decision to re-route the CPR, and its effects on the development of the western interior, see G.F.G. Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada*; W.A. Waiser, "A Willing Scapegoat: John Macoun and the Route of the CPR," *Prairie Forum* Vol. 10, no. 1 (1985): pp. 65-81.

¹⁵ Abrams claimed that it "caused no apprehension when the CPR built steadily westward towards Moose Jaw in 1881, or when the southern route was definitely fixed upon in May, 1882." His sources for this assertion were the local newspapers, notably the *Prince Albert Times and Saskatchewan Review*. Abrams, p. 45.

¹⁶ See Norman Fergus Black, *A History of Saskatchewan and the Old North West* (Regina: North West Historical Company, 1913), p. 227. Black claimed the provisional district divisions were for the benefit of the Post Office Department, but clearly the Saskatchewan district was based largely on the major basin of the North and South Saskatchewan including the Forks and the Lower Saskatchewan. See http://www.canadiangeographic.ca/mapping/historical_maps.

¹⁷ For the evolution of the boundaries, see <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/evolution.boundaries>. By 1887, the Saskatchewan district boasted its own Member of Parliament at Ottawa.

¹⁸ Abrams, p. 48-49.

¹⁹ The 1885 Rebellion has been examined in depth by many historians. In particular, see G.F.G. Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada*; Bob Beal and R.C. Macleod, *Prairie Fire* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985); Thomas Flanagan, *1885 Reconsidered: Riel and the Rebellion* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1983); Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser, *Loyal Till Death: Indians in the Northwest Rebellion* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1997). For Prince Albert's contribution and reaction, see Abrams, chapter six and Code, "Les Autres Metis."

‘Saskatchewan’ identity.²⁰ Although no battles were fought in the vicinity, Prince Albert settlers and businessmen were caught up in the rebellion. Sentiment ran high. In the aftermath, the town stagnated. Buffeted by a severe agricultural depression and struggling to deal with land grievances in the wake of the rebellion, the population dropped dramatically. To revive the fledgling community and jumpstart its economic potential for resource development (particularly timber), commercial interests pushed for a railway. The Qu’Appelle, Long Lake and Saskatchewan line, linking Regina with Prince Albert, was finished in late 1890.²¹

²⁰ An example of the Saskatchewan territorial identity is found in an indignant editorial from Prince Albert when a Toronto newspaper, recounting an exhibition of grains from the west, mentions only three of the four major western districts: Manitoba, Assiniboia, and Alberta. Saskatchewan, the indignant editorial contended, was worthy of pride and filled with righteous anger at being left out. See Prince Albert *Advocate*, 10 September 1900, “Saskatchewan again gets the go-by.” There has been little academic work done as yet on the pre-1905 regional identities surrounding these provisional districts, which at one time were thought to be precursors to provincial borders.

²¹ SAB R-A4535. Photograph by William James of the first train to Prince Albert, piled high with cordwood to feed the steam engine. See Brock Silversides, *Gateway to the North*, p. 42.

Treaty Six Adhesion

On a cold day in February 1889, at the north end of Montreal Lake, Wood Cree families from Lac La Ronge and Montreal Lake met with representatives of the Crown to sign an adhesion to Treaty Six.²² After years of agitation and repeated requests from the boreal bands in the north Prince Albert region, the Crown finally agreed to offer treaty. The adhesion attempted to sort out a dual problem. On the one hand, there were bands with homes in the north Prince Albert region, within the boundaries of Treaty Six, whom had not been offered treaty. The Crown had a responsibility to ensure that ongoing treaty negotiations corresponded to human use of the landscape.

The second problem emanated from the commercial interests of investors in Prince Albert. Surveyors, scouting and marking out timber berths, realized that the boundaries of Treaty Six did not entirely cover the potential area of forest resources that the Prince Albert community believed was within their economic sphere. In short, the land ceded by treaty for settlement and development did not correspond to the boundaries of the Saskatchewan District of the North West Territory, or Prince Albert's intended commercial empire. Officials at Indian Affairs explained: "The object in getting the surrender just now is in order that the Govt might legally dispose of the lumber in that Section permits to cut which have in some cases already been issued..."²³ In effect, the government was initiating a somewhat frantic and belated effort to legally rectify a serious error – they were issuing timber permits on land that had possibly not yet been ceded by treaty. The new northern boundary of the adhesion approximated the northern boundary of the Saskatchewan district. The adhesion reflected, primarily, Prince Albert's intentions regarding the resources of the north Prince Albert region.

²² Although I refer to these bands as Woods Cree, the Lac La Ronge band is sometimes referred to as "Rocky Cree." Vicky Roberts explained the difference in her edited collection of oral histories, *Historical Events of the Woodland Cree*, (Lac La Ronge Indian Band, 1997). Lac La Ronge sits on a divide between the mixed wood boreal forest to the south and the Canadian Shield on the north: "one side consists mainly of thick bush and beaches, but not so many islands. The other consists mainly of rock, much of the ground is covered by bedrock, and the lakes of these parts have many islands and reefs," p. 4.

The signing of the Adhesion and its ramifications have been given a brief overview by Bill Waiser in *Saskatchewan's Playground: A History of Prince Albert National Park* (Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishing, 1989); by Arthur J. Ray, Jim Miller, and Frank Tough in *Bounty and Benevolence: A Documentary History of Saskatchewan Treaties* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Native and Northern Series no. 23, 2000); Joan Champ in her essay "Difficult to Make Hay": Early Attempt at Agriculture on the Montreal Lake Indian Reserve," *Saskatchewan History* Vol. 47, no. 1 (Spring 1995): pp. 27-35; and Peter Goode, Joan Champ, and Leslie Amundson, "The Montreal Lake Region: Its History and Geography," (Prince Albert Model Forest Association: Sentar Consultants, 1996).

²³ LAC, RG 10 Volume 3601 File 1754 Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Edgar Dewdney to Indian Commissioner Hayter Reed, 6 December 1888.

The adhesion brought the Lac la Ronge and Montreal Lake bands into close contact with Prince Albert through subsequent treaty payments and proximity.²⁴ In many ways, the adhesion carried on a traditional use of the north Prince Albert landscape as the southern edge of the boreal bands' territory. The adhesion to Treaty Six kept the original terms of the treaty but ceded additional land. Treaty Six, designed primarily to promote agricultural development, has generally been described as incompatible with boreal forest bands. The overtly agricultural terms of Treaty Six included grants of agricultural implements, stock, harness, and instruction in their use. As historical consultant Joan Champ noted, "these provisions hardly recognized the reality of the Woodland Cree's environment and lifestyle," tied to the hunting, fishing, and trapping cycle.²⁵

Treaty Six did, in fact, recognize the importance of the hunting and gathering economy. As in Treaties Four and Five, Treaty Six promised a yearly allowance of ammunition for hunting and twine for nets.²⁶ The proportion of ammunition or twine could be determined by each band. Plains bands, unaccustomed to extensive fishing, would likely have requested a larger proportion of ammunition. Wood Cree bands such as the Montreal Lake or Lac La Ronge bands often requested twine, which would be considered as a form of 'ammunition' for the procurement of fish. The ammunition and twine clause of the treaty was listed before either the 'medicine chest' or agricultural promises, indicating its importance.

Boreal forest bands were also aware of farming practices. Certainly the Sturgeon Lake band had farming experience and had land under cultivation at the time of the original treaty in 1876. By 1889 when the northerly bands signed the adhesion, agricultural pursuits were common. The Reverend Archdeacon John Mackay noted extensive potato plots cultivated by boreal forest families, often on lakeshores or islands where good land could be found. Oral

²⁴ Treaties were a combination of written and signed, and verbal agreements, between specific bands with elected or selected chiefs and councilors, and the Crown. It is unclear, however, if the family units living beside the various small and large lakes in the north Prince Albert region defined themselves as 'bands' prior to treaty, or if they coalesced as two groups with the intention of signing treaty. The oral history of the Lac La Ronge band suggests that the latter may have been the case. Vicky Roberts, granddaughter of the first chief, James Roberts who signed as Chief of the Lac La Ronge band at the adhesion in 1889, suggested "they agreed that he would make a good leader and elected him as Chief in 1888, by this time these people had heard rumours of treaty signings and wanted someone to represent them, a spokesperson who would speak on their behalf ...this is when bands were formed." There is no suggestion that the Wood Cree of this region had a chief prior to the need to have one to negotiate and sign treaty, which is perhaps indicative of the small, family-oriented style of life within the boreal forest, as opposed to the much larger political bands of the open plains. See Vicky Roberts, "Biography of Chief James Roberts, Signatory of Treaty No. 6 Adhesion," in *Historical Events of the Woodland Cree*, p. 6-7.

²⁵ Champ, "Difficult to Make Hay," p. 27.

²⁶ Treaty Four stipulated \$750 annually; Treaty Six \$1500. See <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca> Historic Treaties.

histories from boreal band members indicate a long history of gardening, particularly at the site of their winter trapping camps. Potatoes and other root vegetables would be planted in the spring, just as families were packing up to take their furs out to market, to fish, and to engage in summer work. These plots would be ready for harvest in the fall when the families returned to their trapping camps, and would supplement the family's food requirements over the winter.²⁷ The northern bands, although centered on and adapted to a boreal environment based on resource harvesting, incorporated agricultural pursuits in their seasonal lifestyle and cultural worldview.

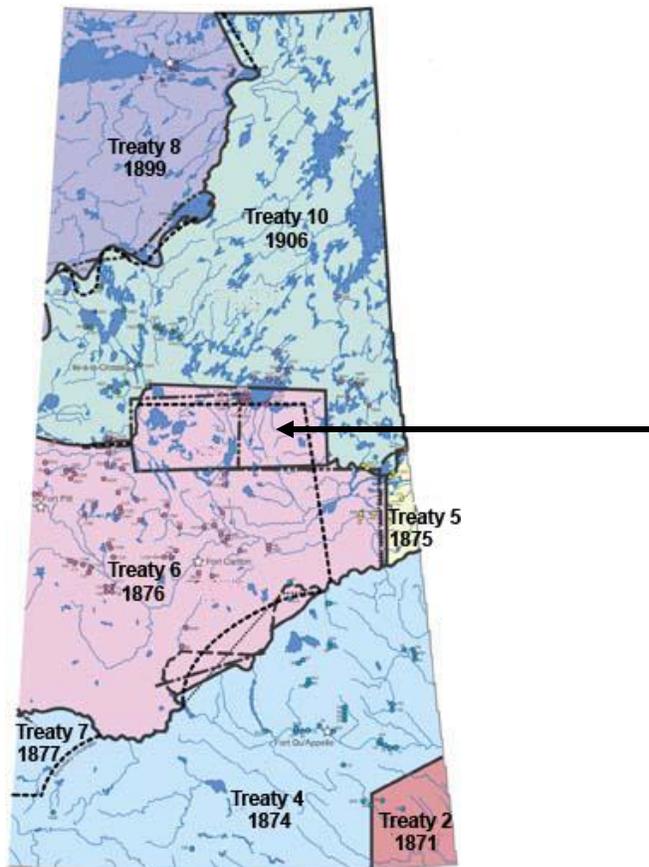


Figure 18. Treaty Six Adhesion area (arrow). Saskatchewan Treaty Map. Office of the Treaty Commissioner. http://www.otc.ca/ABOUT_TREATIES/Treaty_Map/

²⁷ Interview, John Charles with Joe L. Roberts, 14 April 1997; Vicky Roberts with Walter M. Charles, 18 August 1996. *Historical Events of the Woodland Cree*, p. 15 and 21. Archdeacon Mackay, when he was the missionary responsible for Stanley Mission in the 1860s and 1870s, operated a fifteen-acre farm, an experiment in northern farming and gardening that had a significant impact on the local bands. Mackay's agricultural prowess resonated through the oral histories. Interestingly, the oral history of the Woodland Cree of La Ronge remember Archdeacon Mackay as a Scot: "he came from Scotland his name was Archdeacon Mackay and apparently had been involved in agriculture in his home land." In fact, Mackay was of mixed blood descent, the son and grandson of Hudson's Bay Company employees, born at Moose Factory and educated at Red River. He was one of the original 'native' priests ordained by the Anglican Church intent on creating an indigenous clergy in Rupert's Land. See Vicky Roberts, "Biography of Chief James Roberts," *Historical Events of the Woodland Cree*, p. 8; Bill Waiser, "J.A. Mackay," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*.

To a certain extent, the two boreal bands went through a fairly rapid sea change in 1889-1890, moving from a mixed boreal-based lifestyle to one that anticipated greater importance for agriculture. This sea change was expressed in the adhesion and annuity documents. During the 1889 negotiations, the chiefs of both bands rejected the agricultural components of Treaty Six. Chief James Roberts commented that “there are some things offered to them by the Government, such as cattle, which would be no use to them, and they would like to get something instead.” The adhesion documents also reported, “William Charles would not like to receive any cattle just now, as they have no means of looking after them at present.”²⁸ A boreal lifestyle built on seasonal movements for hunting, fishing and trapping was not compatible with the sedentary occupation required for cattle farming.

Benjamin Bird, a senior councilor with the Montreal Lake band, was clearly not afraid to contradict his chief. He stated that the Montreal Lake band “would like to have an Instructor to look after them and teach them the mode of farming.”²⁹ The men retired to their tents to discuss the treaty terms and come to a compromise regarding the agricultural components of the treaty.

When they came back, James Roberts of La Ronge revised his requests. The band asked for a bull, three cows, an ox and pigs, as well as “three ploughs for the whole Band, (small light ones that can be carried in canoes),” along with a few scythes to cut hay for the animals. In lieu of what the government would still owe them, they requested the balance in ammunition and twine for nets. The chief went on to note, “In regard to a horse, harness, and wagon, which would be of no use to him, he would like to get something as an equivalent...1 tent, 1 stove, and 4 sets of dog harness.”³⁰ Roberts presented an interesting compromise between the needs of a boreal band and the agricultural promise held out in Treaty Six. He clearly believed that agricultural implements had a place (after some convincing), and could be wielded with some success. What was different was the scale of their usefulness in relation to other ways to support band members. He created a fine balance between current needs, such as extra twine and ammunition, as well as dog harness, with future needs and possibilities, including scythes and plows.

²⁸ LAC RG 10 Volume 3601 File 1754, Notes taken by Mr. McNeil, of the Indian Department, at the treaty made at the north end of Montreal Lake, on 11 February 1889.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

William Charles of Montreal Lake refrained from making specific requests, pending further discussion with his band.³¹ The horse, wagon and harness due, as chief, in the treaty stipulations were accepted. Charles knew that a rude cart trail existed between the settlement at Prince Albert and the south end of Red Deer Lake (Waskesiu), forming an overland link between Prince Albert and the northern territory. A wagon (which could be outfitted with sleighs) could be a useful vehicle. When the government agents brought the first treaty payment, agricultural implements and supplies, such as hay forks, grubbing hoes and garden seeds, were included. Both bands also requested timber implements such as pit saws, logging chains, axes, and assorted tools.³² Given the forested boreal environment, the possibility of earning income from lumber, and the need to build permanent residences and a school on the reserve, these items were practical and necessary.³³

The fact remained that the northern boreal environment was not conducive to large-scale agricultural practices. Soil capable of growing hay, potatoes and other root vegetables and crops could be found only in scattered pockets. The most effective way to pursue agriculture would be to develop a reserve on land capable of supporting more extensive cultivation, in the Saskatchewan River basin. For boreal bands already well-adapted to seasonal use of the edge environment, substituting farming for bison hunting changed only one component of the mixed boreal lifestyle.

Little Red River Reserve

After signing the Treaty Six adhesion, the Lac La Ronge and Montreal Lake bands debated the location of their home reserves. After much discussion, the Montreal Lake band settled on a site at the south end of Montreal Lake and proceeded to build a new settlement.³⁴ The Lac La Ronge band, however, consisted of multiple-site family-occupied units and had no clear consensus on where to build a single community reserve. Even the surveyor, A.W. Ponton, could not see the benefit of creating a single community. The band, Ponton noted, wanted to set aside *all* the holdings they occupied along the lake “on which they have their houses and buildings.” If the government tried to force them to live on just one reserve, “they will probably

³¹ Three ploughs and twenty scythes were ordered for his band, possibly under the assumption that he would want them in the same quantities and for the same reasons that James Roberts did.

³² See *LAC RG 10 Vol. 3601 File 1754*, “Montreal Lake band articles to be delivered next spring,” late fall 1889 (after fall annuity payment had been given and requests received).

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ For a brief overview of these discussions, which included the divided opinion that the band should settle at Red Deer (Waskesiu) Lake, see Waiser, *Saskatchewan's Playground*, chapter one.

have a strong inclination to return to their [scattered] holdings where they have been accustomed to fish and hunt.”³⁵

If the La Ronge band was undecided as to which of its northern occupations it wanted surveyed as the main reserve ‘in common,’ they did know one thing: “all agree that they would, looking to the future, like some of their land surveyed near the Saskatchewan.”³⁶ Requesting legal rights not only to land at Lac La Ronge, but also closer to the Saskatchewan River, strongly reflected the traditional boreal band use of the ecological edge found near Prince Albert. Archdeacon Mackay, interpreter at the adhesion in 1889, was a driving force behind this request. Mackay spoke with the first chief, James Roberts, and argued, “Someday, all this land will be taken, the fish and moose will disappear and you will be destitute. Farms will never disappear but will grow in value.”³⁷ Mackay suggested that the band should request some of their reserve land as agricultural land within the Saskatchewan River watershed, many miles south of the band’s boreal home.³⁸

After Archdeacon Mackay spoke with Chief James Roberts, the oral history suggested that “The Chief thought about this for a long time. One day he told his wife to make three pairs of moccasins for his long journey. His wife got the help of some other ladies and next morning she gave him his moccasins.” Roberts began the long journey south by dog sled. Along the way, he spoke with Chief William Charles at Montreal Lake. Together, the two of them went to Prince Albert where “Archdeacon Mackay interpreted and the two chiefs gave their case to the government officials.”³⁹

The Department, upon receiving the request, acted surprisingly quickly. Hayter Reed, Indian Commissioner of the North-West Territories, wrote to the Superintendent General at Ottawa: “The Indians of the Lac la Ronge Band desire to have the portion of their Reserve, asked

³⁵ LAC RG 10 Volume 7766, File 1754. Hayter Reed to the Department of the Interior, 25 January 1890.

³⁶ LAC RG 10 Volume 7766, File 27107-4 Pt. 2, Annuity Payment report, October 1890.

³⁷ “History of Little Red River,” as told by Angus Merasty. *Saskatchewan Indian*, Vol. 3, No. 6, June 1972: p. 10. <http://collections.ic.gc.ca/saskindians/a72jun10.htm>. Accessed 28 June 2006.

³⁸ Those who attended residential schools or Emmanuel College in Prince Albert (where Mackay worked for many years as a senior staff member, Cree catechist, translator, and teacher) worked in school farms and gardens. Residential schools used farms and gardens both to supply food and to give the students exposure and experience in farm and garden practices. For an excellent overview of residential schools that strives to present a balanced picture, see J.R. Miller, *Shingwauk’s Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). Historical opinion is divided on the role of garden and farm work in residential schools. Some researchers regard work on gardens and farms little different than child labour and slavery. An unexpected perspective comes from the oral histories from the Lac La Ronge Wood Cree, who allow that exposure to farming practices led to the call for and development of a farm reserve.

³⁹ Merasty, “History of Little Red River Reserve.”

for on the Saskatchewan, near the Sturgeon Lake Reserve, and subject to the Department's approval, I propose to select and define some land on the South side of some good lake, in that locality, which will act as a barrier against frost, and to afford protection to crops."⁴⁰ Reed asked surveyor Ponton to investigate, to see if there was a tract of suitable land in a large enough plot available.

Ponton recommended a tract of land just to the north of the William Twatt (Sturgeon Lake) reserve:

The country is undulating and generally covered with a scattered growth of small poplar. Fire has passed over the country in the past, and left large quantities of dry wood, and open areas ready for the plough. A creek or small river flowing South would cross the Eastern portion, and it is said to be well stocked with jackfish and suckers. Small game such as rabbits, ducks, and prairie chicken are still numerous, and the Band would be located on the direct roads to such fishing lakes as Red Deer Lake, Bittern Lake and others, which they could easily visit at the proper seasons to lay in a supply of fish.⁴¹

Ponton's recommendation illuminated several important points. Although the agricultural capability of the land was paramount, other aspects of its landscape and location were significant. It was near the Sturgeon Lake band, as the boreal bands requested to be near other Wood Cree, with whom they could "meet, and make friends with."⁴² The location was also convenient for the Indian Department, which assumed that "proximity to the Sturgeon Lake reserve would enable instruction and oversight to be given comparatively easily."⁴³ Firewood supply, fish and small game were important. Road access connected the boreal bands with their other seasonal hunting and fishing lands.⁴⁴ The location seemed ideally suited to all purposes.

Problems arose immediately. The Department of the Interior rejected the reserve selection, as "the whole of these lands ...are timber berths, and are under license to Messrs.

⁴⁰ LAC RG 10 Volume 7766, File 27107-4 Pt. 2. Hayter Reed to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 5 November 1890.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Quoted in letter, Hayter Reed to the Deputy of the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs in Ottawa, 4 June 1891.

⁴² Hilliard Merasty, interview with Vicky Roberts, March 14, 1997. *Historical Events of the Woodland Cree*, p. 11. Certainly the Montreal Lake band knew the Sturgeon Lake band quite well, meeting often at the Narrows of Red Deer Lake where there were free traders and trading posts.

⁴³ LAC RG 10 Volume 7766, File 27107-4 Pt. 2. Quoted in letter, Hayter Reed to the Deputy of the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs in Ottawa, 4 June 1891.

⁴⁴ The Montreal Lake band also remembered agitating for a farming reserve near Sturgeon Lake in this period. P. Goode, "Historical/Cultural/Natural Resource Study," p. 3.22.

Moore and MacDowall, of Prince Albert, consequently they are not available.”⁴⁵ Both the Department of the Interior and the Indian Department agreed and anticipated that the desired reserve would, or could, be good farming land. Its primary role, in the meantime, was to service the burgeoning lumber industry at Prince Albert. The Department of Indian Affairs was unable to overrule the Department of the Interior, and there the matter rested.

According to oral tradition, the chiefs of both Montreal Lake and La Ronge continued to press their case for a farming reserve during annual treaty annuity payments. They also made trips to Prince Albert to remind the Indian Department of the bands’ continued interest in the lands in question. At no point did the bands try to acquire any other suitable lands.⁴⁶ In 1894, Indian agent W. Sibbald reported: “the older men say that this farming land is for the rising generation to fall back upon when the hunt will no longer provide a living for them, which is a state they all believe is fast approaching.”⁴⁷ The bands were essentially using the arguments of Archdeacon Mackay and cleverly playing into the ideals of the Indian Department, for whom agriculture was the epitome of modernization and civilization.⁴⁸ The agricultural argument gave the bands leverage in their fight to own a southern reserve in addition to their northern territories. The boreal forest, with its poor leached grey soil, extensive bogs and muskegs, and many rocky outcrops was – except in small, isolated pockets – not suitable for agriculture. If the Indian Department wished the boreal bands to embrace farming, it was imperative to provide land with better soil and growing capability.

The continued and determined lobbying pushed the Indian Department to renew its efforts. Hayter Reed reviewed the whole situation in 1895. The Montreal Lake band, in particular, was suffering from reduced fishing and hunting resources and some were inclined to move south. The farming instructor at Sturgeon Lake would be nearby to give advice, something

⁴⁵ LAC RG 10 Volume 7766, File 27107-4 Pt. 2. Department of the Interior to L. Vankoughnet, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 13 July 1891.

⁴⁶ There is some indication in the Department correspondence that the Indian Department considered other land, but none as acceptable as the land recommended by Surveyor Ponton.

⁴⁷ LAC RG 10 Volume 3815 File 56622, W. Sibbald, Duck Lake Agency, to the Indian Commissioner, 29 September 1894. The Montreal Lake reserve had already been surveyed. The Montreal band would have to give up an equal portion of the home reserve in order to have any part of the Little Red River reserve. Sibbald reported that the Montreal Lake band understood this condition. The La Ronge band, being much larger, was entitled to a proportionately larger share of reserve land. Not all of that land had yet been surveyed.

⁴⁸ The best overview of the idealized role of agriculture and its intended effect on First Nations was put forward by Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy*. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990). Carter’s work reflected a Plains Indian and government dynamic.

the boreal bands specifically, and repeatedly, requested.⁴⁹ Reed once again asked the Department of the Interior if the timber berths on these lands had been renewed or if the lands were available. He even hoped that it might be “possible in the meantime to allow the Indians to occupy the lands in whole or in part, conditionally upon their respecting the right of Messrs. Moore and Macdowall to the timber covered in their license.”⁵⁰ Confusion followed the request. At first, it seemed the land title was clear. Then, railway and timber interests interfered. Distance (and conflicting records) between Ottawa and the land office at Prince Albert held up the process.⁵¹

In March 1897, Reverend T. Clarke, minister serving at Montreal Lake, sent an alarming communication to Hayter Reed. He suggested that it was well known that the Department was trying to secure a reserve around Little Red River. Some Métis were planning to move onto the land and demand squatter’s rights, Clarke contended. Clarke warned that no hay permits should be issued for the area, for fear of leaving nothing for the incoming bands. He also recommended that a crop of potatoes and other vegetables be sown, to have ready for band members planning to move.⁵² The threat of squatters, real or imagined, seemed to galvanize the Indian Department to again ask the Department of the Interior to reserve these lands.⁵³ This time, all outside interests were swept aside. A.W. Ponton completed the survey of Little Red River Indian Reserve No. 106A in the spring of 1897 and by 1900, an order-in-council officially created the reserve held in common for the bands at Montreal Lake and Lac la Ronge.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ LAC RG 10 Volume 7766 File 27107-4 Pt. 2. Memorandum for the Information of the Minister re Farming Lands in the Saskatchewan District wanted for Indians of the Montreal Lake and Lac la Ronge Bands. Hayter Reed, 23 February 1895. In this document, Reed went on to note: “It is only a portion of the Montreal Lake Band that would move in the near future.”

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Hayter Reed to A.R. Burgess, Deputy Minister of the Interior, Ottawa, 5 March 1895.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Department of the Interior to Hayter Reed, 11 March 1895. In fact, the reply stated that not only was the land in question clear, but that the block could be expanded up to one mile west, two miles north, and that no land had yet been disposed of to the east, leaving the Department of Indian Affairs with a free hand to choose a large area. However, this communication was soon rescinded, as timber berths, railway lands and school sections still held precedence, and nothing was done in 1896. A subsequent letter was sent from the Department of the Interior stating that small portions of that tract were in fact under timber berth to George Burn, James Sanderson, and J. Shannon. Hayter Reed then replied that the Department of Indian Affairs “could depend upon securing them at the expiration of the respective license under which they are held.” Interior to Indian Department, 4 April 1896; Indian Department to Interior, 11 April 1896. Some of the requested land was reserved as Qu’Appelle, Long Lake and Saskatchewan Railway grant lands. Interior to Indian Department, 11 May 1896.

⁵² *Ibid.*, T. Clarke to Indian Department, 23 February 1897.

⁵³ Department of the Interior requested a survey to conform with township lines. The survey avoided the railway lands, addressed the school lands, and challenged the one remaining timber berth licensee to give up the berth, arguing that there was no merchantable timber on that land anyway.

⁵⁴ The reserve was created by order-in-council on 6 January, 1900 as “reserved for the ‘Montreal Lake’ and ‘Lac La Ronge’ Indians,” without specific reference to the proportion of the land owned by each band. The vague wording led to confusion, conflicts, and problems. The Montreal Lake band lived closer to Prince Albert, so they were

Although the boreal bands may have requested this southern reserve, and the Indian Department approved and supported it, it was not universally lauded. J. Lestock Reid, a surveyor for the Indian Department, member of the treaty negotiations at Treaty Five, and Prince Albert's member of the legislative assembly of the North-West Territories, objected to the new reserve.⁵⁵ He sent a strongly-worded letter to T.O. Davis, Member of Parliament for Prince Albert in 1897. After sheepishly admitting that the land in question was right where Reid pastured his herd of cattle, he went on: "in the name of all that is holy why bring the Wood Indians from their hunting grounds where they are making a living to try and make farmers of them and starvation." Reid claimed it was better to give them reserve land "where they have been accustomed to live and have lived for generations. I know, no one better, that these Wood Indians will never make a living not even an attempt at farming. If they are brought down it becomes permanent starvation and perhaps worse and help to swell the catalogue of Almighty Voices."⁵⁶ What Reid did not fully appreciate was that the boreal bands would continue to have their northern reserves. They were asking for, in essence, a legally-recognized base of land in *both* boreal and forest edge environments. Ensuring access to agriculture, the bands were essentially broadening their subsistence base and spreading their efforts to ensure a greater measure of resilience.

The creation of a farming reserve at Little Red River was the culmination of several factors. Archdeacon John Mackay and the determined efforts of the chiefs and councilors of the two bands pushed the idea through. The inclusion of two boreal-based bands into Treaty Six forced the Indian Department to consider environment and agricultural capability of the landscape. As a result, the Indian Department supported the boreal bands' requests for a portion of treaty land entitlement to be ceded at the forest edge in the Saskatchewan basin, on land that could be used for agriculture. The adhesion also reflected and echoed a longer history of life at the boreal forest edge, one that included not only the resources of the forest (game, fish, berries,

routinely sent requests, documents, and sometimes money that was not always forwarded or shared with the Lac la Ronge band. The reserve was eventually formally split in 1948, and today there are two band offices operating on the reserve.

⁵⁵ LAC RG 10 Volume 7766 File 27107-4 Pt.2, J. Lestock Reid to T.O. Davis, MP, no date. For a biography of Reid, see *Who's Who in Western Canada: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Living Men and Women of Western Canada*, Volume 1. C. W. Parker, editor. (Vancouver: Canadian Press Association, 1911). See also Ray, Miller, and Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence*, p. 127.

⁵⁶ Reid also challenged the ideals of civilization. "I am told that this idea of moving the Indians comes from the missionary branch the clergymen want them where they will be civilized – well I charge they will make better Christians in the woods ...and for less trouble to the Government." The reference to Almighty Voice reflected another significant problem that arose in the Prince Albert region in 1897. A young Cree, Almighty Voice, was the object of a massive manhunt and was eventually shot to death in a bluff south of Prince Albert in 1897.

plants, and wood), but a balance of life that included the products of the open plains. That product was once the bison. With the demise of the bison, the seasonal round and cultural interest shifted to include agriculture, both stock-raising and grain farming, to supplement – and possibly, but not necessarily, replace – the returns of the boreal forest. Only fifteen miles from the lobstick tree, the Little Red River Reserve was not a new idea or a radical experiment, but a continuation of long-held practice at the forest edge.

The *Dominion Lands Act* and the Lumber Industry

Following the completion of the Qu'Appelle, Long Lake and Saskatchewan rail link from Regina to Prince Albert in 1890-1891, the settlement became the center of a massive lumber industry that dominated the region and its economy for thirty years. The initial forays of Captain Moore expanded almost exponentially throughout the decade of the 1890s, as prairie settlement began to surge.⁵⁷ Large-scale agricultural transition and redevelopment of the prairies sparked a massive demand for lumber, to build houses, barns, fences, schools, churches, hospitals, and towns.⁵⁸ Between 1901 and 1911, Saskatchewan's population exploded, from just over 90,000 people in 1901 to nearly half a million in 1911.⁵⁹ To satisfy the need for new buildings to shelter the burgeoning population, the lumber industry grew dramatically. It was cheaper for new residents to purchase lumber from mills at Prince Albert than to have it shipped to the prairies from British Columbia, Ontario, or the Maritimes.⁶⁰ Prince Albert became the commercial point

⁵⁷ White settlers, as soon as they could afford it, chose to build wood houses instead of tents or sod dwellings. These houses – whether crude log shacks or clapboard dwellings – represented a significant change in land usage. Tents were appropriate for First Nations groups accustomed to traveling through the landscape, using a broad definition of 'home' that included many camping areas that provided seasonal and yearly needs. For an interesting overview of the context of 'home' for First Nations versus non-First Nations in the western interior, see Tolly Bradford, "'Home Away From Home' Old Swan, James Bird and the Edmonton District, 1795-1815," *Prairie Forum*, Vol. 29, no. 1 (2004): pp. 25-44. Boreal forest families would often construct wood cabins in late fall and early winter, when a family unit chose a particular place to inhabit for a longer term, such as the winter fur season on the trapline.

⁵⁸ The division of the land into quarter sections, to be purchased or homesteaded and therefore 'owned,' was a sedentary transition. Families were expected to build habitable, permanent dwellings on their land in order to satisfy homestead requirements. As homesteads became farms, owners were expected (at least in a social and cultural sense) to upgrade their first crude log or sod shacks and build dwellings with commercial grade sawn lumber. For a discussion of the prairie market, and how it spawned its own 'hinterland' around Prince George with prairie capital, labour and a market, see Gordon Hak, "Prairie Capital, Prairie markets and Prairie Labour: The Forest Industry in the Prince George District, British Columbia, 1910-1930," *Prairie Forum* Vol. 14, no. 11 (1989): pp. 9-22.

⁵⁹ Alan Anderson, "Population Trends," *Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2005), p. 706.

⁶⁰ The commercial lumber industry at Prince Albert marketed and sold its wood directly to growing prairie towns. Prior to the opening of the north-south railway link, Captain Moore and his partner had agents at Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan and Battleford selling their lumber. This lumber was shipped along the North Saskatchewan River. See "The Advantages of the Prince Albert District, Saskatchewan, are unsurpassed for rich lands," CIHM 30434, p. 63. The Qu'Appelle, Long Lake and Saskatchewan Railway did not commence full commercial operations until

of connection between prairie and forest, exploiting a cultural contrast that dramatized treeless prairie residents needing northern forested resources.

One of the most important documents relating to the economic development of timber was the *Dominion Lands Act*. Primarily studied by those interested in the transformation of the open plains to 160-acre homestead quarter sections, based on the square township survey,⁶¹ the *Dominion Lands Act* also set out the rules and regulations surrounding timber limits. Farmers on the open plains required access not only to cropland through their homestead, but to timber, to cut for much-needed fuel and building material. Economic historian Chester Martin argued: “the Canadian prairies have seldom been associated with forest growth of any form. The scarcity of forests by comparison with British Columbia or New Brunswick has made the limited reserves of timber correspondingly valuable for the lumbermen and the prairie settler.”⁶² The earliest Dominion Lands statute (amended on an almost yearly basis), stipulated that all timber lands – land capable of producing lumber, and all products of timber including fuel and bark – would be reserved against settlement. Forest lands of any kind were not to be opened for agricultural use. Perhaps this stipulation accounts for much of the push to put settlers onto prairie land – forest

1891. The opening of the railway in 1890-1891, despite exorbitantly high freight rates, led to the development of regional lumber yards in southern prairie towns. For instance, the Sanderson mill at Prince Albert operated lumber yards at Hague, Rosthern and Vonda by the mid-1890s. As well, lumber continued to be shipped using the river. According to Prince Albert historian and archivist Bill Smiley, “each spring, Indian crews would arrive at the Sanderson Mill and construct scows twenty to thirty feet long, load them with lumber and move them... they would be further loaded with flour and other freight. The scows were floated down the river to their various destinations where they would be unloaded, dismantled and the timber used.” Bill Smiley, “The Forest Industry and Prince Albert to 1918,” updated by Carmen Bellhumeur, 2007, p. 8. These examples show the connection between commercial sawmills and regional markets and transportation links, both the older water highways and the new rail lines: the water network of the Saskatchewan reinforced the ‘Saskatchewan district’ identity, while the rail networks created an inter-district market with Assiniboia, Manitoba and Alberta. As railroads continued to be built, water transportation stopped and the industry found itself increasingly relying on the railways.

⁶¹ For a full investigation of the *Dominion Lands Act*, see Chester Martin, *‘Dominion Lands’ Policy* (Canadian Frontiers of Settlement series, Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1938). There is no doubt that the most important aspect of the Dominion Lands Policy was homesteading, which affected thousands of people in the western interior over a sixty year period of intense immigration, until the land was ceded to the three western provincial governments in 1930. For the Prince Albert region, however, the timber policies were perhaps equally as important.

⁶² Martin, *‘Dominion Lands,’* p. 182-183. The “Islands” or “Belts” of trees (islands were large copses or groves; belts were areas of continuous trees, as along a lakeshore or stream) were to be divided into 10 to 20 acre woodlots, “as to benefit the greatest possible number of settlers and to prevent petty monopoly ... as far as the extent of wood land in the township may permit, one wood lot to each quarter section farm” of this precious resource. Specific references to the terms of the Dominion Lands Act 1872 can be found in *Statutes of Canada*, http://books.google.ca/books?id=hEiuAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA56&lpg=PA56&dq=Dominion+lands+act+1872&source=bl&ots=UQbq0qMXF1&sig=J9n8m_HMoT0o4yzFVWsiyvXIk80&hl=en&ei=wiq9SoubMYKl8AbW_Zi4AQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=9#v=onepage&q=Dominion%20lands%20act%201872&f=false, accessed September 25, 2009. Woodlots never materialized on a broad scale on the prairie. Settlers whose homesteads contained no timber or brush were allowed to cut, by permit, sufficient quantities for their needs on unoccupied Crown lands. Additional quantities were cut for sale or barter for a nominal fee.

land in the western interior was considered too valuable to be parceled out to individual settlers.⁶³

The primary quarry for the lumber barons was white spruce.⁶⁴ The north Prince Albert region contained some of the largest stands of white spruce in the western interior. Trees could range in size up to thirty inches – over two feet – in diameter at the base (stump – hence the term ‘stumpage fees’). The *Dominion Lands Act* of 1883 specified that all merchantable trees with an outside bark diameter of twenty-five centimeters (ten inches) or more at the stump *should* be harvested from a timber limit. Within these parameters, millions of board feet of lumber were harvested from timber berths north and east of Prince Albert between 1890 and 1919.⁶⁵ The Act maintained that no timber under these dimensions should be cut; in practice, many more trees were cut than merely those to be sold. Smaller trees were sacrificed for roads and trails (which were extensive), to open clearings, build and heat the bush camps, to make cant hook levers and other poles, to open loading and docking areas, and to build dams and bridges.

⁶³ Only those quarter sections that contained less than twenty-five acres of ‘merchantable’ timber could be homesteaded. This stipulation left considerable latitude in interpretation. Soon after the creation of Little Red River reserve, land was surveyed for homestead development in what became the Shellbrook country west of Prince Albert on the north side of the North Saskatchewan River. Although forested, soil surveys had shown exceptionally rich soil in the area. Dominion Lands regulations regarding farming in forested landscapes were overruled. In time, the success of the Shellbrook settlement proved that the forested land north of the river would eventually become good farmland.

⁶⁴ Black spruce and jackpine were smaller than white spruce. They were sometimes cut by special permit for railway ties or fenceposts. See Saskatchewan, Department of Agriculture pamphlet, “Saskatchewan,” 1909, p. 59-62.

⁶⁵ One board foot is the volume of a one-foot length (twelve inches) of a ‘standard’ board, twelve inches wide by one inch thick. As a result, one board foot measures 144 cubic inches. In this way, the number of board feet could be computed easily if lumber was neatly stacked, no matter what dimensions the wood was cut to.



Figure 19. Sturgeon Lake Lumber Company, north of Prince Albert, circa 1906. *Glenbow Archives NA-303-239.*

Timber reserves were divided and leased to spread the resource evenly and utilize it more effectively. Dominion policy issued two kinds of licenses to cut timber: timber license berths (often called ‘limits’) and timber permits. Timber permits covered small, generally one-square-mile areas and were issued to settlers who could use their own portable saw-mills to cut lumber, shingles, and lathes primarily for their own use. Any excess they wished to sell was charged, over and above the rental fee for the permit. Settlers could also apply for permits to cut cordwood, fence rails and posts, telegraph poles and railway ties. With the exception of shingles (of which ninety-six percent were cut by small timber permit holders), the amount of timber cut for any purpose by permit was dwarfed by the output of the larger timber berths.⁶⁶

Timber berths issued on a commercial scale carried specific stipulations. The Dominion Lands Office ‘cruised’ or surveyed timber limits into blocks of up to twenty-five square miles.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ For an extensive investigation of timber policy in the western provinces, see Martin, *“Dominion Lands” Policy*, chapter 11 “Swamp Lands, Grazing, Timber, Mining and Water Rights.”

⁶⁷ Some of the earliest maps of the north Prince Albert region were made by timber cruisers, defining and describing timber berths. See the collection of the Prince Albert Historical Society and the Department of the Interior files at the Saskatchewan Archives Board.

These limits were offered for lease by public tender, with an upset price established by the Minister of the Interior. Those who leased timber berths had to offer a cash price for the berth, annual ground rent of between two to five dollars per square mile, plus dues on the cut timber which ranged (depending on what the timber was made into) from fifty cents per thousand board feet for sawn lumber, to one-and-a-half cents per railway tie, to fifteen cents per cord for cordwood. Each license was negotiated individually, and few timber limits operated under exactly the same terms (and those terms changed from year to year as the *Dominion Lands Act* was reviewed and changed).⁶⁸ Licenses were renewable each year on April 30, provided there was merchantable timber still available on the berth and all regulations and dues had been satisfactorily met and paid.

Licensees were required to erect one or more sawmills capable of cutting at least one thousand board feet of lumber per day for every two point five miles of limit within their lease. Monthly returns of dues (which required accurate bookkeeping of everything made and sold) were lodged at the Lands Office. Preservation of seed trees and immature trees, disposal of slash and debris, and an agreement to fund half the cost of fire protection were other key provisions of the Act and the timber berth contracts.⁶⁹ The lease holder had to comply with all of the above conditions, or the lease would be withdrawn. These rules, which still allowed a timber limit to operate at a hefty profit, were further strengthened by the easy terms accorded to the building of dams, slides, piers or booms, and the free use of and access to rivers and lakes, for the purpose of moving the logs. Perhaps because of the easy terms, with no adequate provisions for reforestation and inadequate staff to enforce regulations, the north Prince Albert region experienced extensive forest exploitation to the point of degradation.

⁶⁸ It is difficult to follow the many variations and changes in the *Dominion Lands Act* as it related to timber, and my figures may not correspond with others if the sources were from different years. Chester Martin's detailed study focused primarily on homestead land. There has not been a comprehensive review of the timber aspects of the Dominion Lands Act, to my knowledge.

⁶⁹ Martin, "*Dominion Lands*" Policy, chapter 11.



Figure 20. Cookshack on the River Drive, Red Deer River. Prince Albert photographer T.H. Chambury circa 1908. SAB photograph S-B 11901.



Figure 21. Prince Albert Lumber Company, Glenbow Archives. NA-1044-66.

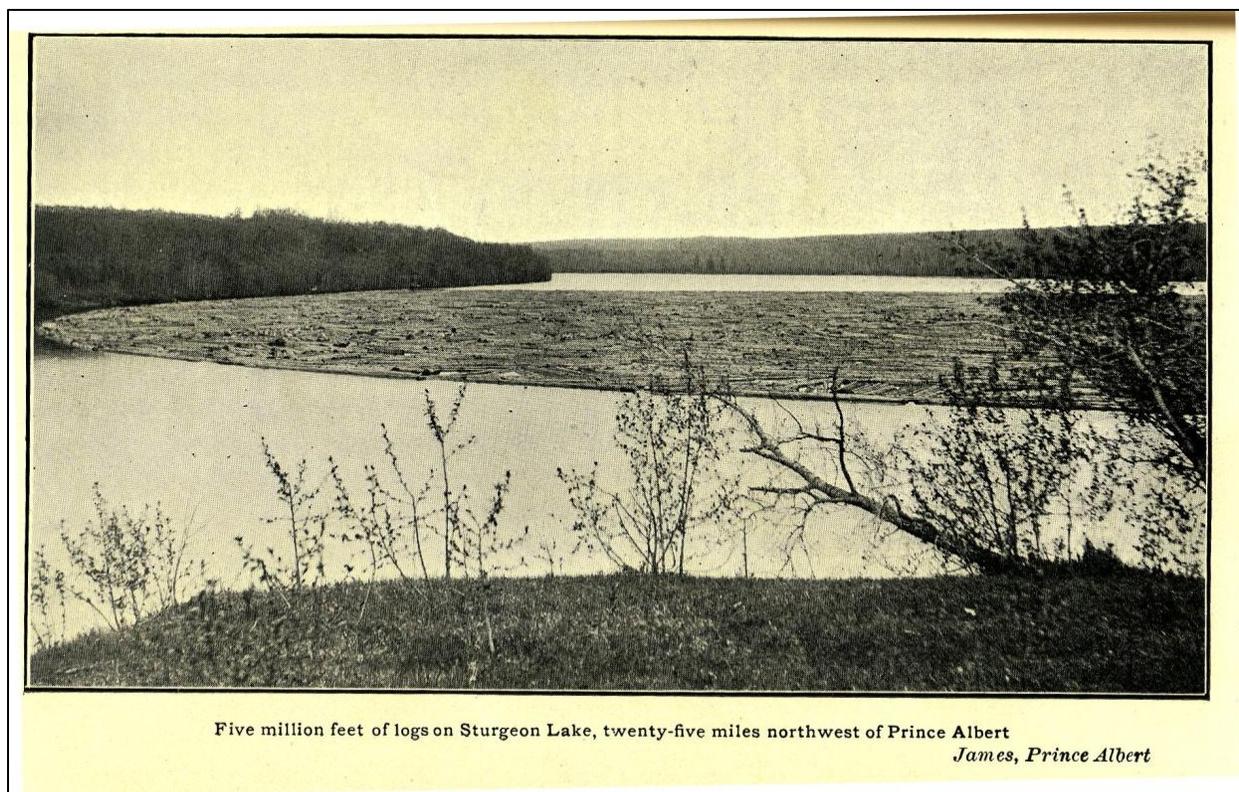


Figure 22. From Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture, *Saskatchewan*, 1909.

The Forest-Farm Nexus

As the lumber industry developed, there was a direct correlation between physical changes in the landscape, the growth of a labour class in Prince Albert, and regional farming.⁷⁰ Once a sawmill owner purchased a timber berth, he required equipment and men to operate the berth and cut the logs. Depending on the size of the mill, the corresponding bush camps might be small or large. Men were hired in the late fall for the camps. Homesteaders from both the prairies and the local area would congregate in Prince Albert after harvest to sign on to the lumber

⁷⁰ Several generations of Canadian historians have benefited from the work of A.R.M. Lower on the forest frontier of eastern Canada. Two of his works, *Settlement and the Forest Frontier in Eastern Canada* (Canadian Frontiers of Settlement Series, Volume IX, Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, 1936), and *The North American Assault on the Canadian Forest* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1938) offered his analysis of the peculiar interrelation between lumbering and farming, as well as the early development of the lumber industry. There remain limitations. The first book dealt only with eastern Canada; the second added the Maritimes and British Columbia, but neither offered an analysis of forestry in the western interior. To date there has been only one general article that examined the forest industry on the prairies, generally with an eye to the future, not the past. See Michael Howlett, "The Forest Industry on the Prairies: Opportunities and Constraints for Future Development," *Prairie Forum* Vol. 14, no. 2 (1989): pp. 233-257.

camps.⁷¹ Homesteading, or creating a viable farm, was a capital-intensive activity. Until a farm had enough land cleared and enough equipment available to farm the land intensively, it turned little profit. In the meantime, homesteaders required ready cash to make up the shortfall from their operations, purchase groceries and supplies, or to expand. Working in the lumber camps throughout the winter was an acceptable option, as wages were good and board was provided.⁷² Wage labour was an important, but too often underestimated, part of the homestead process.⁷³

In 1907, the short-lived Edmonton-based magazine *The Wheat Belt Review* wrote an in-depth story on the lumber interests operating in Prince Albert. It invested a moral overtone to the connection between farming and lumbering: “The farm hand or rancher that has nothing to do in the winter months may, if he will, shoulder his axe and find steady employment in the logging camps until spring. There is no reason why any laboring man should be idle in winter. If he is idle it is because he does not care to work. There is no other town that can be called to mind that has the logging and the farming industry so closely allied.”⁷⁴ Working in a lumber camp, in part to earn cash to build up a homestead, provided an important connection between farming and labour in the north Prince Albert region.⁷⁵

⁷¹ See SAB, A 241, manuscript division, Reminiscences of Skuli Bachman. Bachman worked in the Saskatchewan logging industry throughout the early part of the twentieth century.

⁷² A.R.M. Lower described the farmer-lumberjack relationship in New Brunswick in the 1800s quite differently. There, a farm would have contained a belt or copse of merchantable timber and the ideal was for a farmer to farm in the summer and work his timber for profit in the winter, marrying the two on a small scale. This ideal was seldom reached, according to Lower, who scoffed at small scale efforts and dismissed the whole enterprise as bringing “much harm to the province as a whole.” Lower, *Settlement and the Forest Frontier in Eastern Canada*, p. 33. In contrast, he argued, the land in Ontario was more clearly defined as *either* forest or farmland, and the lumber barons of Ottawa, for example, were held by Lower to be of a higher sort. There, the relationship between farming and lumbering mirrored what happened in the north Prince Albert region, where small farms entered the cut over areas of forest, supplying labour and goods to the camps.

⁷³ Historian Donald Avery rightly acknowledged the relationship between farming and wage labour. See *Dangerous Foreigners: European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, The Canadian Social History Series, 1979). The *Prince Albert Daily Herald* reported in 1916: “March 21st. Men from Bush Arrive. Between a hundred and fifty and two hundred men arrived in the city last evening and this morning from two of the Prince Albert Lumber Co’s camps at Shoal Creek, which have been broken up. It is expected that the other camps of the company will break up about the middle of next week, releasing more than a thousand more men. Some of these men will continue with the company working at the mill here during the summer months, while a large number will go back to the farms and homesteads.”

⁷⁴ *University of Saskatchewan Archives*. Davis Family fonds, f373. *The Wheat Belt Review*, Canada’s Most Popular Magazine, Milford B. Martin Owner and Publisher, November 1907.

⁷⁵ There is no way to know the proportion of logging camp men who were from the prairie as opposed to those who took nearby homesteads, once the land began to be opened for homestead settlement. Avery documented a broad regional pattern that took in coal mining in the prairie south of Alberta and Assiniboia in the fall, logging in the mountains (and on the northern edge of the prairie) throughout the winter, and homesteading in the late spring through harvest.

There was a direct connection between the forest industry and local farms in the north Prince Albert region. A high proportion of the food for the camps was supplied by local homesteaders, especially after 1906 when homesteaders were starting to push into the area across the river. The community of Alingly was formed in large part because of its situation on the lumber and freighting road, and its homesteaders both engaged to work and sold produce to the companies. Hay and oats for horses, milk and cream, eggs, poultry, pork and beef were often taken and traded directly to the camps, providing a local cash market.⁷⁶

Commercialization of the Lumber Industry

Between 1890 and 1910, the north Prince Albert lumber industry grew exponentially.⁷⁷ After the turn of the century, the smaller mills – such as the Sanderson, Telford Brothers, and Cowan mills – were dwarfed by two commercial enterprises, the Sturgeon Lake Lumber Company, which began operations in 1902, and the Prince Albert Lumber Company, opened by a syndicate of American businessmen in 1905.⁷⁸ With the coming of the second railway to Prince

⁷⁶ Richard Dice, in his unpublished memoir of the Alingly district (Prince Albert Historical Society manuscript 705b, “Alingly and Surrounding Districts”), said of the residents of Alingly: “The Sturgeon Lake Lumber Company at what is now Deer Ridge and the Prince Albert Lumber Company at Shoal Creek and the Soup Kitchen was a splendid market for baled hay, oats, dressed beef, and potatoes in the settlement’s early days. On arrival at the camp we would unload, put our horses or bulls into their huge barns, feed them the company’s oats and hay, free of charge; eat at the company’s well filled table, put up with the men in the bunk house and leave the next morning with a good fat check in our pockets...many thousands of dollars found their way into this settlement in the early days which was its real start financially.”

⁷⁷ An advance group of men would be sent in early fall, to cut the roads and build the camp, construct buildings, and make repairs to existing camps as well as to take in supplies. A full complement of men would arrive after freeze-up, generally in late November. Work in the lumber camp was divided. There were key people within the camp who stayed near the base, including cooks, a company storekeeper, the blacksmith, a handyman, and the barn boss and teamster/freighters, along with various helpers. There were several men and horses employed on the tank crew, whose job was to spread water on the trails to make ice roads. Ice roads were an integral part of logging, and the reason why logging was always a winter, not a summer activity. Once an ice road was made, heavy loads could be hauled far more easily by regular teams of two or four horses. The majority of bush workers were those directly involved in cutting and moving the timber, including saw gangs, loading gangs, skidders (who pulled the logs out of the bush to loading areas), and sleigh drivers. The saw gang consisted of six men. An undercutter notched the trees to control the fall direction, two men sawed, one cut off the limbs, and two swampers cut roads and piled the brush out of the way. From there, logs were skidded to a loading point and loaded onto sleighs, often twelve feet high and as much as seventeen feet wide at the top. A loading crew consisted of eight men. From there, sleighs were taken by four-horse team to the collecting point, where they were piled in anticipation of the spring log drives. On any given day, there might be several crews of saw gangs, skidders, sleigh drivers and loaders working in the limit. Logging would go on all winter, in all conditions but the worst of blizzards, although Sundays were always a day of rest, and Saturday night the usual night for extra revelry, from dances to all-night card games or visits to nearby camps. See SAB MS W586. W.W. Whelan, “Echoes of Yesterday,” unpublished manuscript. (There is a copy of this manuscript in the Prince Albert Historical Society archives). See also Lumby Production Company, “Giants of their Time: The Lumberjack,” movie c. 1970s; Bill Smiley, “The Forest Industry in Prince Albert,” SAB Skuli Bachman manuscript; and Allan Kennedy, “Reminiscences of a Lumberjack,” *Saskatchewan History* Vol. 19, no. 1 (1966): pp. 24-34.

⁷⁸ This company was able to purchase many of the timber berths owned by the Telford mill, which burned in the spring of 1905. See *The Saskatchewan Times*, 20 April 1905 “Saw-Mill Destroyed by Fire. Telford’s Lumber Mill

Albert, the Canadian Northern in 1906, the logging industry continued to grow. The peak year of the combined mill output at Prince Albert was 1909, when over fifty million board feet of lumber worth over one million dollars was exported.⁷⁹ The two larger, more commercialized firms led not only to intensification and expansion, but also industrialization. In the 1907 edition of *The Wheat Belt Review*, Prince Albert was described as the “lumber mart of the prairie provinces.”⁸⁰

At its height, between 1906 and 1913, as many as 2000 men worked in various lumber camps north of the river.⁸¹ Engaging to work in a lumber camp meant a logger had to be outfitted for the extreme outdoor labour. General merchants and storekeepers in Prince Albert stocked up on mittens, moccasins, heavy shirts and pants, rubber overshoes, underwear, coats and fur hats. Axes, saws, hammers, sleigh runners, cant hooks, pulleys, and other tools were also sold. Blacksmiths were hard at work, shoeing horses for the heavy winter hauling, often with special spiked or sharpened shoes used on the ice roads. Hotels and bars, restaurants and livery barns were full. Wholesalers were busy organizing bulk food supplies for the lumber camps. These retail and service trades experienced a direct economic spinoff that was an important part of the Prince Albert economy. Indeed, the *Prince Albert Times* noted, “we are a year-round town, not just busy in the fall when the harvest comes in,” in contrast to the seasonal cycle of prairie towns tied to the wheat economy.⁸² These same retailers experienced another surge when the camps broke up in the spring, and the men came to town with money in their pockets.

Once spring arrived, work in the bush was finished, and the loggers returned to Prince Albert. From there, most dispersed to their homesteads but some would wait for the spring river drives where they could earn money bringing the logs downriver to the sawmills. Allan Kennedy, a long-time lumberjack in the Prince Albert region, claimed that the goal, once the rivers opened, was to keep the logs moving twenty-four hours a day. They could run up to a

completely gutted. To the value of \$100,000 buildings and machinery were totally ruined. Started in the sawdust carriers. Although partially covered by insurance they will not be able to take part in this season’s work. Owing to the fire almost 100 men are thrown out of employment and the loss of one of the most complete and up-to-date saw mills in the North West will considerably reduce the output of the season’s cut.”

⁷⁹ Silversides, *Gateway to the North*, p. 12.

⁸⁰ *The Wheat Belt Review* November 1907.

⁸¹ A large camp would consist of between 175 to 200 men. See Silversides, *Gateway to the North*, p. 12; Kennedy, “Reminiscences of a Lumberjack.” Novelist John Beames characterized the atmosphere in Prince Albert as rather raucous and rowdy the two times of the year – fall and spring – when the lumberjacks congregated in the town. See *Gateway* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1933).

⁸² *Prince Albert Times*, 15 January 1903.

million board feet per day and a successful drive would run for about twenty to twenty-five days.⁸³

Transportation limitations to bring the logs out of the bush and to the nearest mill meant that those stands closest to Prince Albert were logged first, such as Captain Moore's limit near the mouth of the Little Red River, logged in 1879. Once the closest berths were logged, overland hauling by horse or oxen was ineffective and inefficient. Timber berths were chosen for their proximity to rivers, particularly the Sturgeon and Shell River system which emptied into the North Saskatchewan just upstream from Prince Albert, and the Spruce or Little Red River system, whose mouth was just downstream from the main settlement. Logs were collected on the banks of these rivers, and floated to Prince Albert with the spring thaw.⁸⁴ The Spruce/Little Red River was small and could not reliably handle log volumes. To compensate, the Prince Albert Lumber Company cut all the trees along the riverbank and built a series of dams to control water flow. This intervention culminated in damming Beartrap Lake (now in Prince Albert National Park) and building a canal southward to move its water into the Spruce/Little Red River system to flow south to the mills at Prince Albert.⁸⁵

There was an almost wanton disregard for the environmental impact of these actions. Millions of board feet of logs caused extensive damage to each river, from killing fish to altering its course. The dams changed not only the ebb and flow of the rivers but the ability of the rivers to handle rains and runoff. Extensive environmental intervention had a local effect on drainage throughout the whole region. Cutting trees on either side of the rivers led to slumping and excessive mud, actually complicating the problems of the river drivers as well as those who had taken up homestead land along the rivers. Homesteaders in the Alingly district, which was opened for settlement during the height of the lumber industry after 1906, struggled to find ways to bridge the river effectively, to allow travel within the district and kids to attend school.⁸⁶

⁸³ Kennedy, p. 30.

⁸⁴The Lumby Production Company movie, "Giants of Their Time," contains live footage of lumber drives, several photographs taken by Prince Albert photographer W.J. James, and an interview with Odias Cartier of White Star, north of Prince Albert, who had worked in the lumber camps and on the drives. A copy of the film was provided to me by the Prince Albert National Park archive, Waskesiu, Saskatchewan.

⁸⁵ Waiser, *Saskatchewan's Playground*, p. 18-19. Waiser documented much of the early freighting, fishing, and general transportation history of the region. See chapter two, "Prince Albert and the New Northwest."

⁸⁶ See Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 6 May 1916. "Alingly. J. Andrist has voluntarily built about 100 yards of trestle foot bridging over the back water on either side of the Little Red River. He did this to allow nine children on the west side of the river to get to school. Violet Smith, aged 6 years however, fell off the trestling into the water on

There was correspondingly less logging along the Garden River (then known as Sucker Creek). The mouth of this river emptied several miles downstream from the mills at Prince Albert. Logs sent down this small river had to be collected in a 'boom' and towed by steamboat up the river against the current and through a stretch of rough water to the sawmills. Too often, rocks or stray logs or other debris floating downriver would strike the boom. If the boom broke, logs would quickly float downstream, past The Forks and therefore irretrievable. As a result, the Garden River never suffered the environmental damage of the other two.

Once the trees were cut and moved to the mill, the second stage of the lumber industry began. The Prince Albert Lumber Company, formed by a conglomerate of American businessmen, operated two mills in Prince Albert and was by far the largest local employer. The first mill was developed for its industrial capacity, with all the latest technology. A typical mill would have a saw mill, a planing mill to finish the lumber, dry lumber storage, barns for horses, machine shops and repair shops. Debris, including bark and sawdust, would be re-purposed as fuel for the steam engines that ran the mills. Finished lumber could be loaded directly onto railcars from a siding that could accommodate twenty-five railcars at a time. Its output, including finished lumber and cord (stove) wood made from the odds and ends of unfinished logs, were shipped to the prairie. This mill was surrounded by what was virtually its own town, with married mill men's houses, bunkhouses, snooker shacks and laundries, its own water system, library and store. The other company mill, at the other end of town, was the old Sanderson mill and was operated primarily for the local market. It had its own lumber yard for retail sales. Between those who worked at the two mill sites, the lumberjacks, and the logdrivers, the Prince Albert Lumber Company had a payroll of between \$30,000 to \$50,000 dollars per month, employing as many as 2,200 men each year.⁸⁷

The Sturgeon Lake Lumber Company, a home-grown Prince Albert business built on the timber leases and experiences of local men Dan Shannon and A.J. Bell, was unique. Its mill was right at its timber limits, in the Sturgeon Lake district more than twenty miles from Prince Albert.⁸⁸ A virtual town – with log shacks, bunkhouses, and a company store – grew up around the mill. It also had its own post office, Omega, named by owner A.J. Bell who thought this

Monday last, but was rescued by the elder children. Mr. Andrist reports that the Centreville bridge is not safe and will require immediate attention after the log driving is over and the water goes down on either side of the bridge.”

⁸⁷ *The Wheat Belt Review*, November 1907.

⁸⁸ The community is now known as Deer Ridge.

timber limit was the farthest place from Prince Albert anyone would move to.⁸⁹ The distance between the mill and Prince Albert meant that instead of transporting raw logs, the company transported finished product, lumber, to the railhead at Prince Albert. Begun in 1902, the company soon discovered that overland transportation was expensive (water transport was not an option for finished lumber). In a unique move, they purchased a small steam caterpillar engine which was transported to Prince Albert during the brutal winter of 1906-1907.⁹⁰ Using the caterpillar tractor, larger loads of lumber, up to 150,000 finished board feet at a time, could be moved from the mill to Prince Albert on an ice road thirty-five miles long.⁹¹ This engine proved so successful that more were purchased, both by the Sturgeon Lake Lumber Company and by its main rival, the Prince Albert Lumber Company.⁹²

⁸⁹ Dice, "Alingly and Surrounding Districts," p. 1.

⁹⁰ Indeed, the train on which the engine was being transported became stuck in a snowdrift, and the manager of the Sturgeon Lake Lumber Company went with a crew to help dig out the train and retrieve his new engine. See *Prince Albert Times*, 14 February 1907. "Big Engine is Working. Sturgeon Lake Lumber Company are Hauling Lumber from their Mill to the City – Many are Witnessing the Novel Method of Moving Lumber. The steam engine for the Sturgeon Lake Lumber Co. arrived on Friday night. It is a good looking and powerful machine and is built to run on ice roads. Mr. A.J. Bell has done everything possible towards getting the engine here, even to going down himself and digging the car upon which it was laden out of a snowdrift. Upon its arrival here, the fell, headlight, oil cup and everything moveable was found to have been taken off the engine. It took all day Saturday to replace the missing parts and fix it up. A platform was erected and Saturday afternoon the engine was run off the car. Quite a crowd witnessed this."

⁹¹ *The Wheat Belt Review*, November 1907. This steam engine, locally known as 'Dinky,' became a fixture in the local memory. Photographs of the engine at work can be found in several local history books, along with stories of working at the lumber mill and logging camps, on the ice road, or supplying feed and food to the camps. For an example, see *Footprints of Our Pioneers Briarlea, Crutwell, Holbein, Nibet, Rozilee, Wild Rose* (Wild Rose and Area History Book Committee, Printed by Friesen Printers, 1990), p. 814.

⁹² The photograph in the Wild Rose history book is from the Prince Albert Lumber Company. It is hauling a load of unfinished logs, probably to Sturgeon Lake for the spring log drive.



Figure 23. “Dinky” engine hauling logs on ice road. Photo from *Footprints of Our Pioneers*, p. 814.

Logging and the Environment

Aside from market fluctuations which would have had a normal impact on the operation of any commercial enterprise based on raw materials, the lumber industry in the Prince Albert region was at the mercy of local environmental conditions, from the size and situation of timber limits, to water levels in the rivers, winter snowfall, droughts, and forest fires. All of these had varying effects, some of them significant, on Prince Albert’s lumber industry. The severe cold and snowstorms of 1906-1907 had an impact on the winter cut, for example, as conditions were too dangerous for horses and men to operate in the bush. As a consequence, there was less throughput at the mills the following summer, with a shortened milling season. As nearby resources were logged out, lumber camps had to move further and further away from town, necessitating more expense in freighting goods to the camps and finding efficient transportation (horse, steam dinky engine, or river) to bring the logs or finished product back to Prince Albert.

Perhaps the two most important environmental conditions that had a severe impact on the local lumber industry were water and fire. Lumberjack Allan Kennedy recalled that through the years several lumber companies got into serious financial trouble when they could not bring their logs down. In 1910, a very dry winter meant low water levels in the spring. The log drive was unsuccessful, as the logs became ‘hung up’ and would not come down the river. When the logs got hung up, some could be salvaged and brought to town with horses, but salvage-freighting was a labour-intensive activity and depended on the state of both trails/roads and the capacity of bridges to take the large loads. In most cases, the summer road system could not handle this kind of load capacity.⁹³ As a result, logs were left to rot, although locals were happy to salvage the logs for their own purposes, and did so.⁹⁴

White spruce is an old-growth tree that requires specific conditions to flourish. Unless a large area of fully mature white spruce was left unlogged, to offer a seed source for new growth, the species could not regenerate efficiently. The debris left from extensive logging, combined with the flammable nature of forest litter in aspen stands, led to forest fires within the area. Homesteaders placed increased pressure on the landscape. Escaped fires from brush clearing on the homesteads raged through the region. The combination of logging, agricultural settlement, and fire was nearly catastrophic: white spruce was virtually eliminated from the forest canopy.⁹⁵ Although the boreal forest is a fire-dependent regime and fire is a necessary part of the forest regeneration cycle, the impact of extensive forestry intensified the effect of fires. Logging virtually eliminated mature white spruce capable of producing cones, and the extensive tree litter prohibited cone regeneration. The impact of fierce ground and canopy fires resulted in a local transition from primarily mixedwood forest to a canopy dominated by aspen, burnt brush, and open meadows.

The changeover to aspen/poplar in the north Prince Albert region encouraged both the rise of mixed farming after 1906, and the growth of the cordwood industry in the 1920s. As

⁹³ The state of the roads was an ongoing problem throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century in the north Prince Albert region. Once municipalities were formed, local governments sought provincial assistance to improve or create even the most rudimentary roads and bridges. These calls filled the meetings of the local municipal boards and the pages of the Prince Albert *Daily Herald*.

⁹⁴ Shortt, “Survey of the Human History of Prince Albert National Park,” p. 15

⁹⁵ Phillip Joseph Burtman, *Towards Sustainable Management of the Boreal Forest* (Ottawa: National Research Council of Canada, 2003), p. 485. There continue to be extensive jack pine forests in the north Prince Albert region. These were selectively logged but never as intensively as white spruce. Jack pine regenerates far more efficiently than white spruce. See Jeffery Thorpe, “Models of Succession in the Southern Boreal Forest,” A Report Submitted to the Prince Albert Model Forest Association, 1996, p. 9.

agricultural settlers moved north of the river, following the logging roads first to the area near the Shell River (Shellbrook) and later into the Buckland, Alingly, Deer Ridge and Henribourg districts north of the Sand Hills, they found less mixed wood forest and more rank aspen growth and extensive brush on the cut-over and burned-over lands.⁹⁶

The Sturgeon River Forest Reserve

The federal government regulated the lumber industry through its *Dominion Lands Act*, but in 1914, it added a new layer of administrative control in the north Prince Albert region. As homesteaders agitated for more surveyed land, increased political and economic pressure from the agricultural sector led to heated debates among settlers, Prince Albert businessmen, and the Dominion government regarding the purpose of land in the north Prince Albert region. Was it best suited to the timber industry or farming? Intensive homestead pressure sent the Department of the Interior scrambling to find arable farmland.⁹⁷ Reports regarding extensive environmental damage from the lumber industry were also disconcerting. Dominion Land Surveyor C.H. Morse went to the north Prince Albert region in 1912 to assess the landscape, the logging industry, and to make a report. Morse's commission was to view the region with an eye to creating a national forestry reserve, which would divide the landscape.⁹⁸ Land with timber suitable for the lumber industry and soil not suitable for farming was withdrawn from settlement. The Sturgeon River Forest Reserve, on land west of the third meridian and east of the Sturgeon River, between townships fifty-three and fifty-seven, was set aside.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Those who took land in the Garden River region, which experienced little commercial logging but some forest fires, found somewhat more mixed wood forest, which included both white and black spruce and pine on sandy soils, in addition to burnt over land, aspen and birch. The Paddockwood history book records that the first settlers in the region found "the country was heavily wooded, mostly white and black poplar with the odd spruce bluff, all green timber." *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 9. However, it seems likely that the region had experienced forest fire activity, owing to the predominance of poplar (aspen), but those burns may have been as many as thirty years or more before major settlement. Of course, forest fires are erratic and do not burn evenly or absolutely, resulting in a forest mix between complete devastation and substantial green areas.

⁹⁷ The Crean expedition into the north Prince Albert region to find suitable farmland in 1908-1909 will be explained in chapter three.

⁹⁸ James Shortt, "Survey of the Human History of Prince Albert National Park," (Parks Canada Manuscript Report no. 239, 1977), p. 13-14; Waiser, *Saskatchewan's Playground*, p. 14.

⁹⁹ The Reserve was formally created by an act of Parliament in 1914. Waiser, *Saskatchewan's Playground*, p. 16.

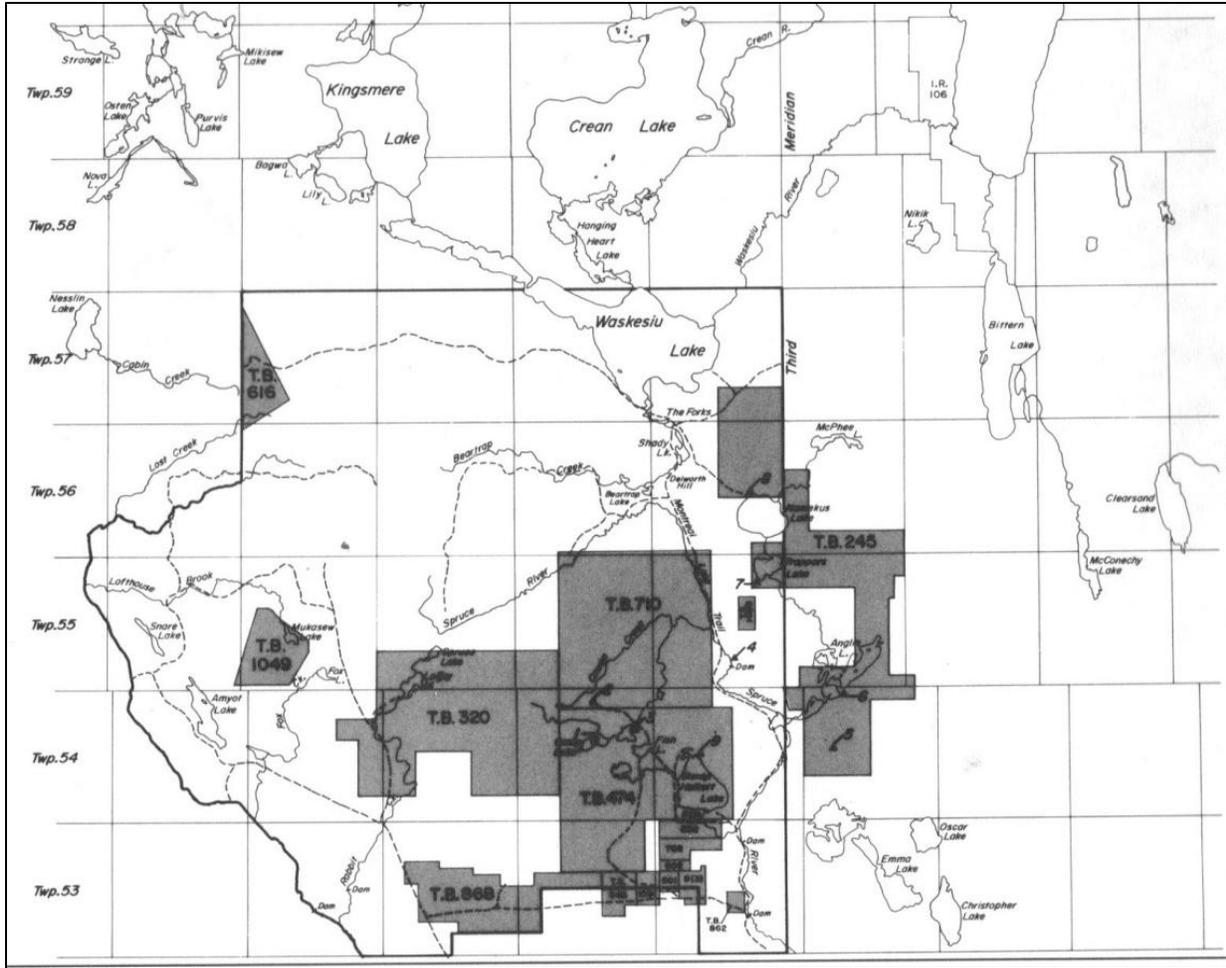


Figure 24. Sturgeon River Forest Reserve showing timber berths, c. 1916. From Waiser, *Saskatchewan's Playground*, p. 18.

Designation as a forest reserve had little impact on the ongoing lumber industry – there were *fourteen* timber berths operating within its borders, all but one controlled by the Prince Albert Lumber Company. In fact, historian Bill Waiser suggested that the lumber company “acted as if the region was now its own special preserve.”¹⁰⁰ Wartime demand doubled the annual cut. At the same time, though, the dominion government, through its forestry reserve inspectors, increased its control. The dominion conducted audits and issued orders for restitution if the number of logs reported cut did not match the numbers reported at the millsite (with shrinkage allowed for fires or logs lost on the river drive). Overall, the creation of the Sturgeon River Forest Reserve signaled a significant change toward resource management and fire control

¹⁰⁰ Waiser, *Saskatchewan's Playground*, p. 16.

for the lumber industry. For homesteaders, it placed legal limitations on the landscape and narrowed agricultural expansion.¹⁰¹

Impact of Logging Industry on Local First Nations

Both the Sturgeon Lake Reserve (known at the time as William Twatt's band) and the Little Red River Reserve (sometimes referred to as the 'New Reserve' or 'Billy Bear's Reserve') were embedded in the major wood 'basket' of the north Prince Albert region and straddled both the Sturgeon and Little Red River systems.¹⁰² Extensive commercial lumbering in the region led to both opportunity and loss. First Nations men worked in the lumber camps, freighted supplies, cut and traded hay and oats, provided fresh meat, and worked on the river drives in spring.¹⁰³ Women found a ready market for moccasins and mittens, jackets and belts. Members living on these two reserves derived considerable income from the lumber camps, either through direct wage labour or in a supply capacity. Little Red River members, in particular, were closely tied to the lumber camps. The Indian Department noted in 1901 that residents of Little Red "derive their income from grain, potatoes, the sales of lumber, hay, freighting, and day labour (lumbering)."¹⁰⁴ Reports from the Indian Department until the end of the First World War reiterated these occupations, along with continued fishing and hunting.

The environmental degradation caused by the extensive lumber industry, however, had a negative ripple effect in the region. Trapping and fishing activities along the rivers were severely disrupted by the large log drives. Hundreds of men, strange sounds, and extensive environmental disturbance virtually eliminated local hunting opportunities, and hunters were forced to go further and further away from the reserves to find meat. Finally, the two reserves contained excellent saw timber. In particular, the Sturgeon Lake Lumber Company and the Prince Albert Lumber Company desired those trees, and documents show that both companies culled valuable timber off Sturgeon Lake reserve land without compensation or authority. In 2001 the Sturgeon Lake band succeeded in settling a major claim with the federal government for the loss of this wood revenue.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Shortt, p. 16-17.

¹⁰² These reserves were just south of the area that was set aside as the Sturgeon Forest Reserve in 1914.

¹⁰³ The logdrivers on the Little Red River system, in particular, were drawn from these reserves. See *The Wheat Belt Review* November 1907.

¹⁰⁴ Saskatchewan Archives Office, "Index to Material Relating to Saskatchewan Indian Reserves in Annual Reports of Department of Indian Affairs 1900-1973."

¹⁰⁵ See Christian Thompson, "Sturgeon Lake First Nation," *Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan*, p. 914.

The Little Red River band is (as of 2010) in the process of prosecuting a similar claim, but the economic and environmental impact of lumbering on their reserve was more complicated. Set aside as a farming reserve for the Montreal Lake and Lac La Ronge bands by 1897, permanent farming settlement was slow to take hold. In 1903, A.J. Bell, manager of the nearby Sturgeon Lake Lumber Company, requested the disposal of the standing and fallen timber on the reserve.¹⁰⁶ The Indian Agent went to Montreal Lake to consult with the chief and council there, and came away with a signed deed of surrender, which initiated a series of problems. One, the Montreal Lake band expressed hesitation and uncertainty over whether or not they should sell the timber, and left it up to the Indian Agent to make the final decision on their behalf. In effect, the band signed a *carte blanche*: “we have decided to leave the question of the sale of the standing and fallen timber in [the Agent’s] hands, if after he goes through the timber, he considers it best to leave it at present, we agree to that; if on the other hand he thinks it should be sold then we agree to that.”¹⁰⁷ The Agent decided that the timber should be sold for several reasons: it was at its maturity, and so at its economic height for merchantable timber; nearby timber limits were currently being logged, particularly the Shannon and Sanderson timber berths; the slash from those nearby limits heightened the fire potential of the area and if a forest fire swept through before the timber could be logged, it would be virtually worthless; the merchantable timber within the reserve was estimated at most to be two-and-a-half to three million board feet, which was considered a small cut. It would be better, the agent felt, to sell the timber now when loggers were nearby and it was practical to cut it. A second surrender, this time from members of the band living on the reserve, was also taken.¹⁰⁸

The fact that the Little Red River reserve was so far away from its two parent reserves created an administrative dilemma. It was difficult to decide whom to ask for a surrender, who had authority, and who had the right to make decisions. The timber was advertised and sold by tender in the summer of 1904 to I.G. Turpiff, Canada Territories Corporation Limited.¹⁰⁹ Almost

¹⁰⁶ LAC RG10 C12112 Volume 7839 File 30107-4. Frank Pedley, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Ottawa to James Macarthur, Indian Agent at Mistawasis, 3 July 1903.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, Indian Agent’s Office, Carleton Agency, 249831. Each person signed with either an x or in Cree syllabic.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, The surrender was signed by Isaac Itawawepsim, Edward Charles, John Hunt, Alfred Charles, Elias Hunt. In the presence of W.E. Jones, Agent. Rupert Pratt, Interpreter and A.I. Wilkinson (possibly a witness or JP). These were not the same people who signed the original surrender document. These men were living on the New Reserve and other documents indicate that at least three of these men were originally from the Lac La Ronge band.

¹⁰⁹ The manager of the Canada Territories Corporation was A.J. Bell, who also managed the Sturgeon Lake Lumber Company and ran the sawmill at Bell’s Lake, just to the west of the Little Red Reserve.

immediately, a letter arrived from the Reverend James Hinds of Prince Albert at the Indian Commissioner's Office in Winnipeg. The letter indicated that the men living on the reserve in question, the 'New Reserve,' "strongly object to all their timber being sold from them." Those who signed the timber surrender, the letter noted, "are living 60 miles north and have plenty of timber there." Those on the reserve did not object to selling *some* of the timber for cash, recognizing its proximity to the timber limits being worked all around the reserve, but they wanted to make sure that some of the bluffs were kept for their own use.¹¹⁰

The letter from Reverend Hines indicated the difficulty under which all parties were operating. By this point, there were two surrenders taken for this wood, one from Montreal Lake and one from men located on the New Reserve. Clearly, though, there were divisions within the New Reserve as well as divisions between the northern and southern settlements. The Indian Department, however, was operating on the legal strength of the two surrenders and the timber was sold. The sale led to the second major problem: the New Reserve was co-owned by both the Montreal Lake and Lac La Ronge bands. In January, 1905, a letter arrived from the Lac La Ronge band expressing their concern over how the wood surrender had been handled, since they were also owners of the New Reserve.¹¹¹ Although the response was that, indeed, the Lac La Ronge band was entirely correct in this assertion, "It was not deemed necessary to confer with them on the question of surrender of timber as they reside at a great distance from the Reserve ... although they are entitled to their equitable share of the proceeds of the timber and will receive it at the proper time."¹¹² The proceeds of the downpayment on the timber berth were split between the two bands. The company which won the contract, however, was slow to hand over the capital. When it finally did, the sum was placed in trust solely for the use of the Montreal Lake band. The capital amounted to over \$5000.00, and the interest was expended in purchasing

¹¹⁰ LAC RG10 C12112 Volume 7839 File 30107-4. James Hines to Indian Commissioner, 8 August 1904. In reply, it was pointed out that only the white spruce sawtimber had been sold; the pine for fenceposts and aspen/poplar for building and cordwood had not been sold.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, Indian Agent's Office, Carlton Agency, Mistawasis, to Hon. D. Laird, Indian Commissioner, Winnipeg, 19 January 1905. "They now heard that the timber on this reserve had been sold. In the first place they did not think this should have been done without their consent, but since it had been sold, they claimed their share of the proceeds: the reserve is not divided; there is not one part for the Montreal Lake band and another for the Lac La Ronge band, but it is the common property of both bands. They did not wish the reserve to be sold, nor any further sale of anything therein, without their being consulted and acquiescing in the transaction." The following notation was written in the margin: "the Indians are right in their contention, that the reserve was set aside jointly for the 'Montreal Lake' and 'Lac La Ronge' Indians and that they should have been consulted and their sanction obtained to the surrender for sale of the Spruce Timber thereon which they claim was not done. It appears to me they are clearly entitled to a share of the proceeds received from the sale of the timber."

¹¹² *Ibid.*, J.D. Maclean, Secretary of Indian Affairs, to David Laird, 7 April 1905.

supplies for the Montreal Lake band over and above those agreed to by treaty.¹¹³ It was only in 1910, after a lengthy investigation into the surrender and sale of the timber and disposal of funds, that there was a redistribution of the capital to the credit of the Lac La Ronge band.¹¹⁴

The timber on Little Red, due to its proximity to transportation, mills, and a market, was correspondingly much more valuable than any similar stands of timber found on the Montreal Lake home reserve or at La Ronge. Correspondence indicated, however, that only a portion of the Little Red River reserve contained merchantable white spruce sawtimber. The rest of the reserve, which was chosen for its agricultural capability, had open hay lands and stands of brush and aspen.¹¹⁵ The controversial timber limit on the New Reserve was apparently not extensively logged. By 1909, the Sturgeon Lake Lumber Company (which bought the permit from the original purchaser) had logged only a portion of the available timber, and their timber license was not renewed.¹¹⁶ As a result of the confusion over capital and ownership, the Little Red River reserve was informally split. The Lac La Ronge band was accorded a much larger share of the reserve, in lieu of the fact they had not yet decided on all their treaty land entitlement in and

¹¹³ *Ibid.* There were several letters in this file from William Charles, Chief at Montreal Lake, to the Indian Department to dispute the use of these funds. It appeared that the Indian Agent at the time was expending the funds to purchase supplies that the Band may not have gotten. It is possible that these supplies were sent to the New Reserve, rather than Montreal Lake. The confusion was another example of distance, separation, and ownership problems involving the New Reserve.

¹¹⁴ LAC RG 10 Volume 7766 file 27107-4. Letter to the Accountant from the Indian Department, 14 October 1910. “The contention of the Lac la Ronge Indians that the reserve, 106A, was set aside for the joint use and benefit of the Montreal Lake, and their band, is quite correct; they are entitled to their equitable share of the proceeds of the sale of the timber. All that seems to have been done to carry out this promise was to place to the credit of the Lac la Ronge Indians and expend for their benefit \$275.00, or half of the deposit given as security by the successful tenderer for the timber when it was sold. All the other payments for the timber have been placed to the credit of Montreal Lake band, and the expenditure therefrom made to the latter band. It is true, the surrender of the spruce timber on reserve 106A, on the 16th of January, 1904, purports to have been made by the Montreal Lake Band of Indians, and stipulates as a condition that all moneys received from the sale thereof, after deduction for expenses of management, shall be placed to their credit and the interest thereon paid to them or their decendants. But this condition is obviously defective, as those who took part in the surrender had no right to appropriate to themselves moneys which belonged to the whole of the two bands for whom the reserve was set apart.”

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Letter to the Accountant.

¹¹⁶ The Sturgeon Lake Lumber Company took over the berth from the original bidder, who had neglected to pay the rest of the tender price. The company paid the dues, after many threatening letters from the Forestry Department. Then, it tried unsuccessfully to renegotiate the original tender, arguing that they felt it was unfair to pay ground rent on the whole reserve – fifty-six point eight square miles – when there was merchantable timber on only a small portion of that area, about three square miles. The company was by this time under considerable scrutiny from the Indian Department regarding their logging on Sturgeon Lake Reserve no. 101, for which they had not paid their dues or cut payments. The Indian Department was reluctant to renew their timber berth contract for Little Red when they were obviously recalcitrant at paying dues, rent, ground fees and payment on the cut at Sturgeon. The company protested, saying that they still had about a million board feet of timber to log out at Little Red, and reluctantly paid back dues for ground rental. They soon rescinded this request, and their license was not renewed in 1909. Of the original estimated two and a half million board feet, they cut one and a half million. See LAC RG10 C12112 Volume 7839 File 30107-4.

around La Ronge; moreover, they were, at the time of treaty in 1889, a much larger band and had a larger treaty land entitlement. The Montreal Lake band was accorded nine out of the roughly fifty-six square miles; Lac La Ronge the remaining forty-seven.¹¹⁷

In the ensuing years, the men of the Little Red River reserve logged the area themselves, and cut the logs using a mill owned by the Indian Department.¹¹⁸ Confusion over who owned the timber in what proportion (until the land was informally split), investigation over how much was actually logged and paid for when and by whom, and the debate over which band (Montreal Lake or Lac La Ronge) now owns the land will complicate the current court battle with the federal government. The situation at Little Red River reserve was *not* the same as what happened on the Sturgeon Lake reserve, even though the two reserves were situated in or near the same wood basket. The landscape and tree cover, ownership, payment, and actual logging must be taken into account.

Regardless of current court disputes, both the oral history and the contemporary documentation pointed to a mixed use of the Little Red River reserve. Although set aside as a farming reserve, its situation in and near the merchantable timber basket of the north Prince Albert region led primarily to continuing timber resource exploitation, both by non-band and band members. Local residents of the reserve took cash employment in the nearby lumber industry. They also began to cultivate grains and gardens, raise cattle, and exploit the reserve's hay meadows thereby taking economic advantage of local opportunities at the lumber camps.

¹¹⁷ LAC RG 10 Volume 7766 file 27107-4. Letter to the Accountant from the Indian Department, 14 October 1910.

¹¹⁸ LAC RG10 C12112 Volume 7839 File 30107-4. J.D. McLean to Silas Milligan, Indian Agent at Mistawasis, 17 January 1916. There was concern from the Forestry Department inspector that the band was leaving behind too much debris and slash, and in general using wasteful practices. The Indian Department investigated and disputed these concerns, claiming that as they were sponsoring the logging and milling, they would ask the band to oversee and minimize any potential fire hazards or other problems. The Forestry Department reminded the Indian Department that "no lumbering operations have been authorized by the Department since April 30th 1909 when the license of the Sturgeon Lake Lumber Co expired. You should report fully as to who actually cut timber since that time, for what purpose, whether for sale or building, to whom it was sold and the kinds and quantities of timber removed. You should particularly investigate any evidence that would tend to place the onus of these operations on trespassers." 1 February 1916. Reply from S. Milligan. "none of this timber was cut by trespassers, as the Montreal Lake overseer, Engineer, and Sawyer superintended the whole of the operations, none of the material has been sold, as it was cut simply for the use and benefit of the Montreal Lake Band. I wrote to the operators of the Mill in October instructing them to advise the Indians to pile all the debris that had accumulated, in order to minimize any such danger, this I understood was being done, but the heavy snow experienced during the early part of the winter put a stop to the work. No doubt when the Spring arrives a further effort will be made by this Band to safeguard the Government Lands in the vicinity of the reserve."

Overland Freighting

If the lumber industry exploded in the immediate Prince Albert area following the completion of the Qu'Appelle, Long Lake and Saskatchewan rail line in 1890, other industries were also quick to take advantage of this new transportation possibility. The completion of the railroad dovetailed with several regional interests, in particular those of the Indian Department and the Hudson's Bay Company. The treaty party that met the First Nations bands at the north end of Montreal Lake in 1889 to sign the adhesion to Treaty Six was lucky. It was winter, and the treaty party sleighed up the rude cart trail past Red Deer Lake to Montreal Lake, carrying the traditional gifts that normally accompanied a treaty signing.¹¹⁹ Delivery of yearly treaty payments following the adhesion created transportation concerns. Treaty payments included agricultural implements such as plows, large quantities of food and seed, twine, ammunition, clothing, and miscellaneous goods. The sheer bulk of these articles posed a serious logistical problem for the Indian Department. The Department asked the Reverend J.A. Mackay of Prince Albert for advice on how to proceed. He suggested that it would be better to ship the goods for the La Ronge band by canoe through Grand Rapids and Cumberland, and from there north to the Churchill system following the old fur trade routes.

For the supplies destined for Montreal Lake, Mackay offered a radical idea: "It would be an immense advantage if the cart road were opened to Montreal Lake. This would do away with all difficulties in the way of transport. The road has been commenced and I believe about \$200 judiciously spent would complete it."¹²⁰ Asking the Indian Department to build a road revealed the costs involved in not only purchasing the treaty supplies, but in freighting them to their destination. Mackay directed the Indian Department to contact a local trading and supply firm, Stobart & Company, for more information and to see if they would freight in the supplies. Hillyard Mitchell, proprietor of Stobart and Company, replied with surprising bluntness: the route north from Prince Albert using the cart road to Red Deer Lake (Waskesiu), then by river to Montreal Lake, "would be both risky and expensive, and I would not care to undertake it except at your risk and expense." Low water in the river, the state of the road, and the heavy amount of supplies complicated matters, Mitchell said. He concurred with Mackay's suggestion, stating that

¹¹⁹ These gifts included flour, tea, bacon and tobacco in addition to treaty medals, flags, and money. Much of the goods were purchased at local trading posts and later replaced by the Indian Department. See *LAC RG 10 Volume 3601 File 1754* Dewdney's office to Hayter Reed, 6 December 1888.

¹²⁰ *LAC RG 10 Volume 3601 File 1754*, J.A. Mackay to Hayter Reed, 20 May 1889.

“The N.W. Government last year expended \$150 on a road cutting from Deer Lake toward the South End of Montreal Lake about 15 miles was cut (being about half the distance) the balance could be cut for about the same amount, thereby opening a cart road direct from Prince Albert to Montreal Lake.” From that point, it was a one-day sail or paddle up the lake to the north end, where the treaty had been signed the year before. “Until this road is cut,” Mitchell went on, “I may say there is no practicable road to Montreal Lake during summer (excepting heavy rain rising the water in Deer River) except via Cumberland and Stanley. This is a long distance round and it would pay your Dept. to at once open the road mentioned.” Freight costs on this road were high: Mitchell cited \$2.50 to \$3.00 per 100 lbs overland; canoe freight was fifty cents per pound cheaper.¹²¹

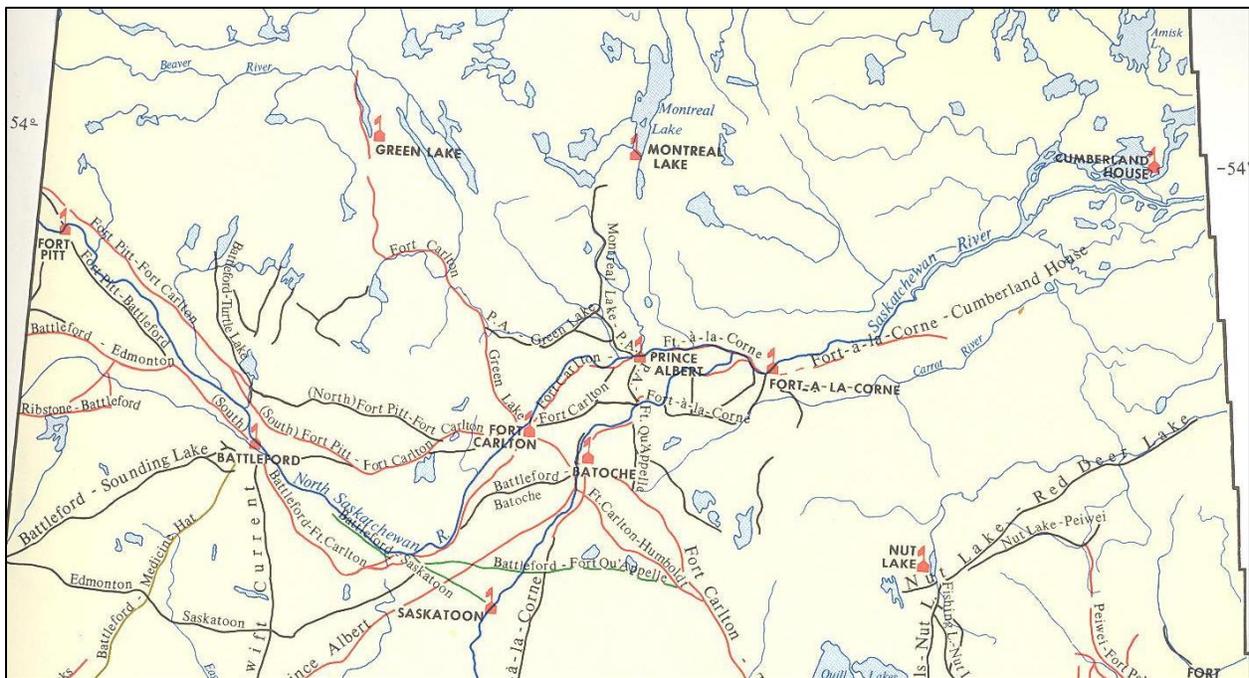


Figure 25. Trails near Prince Albert, circa late 1800s. From *Atlas of Saskatchewan*, 1969, p. 11. Note the Montreal Lake Trail did not reach Montreal Lake.

Considering the lucrative government contract, Mitchell’s letter underscored the precarious nature of industry and transportation through the boreal forest. Interested in providing the supplies, he was reluctant at best to take on the logistics of transport, and refused to take on the cost and risk except at the Indian Department’s insistence and payment. Bluntly, he stated

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, Hillyard Mitchell to Hayter Reed, 24 June 1889. Hillyard Mitchell, in addition to part ownership in Stobart and Co., was an MLA. The cart trail connected Prince Albert to Red Deer Lake. From there, canoes could travel on the Red Deer River to the south end of Montreal Lake. Brigades went north across the lake to the Montreal River, and up that river to Lac la Ronge. The weak link in this route was the water level of the Red Deer River. The river was never reliable for navigation and canoe brigades faced low water levels and several grueling portages.

that unless the Department put forward the money to finish the road, he recommended it use the old Cumberland-Stanley river transportation route, or convince all the bands to meet at his post at Red Deer Lake. He expressed candid opinions as to the utility of plows in the north (“grub hoes are what would be required”), that a “horse and wagon would be of no use to the chief until a road is made,” and that contrary to the statements of the Montreal Lake band, “cattle would do well in small numbers in almost every part of that country.” His opinions had no effect on the supplies going in, but his assessment of road conditions and freight rates scared the Indian Department. Hayter Reed accepted Mitchell and Mackay’s transportation recommendation without hesitation and ordered the Department to find the money to finish the road. Not only would the yearly treaty payments be made more easily, but the road would facilitate future freight, communication, and survey parties.¹²² The road was commissioned and cut, and most of the treaty supplies were sent in by wagon to the south end of Montreal Lake in time for the treaty payment in mid-September of 1889.

The old canoe transportation route through Cumberland to Stanley Mission, recommended by Hillyard Mitchell for treaty payments for the La Ronge band, was soon superceded by the new overland route. Rail lines across the prairies and the northern link completed to Prince Albert in 1890-91 changed all previous transportation practices across northern Saskatchewan. Northern communities, long established by the fur trade and serviced by the inland water highways, were orphaned by the southern railroad transportation system.¹²³ Water freighting began a long decline, and northern Aboriginal families experienced growing hardship.¹²⁴ Yet northern communities still required goods and services. Trading companies and

¹²² *Ibid.*, Hayter Reed to Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs in Ottawa, July 1889.

¹²³ Morris Zaslow’s *The Opening of the Canadian North, 1870-1914* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971) and *The Northward Expansion of Canada*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988) are the best starting points to discover the north and its social and industrial development. See also Jim Mochoruk, *Formidable Heritage: Manitoba’s North and the Cost of Development 1870 to 1930* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2004); Liza Piper, *The Industrial Transformation of Subarctic Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009).

¹²⁴ Northern historians have understood the railroad’s influence on the decline of northern supply and shipping posts, including the hardship on Aboriginal people who derived important income from the water transportation empire as York boat and canoe builders, paddlers, freight haulers, lumbermen, and suppliers. For many, canoe and York freighting provided a means of summer employment and wage labour, often used to supplement winter trapping and hunting returns. See Frank Tough, *As Their Natural Resources Fail: Native Peoples and the Economic History of Northern Manitoba* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996). Northern historians tend to refer to overland freighting in passing, as part of a general discussion on the problems of northern transportation and development, or as merely one of several options for moving goods from one place to another. For provincial north historians of Manitoba and Alberta, water transportation remained an important component of freighting, with much of both the north-south Athabasca and Peace Rivers in Alberta, and the extensive large lake system of Manitoba, navigable by steamers. These waterways in Alberta and Manitoba were linked by early road and rail systems into the provincial norths, but

the federal government were both anxious to find good, efficient transportation links. The completed road to Montreal Lake initiated the beginning of the overland freighting industry in the Prince Albert region, linking the railroad to the northern communities.

The implications of the completed cart trail were immediately grasped by the Hudson's Bay Company, which saw a cheaper transportation route to Lac la Ronge and Stanley Mission.¹²⁵ It shipped a small portion of its northern supplies to Prince Albert by rail, then overland using this route as soon as the road was completed. Historian Bill Waiser explained that the initial trial must have been a success, because "the following season the Company shipped all of the district's supplies north from Prince Albert and established a large depot on the southwest shore of Montreal Lake."¹²⁶ Within one year of its establishment, the cart road from Prince Albert to the south end of Montreal Lake became a major north-south artery, utilized by the Hudson's Bay Company, the Indian Department, local traders, First Nations, and lumbermen. Soon, freighters with teams of horses, ponies, or oxen could be regularly seen plying this new route.

Overland transportation stitched the prairie south with the boreal north and offered economic opportunities for both First Nations and local homesteaders. Men could take contracts for individual freighting trips, work as a contract teamster for a company, or supply farm produce, hay and oats either to the freighters or to the wholesalers. Such options appealed to those who were developing forest edge farms with stock or families to look after. These men tended to prefer or require short-term employment or a service role rather than a full winter commitment in a bush logging camp.

Saskatchewan had few such natural or man-made advantages into or out of its north country. The transportation void in Saskatchewan was filled by overland freighters.

¹²⁵ In previous years, they had shipped their goods via the Churchill River system or, alternatively, the North Saskatchewan by canoe brigade or steamship to Carleton Post. From there, the long-established overland cart road from Carleton to Green Lake was in constant use. The Green Lake route had its own problems. It was a long overland haul, parts of it impassable in wet weather. At its terminus it accessed the Beaver River system north to Ile a la Crosse, which in dry weather was not navigable. This, of course, was a two-pronged dilemma: too wet, and the goods could not be shipped; too dry, and the goods could not be shipped. In 1885, Carleton was burned by accident in the events surrounding the rebellion, ending its role as a shipping point on the supply chain. Prince Albert took over Carleton's role, from the HBC post known as Fort Albert. The Hudson Bay Company certainly used the old cart trail to service its short-lived post at Red Deer Lake, which was listed in the McPhilips Saskatchewan directory in 1888. See H.T. McPhilips, *McPhilips Saskatchewan Directory* (Prince Albert, N.W.T.: The author, 1888), p. 127. Cited in Shortt, "Survey of the Human History of Prince Albert National Park," p. 4 and footnote 7. Shortt suggested that this post was operational as early as 1886.

¹²⁶ Waiser, *Saskatchewan's Playground*, p. 7. See also Prince Albert National Park historical files, "HBC Post at Red Deer Lake, Saskatchewan," 24 March 1969 (historical material on Red Deer post compiled by Hudson's Bay Company archives, Winnipeg) *Prince Albert National Park archives*, Waskesiu, cited by Waiser. The HBC also moved their post to Montreal Lake, and began operations at this new location, effectively making the post at Red Deer Lake redundant. It was closed by 1893. See Shortt, p. 7-8.

Overland freighting was never a successful summer activity, despite the completion of the cart trail. Boreal forest trails were generally incapable of supporting heavy wagon loads of goods. Indeed, Montreal Lake HBC employee Sydney Keighley recalled a particularly brutal stretch of trail where “A wagon entering it immediately sank to the axles. The stretch was corduroyed but the logs were constantly sinking out of sight.” To shore up the road, wagon drivers were forced to improvise, adding road-building to their boreal repertoire. “Axes and hatchets were standard traveling equipment in that area, as there was no possibility of getting a load of any weight at all through the muskeg without building impromptu corduroy roads,” Keeley explained.¹²⁷ The muskegs, endless sinkholes of water, sedges and black, tarry ooze, claimed wagon axles and snapped wheels. It was also terrible on the animals, which became hopelessly stuck and had to be pulled out by the neck. Black flies and mosquitoes added to the misery of both horse and man.

Winter roads, frozen into usefulness, offered a more efficient roadbed, easing the passage over muskeg and creek and providing wide open highways on the frozen lakes. Freighting developed into a significant regional winter occupation. A manpower- and horsepower-intense activity, successful freight hauls required freighters, strong teams of horses, sleighs, and large amounts of hay and feed oats. Freighting developed a co-dependent relationship with local farmers (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal): when farming was slack in the winter, freighting was a viable opportunity to make some much-needed cash money; in the summer, putting up hay and growing oats for the freighters injected cash into the local economy.

¹²⁷ Sydney Augustus Keighley, *Trader, Tripper, Trapper: The Life of a Bay Man* (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer Publishing, 1989), p. 64. A corduroy road was made by chopping logs and placing them crossways on the road, to form an instant roadbed. All northern roads contained corduroy over soft spots.



Figure 26. Freighting fish to Prince Albert. *SAB* photograph collection.

For local First Nations living along the edge of the forest, freighting was an excellent fit. The records of the Department of Indian Affairs and annual reports of the Indian Agents indicated that many First Nations men found lucrative employment. The Indian Department reported in 1900 that “freighting...enables some to make a comfortable living without assistance from the agency.”¹²⁸ In 1901, W.B. Goodfellow, the Indian Agent at Carleton Agency reported that in William Twatt’s band [now Sturgeon Lake First Nation] “some are hired by lumbermen; others earn money by freighting or putting up hay for the lumber camps.”¹²⁹ Through to the First World War, forest fringe bands reported considerable income through freighting. As non-Aboriginal settlers penetrated the forest fringe, occupying cut-over timber berths and commencing farming operations particularly after the First World War, they began to crowd out the Aboriginal freighters. Details are sketchy and numbers are not available, but both oral and written documentation and photographs seem to show a decline – but never a complete absence – of Aboriginal men in freighting and lumbering.

When possible, freighters tried to have a paying load in both directions – from the railhead heading north, and from the north coming back south. In some cases, freighters were

¹²⁸ “Index to Material Relating to Saskatchewan Indian Reserves,” page 2.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

paid to bring back furs from the major fur trading companies. Prince Albert remained the center of the fur industry in Saskatchewan, and most furs funneled through the Hudson's Bay Company, their rivals Revillon Frères, or smaller merchants such as Stobart and Co. who traded furs for groceries and supplies. These companies usually moved their Saskatchewan fur caches south to the railhead and urban fur market using overland freighters.



Figure 27. Crossing a northern lake in winter with a 'freight swing.' Note plow in front. www.jkcc.com.

Overland freighting supported the burgeoning commercial fisheries. Commercial fishing began on lakes close to Prince Albert as early as the 1890s, when Candle Lake, Big Trout (Crean) and Montreal Lake were fished. As with the lumber industry, commercial fishing was a winter occupation. Before mechanized cold storage, fish were caught and transported frozen by overland freighters. The *Prince Albert Advocate* reported in November, 1894, that one William Spencer, "whose seventy-odd years of age seem to have made but slight impression in either his appearance, spirits, or powers of endurance," recently returned from inspecting the fisheries in the northern part of the district *on foot*. "He reports the fish very plentiful and the catch a profitable one," the paper noted, with a combination of glee and awe.¹³⁰ The growth of

¹³⁰ *Prince Albert Advocate*, 28 November 1894. "A good fish story comes from the north. It seems fish are very plentiful in Montreal and surrounding lakes, and when the settlers there run short of hay, as they frequently do, the

commercial fishing – for whitefish, trout, pickerel and northern pike – led to the posting of a Fisheries Overseer at Prince Albert in 1893 to issue permits and ensure fishing regulations were met.¹³¹ Commercial fishing ebbed and flowed according to profit and environmental constraints – as early as 1909 there were complaints of over-exploitation. As a result, a 1909 commission investigated the industry and made recommendations regarding season dates, net dimensions, licenses and other technical concerns. Cleaning and packing procedures, the demand created by the First World War, and improvements in cold storage and transportation led to higher prices and a general expansion in the industry.¹³² After the First World War, Prince Albert saw the fishing and freighting industries explode, as part of the northern ‘boom’ during the 1920s and 1930s.

The End of the Early Commercial Logging Industry

The logging industry centered at Prince Albert continued through the First World War, despite food supply and manpower shortages. Lumber was considered essential to the war effort.¹³³ Indeed, Prince Albert National Park historian James Shortt commented that the Great War gave the Prince Albert Lumber Company its most productive years, when they logged 124.47 square miles within what became park area, with a series of camps near Shoal Creek and Stump Lake.¹³⁴ Toward war’s end, however, demand for lumber had slackened. Constrained by the wartime slump in residential and commercial building, the lumber companies faced a combination of problems: rising transportation costs, manpower shortages, and falling prices. Although an astonishing 520,000 logs were sent downriver from the Prince Albert Lumber Company’s logging camps in the Sturgeon Forest Reserve in the spring of 1917-1918, there remained over 25,000 logs which were never removed. The company suspended local operations

cattle are induced to eat fish by sprinkling salt over them, which the cattle lick, and in this way eat the fish for the sake of the salt. That is only to get the appetite for fish cultivated, however. After that the cattle become addicted to the ‘fish’ habit and in this particular instance a sagacious old ox is said to have frequently gone down to the lake, broken open a hole through three feet of ice, and feasted to satisfaction on the fish which swam into the hole thus made.” *Prince Albert Advocate*, 6 October 1895.

¹³¹ Waiser, *Saskatchewan’s Playground*, p. 11. See also Canada, House of Commons *Sessional Papers*, 1894, Vol. 27, No. 11, App. 10, “Annual Report of the Department of Marine and Fisheries,” p. 299.

¹³² Seymour, p. 15-19.

¹³³ In the spring of 1916, as the lumber camps were breaking up for the season, the federal government created the 224th Canadian Forestry Battalion. It actively recruited in Prince Albert to take experienced loggers and lumbermen overseas to Britain and France to help cut timber and saw lumber for the war effort. This was a volunteer effort, and was ultimately successful. Men could volunteer for duty but not at the front; their work was considered specialized. *Prince Albert Daily Herald*, 24 March 1916.

¹³⁴ Shortt, p. 16. Shortt references a letter from C. Putlick to R.M. Treen, 28 April 1919, *SAB Crown Timber Agency Files*, NR5, B.12.9 and noted that this number is significant, as it represented almost 25 percent of the total area within the Sturgeon Forest Reserve.

in October 1918. Those logs, along with the slash and debris from the entire cut, were left to rot or be salvaged by local homesteaders.¹³⁵

Almost thirty years of active logging in the north Prince Albert region had changed the aspect of the countryside dramatically. Extensive logging, with its rotting slash, change in forest canopy, and new rank growth of leaf-producing aspen, set the stage for a disaster of near epic proportions in the spring of 1919. The Prince Albert *Daily Herald* reported that the spring arrived warm and soon grew hot. By the end of April, all of Saskatchewan including the ground north of the North Saskatchewan River was tinder dry. Bush fires were breaking out.¹³⁶ By May, the region was devastated by wildfires. The *Daily Herald* observed, “Once the blaze develops into a conflagration, Hades is loose and little can be done to check it.”¹³⁷ Serious blazes extended all across the forest edge, burning farms, killing livestock and devastating local homesteads. Fires raged from Green Lake and Ile a la Cross east across much of the boreal plain, far beyond either agricultural settlement or timber berths. Fires endangered the settlements at both Big River and Montreal Lake.

Bishop J.A. Newnham of Prince Albert made a special trip north to check on the inhabitants of Montreal Lake, and gave the *Daily Herald* the following harrowing report:

For about a week thirty of the Indians were working practically day and night fighting fire under the guidance of the forest rangers. At one point on the trail, in the midst of a spruce bluff the bishop and his travelling companion, Mr. Barker of the Hudson’s Bay Company had to swing their team around and rush back, for the flames came leaping over the treetops, twenty to thirty feet high and sweeping onward in a rush of flame. Three hundred yards back the team was halted for there was the edge of the fire zone and the bishop and Mr. Barker turned and watched the conflagration surge and crackle past. Five minutes later, the green bluff just a blackened patch with charred stumps, was recrossed and the journey resumed.¹³⁸

The bishop had motored by car to the Little Red River reserve. From there, he and Mr. Barker went by team and wagon, following the overland cart trail through “ruined forests.” Bishop Newnham was aghast at the ecological devastation: “On the way up the whole country seemed to have been burned over by the recent fires, and only blackened tree trunks, which had fallen or will fall within a year or so, remain in the once well-timbered area. The soil also has been deeply

¹³⁵ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 7 October 1918; Shortt, p. 14.

¹³⁶ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 28 April 1919.

¹³⁷ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 4 June 1919.

¹³⁸ Prince Albert *Daily Herald* 12 June 1919.

burned and even the muskeg had been on fire. The game suffered heavily, young birds and eggs being destroyed.” The roads suffered as well, he added. “In general all bridges over the Little Red and Sturgeon rivers have been burned and a number of the Prince Albert Lumber Company’s dams. The forest rangers are now [making] temporary repairs to the bridges and clearing the trails of fallen trees.”¹³⁹ The devastation seemed complete.

Scientists and historians have pinned these fires to the increasing agricultural expansion into the forest edge, where homesteaders and settlers, eager to clear land for farming, employed extensive brush burning.¹⁴⁰ The Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, however, suggested that the 1919 fires started in the forest reserves.¹⁴¹ Regardless of its origins, the devastation of the massive fires, aided and abetted by years of accumulated debris from logging and combined with a severe drought in 1919, put an effective end to the large scale lumber industry at Prince Albert. The large companies, such as the Prince Albert Lumber Company, abandoned their timber berths.¹⁴² Local residents culled the fire-killed trees for efficient firewood, posts, and telephone poles, and small logging permits continued to be issued for those areas untouched by the blazes, but on a large scale, Prince Albert’s commercial timber industry was finished until northern road improvement took foresters deeper into the boreal north. Commercial timber operations resumed, and the pulp and paper industry was created in the 1960s.¹⁴³

Conclusion

The importance of the lumber industry to the early development of Prince Albert cannot be overstated. Not only was it the major commercial industry in the region, but its exponential growth – supported by the policies of the Dominion Government through its *Dominion Lands Act* and forest reserves – went hand-in-hand with the population explosion on the open prairies.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, J.M.H. Weir and E.A. Johnson, “Effects of escaped settlement fires and logging on forest composition in the mixedwood boreal forest,” *Canadian Journal of Forest Resources* Vol. 28 (1998): pp. 459-467. This essay is based in part on Weir’s unpublished M.Sc. thesis, “The fire frequency and age mosaic of a mixed wood boreal forest,” University of Calgary, 1996. This research focused on Prince Albert National Park. It does not explore or understand the wider implications of the logging industry in the north Prince Albert region on a broad scale. Instead, it argued that incursion into the mixed wood boreal forest north of Prince Albert was for agricultural purposes only outside the Sturgeon Forest Reserve. This is inaccurate.

¹⁴¹ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 3 June 1919. The forest reserves were beginning to see increased use by tourists and campers. It is possible that the fires were started by fishermen or campers, instead of homesteaders.

¹⁴² The Prince Albert Lumber Company reorganized and became the Ladder Lake Lumber Company, moving their operations to eastern Saskatchewan and Manitoba, near Hudson Bay and The Pas.

¹⁴³ For an overview of the origins of the pulp and paper industry in Saskatchewan, see Tom Novosel, “Pulp Fictions: The CCF Government and the Promise of a Pulp Industry in Saskatchewan, 1944-1964,” unpublished MA thesis, Department of History, University of Saskatchewan, 2007.

As settlers poured into the prairie south to build an agricultural utopia, they required lumber in tremendous quantities to build houses, barns, schools, churches, businesses, and bridges. Although mills in British Columbia could provide longer and larger pieces of lumber and continued to ship product into the prairies, local mills found a strong niche market. Saskatchewan's Department of Agriculture noted in 1909 that "the lumbermen of Northern Saskatchewan are conveniently situated; as they have right at their door a market capable of consuming all that they can produce."¹⁴⁴ Prince Albert developed as the pivot point between northern resources and prairie markets. The development of the commercial fishing industry mirrored the north/south contrast of the lumber industry. Overland freighting connected the boreal north with the prairie south through a combination of traditional fur trade practices and First Nations needs (through treaties) with modern resource development of forests and fish.

Despite the cultural binary augmented by the commercial nature of industrial resource development, other aspects of landscape usage in the north Prince Albert region reflected traditional models. Local First Nations incorporated forest edge pursuits of hunting and fishing with farming, logging, and freighting, reflecting a lifestyle built on resilience at the ecological edge. Homesteaders moving north from Prince Albert to develop the cut-over forests into agricultural farms folded farming practices with contract work as freighters, lumberjacks, or fishers and as local suppliers of these industries. Their cultural landscape also pulled from both forest and farm, specifically built on the ecological edge. As Dominion Field Naturalist John Macoun originally prophesied, the north Prince Albert region was a place that could encompass both the "field for investment" and "the home of the emigrant." The forest industry (along with commercial fishing, the fur trade, and freighting) provided both small and large-scale entrepreneurs with investment opportunities and profits. The surge of homesteaders on the heels – and in contention with – the lumber industry signaled another dramatic change in the north Prince Albert region. Homesteaders, like their First Nations counterparts, recreated the north Prince Albert landscape as home, bringing resilience through mixed farming and forest exploitation to create a unique forest edge culture.

¹⁴⁴ Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture pamphlet, "Saskatchewan," issued 1909.

Chapter Three: “A Pleasant and Plentyful Country”: Mixed Farming at the Forest Edge

Hudson’s Bay Company explorer Anthony Henday traveled into the western interior of North America on a scouting and reconnaissance trip in 1754. When he arrived west of the Forks of the Saskatchewan River, he described “fine level land and tall woods ... I am now in a pleasant and plentyful country.”¹ Henday’s description combined both an aesthetic comment (‘pleasant’) and a practical one (‘plentyful’). Both the scenery and wealth or sustenance to be derived from the local landscape influenced Henday’s assessment. The quality of the soil, or “fine level land,” and its “tall woods” were central components. Wood *and* good soil, in the same place, fulfilled both aesthetic need and the requirements of human occupation.

Henday’s “pleasant and plentyful country” in some ways predicted an agricultural ideal built on a landscape prized for both its park-like beauty and its capability to support diversified agriculture. That ideal was mixed farming.² A specific term, mixed farming referred to a type of farm that both grew grain and raised stock – dairy cattle, beef cattle, sheep, chickens, and pigs, for example – both for domestic consumption and the off-farm market. By operating a mixed, rather than monoculture wheat farm, a farmer was able to diversify a farm’s holdings and spread assets over a broad base. Diversification as a risk management strategy offered better resilience over time than other farming operations, particularly the classic boom-and-bust cycle of wheat farming. A mixed farm was situated within (and became in and of itself) an ecologically-mixed landscape that contained cropland, hay land, water, and timber. Continuing First Nations traditional cultural practices within an agricultural context, mixed farms built at rich ecological/forest edge landscapes were promoted as places of diversity and resilience.

The vast majority of studies on western Canadian agriculture focus on the wheat economy that became synonymous with the open plains.³ The economic, social, and cultural

¹Barbara Belyea (editor), *A Year Inland: The Journal of a Hudson’s Bay Company Winterer* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000), p. 64.

² The dairy and beef industries in Saskatchewan have been explored by G.C. Church, “Dominion Government Aid to the Dairy Industry in Western Canada, 1890-1906,” *Saskatchewan History* Vol. 16, no. 2 (Spring 1963): pp. 41-58; C.M. (Red) Williams, “Always the Bridesmaid: The Development of the Saskatchewan Beef Production System,” part I, *Saskatchewan History* Volume 42, no. 3 (Autumn 1989): pp. 106-118. Church claimed that by 1889, cheese was a major Canadian national export and it was thought that butter could be, too. Mixed farmers were the center of the dairy industry.

³ For overviews of the wheat growing culture as it developed in the western interior, see G.E. Britnell, *The Wheat Economy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1939); V.C. Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957); J.H. Thompson, *The Harvests of War – The Prairie West, 1914-1918*

importance of the wheat boom – which drew thousands of immigrants to the prairie west – deserves much of the analytical attention it has received. Its importance, though, has been overplayed. The monolithic wheat narrative has marginalized and distorted the role of mixed farming in developing the western interior of Canada and the relation between farming practices and landscape. The mixed farm versus wheat farm debate was ideologically central to the agricultural history of the western interior. Mixed farming was swiftly tied to landscape in Saskatchewan: wheat farming typified prairie agriculture; mixed farming was pursued in parkland and forest edge environments. The ideological debate symbolized the contrast between opening the Palliser Triangle in southwestern Saskatchewan for agricultural settlement with the opening of the so-called “new north” of the forest edge.

External migration to the western interior may have been drawn by the wheat boom, but Prince Albert promoters advertised the northern edge landscape as a resilient, prosperous, healthy, fertile, and beautiful alternative to the bleak, dry, open plains.⁴ As drought and other natural calamities hit the drier regions, internal migration within the Canadian West was predicated not only on moving from treeless and dry land to forested and humid regions, but also on the debate between grain and mixed farming. Dominion Land surveyors and other government explorers characterized the north Prince Albert landscape as a mixed farming region. Prince Albert promoters capitalized on the grain versus mixed farming debate to exploit an

(Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992). See also David Spector, *Agriculture on the Prairies* (Ottawa: Parks Canada and Environment Canada, National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, History and Archaeology circular 65, 1983) and Grant MacEwan’s popular history, *Between the Red and the Rockies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952).

⁴ When the two districts of Saskatchewan and Assiniboia were (essentially) amalgamated to form one province, the concept of “Saskatchewan” came to include, and soon to be taken over by, the prairie/wheat identity. Up until that point (particularly because of the promotional material of the Prince Albert board of trade and Prince Albert local newspapers) the Saskatchewan district was routinely cast as a rich, lush river valley in contrast to the dry, open plains landscape of Assiniboia. The word ‘prairie’ and ‘plain’ were not interchangeable prior to 1900. In the pamphlet issued by the Lorne Agricultural Society of Prince Albert in 1890, “Prince Albert and the North Saskatchewan: A Guide to the ‘Fertile Belt’ now being opened up by Railway from Regina to Prince Albert, The Central City and Capital of Saskatchewan.” (printed by *The Prince Albert Times*; CIHM 30434), the prairie was defined as the ‘Fertile Belt’ and was described as “probably at one time a dense forest. It naturally inclines to produce timber; and where a prairie escapes the yearly fires for any length of time it speedily becomes overgrown with vigorous young aspens and willows.” This description became, sometime after 1900, the definition of ‘parkland.’ The plain, on the other hand, “has doubtless been destitute of timber from the first” and its meaning was tied directly to such terms as ‘desert,’ or the classic flat, tree-less landscape of the south. The difference between sub-humid or humid ‘prairie’ versus semi-arid or arid ‘plain’ in the United States is more clearly defined and understood.

identity that was decidedly *not* the prairie.⁵ Internal migration from one biome to another changed the face of farming in the western interior.

Wheat Farming Versus Mixed Farming in Historical Perspective

Agricultural historians have understood, in general, that prairie farms operated differently than farms at the parkland/forest edge. Land classification correlated directly to the type of agriculture that surveyors believed could be successfully prosecuted there. Sociologist R.W. Murchie, who wrote *Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier*, explained: “it has been customary...to speak as though only two types of land existed... ‘good wheat land’ or ‘excellent grain land,’ while all other land which was available for settlement was characterized as ‘good mixed farming land.’”⁶ The Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture followed this general classification. A promotional booklet on Saskatchewan issued in 1909 divided the province into four distinct ‘zones’: the open rolling prairie; the mixed prairie and forest; the great northern forest; and the far north. The prairie, in this delineation, was given over to “the Domain of King Wheat,” but the mixed prairie and forest region (also called the park belt) was “splendidly adapted for mixed farming and for stock raising.”⁷ The pamphlet explained, “Here the land is less easily broken up and the temptation to risk all in a wheat crop is thereby somewhat reduced.”⁸ The agricultural difference between prairie/wheat and parkland/mixed farming was reinforced in the *Atlas of Canada* map of 1950, reflecting a continued cultural understanding of the connection between landscape and farm pursuits. The black soil zone of the parkland and the grey soil of the forest edge were known for their mixed farms. These landscapes usually contained water, hay land, and shelter in addition to crop land.⁹ The ability to grow wheat

⁵ Prince Albert’s ‘northern’ identity sometimes created problems. Local historian R. Mayson suggested that one of the common mistakes the city needed to correct was that “twelve persons could be asked about Prince Albert and ten would answer that it is the door to the Arctic Circle and one step across the threshold of the frozen north would send its icy blasts to the marrow. Even so well-informed a person as Lady Macdonald said in one of her published letters that “Prince Albert is the most northerly city in the world,” *SAB*, R-73 Richmond A. Mayson fonds, File I, Pioneer Trails, CKBI Broadcasts, transcripts, “Prince Albert Board of Trade” broadcast 7 May 1954.

⁶ R.W. Murchie, *Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier* (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, 1936), p. 46. Murchie decried simple classifications of “wheat land” and “mixed farm land,” as it was far too loosely used and did not accurately reflect the possibilities of the land and region. Instead, he advocated detailed classifications, from land good for market gardening, grain farming, mixed farming, dairying, stock farming, or ranching. Mixed farms differed from grain farms in that a portion of the land could be rough land (but not all). A good water source was the key.

⁷ Saskatchewan, Department of Agriculture booklet, “Saskatchewan,” 1909, p. 10, 6.

⁸ “Saskatchewan,” p. 48.

⁹ See, for example, Charles W. Johnson, “Relative Decline of Wheat in the Prairie Provinces of Canada,” *Economic Geography*, Vol. 24, no. 3 (1948): pp. 209-216.

successfully, however, remained the primary criterion for agricultural land.¹⁰ As a result, economists and historians have been drawn to the wheat story, and agricultural success or failure has been defined by the landscape's ability to successfully support the wheat economy. Was wheat still important on a mixed farm? Of course, and even the most ardent mixed-farming literature or the boosterism of the Prince Albert promoters acknowledged that fact.¹¹

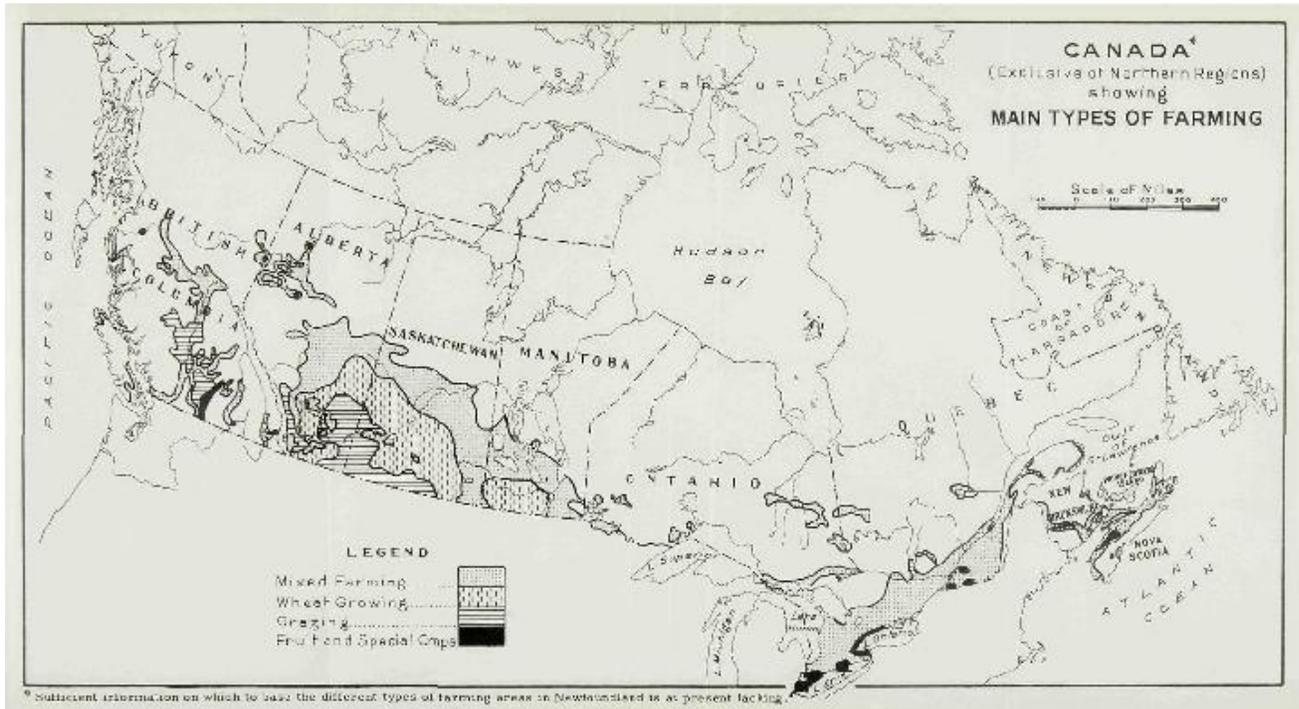


Figure 28. Mixed farming and landscape. *Canada Year Book 1950*.

Hard red spring wheat, particularly the new strains which had a shorter growing season, opened up new wheat lands further and further north, and Prince Albert boosters were quick to

¹⁰ Maps of potential wheat-growing land can be found in many books, and formed the overly-optimistic estimates of the future potential of the western interior. See, for example, Isaiah Bowman (ed.), *Pioneer Settlement: Co-operative Studies by Twenty-Six Authors* (American Geographical Society Special Publication No. 14, 1932), p. 5.

¹¹ The most common method of proving the worth of the local soil was to point to local farmers who had won regional, national and international prizes for wheat. The board of trade averred: “The Prince Albert district is noted for the quality of wheat it produces and has not only gained the sweepstakes at the Columbus, Ohio exhibition this year and the first prize at Brandon from all the rest of Western Canada, but more recently an exhibit from this district won the \$1000 prize offered by Sir Thos. Shaughnessy at the land show in New York.” “Prince Albert Investments.” For an entertaining overview of the connection between agriculture and exhibitions in the western interior, see David C. Jones, *Midways, Judges, and Smooth-Tongues Fakirs: The Illustrated Story of Country Fairs in the Prairie West* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1983). See also Jim Shilliday, *Canada’s Wheat King: The Life and Times of Seager Wheeler* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2007).

The Minneapolis newspaper, *The Northwestern Miner*, extolled Prince Albert’s wheat growing potential in 1908. A front page story gave a glowing account of the quality of the local grain for the Minneapolis flour mills. *The Northwestern Miner* Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1 July 1908. “Wheat is Wheat – Prince Albert – The Gateway to Hudson Bay” by Mae Harris Anson.

reassure their audiences that the northern regions could, indeed, successfully grow this key crop. Their messianic message, though, was that farmers at Prince Albert – with all the local advantages of water, shelter, and fodder – were capable of producing so much more than just wheat. Mixed farming boosters were fighting an uphill battle, though: the astounding ability of the open plains to grow hard red spring wheat drew not only thousands of immigrants, but has been the central narrative for analysts of prairie history.

Agricultural historians John Herd Thompson and Ian MacPherson lamented the “over-generalizations many of us [historians] have indulged in in depicting an almost-monolithic prairie agriculture,” one that emphasized wheat, wheat, and more wheat on the open plains. They proposed, “Future local studies, it is to be hoped, will look beyond our obsession with grain growing to the mixed farms of the park belt.”¹² Historian Peter Russell agreed. By investigating the difference between farming practices on the semi-arid plains and parkland/forest edge environments,¹³ Russell, like Thompson and MacPherson, challenged historians and economists who have classed Saskatchewan’s agriculture categorically as a wheat monoculture.¹⁴ He argued “*some* farmers did rely heavily on their cash [wheat] crop to supply their subsistence needs, but that turns out to depend much more on *where* their farm was located.”¹⁵

Analyzing the agricultural census between the years 1911-1926, Russell showed that “while wheat was the most commonly grown cash crop in most parts of the province in most periods, it alone did not determine ‘the standard of living of the great majority of Saskatchewan farmers.’”¹⁶ Farms that contained forest land were more likely to have secondary field crops, particularly oats and barley (sometimes that acreage would be more than wheat), more stock, and more garden produce. Farms in the semi-arid regions were unable to diversify; in many cases, they were unable to grow even gardens, fodder, hay or other subsistence needs due to low

¹² John Herd Thompson and Ian MacPherson, “How You Gonna Get ‘em Back to the Farm: Writing the Rural/Agricultural History of the Prairie West,” unpublished essay presented at the Western Canadian Studies Conference, University of Saskatchewan, 23 October 1987.

¹³ Peter Russell, “Subsistence, Diversification, and Staple Orientations on Saskatchewan Farms: Parklands vs. Prairie, 1911-1926,” *Saskatchewan History* Vol. 57 (Fall 2005): pp. 15-28.

¹⁴ Russell pointed specifically to Britnell, Fowke, and Thompson.

¹⁵ Russell, “Subsistence,” p. 16. Russell’s essay explored the difference between a commercial farm economy and that part of a farm economy that cannot be measured in money – particularly production which enters the barter system or was used on-farm.

¹⁶ This quote, taken from Britnell, was the central point of Russell’s paper. The statement, Russell argues, is not so much wrong as radically incomplete. See p. 26, 15.

rainfall and poor soils.¹⁷ The landscape, devoid of wood for building or heating fuel, meant that plains farmers had to devote a much greater portion of available cash to procure these necessities.¹⁸ Russell provided an in-depth economic investigation of the connection between mixed farming and the more northern, parkland and forest edge areas. The ecological advantages (and limitations) of the forest edge environment encouraged the development of mixed farming.¹⁹

The Mixed Farming Movement

Mixed farming was typically practiced on small to medium-sized farm holdings in eastern North America, Britain, France, and eastern Europe. Mixed farming had many proponents, so many that historian Paul Voisey likened its boosterism to a crusade.²⁰ Agricultural scientists, agricultural newspapers, and various levels of government consistently advocated a mixed farming practice in contrast to a straight grain farm – often while also investigating improved dry farming/wheat growing techniques. The cliché, used time and again by mixed farming promoters, was that farmers would do well to remember that it was unwise “to

¹⁷ What was even more shocking was that the practice of leaving land fallow (to allow the land to rest every other year or every third year) – advice advocated vociferously in pamphlets, letters, public speeches, and newspaper articles – was heeded *least* in the area which needed it most. “At the southwestern extreme of the province most farms only began to use fallow as extensively as the rest of the prairies as a consequence of the post-war drought.” Russell, “Subsistence,” p. 19. Russell’s contention supported the charge, found in many places in the agricultural literature of the time period, that wheat farmers were “miners.” Wheat mining was described by University of Toronto economist James Mavor in 1911 as follows: “the specialist wheat farmer finds that by cultivating his land to the fullest extent he may in many cases obtain so high a return as entirely to recoup the cost of his land [and implements] by the sale of two or three crops. Although the land is exhausted by this successive cropping, and its productive value seriously diminished, the farmer finds himself in possession of from 160 to 640 acres of land which have cost him almost nothing, in a country in which the price of land is rising rapidly. ...So long as it is possible for the farmer to make a considerable sum of money in a few years and then to sell the partially exhausted land at a good price, recommendations of summer fallowing have little practical effect.” See Mavor, “The Economic Results of the Specialist Production and Marketing of Wheat,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 26, no. 4 (1911): pp. 659-675; p. 670-671.

¹⁸ One of the best reports regarding the cash nexus on grain farms was Britnell’s *The Wheat Economy*, particularly chapter five, “Income and Expenditure,” and chapter seven, “Standards of Living.” Britnell showed that open plains farmers spent between ten and fifteen percent of their cash on heat and light; in the parkland and forest edge, that number dropped to three percent. See table, page 167.

¹⁹ Historian S. D. Clark, writing in 1931, examined the growth of the wheat boom. He argued that the scientific investigation of dryland farming techniques, including the development of earlier-maturing varieties of wheat, railway expansion, and the discovery of agricultural techniques and tools – such as summerfallow cultivation and the self-binding reaper – encouraged prairie wheat farms. See S. Delbert Clark, “Settlement in Saskatchewan with Special Reference to the Influence of Dry Farming,” unpublished MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1931.

²⁰ One of the most accessible overviews of the battle between mixed farming and wheat monoculture was presented by Paul Voisey, “A Mix Up Over Mixed Farming: The Curious History of the Agricultural Diversification Movement in a Single Crop Area of Southern Alberta,” in David C. Jones and Ian MacPherson, eds., *Building Beyond the Homestead: Rural History on the Prairies* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1985), pp. 179-206. A similar version is found in Paul Voisey, *Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), chapter four, ‘Crop Selection.’

put all your eggs into one basket.”²¹ Diversity was the key to a successful farm. To withstand the vicissitudes of environment and market, farmers would find a high degree of stability and resilience through mixed farming practices.

In Ontario, the wheat staple dominated agriculture throughout the mid-nineteenth century but by Confederation, it had been largely replaced by mixed farming, emphasizing meat and dairy products in addition to wheat and other grains.²² It was, economist Marvin McNinn argued, an “interlude between two wheat staple periods,” as the rise of the western Canadian wheat economy after 1896 initiated another wheat boom.²³ Mixed farming gained scientific credibility when it was taught at the Agricultural College at Guelph, which set important precedents. Vocal proponents of mixed farming in western Canada were fostered in Ontario during the mixed farming push and came to prominence on the national stage: John G. Rutherford, Dominion Livestock Commissioner, and W. R. Motherwell, who became Saskatchewan’s Minister of Agriculture.²⁴ Future farmers who either grew up or otherwise participated in the Ontario mixed-farming economy immigrated to the western interior of Canada. Many of these settlers, historian Paul Voisey commented, agonized over the question of what kind of farm to create in the west.²⁵

Mixed-farming advocates developed a two-pronged approach to promote their ideas: farm economics and moral integrity. A mixed farm, it was believed, offered diversity and protection for farmers. If one crop or product should fail (for either environmental or market reasons), the farmer had other crops or products to tide the family through. Mixed farming was described primarily as a long-term investment. Year-over-year gains were smaller than wheat farms, it was usually admitted,²⁶ but generally came out ahead over the course of several years or a lifetime.²⁷ Indeed, Dominion scientist James Macoun noted the difference between wheat and

²¹ It is ironic that mixed farm promoters used a mixed farm metaphor – eggs – to refer to straight wheat farming.

²² Marvin McNinn, “The Changing Structure of Canadian Agriculture, 1867-1897,” *The Journal of Economic History* Vol. 42, no. 1 (1982): pp. 191-198.

²³ McNinn, “Changing Structure of Canadian Agriculture,” p. 191.

²⁴ For short biographies of prominent men who promoted mixed farming, see David Spector, *Agriculture on the Prairies*, p. 7-11; 217-249. See also Lyle Dyck, *Farmers ‘Making Good’: The Development of the Abernethy District, Saskatchewan 1880-1920* (Ottawa: Canadian Parks Service, 1989; Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2008).

²⁵ Voisey argued that settlers in the Vulcan area, many of whom came from mixed farming backgrounds in sub-humid environments either in Ontario or east of the 100th meridian in the United States were “tormented” by self-doubt over one-crop wheat monoculture. See “Mix-up Over Mixed Farming,” p. 179.

²⁶ Although some particularly fervent advocates touted mixed farming as the easier path to riches. See Voisey, “A Mix-up Over Mixed Farming,” p. 180.

²⁷ The question of whether mixed farms were, indeed, more profitable than grain farms has intrigued economists and historians. Parks Canada historian David Spector, in a detailed analysis, showed that in an average ten-year period,

bush farms in 1882. In his book, *Manitoba and the Great North West*, four telling pen-and-ink drawings graphically outlined the difference between bush farming and farming on the prairie. In the short term, the prairie was depicted as the quicker and easier path to a developed farm. Over the long term, however, the farm developed in the bush country showed significant and comfortable prosperity. Overall, mixed farming was believed to hold appeal for farmers who were concerned with long-term resilience, stability, and risk management.

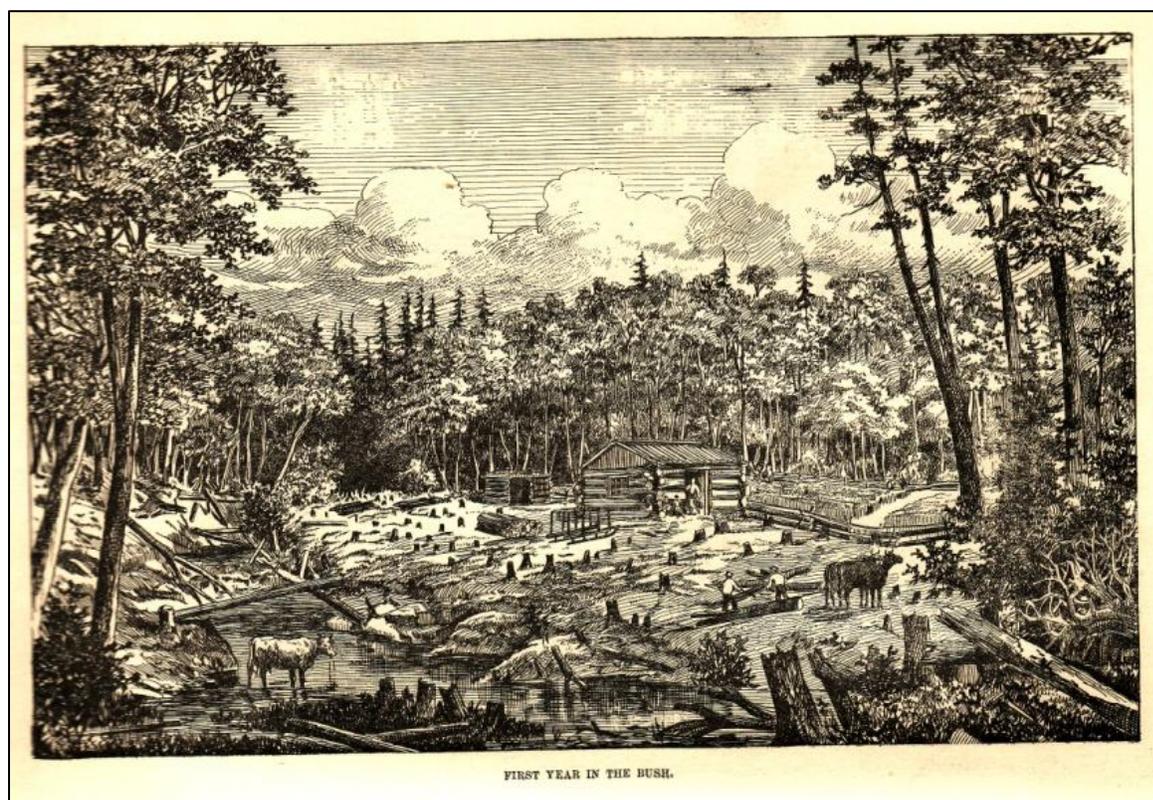


Figure 29. "First Year in the Bush," Macoun, *Manitoba and The Great Northwest*, p. 48.

grain farming was more profitable than mixed farming due to the much higher overhead costs associated with the latter (barns, feed, labour, etc.). See *Agriculture on the Prairies*, p. 48-58. In contrast, agricultural historian Robert Ankli and Wendy Millar suggested that in Ontario, farmers made the switch from wheat to mixed farming (increasing their dairy herd) *knowing* that it offered a lower relative income. They argued that farmers were willing to sacrifice profits as a risk management strategy – the profits were smaller, but grew steadily over time and did not follow the all-or-nothing gamble of wheat farming. See Robert Ankli and Wendy Millar, "Ontario Agriculture in Transition: The Switch from Wheat to Cheese," *The Journal of Economic History* Vol. 42, no. 1 (1982): pp. 207-215. Mixed farming as a logical risk management strategy, to alleviate the most glaring problems of wheat dependence, has been a consistent theme in both mixed farming literature and much of the agricultural commentary seen during and after the Dust Bowl. See Charles Johnson's analysis of the effects of the Great Depression and the Second World War on prairie agriculture in "Relative Decline of Wheat in the Prairie Provinces of Canada," *Economic Geography* Vol. 24, no. 3 (1948): 209-216. Johnson stated: "The satisfactory yields at first encouraged concentration on cash-wheat but finally resulted in the usual loss of security and reduction of self-sufficiency of a one-crop system."

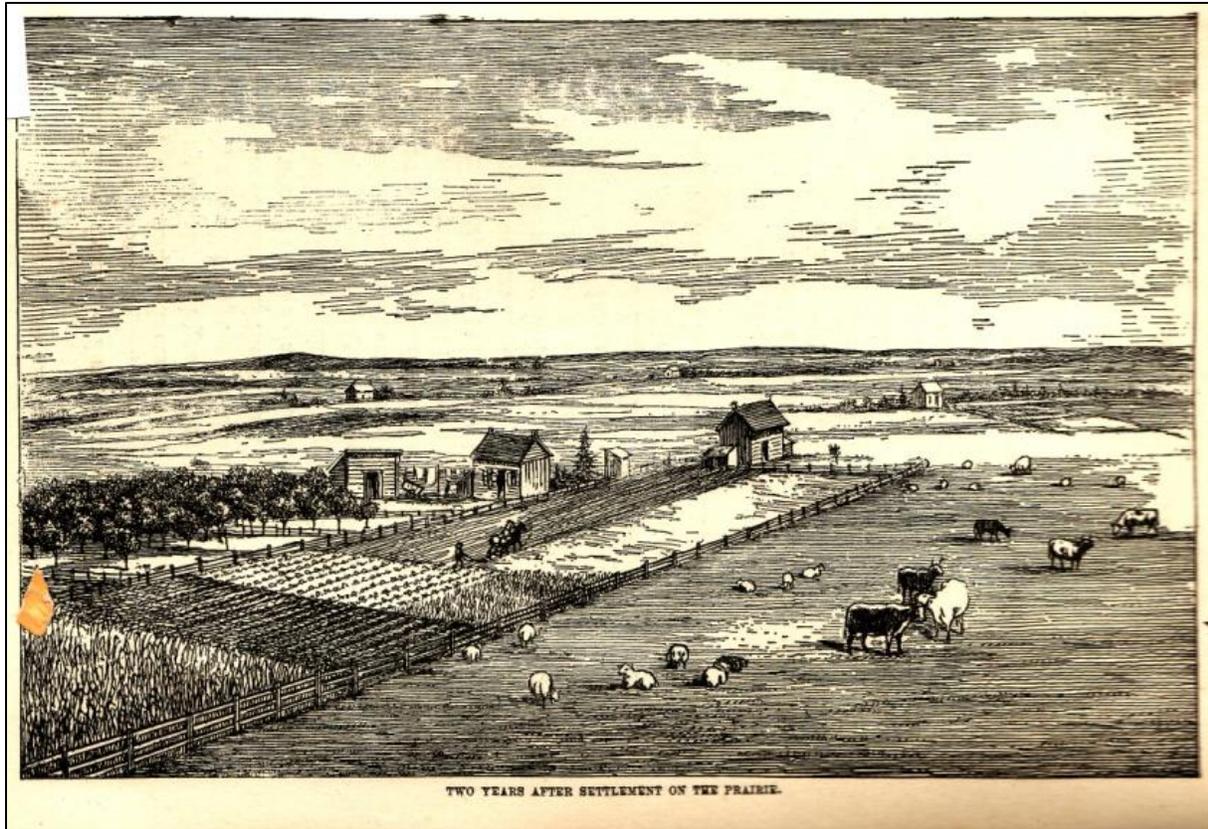


Figure 30. "Two Years After Settlement on the Prairie," Macoun, *Manitoba and the Great North West*, p. 48.

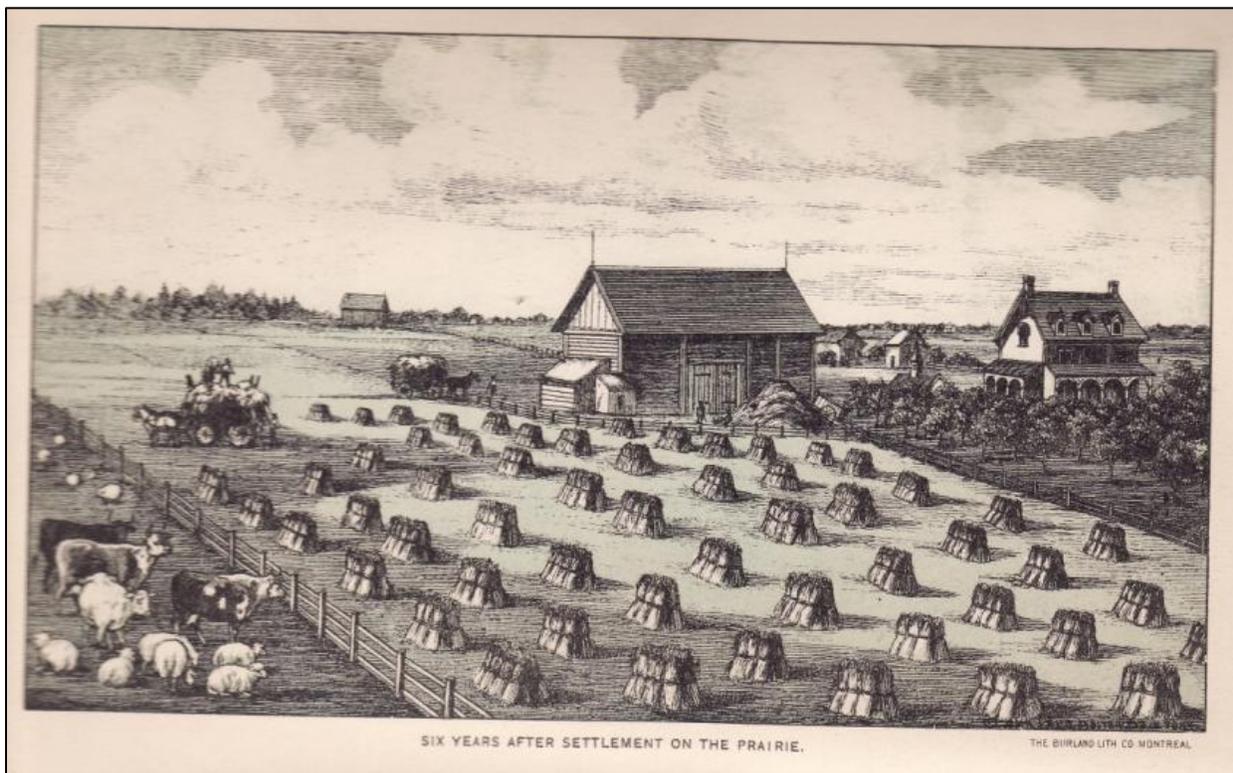


Figure 31. "Six Years After Settlement on the Prairie," Macoun, *Manitoba and the Great North West*, p. 211.



Figure 32. "Thirty Years in the Bush," Macoun, *Manitoba and the Great North West*, p. 211.

Advocates of mixed farming stressed environmental considerations. Soil depletion from continuous wheat monocropping was a serious concern; mixed farming would add leguminous crops to the rotation to bolster the soil nitrogen content. Manure from farm animals could be put back into the soil profile. Soil husbandry was an essential aspect of farm management, particularly intensive farm management over a long period of time. Those farmers interested in developing a stable, resilient, and profitable farm could not afford to deplete their primary resource. In addition, animals found on a mixed farm could convert legumes, grasses, weeds, and frozen or otherwise poor crops to cash simply by eating them. A mixed farm offered a more balanced road to a competent living.

Moral suasion was also an integral aspect of the mixed farming literature. In Ontario, a prosperous mixed farmer enjoyed a prominent social status, with enough wealth to send the

children of the farm family for higher education.²⁸ Social status derived not only from wealth, but from a mixed-farmer's interest in and knowledge of many aspects of agriculture. Expertise in everything from the causes of ear mites in sheep to the best feed to produce high-quality butterfat in dairy cattle enhanced a mixed-farmer's reputation for intelligence in local and regional circles. Another factor in promoting social status was independence. As Laura Ingalls Wilder explained in her semi-biographical book *Farmer Boy* (based on her husband's experiences growing up on a mixed farm in New York State), a successful mixed farmer was beholden to no one else. A farmer "depends on himself, and the land and the weather. If you're a farmer, you raise what you eat, you raise what you wear, and you keep warm with wood out of your own timber. You work hard, but you work as you please, and no man can tell you to go or come. You'll be free and independent...on a farm."²⁹ Within the dry-farming ecology of the western interior, promoters suggested that mixed farmers added to their social stature as keepers of the soil. Crop rotation and soil fertility husbandry contrasted the "wheat-miners" who mined, stripped, and otherwise abused the soil for short-term economic gains at the expense of long-term conservation practices.³⁰ Mixed farming took over the moral high ground of environmental stewardship, independence, intelligence and long-term, stable wealth generation.

The idealism of the mixed farming movement and its correlation to social status did not transplant successfully west of Ontario. Mixed farming in the western interior, despite its proponents and their persuasive arguments, did not sway everyone.³¹ Sociologist S.D. Clark, in his investigation of Saskatchewan settlement, argued that mixed-farming was "regarded with a feeling more or less of repugnance." The repugnance was due, in part, to the much heavier work load of a mixed farm. Clark suggested that "interminable chores, hard work during the whole twelve months of the year, cleaning out stables," turned many farmers away from mixed farming to the easier load of wheat farming. In addition to less arduous work, wheat farming meant the

²⁸ For an examination of the moral and intellectual ideals of farming, see Tom Nesmith, "The Philosophy of Agriculture: The Promise of the Intellect in Ontario Farming, 1835-1914," unpublished PhD dissertation, Carleton University, 1988.

²⁹ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Farmer Boy* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1933. Reprinted 1994), p. 370.

³⁰ For the most severe indictment on such practises, see John H. Thompson, "'Permanently Wasteful But Immediately Profitable': Prairie Agriculture and the Great War," *Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1976), 193-206.

³¹ For a correlation between social consequence, investments, and the rise of the ranching industry, see David Breen, *The Canadian Prairie West and the Ranching Frontier* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983); Warren Elofson, *Cowboys, Gentlemen, and Cattle Thieves: Ranching on the Western Frontier* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); E.C. Morgan, "The Bell Farm," *Saskatchewan History* Vol. 19, no. 2 (1966): pp. 41-60.

possibility of immediate wealth generation, with “big returns, extensive operations, the opportunity to play the role of farm manager with a certain amount of leisure,” Clark contended.³² Wealth was an important social characteristic, and a huge wheat crop, sold at a high price, could achieve that. A wheat grower who obtained this golden ticket could spend his winters in leisure, perhaps in town, back east, in Europe or in sunny California. There was nothing to hold him to the farm in the cold winter months, unlike the mixed farmer with stock to feed and look after every day.³³ The life of a rich man at leisure conjured up images of a wealthy magnate, a patron of the arts and letters, a philanthropist and possibly a politician. Clark went on to claim that mixed farmers were looked upon with “general disfavour ... by his more pretentious but frequently less substantial wheat growing brother.”³⁴ Although mixed farming advocates worked hard to present mixed farming as profitable, better for the soil and more substantial in the long run, “wheat mining” continued to be a popular choice.

In some cases, the “pretentiousness” of the wheat farmer toward the mixed farmer was reflected in ethnic slurs. It was almost an axiom that certain settlers who had come *en masse* into the western interior of Canada from Germany, Ukraine and Russia had a cultural preference for forested farms.³⁵ Saskatchewan provincial historian John Hawkes, writing in 1924, argued that immigrants from Eastern Europe “would not settle on the open sections, preferring those which contained some wood and hay, although they had to contend with a good deal of scrub.”³⁶ Cultural preference for farms away from the open plains filtered back through the division between the straight grain farmer and the mixed farmer. The ‘men in sheepskin coats,’ smelling of garlic and pigs, were the mixed farmers; the grain farmers were clean, English-speaking men in suits, organizing Grain Growers societies and taking prizes for wheat at agricultural fairs.

An intriguing gendered perception of the primacy of wheat farming over mixed farming was put forward by the monthly magazine *The Saskatchewan Farmer* in 1911. This magazine,

³² S.D. Clark, “Settlement in Saskatchewan,” p. 36-37.

³³ A recent investigation of the ‘wheat boom’ of 1880-1910 through the perspective of economics can be found in Tony Ward, “The Origins of the Canadian Wheat Boom, 1880-1910,” *The Canadian Journal of Economics* Vol. 27, no. 4 (1994): pp. 865-883. There have been allusions to this wheat bonanza mentality in historical literature, but there is yet to be an investigation of what role it played in the cultural development of the west.

³⁴ S.D. Clark, “Settlement in Saskatchewan,” p. 36-37.

³⁵ As an example, see the extensive publications of John Lehr on the Ukrainian communities of western Canada. In particular, see “The Rural Settlement of Ukrainian Pioneers in Western Canada, 1891-914,” in B.M. Barr (ed.), *Western Canada Research in Geography* (Vancouver: Tantalus Research, 1975), pp. 53-68; “Government Coercion in the Settlement of Ukrainian Immigrants in Western Canada,” *Prairie Forum* Vol. 8, no. 2 (1983): pp. 179-194.

³⁶ John Hawkes, *The Story of Saskatchewan and Its People* (Chicago-Regina: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1924), p. 732.

produced in Moose Jaw, actively advocated the mixed farming ideal. Straight grain farming, it believed, retarded agricultural development. It made no sense, the paper's editors claimed, for butter, canned milk and other produce to be shipped into western Canada or feed grain shipped out when a thriving mixed farming community could use local feed to create the milk, butter, eggs, bacon, and cheese to feed the burgeoning cities and general population. What stood in the way of creating more mixed farms, first and foremost, was the unequal gender population. "When a bachelor locates, horses, plow, seeder, wagon, binder are his equipment, with a sheet iron stove in a shack to mark his stopping place. He does not bother with a cow nor with pigs; a few of them may have a dozen chickens. ...They make their money out of wheat and flax...and buy their butter, meat and eggs."³⁷ With over 90,000 more men than women, the article declared, bachelor farmers were skewing western agricultural development to favour wheat over mixed farms. The subtext of this contention, of course, was that women (and possibly children) were central to the successful prosecution of a mixed farm. The amount of work required on a mixed farm meant it needed at least two people to manage the workload successfully.³⁸

Despite reasoned and even impassioned advocacy of mixed farming, cereal crop monoculture and the wheat boom predominated on the open plains. National Parks historian David Spector speculated that mixed farming did not achieve its celebrated potential on the open plains for a variety of reasons. Wheat was a farmer's "path to profit" as it required little outlay for equipment and only six months of labour (or slightly less) per year. The introduction of Red Fife and, later, Marquis wheat varieties (which matured much more quickly and could reliably be harvested at good quality) led to an expansion of wheat acreage. Animal husbandry of any sort required large cash investments at startup: to purchase stock, build barns and silos, find an adequate water source (which was an arduous task for many), build fences, and invest land in non-cash forage crops for feed. The semi-arid landscape of the plains, devoid of trees and prone to drought conditions, placed an unusually complicated burden on farmers who may have wanted to diversify their holdings. Adequate water, either from a well to supply stock or as rain to raise fodder crops, was not reliable. In a drought year, everything suffered: water quality and quantity for both humans and animals declined, and both commercial cash crops and hay/fodder crops

³⁷ "Mixed Farming is Need of West," *The Saskatchewan Farmer* Vol. 2, no. 3 (December 1911), p. 30.

³⁸ See some of the recent work by Sandra Rollings-Magnusson on the role of women and children on prairie farms: "Necessary for Survival: Women and Children's Labour on Prairie Homesteads, 1871-1911," *Prairie Forum* Vol. 29, no. 2 (2004): 227-243; "Canada's Most Wanted: Pioneer Women on the Western Prairies," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol. 37, no. 2 (2000): 223-238.

burned from lack of moisture. The double whammy left both the farmer and the stock in a precarious position. Any land not put to commercial (wheat) production meant less cash in hand; a drought year, with no cash production and no hay or fodder, could bring devastation. Building a stock herd took time, money and good fortune before there could be much expectation of return on investment. Finally, the homesteading system, geared towards grain farming, did not consider land to be 'improved' unless it was cultivated and growing crops. Special permission was necessary to obtain patent on land that was left as pasture or hayland for the purpose of stockraising, and permission was not often given.³⁹ Many farmers on the plains, despite the advantages offered by mixed farming, simply could not afford to make the switch.

The solution to the mixed farming dilemma on the open plains was location: those who wished to engage in the so-called morally superior, environmentally responsible and independent mixed farming were encouraged to locate their farms on land suited to this endeavor. The mixed farming ideal was specifically tied to landscape, a practical solution that meant building a successful farm on a piece of land that contained an ecological mix. Good soil would be used to grow cereal crops, and scrub land (such as marshy areas around swamps, scrub wooded lands and forest glades) could be used for hay land, pasture, and as a source of fuel and lumber. Such a farm was described as efficient, as all land within the quarter section could be brought into productive commercial, domestic, or simply scenic use.⁴⁰ A farm with an ecological mix could be found or created. In a completely forested landscape, fields for cereal and rough grain crops could be cut, cleared, and grubbed – albeit only with a tremendous amount of work. The opposite – growing trees on the open plains – proved to be almost as difficult.⁴¹ Tipping the scales in favour of forest landscapes was its ability to usually provide an adequate water source. Within the Prince Albert region, land south of the North Saskatchewan River has typically been

³⁹ For a detailed look at the homestead and general land settlement policies, see Chester Martin, *'Dominion Lands' Policy* (Canadian Frontiers of Settlement Series. Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1938).

⁴⁰ "Efficiency" became a byword of the modernist movement during the twentieth century. For a forestry analysis of wise-use and efficiency in the United States, see Samuel Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999).

⁴¹ An excellent analysis of trees on the prairie can be found in Ronald Rees, *New and Naked Land: Making the Prairies Home* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1988), particularly chapters eight, "The Cult of the Tree," and ten, "Gardens, Parks, and Shelterbelts." For a view from the United States, see Brian Drake, "Waving 'A Bough of Challenge': Forestry on the Kansas Grasslands, 1868-1915," *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 23, no. 2 (1984): 156-158. For a narrative look at the challenge of growing trees on the open plains, see Laura Ingalls Wilder, *The First Four Years*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1971).

described as parkland, or a natural ecological mix of open fields and bluffs of trees. North of the river, farmers could create mixed farms by opening fields through axes and fire.

Opening the North Prince Albert region

James Isbister's fledgling farming settlement on the fertile flats at what became known as Prince Albert alternatively thrived and languished in the decades between its founding and the completion of the railway in 1890.⁴² The absence of a rail link limited the export potential of local farms, which – like the lumber industry – remained closely tied to the local market. The opening of the rail link south to access prairie and international markets, as well as the overland link to Montreal Lake and Lac La Ronge, stimulated the local economy after 1890.⁴³ Prince Albert boosters began promoting the region as a natural fit for mixed farming.⁴⁴ The Lorne Agricultural Society published a twenty-page pamphlet in 1890 simply called “Prince Albert and the North Saskatchewan.” The booklet claimed: “There is no line, either of production or speculation, that ensures a satisfactory return equal to mixed farming when undertaken by practical men.” And mixed farming, the pamphlet was clear, would be most successful in the local mixed ecological landscape: “no country under the sun offers greater natural advantages for this independent occupation than the district of Prince Albert.”⁴⁵ In that year, in addition to external migrants from Britain, Ontario, and the Red River region of Manitoba, the first internal migrants from the prairie began to trickle in. Families from the Estevan area abandoned their holdings to try their luck at Prince Albert.⁴⁶ The successful completion of the railway link, while a major factor in the ensuing explosion of the Prince Albert lumber industry, also initiated an increased influx of agricultural settlement.

⁴² For an overview of this period, see Gary Abrams, *Prince Albert: The First Century* (Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1966), chapters 1-7.

⁴³ See *Prince Albert*, p. 101-103.

⁴⁴ In the 1890s, promotional pamphlets from the Prince Albert district were designed for a general British and Ontarian audience that had very likely heard of the “valley of the Saskatchewan,” and were generally committed to the mixed farm ideal. As early as 1872, the London *Times* began printing stories about the Saskatchewan country. See The *Times* 14 September 1872. Numerous writers, including Captain John Palliser, the Earl of Southesk, Henry Youle Hind, William Francis Butler and other adventurers into the western interior of Canada had written lengthy descriptions of the mighty Saskatchewan and its environs, and their books were hugely popular. From 1882, when the four provisional districts of the North West Territories were formed, to 1905 when the provincial boundaries were decided, Prince Albert was the seat of the Saskatchewan district, with an identity built on the local landscape of the North Saskatchewan River valley. The 1885 Rebellion took the word “Saskatchewan” to the world. The events of that year were reported with breathless intrigue in newspapers and later books drawn from first-hand accounts. Novels depicting the North West Mounted Police and extolling the valley of the Saskatchewan delighted readers.

⁴⁵ “Prince Albert and the North Saskatchewan.”

⁴⁶ Clark, “Settlement in Saskatchewan,” p. 90.

Prince Albert's agricultural development, despite the boosterism of the Lorne Agricultural Society and the promotion of mixed farming, enjoyed gradually increasing success but never exploded. Throughout the 1890s, local markets grew in response to the rise of the lumber industry but in-migration was minimal until 1896-1897, when three conditions merged to support extensive western migration. One, new Minister of the Interior Clifford Sifton initiated a massive advertising campaign designed to draw immigration into the western interior. Two, a world-wide recession/depression ended, allowing capital and people to move more freely. Three, the Yukon Gold Rush drew migrants from around the world overland through the western interior. Retailers in the fledgling urban centers turned their focus to outfitting the gold seekers as well as homesteaders, hundreds of whom were passing through the West every day. Routes to the gold rush regions were advertised. Communities such as Prince Albert and Edmonton placed themselves firmly on the gold rush route.⁴⁷ Boards of trade and territorial government officials were anxious to capture the interest of gold rushers, hoping that they would either stay and never go to the gold fields, or come back to build homesteads in the western interior.⁴⁸ Many did.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the prairie south witnessed intensive immigration and the rise of the wheat boom economy – a different kind of yellow gold.⁴⁹ Agricultural settlement at Prince Albert, prior to 1904, was restricted to the land between the two branches of the Saskatchewan River with the exception of settlement on the extensive pocket of black soil at

⁴⁷ See, for example, "Overland Route to the Klondike," the *London Times*, 23 October 1897: "The failure of so many who have attempted this summer to reach Dawson City by way of the Chilkoot Pass has led to a suggestion that intending visitors to the new placer-mines should make use of certain fur-trading routes which are still travelled by the officers and *employés* of the Hudson's Bay Company. There exists via Edmonton or Prince Albert a well-beaten, long-used and perfectly practicable 'trail' to the Yukon, practicable both in summer and winter and... running entirely through Canadian territory." Prince Albert was declared the best starting point for Yukon gold rushers by the Territorial government in Regina in 1897. See "Yukon via Prince Albert," pamphlet circa 1898, CIHM 15253.

⁴⁸ An anonymous pamphlet, "Prince Albert district Saskatchewan" was published c. 1891. It reiterated much of the same claims made by "Prince Albert and the North Saskatchewan" in 1890, particularly the connection to mixed farming. CIHM 30434.

⁴⁹ A cute story appeared in the *Prince Albert Times* regarding the astounding growth of prairie towns: 'Apropos of the mushroom growth of new towns in the West, a locomotive engineer relates the following: "One day I was driving my engine across the prairie when suddenly a considerable town loomed up ahead where nothing had showed up the day before. "What town is this?" says I to my fireman. "Blames if I know," says Bill. "It wasn't here when we went over the road yesterday." Well, I slowed down, and directly we pulled into the station, where over five hundred people were waiting on the platform to see the first train come in. The conductor came along up front and says to me, "Jim, first we know we'll be running by some important place. Get this town down on your list and I'll put a brakeman on the rear platform to watch for towns that spring up after the trains get by!" 7 February 1907.

Shellbrook, thirty miles west of Prince Albert on the north side of the river.⁵⁰ None of the land directly north of the city had been opened for homesteading.⁵¹ Except for the three First Nations land reserves (Sturgeon Lake Reserve No. 101, established in 1876; Wahpeton Dakota First Nation, set aside in 1894; and the Little Red River Reserve, co-owned by the Montreal Lake and Lac La Ronge bands, set aside in 1897),⁵² north Prince Albert was designated as Dominion forest land, carved into extensive timber berths surveyed primarily by township and range. In response to the explosion of prairie settlement, Prince Albert's economic elite (along with the Dominion government) had focused their attention on lumber exploitation to serve the prairie market. Vying for the valuable wood basket around the Sturgeon and Little Red valleys, the lumber interests were intent on making sure potential timber regions were cruised, surveyed, and leased as timber berths – not homesteads. Land that had been already logged, however, could potentially be opened for homestead settlement.

As the timber berths retreated ever farther north toward the height of land, agricultural settlers, eager to try their hand at mixed farming in the aspen scrub, began agitating for homesteads in the north Prince Albert district. In 1904, the Prince Albert board of trade, in response to an increasing number of requests at the Land Office and to the board, began a determined campaign to open land north of the river for settlement. Part of their attention was turned to what seemed like the easiest target: securing a surrender of the already-surveyed agricultural land of Little Red River Reserve No. 106A. The board of trade also demanded that

⁵⁰ West of Prince Albert, the north branch of the Saskatchewan bends toward the south. As a result, Shellbrook is west of Prince Albert but on the north side of the river.

⁵¹ A few men, technically 'squatters' on Crown Land, lived in the north Prince Albert region prior to homestead settlement, making their living primarily as suppliers for the large lumber camps. Two men, Pat Anderson and Mr. Vangilder, lived in what became the Alingly district. Pat Anderson ran a stopping place on the trail to the Prince Albert Lumber Company camps at Shoal Creek (now the south end of Prince Albert National Park), providing hot food, beds and a stable for the men and teams freighting to and from the lumber camps. He became the first postmaster. Mr. Vangilder also kept a stopping place, as the ice road from the Sturgeon Lake Lumber Company ran through his yard. He made extra money cutting hay in the area and selling it to the lumber camps, but had to give up this practice when the land was surveyed and opened to homesteaders. Information on Vangilder and Anderson was provided by Richard Dice, "Write up Alingly and surrounding Districts," Manuscript 705b, Prince Albert Historical Society.

⁵² For an overview of the creation of Wahpeton for the Dakota Sioux who came to Prince Albert in the aftermath of their victory over Custer, see Peter Elias, *The Dakota of the Canadian Northwest: lessons for survival* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1988). For a description of the Dakota Sioux at Prince Albert from a missionary perspective, see Elizabeth Byers, *Lucy Margaret Baker: A Biographical Sketch of the first Missionary of our Canadian Presbyterian Church to the North-West Indians* (Women's Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church of Canada, 1920); SAB Lucy Margaret Baker fonds, F375 S2005-15, Speech by Lucy Baker.

the dominion government survey the land north of the river into quarter sections, ready for homestead applications.

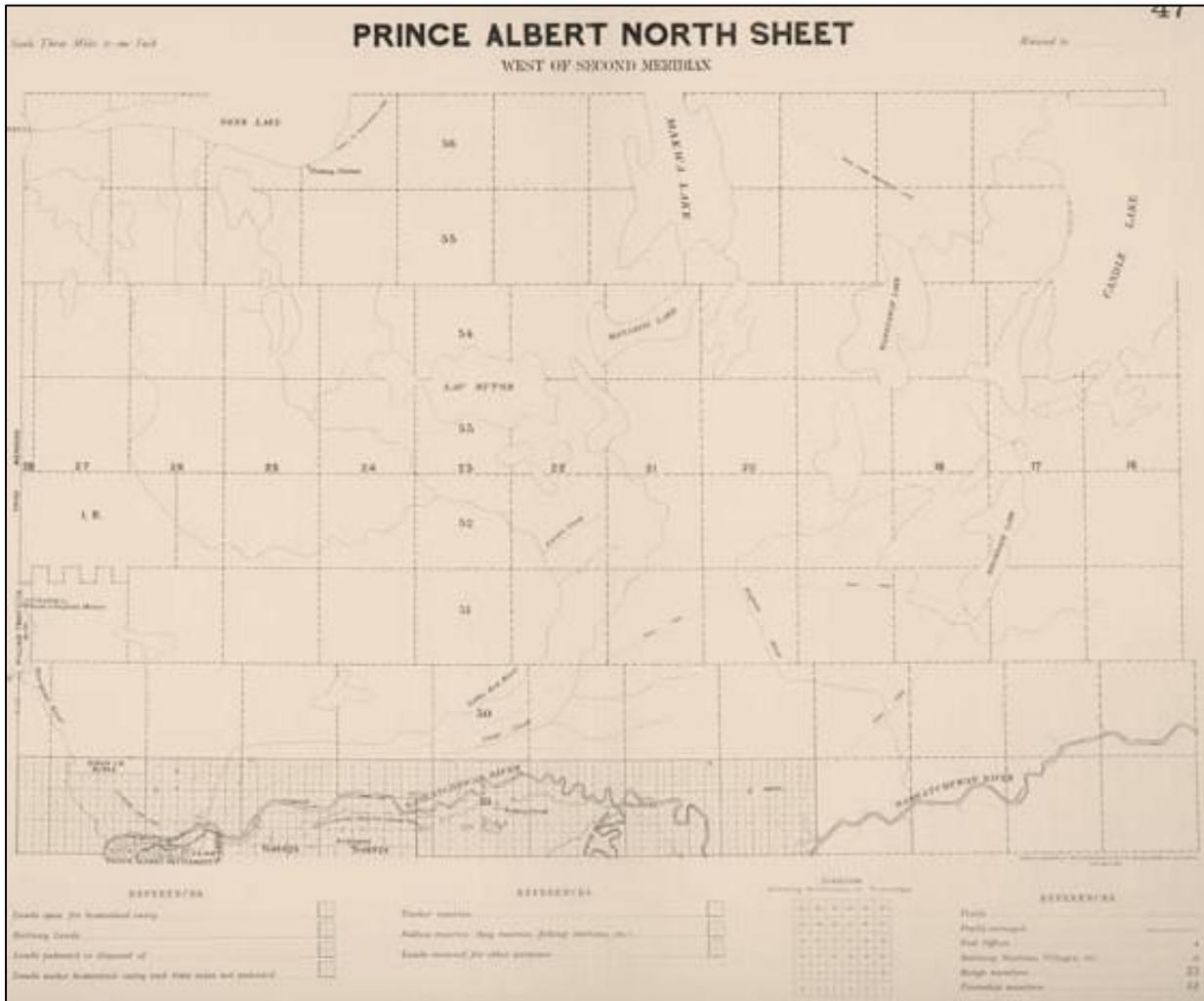


Figure 33. Prince Albert North, 1897. Dominion Land Survey. Note that some quarter section surveys had been completed at the North Saskatchewan River, but none further north. The surveyor’s knowledge of the landscape was sketchy, an amalgamation of guesswork and hearsay rather than survey work. Montreal Lake was mislabeled as ‘Makwa’ Lake, and other lakes were in incorrect positions or mislabeled. This map was created before Little Red River reserve no. 106a was finalized, although the Sturgeon Lake reserve (I.R. on the map, left hand side) is shown.

Surrender of Little Red River Reserve

The board of trade asked local M.P. T.O. Davis to “press the government to have this reserve [Little Red River] thrown open for homesteading.”⁵³ Political pressure led Department of

⁵³ LAC RG 10 Volume 7766 file 27107-4, Prince Albert board of trade to T.O. Davis, 30 April, 1904. A follow-up letter from Davis to Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior, suggested that railway lands north of the city should be opened up for Galician and Hungarian settlement. The coming of the Galician settlers sparked ethnic controversy in the Prince Albert and district newspapers, evoking the ire of those who promoted British settlement. Eventually the group chose land on the Garden River, between ten and twenty miles north of the city. Upon hearing the news of the new colony, the Melfort Moon newspaper wrote: “A New Colony of Galicians to be Established near Prince Albert.

the Interior Minister Frank Oliver to order an investigation in 1906. Biased observers claimed that “the reserve is nearly all good land and that *there is only one Indian living on it*” [emphasis added]. If there was virtually no one there, the board of trade declared, then perhaps the Indian Department could negotiate a surrender and open the land for settlement.⁵⁴ In the meantime, the Dominion Lands Office and the Department of Indian Affairs were inundated with requests for information about the possible opening of the land.⁵⁵

The Department of Indian Affairs investigated the claims, but were blindsided by a shocking revelation of greed and gross misrepresentation. The farming instructor at the reserve, J.G. Sanderson, informed the Department that he had been approached by a local real estate company who offered him one hundred dollars cash if he would obtain a signed surrender document from those living on Little Red (New Reserve). When he refused, a previous farming instructor, Patrick Anderson, was approached, and he accepted the commission. Anderson proceeded to dupe 106A reserve residents into signing the document. When questioned individually by the local Indian Agent T. Eastwood Jackson, the men replied that they had been told that the government was going to take back the land and their signature was little more than a formality. The men claimed that Anderson had also told them that they would be forced to go back to Montreal Lake to live. Little Red River reserve resident Joseph Hunt noted with alarm, “I visited Montreal Lake twice during the winter, but I found that they were nearly starving: that fish were scarce, and game was scarce; that the people did not have enough to eat, and I do not want to go there.” Another resident, Samuel Charles, noted that Anderson told him that the northern bands did not need to see or sign the document; only the people on the New Reserve must sign.

Jackson was horrified by these underhanded proceedings. In a letter to the Indian Department, he said: “I admit that it is annoying to see good land locked up from settlement within 35 miles from Prince Albert and that I have felt disgusted myself with the families residing on the reserve for not making better use of it.” But on the other hand, he declared, “the

If this is the same class that figures so prominently in the Winnipeg court records lately, we extend Prince Albert our heartfelt sympathy. We would advise our friends there to petition to government to increase the force of Mounted Police at that point, and see it that a detail is on duty both day and night. Forewarned is forearmed.” Melfort Moon, reprinted in *The Saskatchewan Times*, 20 April 1905.

⁵⁴ LAC RG 10 Volume 7766, file 27107-4, pt. 2. J.B. Harkin to Mr. Pedley, 15 March 1906.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Wells Land and Cattle Company Limited of Davidson, Sk., to the Minister of the Interior, 4 July 1906; W.J. Perry, Napinka Manitoba to the Department of the Interior, Lands Branch, 1 October 1906. Such letters were important as the Dominion homestead and timber permit applications were based on a first-come, first-served basis.

utmost consideration is due to these aboriginal owners of this country. The influx of white settlers is bound to cause increasing scarcity...In my opinion they should not be allowed to give up their reserve.”⁵⁶ The Indian Agent’s strong stand was supported by the Reverend Archdeacon John Mackay. He pointed out that those who were arguing that the Indians were not making proper use of the land were totally wrong. Not only was there farming and subsistence activities on the reserve, but when the reserve was set aside, he reminded, it was never intended for the current generation but for future generations.⁵⁷ The question of current land use, the Archdeacon felt, was a moot point.

Unfortunately, Indian Affairs had already asked Thomas Borthwick, who later became the Treaty Ten commissioner, to inquire about getting a surrender. He approached the reserve’s owners, the Montreal Lake and Lac La Ronge bands, and succeeded. A handwritten surrender signed by the chiefs and councilors of both Lac La Ronge and Montreal Lake bands was sent to Ottawa. Borthwick, thinking ahead, also visited the band members actually living on the New Reserve and told Indian Affairs he had promised that “the Indians residing on that reserve ...should be allowed to retain the homes they had erected and the land they had begun to cultivate should they desire to do so,” under homestead quarter section surveys. He emphasized that he solicited “the distinct understanding that in the event of their subsequent abandonment of their location, the amount realized from the sale of their land should go to the credit of the band and only the value of their improvements to themselves.”⁵⁸ Borthwick’s clarifications and negotiations proved that there was agricultural development on the reserve, more than enough to warrant special attention. A formal deed of surrender – not just the handwritten deed – was drawn up, but in light of the stated objections of Archdeacon Mackay and Jackson, and the

⁵⁶ Jackson went on to defend both the rights of the northern bands and their astute ownership of Little Red: “The search for timber and minerals and the needs of the fishing companies will cause the invasion of the North by railways which will take from the Indian his employment in the transport of goods and furs, and I would respectfully submit that our Northern Bands should not be robbed of the only chance their descendants will ever have when darker days come upon them of exchanging their precarious existence for the more certain and equally healthy livelihood of the farm. The greed for gain of a Real Estate concern should not be permitted to deprive them of the fruits of [their] forethought.” This entire story is found in *LAC RG 10 Volume 7766, file 27107-4, pt. 2, T. Eastwood Jackson, Acting Indian Agent, Carlton Agency, to the Secretary, Department of Indian Affairs, 20 August 1907.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, J.A. Mackay to Frank Pedley, 31 August 1907.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Borthwick to Frank Pedley, 27 September 1907; no. 314903, John Macdougall to Frank Oliver, 30 September 1907; no. 315293 handwritten surrender agreement for 106A signed by Borthwick and members of Lac La Ronge and Montreal Lake bands; Borthwick to Secretary, Department of Indian Affairs, 7 October 1907 regarding homestead promises to settlers on 106A.

obvious controversy surrounding the actions of the real estate company, the surrender was cancelled.⁵⁹

Renewed interest from the younger members of Montreal Lake and Lac La Ronge bands and a local scarcity of furs and game around Montreal Lake, led to a planned exodus, particularly from the Montreal Lake region to the New Reserve.⁶⁰ Those most interested in moving to Little Red Reserve were those who had taken job contracts as freighters.⁶¹ Used to moving back and forth between the shield and the agricultural regions on the road that ran through the New Reserve, these men typified long-standing First Nations practice across the ecological edge. With limited agricultural help from Indian Affairs, some families from both Montreal Lake and La Ronge began to trickle in to join the families already established. The wishes of the board of trade for agricultural settlers in the north Prince Albert region were met, if not in the way they had wished.

Dominion Land Survey

The second part of the campaign to open the north Prince Albert region to agriculture was to initiate a Dominion Land township survey. Homesteads could not be legally filed and registered until the land had been surveyed and marked by the quarter section. The process was expensive and time consuming, and the Dominion was careful to initiate the process only when there was strong interest.⁶² In addition, the north Prince Albert region had been designated as Crown timber land, held apart from homestead settlement. To allow *both* kinds of landscape use

⁵⁹ The surrender was cancelled before letters began arriving from Montreal Lake band stating that they had changed their mind and wished to move onto the New Reserve. These requests were also supported by Elias Roberts of La Ronge. To relocate to the farm reserve, band members required ready cash to purchase plows, seed, oxen and other farm implements. Money for these needed supplies was held in trust from their timber surrender on 106A. The bands also requested farm instruction in their own language, and a school on the New Reserve. See *LAC RG 10 Volume 7766 File 27107-4 pt. 2 no. 324178*, Montreal Lake and Lac La Ronge bands to Frank Pedley, 9 April 1908. David Laird, the Indian Commissioner for western Canada, was appalled and upset at the news of a surrender, as he stated: "Whatever action the Department took in regard to a surrender was taken without my knowledge. It is only from indirect reference that I have had any information as to a surrender, and I have had no advice as to what was done or what it is purposed to do." *Ibid.*, no. 324595 Laird to Secretary, Department of Indian Affairs 24 April 1908.

⁶⁰ Certain members of the La Ronge band, during the annuity payments of 1908, formally asked for their money that they were expecting from the surrender of 106A. The confusion and contrary information provided an excellent example of the internal dynamics of the Little Red River reserve and its two owners, the Montreal Lake and La Ronge bands, and how their varying interests and needs were often at odds. The uncertainty led to a visit by W.J. Chisholm, Inspector of Indian Agencies to the bands. See *Ibid.*, notes on a meeting held 22 July 1908 and report, W.J. McLean, Paying officer for Treaty Ten, 1908.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, no. 335082, W.J. Chisholm to Secretary, Department of Indian Affairs, 16 December 1908.

⁶² For an investigation of surveys and settlement in the western interior (particularly Manitoba), see John Langton Tyman, *By Section, Township and Range: Studies in Prairie Settlement* (Brandon: Assiniboine Historical Society, 1972).

(farming and timber harvesting) in the same area at the same time required a change in dominion intentions. The board of trade sent a telegram to Ottawa in 1906: “Delegates here representing five hundred families. Would settle north of river. Not sufficient land available.”⁶³ The turn-of-the-century surge in homestead entries at the Prince Albert land office no doubt supported the board of trade’s demands. In 1900, only 300 homesteads were filed at the Prince Albert office, for land between the North and South Saskatchewan rivers and at Shellbrook. By 1903, almost 3000 homestead entries had been filed, and further homestead land was scarce.⁶⁴ The surveyor general approved the survey. But he added wryly, “a radical change must have taken place in the conditions around Prince Albert if fifteen townships are required for settlement north of the Saskatchewan River.”⁶⁵

Since the area opened for survey had already been extensively logged, neither the dominion lands agent nor the lumber interests registered any particular concerns with the policy change from forest to farmland. Extensive logging did not preclude farming. In fact, the logging industry was inextricably tied to the local homestead culture, and probably would not have survived so successfully without it. Nearby farms provided both much-needed supplies and seasonal labour.⁶⁶ The north Prince Albert region was beginning to be modernized and divided by the state according to principles of best usage of the landscape: kept as forest reserves or berths, or opened for farming.

⁶³ At the time, the Surveyor General had already commissioned nine townships to be subdivided, including those lands recently opened by the Galician settlement. The board of trade was asking for even more land, a total of fifteen townships. SAB R-183 I.352. Telegram, Prince Albert 16 July 1906, Prince Albert board of trade to Hon. J.H. Lamont, Ottawa.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Abrams, *Prince Albert*, p. 124. Homestead numbers are a good reflection of the popularity of an area, but they vary significantly from year to year. The Prince Albert land district, despite opening the land north of the river to homestead settlement, did not beat its 1903 record until the opening of second homesteads in 1928. Also, as land was alienated from the government, real estate records for each quarter section would be necessary to properly trace in-migration.

⁶⁵ SAB R-183 I.352. Memorandum, Surveyor General to Deputy Minister of the Interior, Ottawa, 21 July 1906.

⁶⁶ Rosemary Ommer and Nancy J. Turner commented on the important role of the informal economy on the commercial mercantile economy in their essay, “Informal Rural Economies in History,” *Labour/Le Travail*, Vol. 53 (2004), pp. 1-30; p. 16. Commenting specifically on the creation of villages occupied year-round by seasonal employees of the fishing industry in Newfoundland, their work could be applied to any mixed forestry/farming society, such as could be found in New Brunswick, Ontario, or northern Saskatchewan. They argued: “The formal commercial mercantile economy relied upon the informal system because the flexibility of the community and its seasonal exploitation of a range of resources allowed the local residence of an otherwise too expensive labour force.”

Department of the Interior

HONOURABLE ROBERT ROGERS, MINISTER

1912

76-93

Prince Albert Land District.

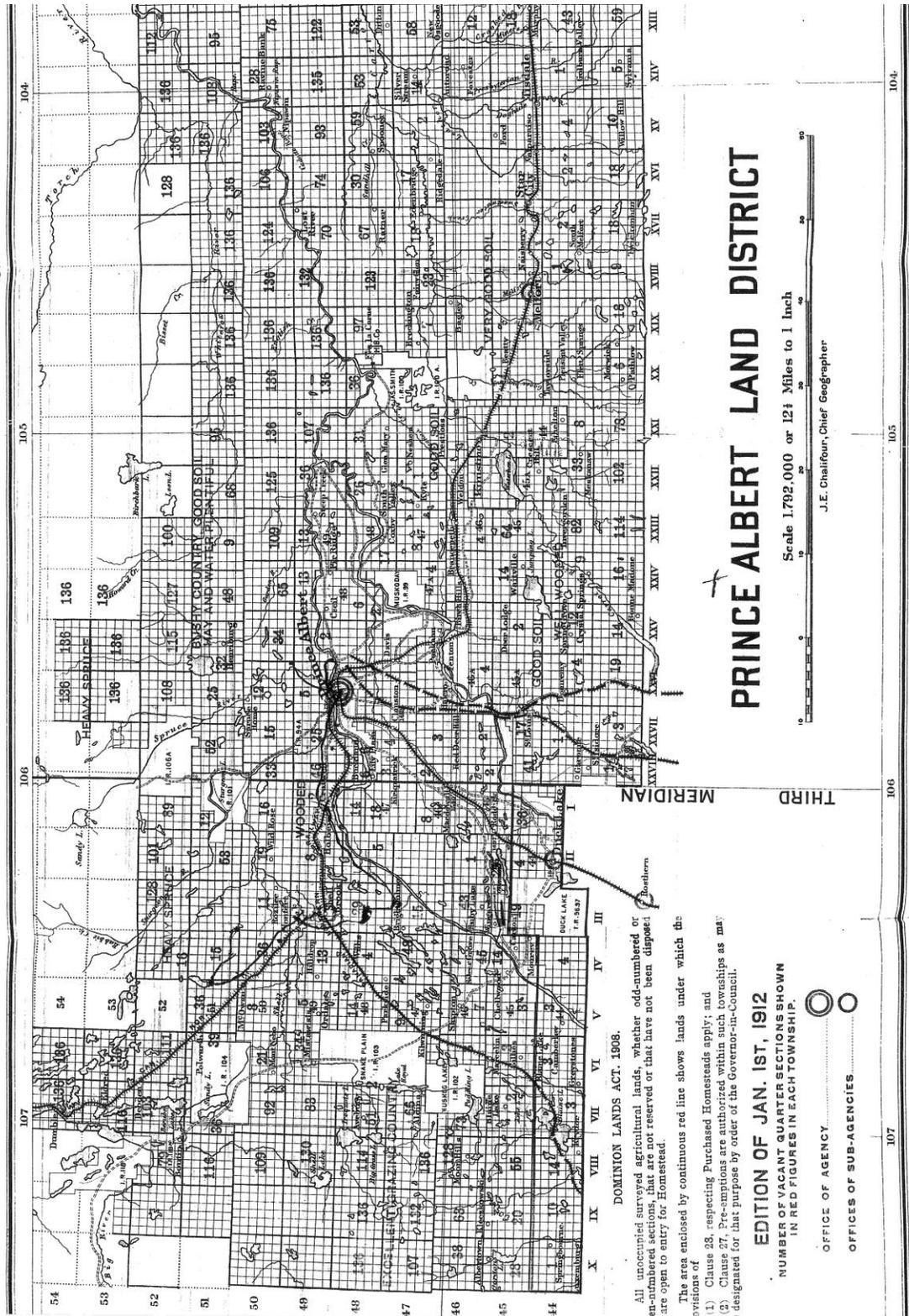


Figure 34. Prince Albert Land District, Department of the Interior, 1912. Directly north of Prince Albert, the land is listed as “Bush Country Good Soil. Hay and Water Plentiful,” whereas further north “Heavy Spruce” would be encountered.

The timing was exquisite. A perfect storm of converging interests would play out in the Prince Albert region after 1904. Prince Albert had shed its poor missionary post and frontier town image and was declared a city in 1904. The board of trade, looking to capitalize on the agricultural campaign (and continued resource development) north of the river, signaled its ambitions by hiring a full-time secretary to send the Prince Albert message to the world.⁶⁷ Economic development from the railways and lumber mills, natural disasters on the open plains, and increased interest from the federal government, soon sent all eyes to the Prince Albert region.

Railways and Bridges

The Canadian Northern Railway brought its line to Prince Albert in January of 1906, doubling the export capacity of the city and its environs.⁶⁸ The lumber industry was quick to take advantage, ramping up production and building new milling facilities, reinforcing the importance of the northern wood basket to the continued prosperity of the city. The railway brought competition, somewhat lower freight rates, and was expected to bring opportunity to all aspects of Prince Albert's development, from industry to agriculture. Local citizens fully expected and planned for further rail lines to penetrate the north, both to serve the recently-surveyed homestead land and to exploit minerals, timber, fish and other resources.

With ongoing growth in the Shellbrook community, the lumber and freighting trade, and the push to open homesteads across the river, it became imperative to build a traffic bridge over the North Saskatchewan River. As it was, the north Prince Albert region was cut off during key times of the year, when the ice was too weak to use in the spring and before it was sufficiently frozen in the late fall. In the summer, the ferry could only handle small weight loads.⁶⁹ Calling

⁶⁷ SAB B11.10 Richmond Mayson fonds, Histories of Prince Albert. "Prince Albert Board of Trade," transcript of broadcast over CKBI by R. Mayson, 7 May 1954. "The Prince Albert Board of Trade was first organized in the winter of 1881-1882...the chief ambition of the town was to get a railroad. During many years and until 1906 the board attempted no systematic publicity crusade. It could not. Its secretaries were business men who had their own affairs to handle and could not devote the necessary time."

⁶⁸ Abrams, *Prince Albert*, p. 130. For an overview of the drawn-out process of bringing in the second railway and the frustrations of the city, see pages 125-130.

⁶⁹ *Prince Albert Times*, 16 May 1907. "Traffic Conditions Are a Disgrace. River Crossing Facilities Woefully Inadequate. Shellbrook Farmers Delayed in City for Weeks. The need of a traffic bridge was amply demonstrated this week. For nearly a week it was impossible to cross the river and residents of Shellbrook were cut off from the market. All day Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday the river bank on both sides was crowded with teams waiting to cross. It would have taken half a dozen ferries to have accommodated this traffic. The unfortunate part of the inadequate crossing facilities was that many Shellbrook farmers lost two days of this fine seeding weather. Just now a day lost is a serious blow. Unfortunately when the ferry was being launched on Thursday she struck and stove a hole in her bottom. Tuesday night City Engineer Moon and ten men worked nearly all night making repairs."

for a traffic bridge, the city was caught in a double bind: should the town build a bridge to service the settlers at Shellbrook and offer all-weather access to the region over the river, or should they wait for the Canadian Northern Railway (CNoR) to build a bridge and convince them to add a traffic bridge to the railway bridge? With alarm, the local newspaper pointed out the heart of the problem: “The absence of [a railway bridge] has done untold injury to this city. People come to Prince Albert and go away again. They say that ‘the land across the river is not worth anything and nobody lives there because it has never been necessary to build a bridge and if the land was worth anything the bridge would have been built long ago.’”⁷⁰ The city continued to joust with the railway, putting off building their own bridge until 1909, when the CNoR completed a dual railway and traffic bridge.⁷¹ Rail and other traffic could finally move easily over the natural barrier of the river.⁷²

⁷⁰ *Prince Albert Times*, 28 February 1907. The Prince Albert board of trade voted to send petitions to the dominion and provincial governments regarding a traffic bridge as early as 1905. A second article from the *Prince Albert Times* on 28 February 1907 stated: “A strong movement is on foot to have a traffic bridge built across the Saskatchewan river from some point on River Street near the Board of Trade office. Such a bridge would be a great boon to the city as it would give the settlers across the river easy access to the stores and the market of Prince Albert...In the petition, it was pointed out that there were many homesteads across the river. Some were occupied, others would be this summer. The time had come in the interests of Prince Albert when it was imperative that a traffic bridge should be built across the river.”

⁷¹ The rail line was completed to Shellbrook in 1909, north to Big River by 1910, and west to North Battleford by 1914.

⁷² The call for a bridge over the North Saskatchewan River was part of a much larger push to build a railway to Hudson Bay. For a history of the Hudson Bay Railway scheme, which is incredibly detailed, full of political manoeuvrings and went on for years before it was finally completed, see H.A. Fleming, *Canada's Arctic Outlet: a history of the Hudson Bay Railway* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957); Ian Bickle, *Turmoil and Triumph: the controversial railway to Hudson Bay* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1995); A.M. Pratt and John Archer, *The Hudson's Bay Route*, (published under the joint auspices of the governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, 1953). The popular version remains Grant McEwen, *The Battle for the Bay* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1975). Prince Albert mayor Mr. Cook went to Ottawa in 1907 to procure support for Prince Albert as the logical starting point of the railway, and relayed a delighted message back to the city: “The Mayor says that since the Dominion Government has made its decision in regard to the Hudson Bay Railroad that Prince Albert is “IT” and all eyes are turned this way. Prince Albert will be the great point in the new railroad.” *Prince Albert Times*, 7 March 1907. The Hudson Bay Railway scheme played an important role in the boosterism of Prince Albert: as late as 1926, the city was calling itself “The Gateway to Hudson Bay.” A great map can be found in the notes of Archie Ballantine, timber inspector, who made an inspection of the proposed route of the railway from Prince Albert to Beaver Lake in 1914. See SAB 102 Ra.220 Department of Railways. “Petition General Prince Albert.” Although the optimism of the Hudson Bay Railway scheme continued to fuel the new Prince Albert agricultural boom, hopes were continually delayed. The Hudson Bay Railway – which did *not* go through Prince Albert – was finally finished in 1929.

The Killing Winter

In the midst of the push to open homesteads in the north Prince Albert region came the brutal winter of 1906-1907.⁷³ A mid-November three-day howler exploded across the prairies in 1906, stretching from the Lakehead to the mountains. Blizzard after blizzard followed, with only minor reprieves, wreaking havoc on both human and animal life.⁷⁴ The terrible winter came after a long summer of strike and protest in the southern Alberta coal mines, initiating a coal shortage that exacerbated the chilly weather.⁷⁵ With no chinook to soften the storms, the fuel situation escalated from a coal shortage into a coal famine. Freight trains were immobilized by the snow and extreme cold; the engines, already stressed by the cold which cut their output by half, could not produce enough steam to power the locomotives through drifts, where they became hopelessly stuck.⁷⁶ As the winter dragged on, the paralyzed railways left towns, villages and cities across the prairies stranded with sometimes extreme shortages.

⁷³ Historian Joe Cherwinski has made a special study of that brutal winter. Some of his findings were presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association in Toronto in May 2002 as "Cold Comfort: the Brutal Winter of 1906-07 and the Defining of the Prairie Regional Identity"; another essay, "The Rise and Incomplete Fall of a Contemporary Legend: Frozen Englishmen in the Canadian Prairies During the Winter of 1906-07," was published in *Canadian Ethnic Studies/Etudes ethniques au Canada* Vol. 30, no. 3 (1999): 20-43. Many thanks for Dr. Cherwinski for sharing these papers with me.

⁷⁴ Cherwinski, "Rise and Incomplete Fall of a Contemporary Legend."

⁷⁵ For a detailed analysis of the strike, see William M. Baker, "The Miners and the Mounties: The Royal North West Mounted Police and the 1906 Lethbridge Strike," *Labour/Le Travail*, Vol. 27 (Spring 1991): 55-96; William M. Baker, "The Miners and the Mediator: The 1906 Lethbridge Strike and Mackenzie King" *Labour/Le Travail*, Vol. 11 (Spring 1983): 89-117. Other secondary sources include AA. den Otter, *Civilizing the West: The Gaits and the Development of Western Canada* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1982), 282-304; C.J. McMan, "Trade Unionism in District 18, 1900-1925: A Case Study," unpublished MBA Thesis, University of Alberta, 1969, p. 49-57; and A. Seager, "A Proletariat in Wild Rose Country: The Alberta Miners, 1905-1945," unpublished PhD dissertation, York University, 1982, p. 208-17.

⁷⁶ Writer Joseph Kinsey Howard in *Montana: High, Wide and Handsome* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003) reported that it was so cold, railway tracks snapped.



Figure 35. CPR train stuck in snowdrift. *Glenbow Archives NA-1255-21*.

Although the impact of the coal shortage was noted with alarm by prairie newspapers as early as November,⁷⁷ the situation was not as clear in Prince Albert, where costly coal was a secondary fuel source; cordwood, cut from small timber limits, was more popular. By January, the city newspaper complained of minor shortages as freight trains were continually delayed. The *Prince Albert Times* reported on 17 January 1907, “Sugar and Spice are Scarce. There may be a Dearth of Luxuries in Prince Albert if Freight now on the Road does not soon Arrive.” The shortages, the paper believed, might get serious, but at that moment “There is plenty of flour, meat, potatoes, and other staple articles of food, but luxuries, such as sugar, tea, and pepper and such are getting scarce.”⁷⁸ Not long after this account, more information poured out of the prairies declaring the extent of the fuel famine and its repercussions. In early February, the *Prince Albert Times* expressed concern:

The more we hear about the suffering from lack of fuel to the south of us, the more we feel constrained to offer our assistance. But how can we do it? Here we have plenty of fuel to supply all our needy neighbours to the south but we are powerless to lend aid. When we find even the railroads running out of coal, then we begin to realize in some degree the extent of the disaster that has overtaken some parts of the West. ...There is talk of starting the old freighting system that antedated the railways. The freighters could take down fuel to the plains and

⁷⁷ See Cherwinski “Rise and Incomplete Fall,” and “Cold Comfort.” The *Killarney Guide* called it the earliest, most violent and longest storm in living memory, 23 November 1906, quoted in Cherwinski, “Cold Comfort” and Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House Publishers, 2005), p. 56.

⁷⁸ *Prince Albert Times*, “Sugar and Spice are Scarce,” 17 January 1907.

bring back freight that is long overdue here. Meantime the CNR would do well perhaps to start burning wood in their engines on the Prince Albert branch.⁷⁹

The same paper offered specific information, telegraphed from the town of Craik, Saskatchewan: “The fuel situation is horrible. J. Cole, a farmer, cried today when he found no coal here to take home to keep the family from freezing. C.C. Phillips, a farmer, has been burning manure. [The village of] Shipman has burned wheat for over a month. Mr. Brunt, in town, tore down his barn and outhouses for fuel. Three families at Long Lake have bunched together and are burning the other two houses. Some have been in bed for three days.”⁸⁰ Newspapers across the country picked up the stories, both true and untrue. One family near Weyburn was surprised to hear about their demise from the Mountie who pushed through four-foot high drifts to their remote homestead shack, with the news that rumours had circulated for weeks that they were frozen in their beds.

The consequences of that brutal winter played out in many directions. For the Prince Albert region, it invigorated advocates who believed that settlers would be better off taking homestead land in an area where they could at least have access to their own fuel.⁸¹ Homestead registrations continued strong. The fuel shortage reignited Archbishop Taché’s cautionary warnings regarding extensive settlement on the open plains. Taché, a resident of the western interior during its formative years, wrote *Sketch of the North-West of North America* in 1870. In it, he recounted some rather frightening experiences crossing the open plains in winter. In contrast to those who supported extensive prairie settlement, Taché offered a stinging indictment of such a scheme. No one could build a successful farm on the open plains, he argued, unless the farm or settlement was built where “the prairie touches on wooded country.”⁸² Just as First Nations inhabitants of the western interior moved from ‘island’ to ‘island’ of woods or spent their winter at the forest edge, it was the scarcity of fuel, not the agricultural possibility of the land, that would be the limiting factor determining settlement potential. Dominion and provincial

⁷⁹ *Prince Albert Times*, “The Fuel Situation,” 7 February 1907.

⁸⁰ *Prince Albert Times*, “Telegraphic Notes,” 7 February 1907.

⁸¹ Historian Jim Wright concluded, in discussing that awful winter: “people who lived in the Parklands and Forest regions were thankful for the native trees which meant shelter from windchill and firewood for their stoves.” Jim Wright, *Saskatchewan: The History of a Province* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1955), p. 129-130.

⁸² Archbishop Taché, *Sketch of the North West of North America*. Translated from the French by Captain D.R. Cameron, Royal Artillery. (Montreal: John Lovell, 1870).

governments, shocked by the conditions of that brutal winter, seemed to have reached a similar conclusion.⁸³ Fuel, both levels of government agreed, was indeed a primary concern.

The “New Northwest”

On 24 January 1907, in the middle of the fuel shortage and brutal winter, (and building on the momentum of enthusiasm generated by the second railway, the Prince Albert economy, the lumber interests and the potential Hudson Bay Railway), Senator T.O. Davis of Prince Albert stood up in the Senate and issued a call for a special committee to investigate the land north of the North Saskatchewan River.⁸⁴ The *Prince Albert Times* reported that it was time to “Unfold the Riches of the North.” Davis called for exploration parties to look into the region north of the Saskatchewan watershed, to ascertain not only its agricultural potential, but its other resources as well.⁸⁵ Senator Davis’ call set in motion a firestorm of popular interest that lasted well beyond that brutal winter. The Senate Committee’s report, gleaned on a meager budget by interviewing and collecting statements from people who knew the region, was eventually published as *Canada’s Fertile Northland: A Glimpse of the Enormous Resources of Part of the Unexplored Regions of the Dominion*. Copies of the report were sent to major newspapers across the country, a savvy media blitz that resulted in extensive coverage. The Department of the Interior reeled from the avalanche of over ten thousand requests for the published report.⁸⁶

The next step was to fund a detailed physical investigation of the region, starting with the area north and west of Prince Albert. Civil engineer Frank Crean led two expeditions, one in

⁸³The dominion government acted with uncommon alacrity to temporarily release prairie homesteaders from key homestead duties that winter, particularly the restriction of living for six months on the homestead. The fuel shortage led a shocked government to allow homesteaders the right to abandon their holdings and seek other shelter. Within certain subagencies on the prairies where there were reserves of forested Crown land, the government temporarily rescinded the need to apply or pay for permits to cut fuelwood, opening the forests for desperate prairie homesteaders. See announcements in the *Prince Albert Times*, 7 February 1907.

⁸⁴ Canada, Senate *Debates*, 24 January 1907, p. 138.

⁸⁵ *Prince Albert Times*, 31 January 1907. See Bill Waiser, *The New Northwest: The Photographs of the Frank Crean Expeditions*, (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1993). Waiser documents the Dominion’s interest in the northwest from as early as 1870, when it took control from the Hudson’s Bay Company. In a preface essay to the photograph collection, Waiser pointed to the influence of the Department of the Interior’s superintendent of railway and swamp lands, Robert Young. Young reported that the end of homestead land in the western interior was particularly crucial in the drive for northern development. I agree. However, the drive to open northern homesteads was also tied to the mixed farming movement, including the need for settlers to have their own fuel resources. Although neither Davis nor subsequent documents from the reports generated by Crean specifically refer to the killing winter, the consistent interest in northern fuel – which *is* reflected in the reports -- shows their heightened concern and appreciation of the importance of this resource caused by the fuel famine. The drive for more land was predicated primarily on the end of free homestead land in the south and the opening of specifically *mixed farms* in the north. Fuel and other resources were a subsidiary, but important, part of the investigation.

⁸⁶ See Waiser, *The New Northwest*, p. 9-11.

1908 to Green Lake and Ile-à-la-Crosse, the other in 1909 which covered the Alberta region north of the North Saskatchewan River, near Cold Lake and Lac La Biche. Crean reported that, for the most part, the region would support mixed farming, as opposed to a new wheat belt. He asserted that about one quarter of the twenty-two million acres of land in his study region could be farmed. Crean deliberately emphasized what he believed was the region's *potential* for mixed farming, a vague but hopeful term. The area's most serious drawback was not climate or soil, he argued, but transportation and access. His reports were published as *New Northwest Exploration*, and the area became known as the New Northwest.⁸⁷

Crean's report reinforced the Prince Albert board of trade's insistence on the fitness and potential of the area for mixed farming – although the board was more interested in the outlying regions for resource development, not farming. Farming required at least some good land, and those who had traveled the northern trails expressed uneasiness regarding the grandiose assertions of good land as far north as Crean believed.⁸⁸ Regardless, Crean's repeated correlation between the New Northwest and mixed farming was echoed by Dominion surveyors. The wood basket that supported the lumber industry had become denuded within thirty miles of the city, and clearcut logging and fires opened more of the country. Into this landscape, quickly being repopulated by a vigorous growth of aspen and willow, came the surveyors. Their quarter section survey reports and maps for the north Prince Albert region consistently presented the land as suitable for mixed farming.

The whole of 1907 was devoted to opening up twenty townships north of the river.⁸⁹ Surveying twenty townships, instead of the fifteen extravagantly demanded by the board of trade, reflected the impact of the killing winter and fuel shortage on the plains. Homesteads with their own fuel source were popular in the aftermath of the shortages of the extreme winter.

⁸⁷ Waiser, *The New Northwest*, p. 23. The name The New Northwest had variations in Manitoba and Ontario. In Manitoba, whose borders were pushed north in 1912, the non-prairie north became known as New Manitoba. In Ontario, New Ontario was the name given to the Clay Belt region that was being opened for settlement.

⁸⁸ The Saskatchewan Minister of Education, for example, believed that "after a line forty miles north of Prince Albert is reached, the land is unfit for any purpose whatever." Prince Albert citizens disagreed. After all, there were lumber, fish, and possible mineral resources. Nonetheless, for farming purposes, many agreed that the limit of agricultural land north of Prince Albert likely did not exceed the forty mile band. See *Prince Albert Times* 7 March 1907.

⁸⁹ "Already the newly surveyed townships north of this city, where until quite recently it was generally supposed no land existed fit for settlement, 130 homestead entries have been made within a radius of twenty miles." Canada, *Sessional Papers* Vol. XLII No. 12 4 April 1907. Report of R.S. Cook Agent of Dominion Lands, Prince Albert.

Surveyors described each township,⁹⁰ its aspect, soil, topography, water sources, and potential for development. A typical description covered access trails, soil conditions, timber and fuel resources, hay land and surface or well water potential. The surveyor's reports also assessed potential mineral resources, such as coal outcrops or stone quarries. Local game was always described, particularly if any could be used for human consumption.⁹¹

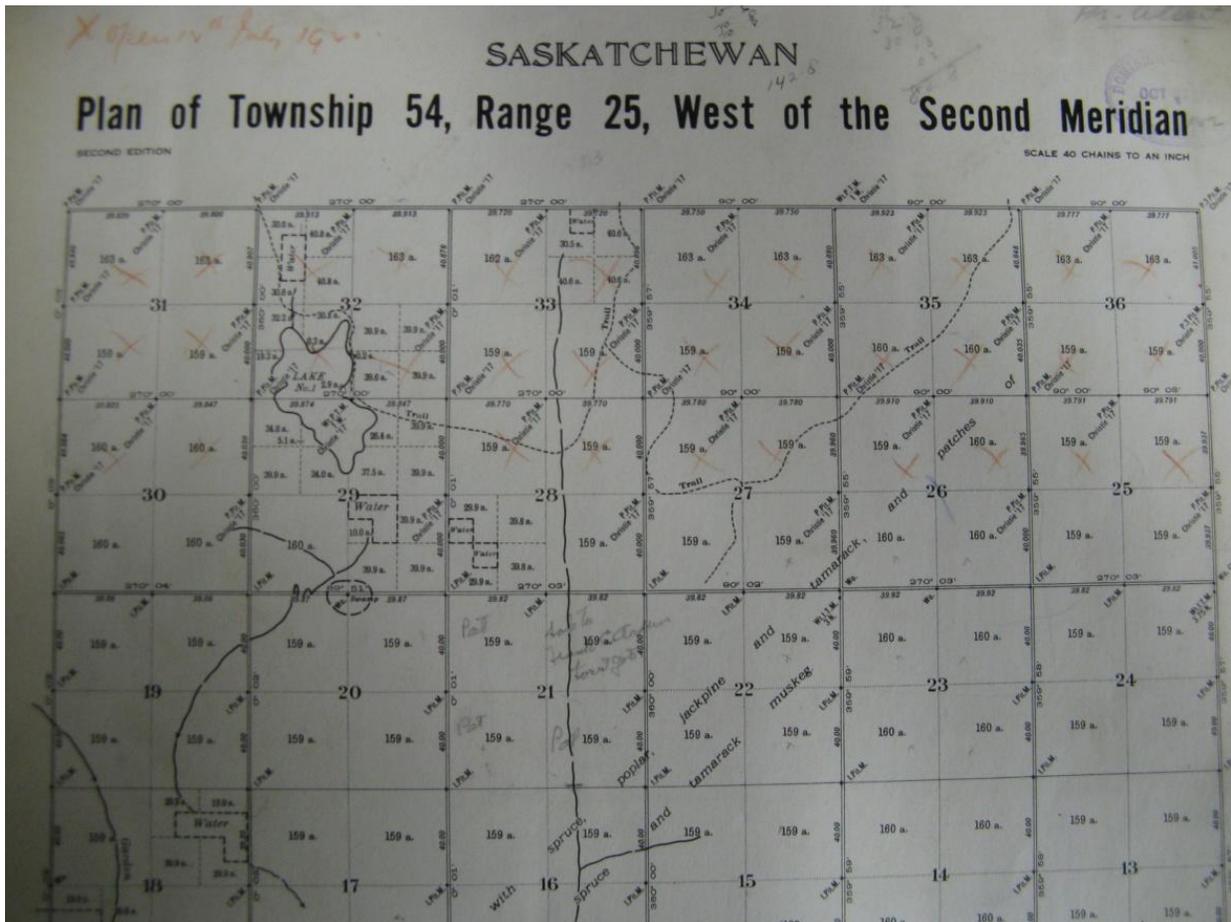


Figure 36. Department of the Interior, E. Deville Surveyor, 1918. “Gently rolling country covered with spruce, poplar, jackpine and tamarack, willow swamps and spruce and tamarack muskeg.” The trail shown in the center is the Montreal Lake Trail. *Prince Albert Historical Society, Bill Smiley Archives, Surveyor’s maps.* Photo by Merle Massie.

Climatic indications were also noted, but these were generally descriptions of what the weather was like at the time the surveyor was physically visiting the area. The summer of 1907,

⁹⁰ A township is six miles in length by six miles in width, with thirty-six sections and one hundred and forty-four quarter sections. Surveying twenty townships opened almost three thousand new homesteads. Within that space, there could be considerable variation in the quality and suitability of each quarter section.

⁹¹ A typical example can be found in Canada, *Sessional Papers*, Vol. 25 8-9 Edward VII A 1909. A.L. McClennan, Dominion Land Surveyor, reporting on Township 51, Range 25, west of the Second Meridian.

following on the heels of the brutal winter, was particularly miserable.⁹² The survey reports were littered with reference to the cold and even freezing temperatures, giving the impression that these conditions were normal for that region. Since the dominion surveyors were men brought into the area from elsewhere in Canada, they may not have known typical local conditions. Their reports would plague development of the area for years to come. The Dominion Lands Agent at Prince Albert, D.S. Cook, in an attempt to mitigate the effects of the survey reports, explained, “The year just closed has been the most unfavourable in the history of the country. The severe winter of 1906-1907 was followed by a late spring and a cold, wet summer.” Crops were damaged all across the west, but at Prince Albert, Cook was quick to note, a fair or even a poor crop was enough for local farmers. The region “is essentially a mixed farming country and the light wheat crop does not seriously affect the condition of the farmer. The banking institutions and implement men inform me that collections are good, and that there is no serious falling off of business.”⁹³ The survey of 1907 ended at the fourteenth Base Line, from townships 49 through to 52, and ranges 23 to 28, north of the river. These boundaries opened up the land west of the Indian reserves at Wahpeton, Sturgeon Lake and Little Red River.⁹⁴

Marketing the Mixed Farming Message

With homesteads available north of the river, and building on the recent fuel crisis, Prince Albert became a popular homestead destination. The Dominion Lands agency at Prince Albert saw a rise of 500 homestead applications in 1908 over 1907.⁹⁵ The biggest competition for new homesteaders in the Prince Albert region was the newly opened land in the Palliser Triangle of southwestern Saskatchewan and southeastern Alberta. Originally closed to homestead settlement, the Palliser region had been reserved as Crown land for grazing purposes. As homesteaders

⁹² *Prince Albert Times*, 9 May 1907. Satchel of the Satellite: “The Indians tell us that once in every hundred years there is no summer. I can’t tell as I wasn’t here the last time, but I’m here now alright! The ice is still not out on the river!”

⁹³ Canada, *Sessional Papers* Vol. 25 8-9 Edward VII A 1909. Report of the Agent at Prince Albert, R.S. Cook, 11 April 1908.

⁹⁴ More townships were opened to the west of these reserves, in the same township range of 49 through 52, but west of the third meridian, opening the land around what became the communities of Holbien, Briarlea, Crutwell, Wild Rose and Deer Ridge. Their development is similar to that of the region directly north of Prince Albert, but cross-country interaction was limited and continues to be so. There were few and only poor roads through the Indian reserves running east-west. Before 1912, another township, 53, on the north side of the baseline, was opened for settlement in ranges 24 through 26, to the north of the new settlement at Paddockwood. These surveys completed the northern advance until 1919, when townships 54 and 55 were surveyed in 1919 in anticipation of the press of soldier settlement.

⁹⁵ SAB, Department of Agriculture files, R-266.IV.40, “Homestead Entries 1905 to 1943 by Land Agencies and Census Divisions.”

poured into the western interior, less and less surveyed land was available each year for new settlers. Following the devastation and decimation of the cattle ranching industry during the brutal winter of 1906-1907, the drylands were hastily surveyed and thrown open for settlement.⁹⁶

The divergent push to develop land in two completely different biomes – the New Northwest and the Palliser Triangle dryland region – represented the difference between those who advocated mixed farming at forest edge landscapes versus those who promoted dryland/wheat farming techniques. Settlers in the drylands were allowed to file on both a homestead quarter, as well as a purchased ‘pre-emption’ homestead, thereby creating 320-acre or half-section farms. It was believed that because the land was arid, it would be less productive. Twice as much land was necessary to operate a successful family farm. The opportunity to gain a half-section of land proved irresistible. In 1908, this region drew over 18,000 entries; in 1909-1910, a tremendous 26,000 homestead entries were filed, dwarfing interest in the northern forest edge.⁹⁷ Historian Curt McManus called the movement into the Palliser Triangle “the Last Great Land Rush of modern times.”⁹⁸ Scientific investigation of dry-farming techniques such as

⁹⁶ The disastrous winter of 1906-1907 crushed the ranching industry. Ranching historians have consistently pointed to the hand of nature in bringing about the end of the large, open plains ranching era. Writer Wallace Stegner, in his acclaimed classic, *Wolf Willow*, noted the efforts of ranch hands to scrape snow from hillsides to help cows reach forage. These pitiful attempts were continually frustrated by the next blizzard. Cows, driven to bottom lands searching for shelter, ate willows and starved to death for lack of nutrition. Chinooks only made the situation worse, melting the top layer of snow – it re-froze to solid ice four inches thick, permanently covering meager forage supplies and freezing cattle where they lay. Dead, buried in ice and snow, their bodies served as burial platforms for other cattle, driven to seek shelter by the next storm and dying on top of the carcasses, sometimes three or four deep. Stegner called the spring of 1907 ‘carrion spring,’ where stinking, bloated carcasses floated downstream with the spring breakup, or hung in trees as the drifts melted away. The killing winter spelled the end of the big, open-range cattle companies, many of whom liquidated what cattle survived and abandoned their holdings. Wallace Stegner, *Wolf Willow: A History, a Story and a Memory of the Last Prairie Frontier* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1955), chapter three, ‘Carrion Spring.’ Starving cattle also wandered into towns, searching desperately for food. Historian Joe Cherwinski recounted cattle invading Lethbridge and Medicine Hat by the thousands that had to be driven out by cowboys. See “Cold Comfort.” For an overview of the winter as it related to the cattle industry, see L.V. Kelly, *The Range Men: The Story of the Ranchers and Indians of Alberta* (Toronto: W. Briggs, 1913); David H. Breen, *The Canadian Prairie West and the Ranching Frontier 1874-1924* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983); Don C. McGowan, *Grassland Settlers: The Swift Current Region During the Era of the Ranching Frontier* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1975); Warren M. Eloffson, *Cowboys, Gentlemen and Cattle Thieves: Ranching on the Western Frontier* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2000); Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, p. 57-58. Those who continued ranching began to practice a more forage/farming oriented ranch style similar to mixed farming, where some land was broken and seeded to provide sufficient fodder for the animals in winter.

⁹⁷ “Saskatchewan Homestead Entries.”

⁹⁸ Curt McManus, “Happyland: The Agricultural Crisis in Saskatchewan’s Drybelt, 1917-1927,” Unpublished MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2004, p. 31. The Moose Jaw land office was the only one in operation in southwestern Saskatchewan in 1907-1908, and had to handle the new claims of all the homesteaders pouring into that newly opened region. In 1908 alone, over 8,000 homesteads were filed at the Moose Jaw office, compared to

summerfallowing and crop rotation bred enthusiasm that good farming would triumph over nature – as long as you owned enough land to generate a living.⁹⁹

Prince Albert boosters looked on the popularity of this southern region with envy, and redoubled their efforts to promote mixed farming in the north as opposed to “wheat mining” in the south. The pre-emption, the dryland allowance for a second quarter, was remade as a detriment. Boosters contrasted the pre-emption region to the northern edge landscape: “So fertile is the land [in the Prince Albert area] and so favored by climatic conditions that the Dominion Government did not include it in the pre-emption area, knowing full well that 160 acres of this land was equal in production capacity to 320 acres in semi-arid...south western Saskatchewan and southern Alberta.”¹⁰⁰ Ideals of permanence, resilience and long-term prosperity were tied to the non-prairie landscape. Promoters admitted that “It is not surprising that the immigrants preferred the bare prairie, which could be easily broken up, to the richer but more bushy soil of the Prince Albert district.” Such short-term gain, however, was not in a true farmer’s best interest. Economic return on mixed farms, they stated, “if slow...has been substantial and solid. The farmers not living on the prairie went in for the more sure occupation of mixed farming, and, never running risks of total loss from droughts, early frosts or hot winds, they have, almost without exception, built up a competence and in many cases much more than that.”¹⁰¹

From the brutal winter of 1906 through to the beginning of the First World War, the Prince Albert board of trade sold the north Prince Albert region as a mecca for those interested in the business of mixed farming in a forested landscape. The pamphlets trumpeted: “Prince Albert – The Centre of Extensive Mixed Farming District,” and “Prince Albert, Saskatchewan – Where Crops are Sure.” The pamphlets scorned the bleakness of the open plains and presented Prince Albert as a park-like paradise:

less than 2,000 at Prince Albert. A land office at Swift Current opened soon after to alleviate the demand, and one in Maple Creek in 1912-1913. See “Saskatchewan Homestead Entries.”

⁹⁹ For an excellent overview of dry farming and the scientists who studied and promoted it, see Peter Russell, “The Far-From-Dry Debates: Dry Farming on the Canadian Prairies and the American Great Plains,” *Agricultural History* Vol. 81, no. 4 (2007): 493-521. See also Mary Hargreaves, *Dry Farming in the Northern Great Plains, 1900-1925* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957).

¹⁰⁰ Several pamphlets were published in 1910-1911. See SAB, Morton Manuscript collection, Mss C555/2/10a, “Prince Albert: Europe’s Easiest Way,” Prince Albert Board of Trade, 1910; 10b, “Prince Albert, Saskatchewan: The Ideal Spot for the British Settler,” Prince Albert Board of Trade, 1910; 10c, “Prince Albert, Saskatchewan: The Easiest Way,” c. 1911, and 10d, “Prince Albert Investments: Issued Monthly in the Interests of Prince Albert and Vicinity,” November 1911. Boosters promoted the Prince Albert landscape as being closest to a British conception of “home.” The above quote is from “Prince Albert Investments.”

¹⁰¹ “Prince Albert: Europe’s Easiest Way.”

From a vantage on [Prince Albert's] wooded slope it is possible to get a birdseye view of the north country, as it lies spread out like a map stretching away to the farthest horizon, a variegated mass, in the sunlight, of shaded green; changing as the woods merge from poplar into spruce, and from spruce into pine. For sheer picturesqueness of location there is no city in Western Canada that can compare with Prince Albert.¹⁰²

Typically, such effusive descriptions contrasted the idyllic, green landscape with “the bare, bleak isolation of the prairie town; the scorching winds as from Sahara; the blinding, death-dealing blizzards, which come as a terror by day in the bitter chill of winter.”¹⁰³ Mixed farming and the beautiful, forested landscape were bound together.

The major disadvantage of mixed farming was that it required heavy capital investment, particularly for stock, buildings, and feed. Prince Albert promoters flipped those drawbacks into another advertising hook. The local landscape contained all “the essentials for settlers possessed of meager capital: cheap fuel, good water, and natural pasture. These [are] in abundance, without money and without price.” As those who operated farms on the open plains knew, these resources “would cost a small income out of capital during the first years of development in a purely prairie country.”¹⁰⁴ The Prince Albert boosters promoted the region's natural advantages of wood, water, and hay land/pasture to those with little capital. Marketing to the low-income settler became a key feature in promotional literature which became more and more important as internal migration from the prairies came to rival external migrants.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ “Prince Albert, Saskatchewan: The Ideal Spot for the British Settler.” Economist G.E. Britnell showed that certain goods and services cost less at the forest edge (particularly fuel, fodder, lumber, and garden produce); but these savings would have been offset by the extra cost of mixed farming diversification and increased freighting costs added to groceries and other goods. See Britnell, *The Wheat Economy*, Appendix, “Cost of Living on Farms in Saskatchewan,” p. 242-243.

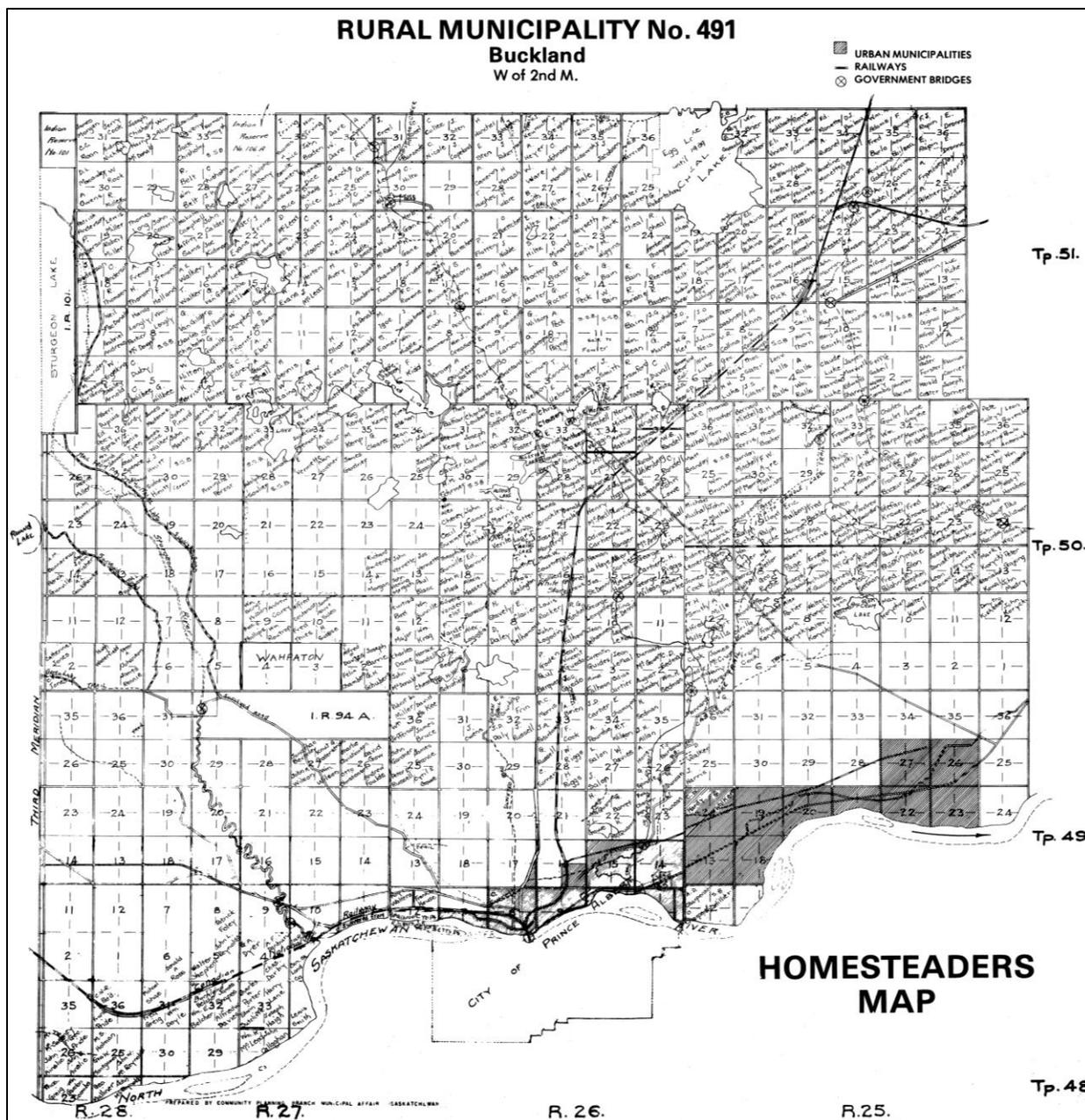


Figure 37. From *Buckland's Heritage*. The unfiled homesteads in the southern portions of this map represent areas covered by the Sand Hills and pine forest. The Alingly district is directly east of the Sturgeon Lake reserve. The railroad depicted on this map was not in existence until 1924, although the rail line roughly followed the trail that led into the district. Note Round Lake hand-written on left-hand side of map.

Homesteading the North Prince Albert Region

Between 1906 and 1914, over 15,000 homesteads were filed at the Prince Albert land office.¹⁰⁵ In the north Prince Albert region, homesteaders skipped over the scrub jackpine and sand in the Sand Hills (now Nisbet Forest Reserve) to move further north in search of better land,

¹⁰⁵ "Saskatchewan Homestead entries."

settling the black and transition soils of the Shellbrook-Meath Park plain. Although the land was better, it meant traveling a greater distance over rather poor roads to the Prince Albert market. The potential of the northern homesteads, though, was not necessarily tied to city markets or wheat export. A jubilant article in the *Prince Albert Times* in the spring of 1907 declared: “These townships offer a splendid opportunity to settlers as they have a good market for all kinds of farm produce in close proximity and all winter they can have work in the lumber woods.” The markets in ‘close proximity’ were the lumber camps, which were expected to soak up any excess supplies of eggs, butter, milk, meat, oats and hay that the new homesteaders might have for sale – in fact, almost all farm produce *except* wheat. In addition, those same lumber camps would provide work for the homesteaders to raise money to build up their farms.

Homesteaders in the newly formed Alingly district east of the Sturgeon Lake reserve and south of the Little Red River reserve became intimately tied with the lumber camps, providing stopping places, hay, and produce, working in the camps and on the spring river drives, and purchasing finished lumber.¹⁰⁶ The road to this new settlement came east from the Sturgeon Lake lumber and freighting road, instead of straight north from the city, further bolstering the connection between new farms and local lumber interests. Other homesteaders traveled north and slightly east from Prince Albert up what became known as the “Sand Hill” road, ending at or near the large, shallow body of water known locally as Egg Lake. Homesteaders would break off these primitive roads to slash trails through the bush to their own homesteads. As more homesteaders arrived, the need for roads, bridges, and other municipal requirements (such as fence laws and herd laws, as well as taxes and school boards) became more important. The district directly north of Prince Albert formed a Local Improvement District in 1910, but quickly changed to become the Rural Municipality of Buckland No. 491, in October 1911.¹⁰⁷ The post office at Alingly was soon joined by post offices at Spruce Home in 1908, Henribourg in 1911,

¹⁰⁶ *Prince Albert Historical Society, Bill Smiley Archives*. Manuscript 705b, Richard Dice, “Write-up of Alingly and District.”

¹⁰⁷ See “Local Improvement District, No. 491,” *Buckland’s Heritage* (Buckland History Book Committee. Printed by Turner-Warwick Printers, 1980), p. 14-20. The Paddockwood/Christopher Lake area operated as Local Improvement District no. 959 for over sixty years more, incorporating as the Rural Municipality of Paddockwood, No. 520 only in 1978. *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 36. It is important to note this distinction: the Local Improvement District at Paddockwood came under the direction of several non-Rural Municipality influences through the years, including the Northern Settler’s Re-establishment Branch and the Northern Areas Branch. The different form of local government showed in large measure the fundamental difference between the two municipalities. Paddockwood’s landscape covers the transition zone from farmable land to the northern grey soil zone and boreal environment not conducive to grain farming. Its governance history reflects that difference.

and Albertville in 1914.¹⁰⁸ Further to the north, the homesteaders in what became known as Paddockwood opened their post office in 1913.

The sprouting postal districts as well as the growing community at Little Red enthusiastically embraced the mixed farming ideal. Shacks and houses were made with logs and locally-sawn lumber. Soon, community halls, churches, and schools were built using the same materials.¹⁰⁹ A cheese factory was built at Henribourg, and a creamery which made butter at Albertville. These were local endeavors that offered a commercial outlet for the surplus milk and cream from the homesteads and injected cash into the mixed-farming economy. Garden produce, wild hay, fresh meat, eggs, and dressed game found a steady local market.

Although the mixed farming ideal was predicated on an ecologically mixed landscape and promoters believed the north Prince Albert region was eminently suitable, building a farm in the forest region rather than on the prairie meant encountering and solving a completely different set of problems. The landscape required new breaking and cultivation methods and equipment, different crops, livestock feed, and more time to change from a pioneer homestead to a settled and permanent farm. The Alingly oldtimers recalled in the 1950s:

The appearance of the landscape was very different at that time, with all the low spots and sloughs full of water. The abundance of water was a great attraction for all kinds of waterfowl [and] the mosquitos were very bad during June and July. As well as being too much water, there was also a great deal of poplar bush, spruce and willow. The clearing was done with an axe, and by burning. The breaking was done with four horse teams and fourteen inch brush breaking plows. The clearing was hard work, and slow, so if ten acres were done in a season it was considered a big job.¹¹⁰

Clearing the land by axe, grubbing out the roots, and burning the trash were common methods of land preparation before a plow ever came near the soil. It was a time-consuming process, and

¹⁰⁸ Chapter Eight, The Royal Mail. *Buckland's Heritage; Cordwood and Courage*.

¹⁰⁹ The community hall at Paddockwood was built in the winter of 1915-1916; a rousing dance was held at its inauguration, reported in the Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 15 January 1916. Soon after, a school was proposed.

¹¹⁰ SAB Saskatchewan School District Jubilee Histories Micro S-8.15. "Alingly School District Jubilee History," 1955. Another major problem arising from the forest locale was swamp fever (infectious anemia), a viral infection thought to be water-borne that killed valuable horses. The University of Saskatchewan College of Agriculture took up the issue of swamp fever in response to the needs of the forest-based mixed farmer. For an example of the physical and economic problems of swamp fever, see Gilbert Frank Roe, "The Alberta Wet Cycle of 1899-1903: A Climactic Interlude," *Agricultural History* Vol. 28, no. 3 (July 1954): pp. 112-120. Heavy horses (such as Clydesdales or Percherons) noted for their strength on the open plains were of less use in the northern bush: the larger horses were "too clumsy, took too much feed, not as nimble in the bush for skidding logs, rather prone to swamp fever. The shorter, chunkier kind of horse was better." Sarge McGowan, "Gee and Haw," *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 634. Such comments represent the trial-and-error nature of trying to bring prairie-based agriculture to the forest edge.

was one of the major deterrents to bush homesteading. Prairie land, free from scrub bush and endless roots, could be turned to profitable crops much more quickly, offering a faster return for the farmer. Fortunately, the government soon recognized that farming at the forest edge required a different set of rules. Homestead regulations designed for an open prairie environment, in particular the amount of land that the dominion expected to be broken up, plowed and ‘improved’ each year, could not be met. Homestead inspectors took local conditions into consideration and were known to allow patents on land where far less than thirty acres were broken. Formal regulations justifying these decisions soon followed.¹¹¹

Roads were cut by hand with limited government subsidies along the road allowances – a departure from the original roads that usually took the easiest route through the bush. Roads were in fact one of the most important local concerns. The Buckland municipal council pointed out that “many settlers who would have located in these townships had not done so on account of the bad condition of the roads.” Road improvements, the council argued, would not only help the local population and encourage new immigrants, but would contribute to the city’s finances and security as well. If the settlers could get to and from the city more efficiently, they could deliver wood and other goods more easily into town, as well as build more efficient farms. “Transportation means everything in a new country” the council added, with a ring of both warning and promise.¹¹² Residents regularly called for municipal and provincial governments to improve transportation connections. They also took matters into their own hands at times, building roads and bridges to ease local traffic problems.¹¹³ Settlers, for example, were interested

¹¹¹ The most common method of calculating the labour required to clear and break a bush homestead was the \$5 per acre rule. The Dominion believed that open prairie land could be broken for \$5 per acre, for a total of \$150 equivalent of thirty acres. If land was heavily forested, it may cost as much as \$20 dollars per acre to clear and break; therefore, some homesteads were allowed patent with ten acres or less in crop. This rule of thumb became particularly entrenched during the 1930s, in the post-1930 homestead records. See *SAB*, S43 R2004-220, post-1930 homestead records. See also *Prince Albert Historical Society, Bill Smiley Archives*, Local history fonds, Buckland, “From Ox-Team to Combine: Local History of Buckland District.” The Buckland history claimed: “The Homestead Inspector occasionally tried to check up on the clearing and breaking of settlers. He usually got lost or stuck in a mudhole with his buggy. He found it easier to waylay the settler at Prince Albert and take a statement from him about his improvements. In bush countries the required acreage was reduced and left to the discretion of the Inspector, so long as the man was a bona fide settler. An acre looks a lot of land in the thick bush, and the term ‘homestead acres’ was a standing joke. They were as much exaggerated in size as the fish some anglers catch.” p. 4.

¹¹² *Prince Albert Daily Herald*, 4 March 1916.

¹¹³ See Dice, “Alingly and District.” See also *Prince Albert Daily Herald*, 15 April 1916. “Alingly news. Some voluntary road work was performed by covering about 250 yards of corduroy with the remains of a straw pile to facilitate teams drawing earth on the corduroy when the frost goes out. This will open up an east and west road... Quite a number of men and teams turned out, and showed in a practical way the spirit of harmony which exists in this go-ahead community.”

not only in improving the roads into Prince Albert, but improving the trails that led east-west *between* communities. It was arduous and unnecessary, settlers thought, to have to go all the way to Prince Albert and back out on a different trail to reach a neighbor's house, school, community hall, post office, or village that was only a few miles away. The settlers and the rural municipality were effectively repeating what Frank Crean had noted in 1908 and 1909: the limits of the area north of the North Saskatchewan River (at least within the forty-mile band of supposed potential agricultural land) had less to do with the quality of the land for mixed agriculture and more with the limits of transportation.

In concert with the city of Prince Albert, homesteaders began agitating for a railway branch line north of the city. It was clear that, despite approval of the line in 1912, the Canadian Northern was not building the expected line fast enough to suit local interests and conditions.¹¹⁴ Although railways were important for all western farms, farmers in the forest landscape had particularly acute heavy railway transportation requirements. In a letter to the Minister of Railways, the Mayor of Prince Albert, William Knox, argued:

A good many of these people are struggling to make a living on land which has to be cleared of bush but without Railway facilities they can scarcely make a living and the authorities of this City are afraid that all the expense which has been gone into advertising the district and the money which the Government has laid out in settling it will go for nothing...In this particular section it is for the most part poplar bush some of it of very considerable size... If a Railway were built in there would be a good business done for quite a number of years in shipping out cordwood, and this industry would enable the settlers to get their lands cleared...¹¹⁵

The cover letter to the same document noted that "If a railway could be commenced immediately the settlers in that part of the country would be able to find work, would be able to clear their lands of timber and ship, and from the revenue derived from this source would be able to bring the land under cultivation much more quickly than under present conditions." Although the local lumber and freighting industries offered off-farm work, the sheer number of homesteaders

¹¹⁴ The continued delays were most likely bound up in the ongoing financial problems of the Canadian Northern Railway. By 1917, in large part due to the disruption of the war, the Canadian Northern failed. It was bought by the federal government who amalgamated the Canadian Northern and Grand Trunk Pacific lines to create the Canadian National Railway. For a history of the Canadian Northern railway, see T.D. Regehr, *The Canadian Northern Railway: Pioneer Road of the Northern Prairies, 1895-1918* (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, 1976).

¹¹⁵ SAB, Department of Railways files, Ra 400. CNR plans and construction (b) (20). William Knox to The Honorable Frank Cochrane, 6 May 1916. See also Ra 220. Department of Railways, General File (2) (a). Petition to James Calder, Minister of Railways.

became more than these industries could support. A railway offered a different economic prospect, allowing homesteaders to capitalize on their poplar trees by turning them into cordwood. A petition signed by sixty of the area's settlers emphasized the importance of this resource not only to the incomes of local homesteaders, but to meet the needs of prairie farmers: "the matter of fuel shortage has become a question of more than ordinary importance, not only to the people residing in the North, but also to those residents of the Prairie Sections." The fuel shortages and killing winter of 1906-1907 were not far from anyone's minds; the settlers used those memories to support their request for a railway line. Wartime and other delays meant that the railway was not completed to Paddockwood until 1924.

In the meantime, despite the transportation difficulties, those who were operating homestead farms within the north Prince Albert region were experiencing early prosperity, particularly during the war years. With wheat at or near two dollars per bushel, a phenomenal price, homesteaders had cash to put toward clearing and breaking new fields. Oats and hay were also in high demand, and the northern farms were well suited to provide these staples. War restrictions led to a surge in demand for farm produce, particularly meat, milk, eggs, and butter. The local lumber camps were in high production to serve the war effort, providing another excellent market. The newly-established creamery at Henribourg had doubled its operation by the end of 1918, before the flood of soldier settlement.¹¹⁶ As the fields grew, carving acreage from scrub aspen bluffs and heavy timber to create productive farmland, homesteaders could apply for patent. By 1919, the majority of the land in the Alingly, White Star, Henribourg and Albertville districts had been alienated from the public domain into private holdings. The 1955 Jubilee history of the Buckland municipality noted: "The close of World War One marked the end of the first stage in the economic development of Buckland. Many of the homesteaders had left, and been replaced by men who bought their farms ...homesteads...were beginning to be called farms."¹¹⁷ Some of these farms, proved up and patented, were rented out to newcomers.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 15 January 1919.

¹¹⁷ "From Ox-Team to Combine," p. 5.

¹¹⁸ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 8 April 1919. "Farmers who have been in the city for the winter months are now moving out on their farms or are renting others and taking out their equipment for the spring operations. It is understood that a considerable number of farms have been rented this year to new settlers who are making trial of their ability to make headway in wheat raising and mixed farming. Besides the returned soldier who is being helped to operate a farm, there are a good number who are taking the responsibility themselves to make the land productive."

Homestead work in the Paddockwood district was also progressing well, although newcomers were limited when the area was reserved for soldier settlement.

The price of farm commodities, particularly wheat but other crops as well, led to continued homestead registrations throughout the Great War. Over 5000 homesteads were filed in the Prince Albert land office throughout the war years even though external immigration had been effectively halted. The homesteaders were either internal migrants or the result of natural growth, with sons requesting permission to take on homesteads in response to wartime demand and prices (and perhaps to dodge war service).¹¹⁹ Such demands put pressure on the local land resources: if the areas around Alingly, White Star, Henribourg and Albertville were essentially filled up with homesteaders, and Paddockwood was reserved for future soldier settlement, where was that development to go?

As early as 1914, the Ratepayer's Association at Alingly, the community that considered itself 'hemmed in' on the west and on the north by the Sturgeon Lake and Little Red River reserves, began petitioning the Department of Indian Affairs, once again, to open Little Red River reserve for settlement. The petitioners argued that "outside of slough quarters there are no homesteads available in this Township and very few in the adjoining Townships." Predictably, the Alingly farmers targeted those living at Little Red, charging: "there are only eight families of Indians living on the North West corner of this reserve it is unfortunate that this large tract of mixed farming country for which the Indians appear to have little or no use should be held up in this way." Not only were there merely a few families holding up the development of over fifty square miles of farmland, the petitioners declared, but those who were living there were not pursuing agriculture. Little Red inhabitants were making their living choring for the lumber camps and operating stopping places for freighters – conveniently ignoring the fact that many Alingly homesteaders were pursuing similar activities.¹²⁰ To add insult to perceived injury, the petitioners claimed, "there are three Indian Reserves in or adjacent to this Rural Municipality [Buckland] and although the Indians use the public roads, they do not contribute to the making or the up-keep of them."¹²¹ Roads and road building were already a point of contention for

¹¹⁹ For a somewhat problematic but still important overview of agriculture during the First World War, see Thompson, *The Harvests of War*.

¹²⁰ LAC RG 10 Volume 7766 File 27107-4 Pt. 1. Letter from Alingly Rate Payers Association.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, "Petition to open up "Hunts" Indian Reserve in Township 52, Range 26, 27, and 28, West of the 2nd Meridian for homesteading." This petition was also supported by a resolution from the Rural Municipality of Thompson at Shellbrook, asking for this reserve to be opened.

municipalities scrambling to fund such modern developments. The reserves, in the estimation of the Alingly ratepayers, were a serious drain on local resources.

The perceived ‘best use’ debate over Little Red dragged on for years, in letters between the Department of Indian Affairs Lands and Timber Branch, the Alingly Rate Payers Association, and the Prince Albert board of trade. Reserves could not be summarily opened for homesteading. The land had to be formally surrendered and as the previous attempt had showed, getting a surrender for Little Red would be problematic, at best, and probably virtually impossible given the different opinions of all parties in question.¹²² The local Indian inspector dutifully wrote to Ottawa, stating calmly that, in his opinion, it was only a matter of time before “the northern bands interested in this reserve will begin to see the advantage of earning a livelihood from farming instead of depending on the hunt.”¹²³ The reserve was steadfastly defended as the place where the northern bands would find their agricultural future.

In fact, settlers at Little Red were farming, although they were not bound by the restrictions and expectations of the Dominion Lands Act. As a result, they had not expanded their operations or developed fields and crops to the extent local farmers believed was the bare minimum. By 1914, there were at least sixteen heads of family on the New Reserve, agitating for a local day school to serve the more than twenty children. Local men such as William Bear, who operated a farm on the reserve as well as an extensive freighting business, stood his ground both in the matter of a land surrender and in pushing for local services, particularly a school.¹²⁴ The residents of Little Red derived their livelihood from both the local landscape (hunting, fishing, and farming), and local industries. Their way of life was entirely similar to the non-native homesteaders surrounding the reserve – the difference lay in the emphasis. For the boreal families settled at Little Red, farming was just one aspect of a diversified economy drawn from products of the edge landscape. For incoming farmers, forest resources were a supplement to the more important business of developing a farm. The mixed base of hay crops, root vegetable

¹²² *Ibid.*, Lands and Timber Branch file 72,438. 5 June 1914. Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, wrote to Alingly to repeat the same point. Local residents, and their supporters in Prince Albert, were reluctant to abandon the fight. The board of trade at Prince Albert took up the cause, sending letters to Ottawa and visiting both their local M.P. and the local Inspector of Indian Agencies to press for a surrender. By 1917, things had not moved forward but agitation continued.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, Office of the Inspector of Indian Agencies, North Saskatchewan Inspectorate to Mr. Scott, 23 July 1917.

¹²⁴ Bear was referred to as “that fine young Cree” in both Indian Affairs documents and letters from the local Anglican Diocese in Prince Albert. Since Little Red was owned by the Montreal Lake and Lac La Ronge bands, it did not have its own chief, although most people both on and off the reserve considered Billy Bear to be the leading public figure.

crops, lumbering and freighting income continued on Little Red River Reserve until the end of the war, when their employment in the local lumber industry was curtailed by fire.¹²⁵

Southern Migrants: Landscape, Location, and Choice

Although Prince Albert promoters continued to look with envy on the enormous popularity of the dryland region between 1908 to the end of the First World War, homestead registrations did not reveal the whole tale. Cancellations of homesteads within the dryland area began almost as soon as people moved in. Overall, immigration to the western interior experienced roughly forty percent cancellation of homesteads. Homesteaders and their families would cancel (abandon) the land on which they had filed their claim, and leave to choose another homestead, go into another line of business, or return to their country of origin, as circumstance and character demanded.¹²⁶ Cancellation in the dryland region, however, shattered these ‘normal’ numbers. Historian Curt McManus noted extreme cancellation rates – over eighty percent of those who filed – within three years of opening the drylands for settlement.¹²⁷ The rush of settlement into the dryland belt never completely stabilized. Abandonments and out-migration counter-balanced in-migration.

The population of the north Prince Albert region was fortified by south-to-north migration, some of which came from the newly-opened dryland region.¹²⁸ Whereas migrants to Prince Albert after 1906 were seeking fuel sources on their own homesteads, the dryland disaster brought drought refugees searching for water. Inadequate rainfall plagued farmers in the Palliser Triangle, but the drought of 1914 marked the first serious warning, particularly for the provincial and federal governments, that the decision to open the pre-emption region would be fraught with difficulty. Farmers in the dry region had no crop. In desperate need of feed and fodder for stock,

¹²⁵ By the war years, there was considerably less grain grown at Little Red. The community focused on supplying the needs of the lumber camps and freighters. Hay was their agricultural priority, but potatoes and other garden produce was probably grown and sold. Little Red did not take advantage of the spectacular wheat prices offered during the war years, although other regional reserves, such as Mistawasis and Sturgeon Lake, did. See Saskatchewan Archives Office, *Index to Material Relating to Saskatchewan Indian Reserves*.

¹²⁶ Free homesteads taken between 1870 to 1927 and subsequently canceled were calculated by economist Chester Martin, and averaged forty percent over the longer time period. Between 1911 and 1931, there were 57 percent cancellations in Saskatchewan. In large part, this number was higher because of the dryland disaster. Martin called cancellations “the silent but deadly attrition,” and “the real cost of the western Canadian frontiers of settlement.” See Martin, “*Dominion Lands*” Policy, p. 172, 174.

¹²⁷ McManus, “Happyland,” p. 39-40.

¹²⁸ Another fuel shortage due to extreme cold weather in the winter of 1916-1917 led to a boom in cordwood production for the homesteaders north of the city, who hauled the loads to town by sleigh while petitioning for a railroad. Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 6 January 1916. “Fuel Boom Follows Close on Cold Spell. Local Wood and Coal Dealers are Having Their Harvest Season.” Fuel shortages on the prairies led to increased business for, and interest in, northern homesteads.

seed grain for the next planting season and relief to tide families through until a successful crop should come, settlers appealed to the federal government. For the first time, aid was needed on a scale “hundreds of times greater than the total advanced in all the years since 1886.”¹²⁹ The declaration of war overshadowed the emerging problems in the dryland on a national scale, but local newspapers and homestead records pointed to a steadily growing number of new homesteaders coming to the Prince Albert region from southern areas of the province.¹³⁰

It is tempting to assess migration solely as an expression of vulnerability, degradation of resources, reactive response, and desperation. Such characterizations, however, are deficient. Migration as an adaptation strategy was also a proactive choice. The Prince Albert *Daily Herald* editors declared that internal migrants were seeking a more resilient and balanced mixed-farming lifestyle at the forest edge. To counteract the most egregious inadequacies of the wheat monoculture – the iconic picture of drought in the drylands – migrants were looking to move to a landscape that could support a diversified mixed farm base.



Figure 38. Poor wheat crop in the dryland region, 1918. SAB R-A9695.

Another reason for moving north was a simple desire for better scenery: “Prairie Farmers Turning Toward North Areas. They Want Sight of Tree Once in a While,” headlines declared.

¹²⁹ Jones, *Empire of Dust*, p. 80.

¹³⁰ See, for example, the story of the McGimpsey family who moved from Hearn, Saskatchewan (near Moose Jaw) to Paddockwood in 1915. Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 6 May 1916. Mrs. McGimpsey took patent on her land in 1920, after her husband and daughter died in 1916. See SAB, homestead file 3448546, SW 20-52-25 W2.

The Dominion Lands agent reported that letters were “being daily received” from farmers in the southern part of the province, asking about the prospect of obtaining grazing lands for their stock, or homesteads north of the city. “Many of the letters express themselves as weary of the monotonous life of the prairie and say they would be glad to be amongst the trees once more.”¹³¹ Local landscape attributes of greenery, growth, beauty and health became a cultural draw, over and above economic considerations.

Some of the settlers moving to the north, the newspapers suggested, had in fact been successful on the prairies. They were coming north deliberately with extensive capital to invest in a mixed-farming enterprise. “It is a noticeable fact,” the *Daily Herald* declared, “that many of the new settlers are men who have made a success of farming on the prairie, but seemingly are tired of the monotony of straight grain growing.” They sought the timber country, “with its wealth of fuel, plenty of wild hay and the availability of wild game at certain seasons of the year.” Such a landscape would “appeal strongly to many men who are desirous to engage in farming of a mixed variety and to stock raising.”¹³² The prairies, in this interpretation, were a convenient stop for a short period to shore up some capital, but real farmers looking to create long-term, resilient, ecologically-sustainable mixed-farming enterprises were heading north. Their migrations, the newspapers asserted, were deliberate expressions of capability and choice, rather than a reactive response to environmental vulnerability.

Conclusion

The depiction of the forest edge as a mixed farming area is a significant but little understood aspect of Saskatchewan’s agricultural history. The difference between the open plains and the forested or parkland regions has often been described, but not analyzed. The tremendous push by the Prince Albert board of trade to find a creative ‘hook’ to entice settlers to the area became entangled in contemporary debate over the potential of mixed farming versus grain (wheat) farming. Mixed farming was depicted as an ideal farming method that shepherded and husbanded the land. It broadly drew on an ecological mix of resources, crops, and stock

¹³¹ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 28 January 1919.

¹³² Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 22 February 1919. “Paddockwood Area Shows Great Activity in Attraction of New Settlers from Prairie Districts.”

thereby lowering farm risk. Such an enterprise, it was argued, offered perhaps a slower road to riches but a sure and steady one.¹³³

The difference between mixed farming and grain farming became enmeshed in the contrast between the forested regions and the open plains. At the forest edge, trees provided fuel and shelter for the stock, wild hay lands were available, and water sources were plentiful. The shorter growing season with potentially damaging wheat frosts did not affect the oat crop needed for fodder. Wood was available to build houses, barns and fences, an expensive undertaking on the open plains. Local lumber camps and freighters created strong demand for farm products, and provided cash labour opportunities. As early as the 1890s, Prince Albert boosters promoted mixed farming at the edge landscape to both external and internal, regional migrants. After 1906 and the opening of homestead land north of the river, this migration grew. Immigration to the north Prince Albert area was heavily influenced by the advertising campaigns of the Prince Albert board of trade which emphasized the landscape differences between the bleak, isolated, dry open plains and the lush, green, forested northern landscape. Like Hudson's Bay Company servant Anthony Henday, mixed farming advocates and Prince Albert boosters believed that settlement required *both* "fine level land and tall trees," in a "pleasant *and* plentiful country." Extreme environmental conditions, including devastating winters with extensive fuel shortages, as well as drought, also influenced migration. Proactive migration patterns brought settlers drawn to the mixed farming promise of diversity and resilience, and the beauty of the forested landscape. Contrasts – south and north, prairie and forest, grain farming and mixed farming – played a substantial role in soldier settlement and later Depression resettlement in the north Prince Albert region throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

¹³³ Dominion Field Naturalist John Macoun is generally skewered by historians as the leading proponent of the wheat boom, and at least indirectly responsible for the disastrous march into the Palliser Triangle. John Langton Tyman, *By Section, Township and Range: Studies in Prairie Settlement* was particularly critical of Macoun. He reprinted the pen-and-ink drawings from Macoun's *Manitoba and the Great North West* of the first year in the bush and on the prairie *but did not show* the later drawings. Macoun's book, while advocating and predicting an enormous wheat boom and extensive prairie settlement, did anticipate the importance of the forested regions as a lumber resource for the prairies, as well as the possibilities of impressive, wealthy holdings on farms developed in the bush, after a long period of development.

Chapter Four: “Go North, Young Man”: Soldier Settlement, the Dryland Disaster and Northern Migration

Canadian Expeditionary Force soldier Roger Picand, of the 67th Battery 52nd Artillery Regiment, wrote to the Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture from Angéloûme, France on 30 September 1916. Picand requested information regarding settlement in northern Saskatchewan. Was the Saskatchewan River navigable, he wondered, and how long were the winters? Can wheat and oats be grown north of the North Saskatchewan River? And finally, what were the game and fish like in these parts?¹ Picand’s letter, anticipating land resettlement concessions for Canadian soldiers, outlined questions typical of northern homestead development. He was interested in transportation, climate, potential agricultural crops, as well as off-farm products of the local landscape. The dual role of agriculture and off-farm resources in Picand’s letter suggested the growing correlation between mixed farming and the forest landscape. Mixed farming was a traditional agricultural practice; mixed farming at the ecological edge encouraged development not only of on-farm, but off-farm, forest resources. Broad landscape diversification contrasted the straight grain/wheat farming common on the open plains and typified northern soldier and other forest edge settlements.

The connection between mixed farming, the forest edge, and soldier settlement is an important, but understudied, aspect of the post-First World War land settlement experience. The Soldier Settlement Board (SSB) actively promoted mixed farming as a central tenet of soldier land settlement. By extension, soldiers were encouraged to settle on land suitable for mixed farming. Building on years of promotion as ‘The Home of Mixed Farming,’ the north Prince Albert region was ideally suited to the goals of the Soldier Settlement Board, and became a preferred destination.² Ongoing environmental disaster and drought on the open plains – which intensified during the spring and summer of 1919 when soldiers were arriving home and

¹ SAB, Department of Agriculture fonds, R-266 no. 1644. Picand to Department of Agriculture, 30 September 1916. This document can also be found online at <http://www.sasksettlement.com>.

² Military historian Kent Fedorowich has made a detailed international study of soldier settlement, including the Canadian context, in *Unfit for Heroes: Reconstruction and Soldier Settlement in the Empire between the Wars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995). One quarter of the men surveyed were interested in soldier land settlement, p. 79. Fedorowich noted the importance of the mixed farming concept to the Soldier Settlement scheme, but did not recognize its specific correlation to place – the more forested agricultural regions, away from the open plains.

searching out land options – also directed soldier settlement north, away from drought regions.³ In addition to soldier settlement, the north Prince Albert area drew a noticeable influx of migrants from the Dryland Disaster of the Palliser Triangle. Recurring drought and crop failures pushed settlers in vulnerable regions out, and gave Prince Albert boosters a receptive audience. The Canadian National Railway (CNR) colonization department, as well as the dominion's Land Settlement Board and 3000 British Families scheme, also brought settlers to the north Prince Albert region in the post-war period.

In practice, the mixed farming ideal changed within the forest edge environment. Immigrants drew extensively on the edge landscape to create livelihoods that combined the economics of farm and forest. Promoters intensified a perceived correlation between the forest edge and cheap living, recreating the north Prince Albert region as a destination for poor but ambitious and hard-working immigrants. The rise of the cordwood industry, overland freighting opportunities, commercial fishing, trapping, and work in railroad tie camps, as well as mixed farming, were dominant 'pull' factors that encouraged migration. The ecotone of the forest edge, where both on-farm and off-farm products could be used, contributed to a high degree of human economic resilience. Throughout the 1920s, settlers engaged in occupational pluralism and an extensive barter economy that went beyond the basic mixed farming message to develop a cultural, social and economic lifestyle rooted in the landscape.

The Soldier Settlement Scheme

The dominion government canvassed overseas soldiers fighting in France – such as Robert Picand – to find out what the men wanted the government to provide for returning men at the war's end, in appreciation and to help them readjust to civilian life. One of the most popular ideas offered by the men was that the dominion should provide loan support and land for soldier settlement, to support the men to become established farmers. A preliminary plan of action was put in place in 1917. Due to unprecedented and unexpected demand, an expanded version was passed in 1919.⁴

³ According to the Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, many of the soldier settlers looking for land in the area were from "the southern part of the province." 16 January 1919. "Settlers are coming into North Country."

⁴ Historians Desmond Morton and Glenn Wright discussed various soldier re-establishment issues, including soldier settlement, in their book *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life 1915-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); see also E.C. Morgan, "Soldier Settlement in the Prairie Provinces," *Saskatchewan History* Vol. 21, no. 2 (Spring 1968): pp. 41-55; John McDonald, "Soldier Settlement and Depression Settlement in the Forest Fringe of Saskatchewan," *Prairie Forum* Vol. 6, no. 1 (1981): pp. 35-55. The head of the

Historical opinion on the soldier settlement scheme has been blunt: soldier settlement was, overall, a “disappointing failure.”⁵ It was expensive, many soldiers abandoned their holdings despite extensive and intensive support from the Soldier Settlement Board, and conditions were, in places, harsh. Because soldier settlement was a national endeavour, and soldiers were placed upon (or returned to) agricultural land in all the provinces, historical analysis has favoured a national perspective. Pan-Canadian analyses have inadvertently fused the experiences of all soldiers across all regions. Too often, the most disastrous and unfortunate examples have been used to explain broader trends. For example, although the majority of returned soldiers across the dominion purchased or returned to developed farms, historical analysis has favoured the study of block settlement schemes on remote, undeveloped, forested Crown lands. These remote forested settlements were, for the most part, considered failures.⁶ As a result, the perception of the success of soldier settlement has been skewed. In the north Prince Albert region, soldier settlement was, overall, a success and was a critical aspect of regional development.

Soldier Settlement Board, E.J. Ashton, wrote a contemporary account, “Soldier Land Settlement in Canada,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* Vol. 39, no. 3 (May 1925): pp. 488-498.

⁵ Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes*, p. 106.

⁶ Three examples of block settlement schemes on forested Crown land are: the Kapuskasing Colony in Ontario; the Merville settlement on Vancouver Island; and the Porcupine Soldier Settlement in Saskatchewan north of Yorkton on the old Porcupine Forest Reserve. See J. David Wood, *Places of Last Resort: The Expansion of the Farm Frontier into the Boreal Forest in Canada, c. 1910-1940* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006); James Murton, *Creating a Modern Countryside: Liberalism and Land Resettlement in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, Nature/History/Society series, 2007); Herbert Harris, *Book of Memories and a History of the Porcupine Soldier Settlement and Adjacent Areas Situated in North-Eastern Saskatchewan Canada 1919-1967* (Shand Agricultural Society, 1967); E.C. Morgan, “Soldier Settlement in the Prairie Provinces,” and John MacDonald, “Soldier Settlement and Depression Settlement in the Forest Fringe of Saskatchewan.” Both the Kapuskasing and Merville colonies have been classified as failures and shams, pet schemes of a federal government intent on opening new land without regard for the human cost associated with opening forested land. The Porcupine Forest Reserve settlement has received mixed reviews. There remain extensive viable farms throughout the districts that were opened, particularly in Saskatchewan.

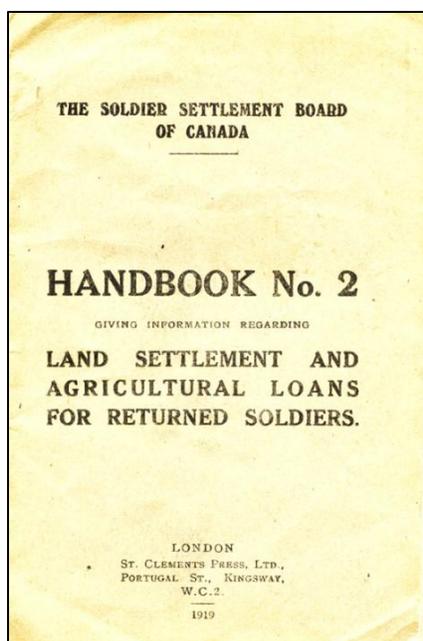


Figure 39. Soldier Settlement Board, 1919.

Soldier settlement on agricultural land fired the imagination of many across the country at the tail end of the war. Editorial pages, letters to the editor, and advertisements in newspapers heralded the scheme.⁷ The 1919 Soldier Settlement Act provided for three land settlement options. If a soldier already owned agricultural land, he could obtain a loan to clear ‘encumbrances’ (usually mortgages, liens, and taxes), or to purchase livestock, implements, or erect permanent buildings. A soldier could alternatively purchase land through the Soldier Settlement Board, which acted as both realtor and bank, setting the land price and holding the mortgage and title until the loans were paid off. He would also qualify for a loan to purchase stock and erect buildings. Finally, a soldier could take free dominion land within the western provinces (usually a soldier grant *and* a homestead) and qualify for a smaller loan to purchase

⁷ See, for example, the full-page advertisement from the Soldier Settlement Board, 6 April 1919, Prince Albert *Daily Herald*: “War to Peace. Land and Loans – to Help Soldiers Become Farmers. It is anticipated that a great many soldiers who have served with the Canadian, British, or Allied forces may want to become farmers in Canada. The vital need to-day is to increase production and the acreage under cultivation. It is thus in Canada’s best interests to give these soldiers every assistance. The Government has therefore been developing a programme that includes the providing of land, the granting of loans and the training and supervision of those inexperienced in farming.” Ad printed by the Repatriation Committee, Ottawa. The large advertisement was placed by the Soldier Settlement Board in daily newspapers across the country. See also stories in *The Saskatchewan Farmer*, particularly “Farm Training for Soldiers,” Vol. 7, no. 1 (1916), p. 17; “Land for Soldiers,” Vol. 7, no. 9 (1917), p. 13; “Land Settlement Plans Announced for the Soldiers; For Experienced Men,” Vol. 9, no. 3 (1918), p. 9.

livestock, equipment, or erect buildings.⁸ Historical analysis of soldier settlement, in large part because of the tripartite nature of the loans and land process, has been fundamentally flawed. To compare the experiences of a soldier who purchased expensive farm land and took large loans to buy stock and equipment with another soldier who chose free dominion land and qualified only for smaller loans is problematic, at best.

The inducements to settle at the forest edge on what most historians have dismissed as ‘scrub’ land – the lure of mixed farming, the strong forest economy, access to both a homestead and a soldier grant – have traditionally been downplayed. As a result, the narratives invariably depicted men “forced” to take off-farm employment in regional industries, or to hunt, trap, or fish to help feed their families. Robert Picand’s letter suggested, however, that off-farm opportunities were more of a draw than a detriment. Picand’s positive assessment was supported by stories drawn from the local history books of forest edge communities, where both on-farm and off-farm opportunities drew soldiers. In contrast, academic discourse characterized soldiers as little more than pawns, tricked into taking poor land in a larger game orchestrated by the federal government. It was a game “designed to open up vast new areas of land,” whether that land was fit for settlement or not – and the narrative consistently suggested that the Crown land available for settlement after the war was not fit for agriculture.⁹

Agricultural surveys conducted throughout the latter part of the war years on the prairies showed a relative scarcity of dominion lands, particularly in contrast to the amount of land that had been available prior to and during the major settlement era between 1896 and 1910. What was left was either in the forested regions or the Palliser Triangle. Any remaining productive prairie land had been alienated from the government, owned by the Hudson’s Bay Company, railway and colonization companies, private speculators, school lands, or Indian reserves.¹⁰ To

⁸ The Soldier Settlement Act may be found online at <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/S-12.8/text.html>. It is the consolidated version which includes all the additions and changes made to the act up to 1946.

⁹ Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes*, p. 70. Geographer J. David Wood, in *Places of Last Resort*, provided the best example of the argument that northern settlers were duped. On the back cover, Wood proclaimed, “Grappling with demanding conditions, the northern settlers were encouraged by politicians, bureaucrats, and religious leaders who often had less than innocent reasons for endorsing questionable settlement experiments.”

¹⁰ The monthly agricultural magazine, *The Saskatchewan Farmer*, deplored the fact that there were millions of acres of unoccupied land within easy reach of settlements and railways that were in the hands of speculators. “The Government has in the past commandeered part of our wheat crop. Why not commandeer this vacant land? ... Surely something can be done to compel the owners of our vacant lands to ... sell it at a reasonable figure, so as to allow returned soldiers or other purchasers to cultivate it.” A forced purchase scheme was infinitely better, the magazine noted, than offering homesteads in remote, northern, timbered districts without rail lines or established service centers. See *The Saskatchewan Farmer*, “Land for Soldiers,” Vol. 7, no. 9 (1917), p. 13.

bring that land back under the auspices of the federal government for the soldier settlement scheme, the land had to be purchased. All of these companies, private individuals, or Aboriginal bands were squeezed to find land for soldier settlement.

The most important change between the Soldier Settlement Act of 1917, and that of 1919, was that the loan capacity of the SSB was expanded. As a result, soldiers could access loans to purchase title to farmland in *any* of the nine provinces. Soldiers could immigrate or return to Canada and take up farms wherever they chose. They were not kept strictly to the remaining Crown land of the western interior. In fact, just *one-sixth* of the total number of soldiers who received land through the Soldier Settlement Board took the dominion homestead plus the soldier grant – and those men would have been spread across the western interior on any remaining Crown, school, or otherwise unalienated land.¹¹ Nonetheless, soldier settlement opened millions of acres of Crown land along the forest fringe.

Soldier Settlement Regulations

Soldier settlement in the north Prince Albert region – and across the dominion – ushered in a new era of assisted settlement on a scale not before seen in Canada. The homestead system under Clifford Sifton and Frank Oliver held out the carrot of 160 acres of free homestead land. Free land, a massive advertising campaign, and support from railways and steamships to move the settlers drew immigrants to the region, but offered them little else.¹² Once a man or a family were on their homestead, it was up to them to succeed on the farm or choose to abandon the farm and go elsewhere.¹³ There was no further intervention or support from the Dominion Lands agency. Soldier settlement, on the other hand, was highly regulated. The soldier had to apply to the program and be approved. Between one quarter and one third of applicants were rejected.¹⁴ The SSB required soldiers with no farming experience to undergo practical training, through courses and/or with a farmer (as hired help) to learn the business of mixed farming.¹⁵

¹¹ Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, p. 146. Reserve land, on the other hand, had to be purchased by the Dominion on behalf of the SSB, once it was surrendered by the First Nation band.

¹² See Chapter Six, “Land I Can Own,” in Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House Publishers, 2005).

¹³ Land abandonment or cancelling a homestead was not necessarily a ‘failure,’ although many historians and government inspectors have branded it as such.

¹⁴ See Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, p. 146.

¹⁵ By 1921 in the Prince Albert district, over 1,300 settlers had been placed on farms, forty had been recommended for training, and of those, twenty-five had been placed “with the best farmers in the various districts, and the wages have been satisfactory to all the settlers in training.” “Soldier Settlement on the Land,” Report of the *Soldier Settlement Board of Canada*, 31 March 1921, p. 90. In Saskatoon, 76 had been recommended for training, 114 in

The land also had to be approved. Land assessment was the cornerstone of the Soldier Land Settlement program, according to the SSB: “If the first maxim is that the *man* must be ‘fit to farm,’ the second maxim is that the *land* must be ‘fit to farm.’ They were of equal importance.”¹⁶ To that end, the Soldier Settlement Board hired inspectors to oversee land purchases, evaluate and approve or reject improved farms or unimproved ‘wild’ land. Prices were negotiated with farmers who decided to sell their holdings to the Soldier Settlement Board. Quarter section surveys, including soil assessments, were done on every piece of land bought through the SSB, in an attempt to direct soldiers onto land suitable for mixed farming.¹⁷

One of the founding principles of the Soldier Settlement Act was that soldiers should not be asked to go to remote farms, miles from service centres or transportation facilities. The Soldier Settlement Board literature insisted: “The board does not contemplate the settlement of soldiers as pioneers in remote locations or under isolated conditions, removed from markets, in virgin forest areas.”¹⁸ As a result, the SSB pushed itself to place soldiers primarily on land in established farming districts, within fifteen miles of a railway – hence the push to open Indian reserves, school lands, and Hudson’s Bay Company lands, as well as land in the hands of speculators and other private owners.¹⁹ If demand still exceeded supply within these limitations, then soldier settlement was promoted in places *likely* to soon get a railway, or in “specially approved districts along projected lines where general settlement is well developed.”²⁰ The north Prince Albert region, with the fledgling communities of Alingly, Henribourg, Albertville and Paddockwood, and a promised branch railway line, qualified.

Regina, for a total of 230 for Saskatchewan; 244 in Edmonton and 167 for Calgary, a total of 411; 378 in Manitoba, 508 in Ontario.

¹⁶ “Soldier Settlement on the Land,” p. 10.

¹⁷ *SAB*, Micro S.183 Records of Premier William Martin, Soldier Settlement files.

¹⁸ “Soldier Settlement on the Land,” p. 10.

¹⁹ The restriction to land within fifteen miles of a railway did not match practice, in all cases. Special allowances were made to settle in certain areas, including the Porcupine Forest reserve in east central Saskatchewan, and the Peace River block in northern Alberta. These areas were, contrary to the stated intent of the SSB, heavy bush country without railway facilities in the earliest years of their development.

²⁰ “Soldier Settlement on the Land,” 10.



Figure 40. SAB R-A19420. “30,000,000 Acres of Fertile and Idle Land Held by Graball & Co. 160 Acres Free Land only 100 Miles from Civilization. Denied Access to the Land which he Bled to Defend.” This political cartoon has done much to propagate the idea that soldier settlement on forest land (where the wolf was near to howl at the door) was a poor way to repay the soldier for their sacrifices. Many newspapers, including *The Saskatchewan Farmer*, lamented the amount of good land owned by speculators. Under the 1919 SSB regulations, the SSB could purchase alienated land, mitigating somewhat the push onto forested and remote lands.

The difference between early dominion immigration policies and soldier settlement was the ongoing hand of government. Loans secured by the returned men were to be paid back over the course of twenty-five years.²¹ During that time, the soldier settler would continue to be advised and supported by the SSB. The Prince Albert *Daily Herald* lauded the idea: “Not only does it give him a start, but it sustains him, not through charity, but through a well-thought out

²¹ The Canadian Pacific Railway had also developed an extensive land settlement scheme to sell their immense land holdings. In some cases, they partially developed farms, with irrigation, houses, or other improvements, and sold the land to incoming settlers. Typical mortgages were twenty years. See *The Saskatchewan Farmer*, Vol. 7, no. 6 (1917), p. 15; James B. Hedges, *Building the Canadian West: The Land and Colonization Policies of the Canadian Pacific Railway* (Toronto: Macmillan Company, 1939). The SSB scheme no doubt drew from these ideas.

system of credits by means of which everything needed by the settler may be purchased and paid for over a long term of years.”²² As long as the soldier settler was still on his SSB farm, actively working and paying his loans (or at least the interest), the SSB would continue to support him, offering further advice or loans to expand the farm or help in lean years. The ongoing, sustaining help would, it was thought, make the difference in successful soldier settlement.²³

Mixed Farming and Soldier Settlement

When the first trickle of soldiers began to arrive back in the dominion during the winter of 1918-1919, Prince Albert advocates sprang into action. The soldier settlement scheme was popular, though there was disgruntlement in Prince Albert when soldier Land Settlement Boards were announced for Regina and Saskatoon. The Prince Albert board of trade angrily pointed out: “not one of the men selected to perform the vital duty of securing land for the returned soldiers was familiar with the northern part of the province where hundreds of the soldiers desire to locate.”²⁴ There were real differences, both the board of trade and *Daily Herald* editors cautioned, between wheat farming on the prairie and mixed farming in the north.²⁵ The implications of the plan, including the amount of money needed for loans, the kind of land required, and other issues were different in the local context than on the prairies. After several letters, meetings, and hot debate, the Soldier Settlement Board relented and agreed to establish a local Land Settlement Board at Prince Albert. It was the only province to have three boards.²⁶ The Land Settlement Board strengthened the ambitions and long-held beliefs of the Prince Albert

²² Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 2 June 1919. The story was a reprint from the *Toronto Times*. The article went on to argue, “These arrangements supply the necessary quality of permanency which has hitherto been absent from our land settlement policies. That the west is no more settled than it is, is not due to the fact that people have not gone into the western provinces, but that too many have not stayed there. They have simply gone through it like a sieve. Large numbers have gone out of the country because they had nothing to sustain them over a few bad years. The returned men taking up land under the soldier settlement scheme will be sustained in a way so that he may come through lean years.”

²³ The soldier was expected to secure all his loans through the SSB, which would also prepare bulk purchases of machinery, supplies, and stock, to pass the savings on to the soldier. Although advertised as a new and welcome departure in land settlement policies, there was a considerable paternalistic overtone to the endeavour.

²⁴ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 13 February 1919.

²⁵ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 17 January 1919. “Land Problem. ...there is considerable dissatisfaction with regard to the manner in which the problem of northern Saskatchewan has been handled, the principle of loaning money that applies on the prairies having been attempted in the mixed farming area. It is likely that the local veterans will endeavour to impress upon Major Shore the necessity of evolving a plan that will give the prospective mixed farmer of northern Saskatchewan an even break with his neighbour in wheat raising on the prairie.” Given the stated aims of the SSB in regards to mixed farming, the SSB had little choice but to give in.

²⁶ See “Soldier Settlement on the Land,” p. 28-30.

boosters. Intrinsically different than archetypal prairie wheat farms, the boosters believed that the northern edge landscape naturally supported mixed farming.

The long-held connection between mixed farming and the Prince Albert region fit perfectly with the designs of the Soldier Settlement Board. The push toward mixed farming also supported the ambitions of the dominion to develop more agricultural land at the forest edge, following civil engineer Frank Crean's assessment of millions of acres of potentially fertile land waiting to be opened in the 'new northwest.' The first report of the SSB declared mixed farming as the soldier settler's route to established success. Using clichés typical of the most ardent mixed farming advocates, the SSB declared that "settlers are not encouraged to embark on a scheme of farming in which 'their eggs are all in one basket.' ... The impulsive direction is towards mixed farming, because it is based on sound economic principles." Those principles, the Board literature declared, showed that "Where several important crops are grown and several classes of animals are kept they are not all likely to meet adverse conditions of climate or market in the one year."²⁷ Operating a mixed farm, with cows, pigs, poultry, and a good vegetable garden, soldier settlers would be assured of a "healthy livelihood."²⁸ Mixed farming promoted not only resilience and profit over time through diversification, but a large measure of self-sufficiency. Soldiers were encouraged, even outright directed, to engage in mixed farming practices. In response to years of promotion – and the advice of federal scientists and surveyors – the mixed farming directive encouraged soldiers to file on homestead and soldier grant land (or purchase farms through the SSB) in parkland and forested areas suited to mixed farming.²⁹

Farm Economics

Despite the lack of immediate rail transport to the lands set aside for soldier settlement, the Prince Albert SSB land branch was busy. There were several advantages to purchasing land in a recently-homesteaded, forested region. Not only was such land considered the best bet for

²⁷ For these quotes, see "Soldier Settlement on the Land," p. 11-12.

²⁸ The report continued, "Different crops and different classes of animals make for better distribution of labour throughout the season. Waste is lessened because the product from one crop or animal is utilized by another class of animal. Fertility is conserved because manure rich in plant food is returned to the soil. Income is steadier and better distributed throughout the seasons; consequently there is less likelihood of contracting a great number of small debts." "Soldier Settlement on the Land," p. 11-12. Although they would never have admitted it, it seems reasonable to assume that the SSB was not interested in creating a wealthy class of successful wheat farmers. They supported a scheme that kept soldiers busy – and the heavy demands of a mixed farm fit the bill.

²⁹ There were individual instances of soldiers being granted land or loans to develop specialized farms (such as poultry, fruit, or market garden ('truck') farms), but these were in cases where the soldier had extensive previous experience.

mixed farming, but it was, in general, much cheaper than prairie land. In the Regina and Saskatoon districts, where free dominion land was scarce, the majority of soldier settlers took loans to remove encumbrances on privately-owned land, or to purchase farmland.³⁰ In Saskatoon, 1,364 soldiers purchased farms through the SSB, where the average farm cost about \$3000, requiring loans of four million dollars. The Regina situation was similar: 1,322 soldiers purchased land averaging \$3500 at a cost of four-and-a-half-million dollars. At Prince Albert in 1919, the majority of soldiers, 590, settled on dominion land. The 559 soldiers who purchased land needed loans to the amount of \$1,613,033, which worked out to less than \$2900 dollars per farm.³¹ This figure is an average and is somewhat misleading. According to soldier land settlement records held by the Saskatchewan Archives Board, an established farm in the settled districts around Melfort (south and east of Prince Albert) or Shellbrook sold for significantly higher prices than the just-proved up farms in the north Prince Albert region. If a soldier bought a farm in the north Prince Albert district, it cost only about \$1200 per quarter. He faced smaller payments.

The Prince Albert district gave out significantly fewer loans overall, as settlers on Crown land were limited to loans for stock, equipment and improvements, while their land was still in the proving-up stage. Soldier settlers who bought more expensive farms carried much higher and more risky loan portfolios, attempting to make payments on nearly everything: their stock, buildings, and the land itself. Indeed, in the Prince Albert district to 1921, the average loan per settler on purchased land was \$5,663 dollars; on dominion land, it was \$1,497 dollars. The majority of soldier settlers on dominion land across the country decided to go about “pioneering in the ordinary homestead use of the term without government financial assistance,” choosing not to take any loans at all.³² In the Prince Albert district, more loans were given out for the purchase of stock and equipment than for land; in Regina and Saskatoon, land purchases were

³⁰ The Soldier Settlement Board had sweeping land power. It could negotiate and purchase land directly from farmers and hold the land under speculation for purchase by soldiers. Soldiers could also approach the SSB with agreements worked out with private owners on land they wanted to buy. “Vendors of land to the board are always requested to reduce the original price of the land by sums ranging from \$200 to \$1000, and it is estimated that at least a saving of seven per cent has been effected on land purchased since the inception of the local office.” “Soldier Settlement on the Land,” Prince Albert board report, p. 89.

³¹ SAB, Micro S.183 Records of Premier William Martin, Soldier Settlement files.

³² As of 1921, there were 25,443 soldier settlers. Of those, 5,672 settled on dominion land with no loans at all. A further 3,735 settlers on Crown land received loans, which were miniscule (\$6,369,364) in comparison to the amount of loans to settlers on purchased lands, with total loans \$69,259,608 “Soldier Settlement on the Land,” 1921, p. 13.

worth double that of loans for stock and equipment.³³ A soldier settler on free dominion land, able to secure both a soldier grant and a homestead grant, carried a lighter burden of debt spread across more land. The majority of soldier settlers in the north Prince Albert region took their land at Paddockwood under the combined soldier grant/homestead option, with a significant minority purchasing cheaper, recently-patented farms in the Alingly, White Star, Henribourg, and Albertville districts.³⁴

Land Classification and Surveys in the North Prince Albert Region

F.J. O’Leary, District Superintendent of the Soldier Settlement Board at Prince Albert, reported in 1921 that soldier settlers in the “timbered country” of the Paddockwood district, twenty-six miles north of Prince Albert, were showing evidence of “making good.” Soil was listed as first class “chocolate loam,” a new railway into the district was “under construction,” and the country was covered with black and white poplar.³⁵ With settlers taking both homestead and a soldier grant, about two townships of land were opened.³⁶ Although soldier settlers were given priority, civilian homesteading was once again allowed in the Paddockwood area and settlement spread steadily north, filling townships fifty-two, ranges twenty-three to twenty-six and spilling over into township fifty-three. In fact, settlement was rapidly spreading to the end of surveyed land, forcing the dominion to face a land shortage or find new areas of expansion.

As the land was being filled, the dominion government financed a land classification survey in the north Prince Albert region. Sending professional surveyors to the area, their job

³³ See statistics for Prince Albert, Saskatoon, and Regina, “Soldier Settlement on the Land,” p. 88-89, 95, and 105.

³⁴ The principle of chain migration would also apply in the popularity of the north Prince Albert region. Fighting men bound by their experiences overseas were sometimes loath to break the important social networks formed by their battalions. For this reason, men from the same battalion, if otherwise uninfluenced by ties of family or previous farmland elsewhere, would sometimes choose to settle in the same region. In the case of Paddockwood, several men from the 44th Battalion came to settle there. These men were influenced by the descriptions of the land and its possibilities from David Dunn and James Stoddart, local men who had homesteaded at Paddockwood in the early part of the war, then joined the army. Returning to their homesteads in 1919, bearing the experiences of war and sporting new war brides, the men encouraged their compatriots to join them. Dunn and Stoddart purchased livestock and machinery using loans from the Soldier Settlement Board, and each received a second quarter of land, a soldier grant near their homesteads. With two quarters each, new livestock and machinery, the two families – along with their extended Battalion comrades – settled down to build their farms and community. The story of David Dunn and James Stoddart is found in *Cordwood and Courage* (Paddockwood History Book Committee, 1982), p. 186-187. David’s son, Bryce Dunn, still lives on the original homestead at Paddockwood. He was interviewed twice by Merle Massie, summer 2006 and summer 2007.

³⁵ “Soldier Settlement on the Land,” p. 93.

³⁶ A map prepared by the Information Services Corporation (ISC) on Dominion Land Grants in what later became the RM of Paddockwood No. 520 listed 130 quarters of land positively identified as Soldier Settlement land. Many other quarters may have passed through the Board after being homesteaded, and their records may be hidden in Dominion Land files, destroyed, or otherwise unavailable at the time the map was made (c. 2005).

was “to examine and report upon those lands suitable for immediate settlement ...[and] to classify the lands for general information, giving data that will afford prospective settlers and the general public a better knowledge of the country.”³⁷ This survey classified the land by quarter section, specifically visiting abandoned homesteads or other land not yet settled. The survey provided information on the older settled districts around Alingly, White Star, Henribourg and Albertville. It used these assessments to forecast the possibilities of the Paddockwood district, including the recent soldier settlement, and to classify the land that could yet be opened further north.³⁸ In general, the report divided homestead land from unfarmable scrub and muskeg land, such as that found in the more northern townships. Good land, the survey noted, ended in roughly township fifty-three; few quarters were thought fit for homesteads from township fifty-four and further north. Settlement past this point was moving out of the relatively good land of the Shellbrook-Meath Park plain and moving onto podzolic leached grey forest soil, with more white and black spruce, jackpine, and muskeg. Soldier and other northern settlers were rapidly reaching the end of good land.



Figure 41. SAB R-183 I.222 (19). The Montreal Lake Trail in summer.

³⁷ SAB Department of the Interior files. R-183 I. 290. Report on surveys completed in 1920. M.D. McCloskey, Dominion Land Survey to E. Deville, Esq., LL.D., Surveyor General, 30 March 1921.

³⁸ Such reports, on a quarter section level, were not published for the general public as they would be out of date almost immediately, as quarter sections were taken up faster than printing could be accomplished. However, it is possible that the report may have been kept on hand at the Dominion Lands Office for reference.



Figure 42. SAB R-183 I.222 (7). Department of the Interior surveyors, 1918-1920, north Prince Albert region.

Soldier Settlement on Reserve Land

The popularity of soldier settlement meant that the dominion was scrambling to find enough suitable farm land within fifteen miles of a railway to offer for soldier settlement. One of the most common places to find farmland was on First Nations reserves. During and immediately following the First World War, hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland were forcibly or coercively (and voluntarily) surrendered by reserves and sold to the Soldier Settlement Board. As the practice became more common, farmers in the Alingly district in the north Prince Albert region, stymied in their attempt to have the Little Red River reserve opened for homestead settlement, changed their tactics. The local Grain Growers Association petitioned for the opening of the reserve, not for homesteading, but for soldier settlement.³⁹ They believed the added moral weight of servicing the returned soldiers would tip the balance in their favour.

The attempt to open the reserve for soldier settlement became a game of semantics. What one group (the Alingly Grain Growers association and the Prince Albert board of trade)

³⁹ LAC RG 10 Volume 7766 File 27107-4 Pt.1. Alingly Grain Growers Association to Indian Affairs, 3 April 1918. The idea to open the reserve was reported in the Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 1 March 1919: "Indian Reserve for War Veterans. Alingly People Ask Department to Open Reserve No. 106A for Use of Returned Soldiers. Say Little Red Indian Allotment Over 56 Square Miles Good Country. ... the Indian Department had been asked to open up the Little Red River Reserve No. 106A for the returned men and said the Indians did not use more than a fraction of the 56 ½ miles of this reserve which is excellent mixed farming country."

considered good mixed farmland, the other (Department of Indian Affairs) scoffed at as “questionable” and hardly fit for settlement.⁴⁰ W.B. Crombie, the local Indian inspector, stated: “were this land put up for sale today it is very questionable if it could be sold readily, but on the other hand, were it thrown open for homesteading no doubt the most of it would be taken up for mixed farming purposes.” It was a telling statement. Crombie suggested that there was a different standard between land appropriate for purchase, and land good enough to homestead. Purchased land had to be ‘improved,’ with fields ready to farm and buildings suitable for occupation to be worth its money. Homestead (and soldier grant Crown) land was essentially free. Clearing land and building buildings was a sweat equity process, where a homesteader added marketable value through labour to change a homestead to a farm worth money. The reward of a patented farm to be sold for profit came at the risk of settling on possibly inferior land, or land which could take a lot of time to clear and break.

Those who were demanding the Little Red River reserve be surrendered and opened for settlement continued to claim that few people lived there, and even fewer who lived there year round. Others stated that as many as sixty people lived on the reserve, and perhaps more. Still stinging from the underhanded tactics of the real estate agency and farm instructor who duped residents into signing a surrender,⁴¹ the Department of Indian Affairs refused the new soldier settlement surrender requests. It would have been a difficult surrender to obtain, regardless, and the department knew it. What was the department to do with the families already in residence? How would it deal with those who were farming, like Willie Bear, who had both a successful farm and a freighting business? Should he be offered homestead rights, which were not offered to First Nations men? What of the others who were cutting hay and feeding cattle on the reserve land? It was, after all, a reasonable use of the land, given the growth of stock raising and the market at Prince Albert. Who was required to sign the surrender documents: the inhabitants at 106A, or the reserve’s legal owners, the Montreal Lake and Lac la Ronge bands? If the northern bands, who would go up there and ask? The journey was still a tremendous undertaking.⁴² These were questions and concerns no one at Indian Affairs wanted to answer or undertake. Considering the pressing need for farmland in the north Prince Albert region due to increased

⁴⁰ LAC RG 10 Volume 7766 File 27107-4 Pt.1. W.B. Crombie, Inspector to the Secretary, Department of Indian Affairs, 27 June 1918.

⁴¹ See chapter three.

⁴² By this time, the Lac La Ronge band had split into two bands, making the legal ramifications even more complicated.

soldier settlement demand and the rather discouraging results of the land survey, the refusal to ask for the surrender of Little Red was remarkable.⁴³

The Home Branch

The Soldier Settlement Board was considered a new departure in leading and nurturing land settlement. Not only was it closely allied with the mixed farming movement, but it ushered in an era of government intervention in settlement beyond the mere opening of homestead land. Potential farms were inspected and approved. Soldier farmers were vetted and trained, if necessary. Loans were offered under long-term repayment plans and both stock and implements could be bought through the SSB for reduced prices. Ongoing farm visits by SSB inspectors provided support, advice, and intervention. Despite this long list, perhaps the most intriguing difference between soldier settlement and previous land settlement schemes was the development of the Home Branch in July of 1919.⁴⁴ The SSB literature decreed that “home conditions are a vital and often a deciding factor in the success of the settler. A branch, therefore, was formed to instruct and advise the wives and family dependents of settlers in home economics.”⁴⁵ The creation of the Home Branch was in part responding to important social developments and public recognition of the role of women in society, particularly on the farm.⁴⁶

⁴³ In particular, it is noteworthy that no surrender for Little Red River was considered given the ease with which the Soldier Settlement Board and the Department of Indian Affairs were able to acquire surrenders of other reserve land, both in the Prince Albert region at Mistawasis and Muskeg Lake, and other reserve lands further south. It seems that the main factor saving Little Red from a similar fate was the complicated nature of its legal ownership. For an overview of Soldier Settlement and reserve land, see Sarah Carter, “An Infamous Proposal: Prairie Indian Reserve Land and Soldier Settlement after World War I,” in *Manitoba History* No. 37 (Spring/Summer 1999): 9-21. See also Bruce Dawson, “Better than a few Squirrels: The Greater Production Campaign on the First Nations Reserves of the Canadian Prairies,” unpublished MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2001.

⁴⁴ As yet, there has been no investigation of the Home Branch. It would make an excellent MA thesis.

⁴⁵ “Soldier Settlement on the Land,” p. 17.

⁴⁶ Common complaints from women on homesteads in the western interior prior to the First World War included isolation and loneliness. In many cases, these feelings were exacerbated by complete bewilderment and lack of background knowledge in farming practices. The phenomenal growth of women’s organizations, particularly the Women’s Section of the Grain Growers and the Homemakers (Women’s Institutes) prior to and during the war, started to alleviate these concerns. Combined with women’s valuable contributions to the war effort and ongoing work by public women such as Nellie McClung in promoting women’s issues and rights, the growing public stature of women in farm communities led to female enfranchisement in 1917. A favourite book on women and the western frontier remains Linda Rasmussen, Lorna Rasmussen, Candace Savage and Anne Wheeler, *A Harvest Yet to Reap: A History of Prairie Women* (Toronto: Canadian Women’s Educational Press, 1976); others include Eliane Leslau Silverman, *The Last Best West: Women on the Alberta Frontier 1880-1930* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1984); Veronica Strong-Boag, “Pulling in Double Harness or Hauling a Double Load: Women, Work and Feminism on the Canadian Prairie,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* Vol. 21, no. 3 (November 1986): pp. 32-50; Sara Brooks Sundberg, “Farm Women on the Canadian Prairie Frontier: The Helpmate Image,” *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women’s History*. Veronica Strong-Boag and Vicki Fellman, eds. (Toronto: Copp Clark Pittman, 1986), p. 95-106. Recent work includes Sandra Rollings-Magnusson, “Hidden Homesteaders: Women, the State and Patriarchy in the Saskatchewan Wheat Economy, 1870-1930,” *Prairie Forum* Vol. 24, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 171-183; Catherine

Perhaps the Soldier Settlement Board, in keeping with its close alliance with mixed farming, understood what agricultural newspaper *The Saskatchewan Farmer* had been saying all along: it was not possible to operate a successful mixed farm without a partner to shoulder part of the workload.

Journalist Ethel Chapman wrote about the Soldier Settlement Board Home Branch in *MacLean's Magazine* in 1920. A woman, Chapman averred, was an "absolute necessity" on a farm. But her needs required due care and attention: "If the wife is not contented or if the home conditions are not liveable for the family, the farm business cannot prosper." Just as the SSB was there to look after the man and the farm business, the Home Branch was there to look after the needs of the wife and family.⁴⁷ The Soldier Settlement Board looked at earlier homestead policies of the dominion government and decided that one obvious shortcoming was the lack of aftercare and support, particularly for the women and families. Chapman suggested that the Home Branch operated as the women's branch of the Soldier Settlement Board, just as there was a woman's branch in many other social and political movements in Canada at the time.⁴⁸

The Home Branch concentrated on providing information, bulletins, pamphlets and courses designed to help women successfully support their family and farm.⁴⁹ Personal visits

Cavanaugh, "No Place for a Woman": Engendering Western Canadian Settlement," *Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 28 (Winter 1997): pp. 493-518.

⁴⁷ Ethel Chapman, "For the Soldier Settler's Family," in the section 'Women and Their Work,' edited by Ethel Chapman, *MacLean's Magazine*, circa 1920. A somewhat more derogatory view of a woman's role on a farm came from the SSB: "It is recognized that the wife's attitude towards the undertaking may be either a great help or a serious handicap to a settler. If she is cheerful, interested, capable, [all is well.] If she is discontented, not interested in farm life, or unthrifty and indolent, it is impossible to estimate the financial injury which she may do." "Soldier Settlement on the Land," p. 38. The same paragraph went on: "It is futile to loan money to a man for the purchase of land, stock and equipment if the mental attitude of his wife and her physical condition are such as to discourage and render him incapable of repaying that loan." In large part, the Home Branch was inaugurated to protect those loans by identifying, helping, and teaching the farm wife before her inabilities, attitudes, or accidents required funds to rectify a physical, mental, or embarrassing financial situation.

⁴⁸ The Prince Albert branch noted that assistance tended to fall into three general categories: educational and technical, medical, and information. Educational information and technical help (usually printed bulletins) were geared almost exclusively toward home-making issues, teaching women the basics of farm life, including such staples as baking, milking cows and making butter, looking after poultry, gardening, canning, sewing, and raising children. These skills were particularly useful to the wife of a mixed farmer, operating beef and dairy cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, poultry, and a kitchen garden. Traveling libraries and homeschooling techniques and books, for those too far from established schools, were also important. "Soldier Settlement on the Land," p. 39.

⁴⁹ The Home Branch established courses through University Extension divisions across the country, including the University of Saskatchewan. These were often called Short Courses, which extended for between two days to several weeks. Board and tuition were covered, at first, by the Training Contingency Fund left over from the war effort. Courses and lectures reflected what the Board felt were the duties of women, including "Poultry Raising," "Home Dairying," "The Kitchen Garden," "Personal Hygiene," "Bread-Making," "Beautifying the Home," "Canning," and "Remodelling of Clothing," to name just a few. See "Soldier Settlement on the Land," p. 39-41. The Home Branch continued as an important component of settlement aftercare and their many publications found their

from qualified Home Branch staff helped ease the loneliness and provide technical help and advice.⁵⁰ Chapman claimed “it was made clear that their [Home Branch staff] purpose was not supervision, and not inspection – that they should go into the homes of the settlers and find out their greatest need.”⁵¹ Sometimes that ‘greatest need’ was advice, or even just a visit from another woman. Other issues came up. “Lost baggage has been traced, gratuities secured, employment found, information secured on selling houses, War Bonds, obtaining divorces, reuniting parents and children, getting relatives out from England, and any of the hundred-and-one questions which may arise,” the Home Branch report proudly declared.⁵² The Home Branch soon found itself with “a sheaf of letters on file from bachelors asking them to find them wives.”⁵³ The Home Branch effectively operated as a clearing-house for all other issues aside from the business of operating a commercially-successful farm enterprise.

Home Branch representatives specialized in two areas in particular: first, an ability to liaise with other established organizations; and second, a commitment to health. The Home Branch had a limited budget, and could not meet specific requests or requirements themselves. To compensate, it excelled at creating connections with such groups as the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE), the Homemakers Clubs, the Patriotic Fund, the Women’s Grain Growers Association, the Rotary Club, the Legion branches (once they were established), local churches, and various branches of the provincial or federal government, such as the Soldier’s Civil Re-establishment scheme. Chapman argued, “This is the long suit in the [Home Branch’s] methods...seldom, when they have fully carried out their campaign, do they fail to find sympathy and help.”⁵⁴ The ability to link in with other organizations allowed a fuller measure of help, support, or information to the soldier settler’s wife.

way into the hands of those who were not specifically under their scheme, including the popular book *Useful Hints on... Home Management*.” This book was published in 1930 by the Soldier Settlement Board as an amalgamation of household hints and tips collected by Mrs. Jean Muldrew, who was in charge of the Home Branch throughout its existence. The book focused on the practical aspects of being a farm wife, from cooking to poultry raising, laundry tips, raising children and decorating the home on a budget. All Home Branch publications were printed in English. It was thought that non-British immigrants were already well-versed in mixed farm life and had experience, while British war brides and those brought out under the 3000 British Family scheme needed far more help, support, and advice. The Home Branch was eliminated when the SSB was reorganized in 1930-1931.

⁵⁰ “Soldier Settlement on the Land,” p. 91-92.

⁵¹ Chapman, “For the Soldier Settler’s Family.”

⁵² “Soldier Settlement on the Land,” p. 92.

⁵³ Chapman, “For the Soldier Settler’s Family.”

⁵⁴ Chapman, “For the Soldier Settler’s Family.” See also “Soldier Settlement on the Land,” p. 92.

The second, and perhaps even greater, strength of the Home Branch was “where sickness or unfortunate disaster occurs.”⁵⁵ Health, hospital and nursing care, and health information were considered a top priority and the Home Branch worked hard to initiate public health reform and promote local medical facilities. Working with each of the provincial departments of Health, the Home Branch promoted health examinations of every dependent of the soldier settlement scheme. Their in-depth knowledge of local needs led to agitation for cottage hospitals, nurses, and other medical services. The Home Branch found their greatest ally in the Red Cross.

Red Cross Outpost Hospitals and Soldier Settlement

During the war years, the Red Cross had operated a full-scale campaign to provide services and supplies to the men at the front.⁵⁶ At the end of the war, flush with money, the Red Cross vowed to continue its campaign.⁵⁷ Activities following the war refocused primarily on the health and welfare of returned soldiers and their families, although it soon expanded into other areas. One of the first priorities, in part due to agitation from the Home Branch of the SSB, was the creation and establishment of Red Cross Outpost Hospitals. A Red Cross pamphlet outlining post-war Red Cross initiatives noted: “The settlement of ex-service men on the land drew attention to the fact that many pioneer districts in Canada were woefully lacking in medical and nursing care.”⁵⁸ The first of what became several hundred small outpost hospitals strung across the entire British Empire was built at Paddockwood, Saskatchewan. It opened in the fall of 1920.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Chapman, “For the Soldier Settler’s Family,” “Land Settlement: Sixth Report of the Soldier Settlement Board of Canada, December 31, 1927,” p. 12.

⁵⁶ For a delightful narrative version of the work of these clubs, including the Junior Red Cross, see L.M. Montgomery, *Rilla of Ingleside* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1920; 1973).

⁵⁷ *Glenbow Archives*, Canadian Red Cross Society, Alberta-North West Territories Division fonds, M8228 Series 6a pamphlet collection 224. “Nation Builders: Are You One? Red Cross Campaign, November 5th to 11th, 1922.”

⁵⁸ *Glenbow Archives*, Canadian Red Cross Society, Alberta-North West Territories Division fonds, M8228 Series 6b-226, “A Brief Summary of the Work of the Canadian Red Cross Society Since the War.”

⁵⁹ For an overview the Red Cross Outpost network, including a list of all Saskatchewan Red Cross Outpost hospitals, see Merle Massie, “Red Cross Outpost Hospitals,” *Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2005), p. 680. See also http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/red_cross_outpost_hospitals.html. For an overview of the Paddockwood hospital, see Merle Massie, “Ruth Shewchuk: A Red Cross Outpost Nurse,” in *Saskatchewan History* Vol. 56, no. 2 (Fall 2004): pp. 35-44. See also Jayne Elliott, “(Re)constructing the Identity of a Red Cross Outpost Nurse: The Letters of Louise de Kiriline, 1927-1936,” in *Place and Practice in Canadian Nursing History*. Jayne Elliott, Meryn Stuart and Cynthia Toman, eds. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008): pp. 136-152; Jayne Elliott, “Blurring the Boundaries of Space: Shaping Nursing Lives at the Red Cross Outposts in Ontario, 1922-1945,” *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History/ Bulletin canadien d’histoire de la médecine* Vol. 21, no. 2 (2004): pp. 303-325; and Jayne Elliott, Dianne Dodd and Nicole Rousseau, “Outpost Nursing in Canada,” in *On All Frontiers: Four Centuries of Nursing in Canada*. Christina Bates, Dianne Dodd and Nicole Rousseau, eds. (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization and University of Ottawa Press, 2005): 139-152. For other stories from Red Cross



"Ambulance" brings patient to Paddockwood, Saskatchewan Outpost Hospital – Opened in 1920.

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Figure 43. Paddockwood Red Cross Outpost Hospital. *Glenbow Archives*, Red Cross collection.



Figure 44. SAB, Ruth Shewchuk collection, 1948. Ruth was the last nurse at the hospital before it was closed.

nurses and outpost hospitals, see Gertrude LeRoy Miller, *Mustard Plasters and Handcars: Through the Eyes of a Red Cross Outpost Hospital Nurse* (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2000); Phyllis Martin, *Red Cross Nurse on the Bay Line* (self published by the author, no date).

The hospital was a unique combination of local and Red Cross resources, but directed and initiated by the Soldier Settlement Board. F.J. O’Leary, the Prince Albert SSB District Superintendent, chaired a community meeting at the log hall at Paddockwood. The community was to build and maintain a suitable building, which the Red Cross would furnish and equip, and for which it would provide trained staff.⁶⁰ The community got to work immediately. Situated on the top of a hill just off Montreal Lake Trail and near the burgeoning village of Paddockwood, the Red Cross Outpost Hospital, with its big red cross painted on the roof, could be seen for miles. It first accepted patients in September 1920. A big opening ceremony attended by locals, members of the Soldier Settlement Board and the Red Cross was held on 8 October 1920.⁶¹

Staffed with a resident charge nurse who lived at the hospital, the nurse took care of maternity cases, deliveries, cuts, wounds, broken bones and dispensed medical advice. The hospital operated as a local clearing-house or triage service. Minor problems were attended immediately; serious injuries or illnesses were sent to the larger hospital at Prince Albert. Doctors would visit from Prince Albert once a week, or on call as necessary, which reduced local expenses while maintaining a high degree of care. A local Homemakers Club, also formed in 1920, was closely allied with the hospital and over the years donated time, money, linen and other necessities.⁶² The hospital operated continuously for almost thirty years, bringing a sense of self-sufficiency and pride to the burgeoning community.

It is hard to overestimate the implications that having a local hospital gave to the development of the Paddockwood area. At the time, although the railroad had been promised, there was only a graded road between Prince Albert and Paddockwood. In dry weather, this trail was “suitable for motor traffic,” an important consideration as cars were becoming more common in the Prince Albert area.⁶³ Most of the time, however, this trail was difficult to travel. Dominion Land Surveyor M.D. McCloskey pointed out in 1920 that “considerable work remains

⁶⁰ Luba Crawford-Petruk, “Memoirs of the Paddockwood Red Cross Outpost Hospital,” *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 12-17.

⁶¹ The first overnight patient at the hospital was Nellie Hambleton, who was admitted 29 September 1919. Her baby son was born the next day, and they greeted visitors at the official opening ceremonies. See *University of Saskatchewan Archives*, miscellaneous fonds, “Paddockwood Red Cross Outpost Hospital record of patients 1920-1947”. See also Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 2 October 1919: “The visitors at the ceremony found that the hospital was already occupied, the stork having visited the district two nights previous and left a son to Mr. And Mrs. Hamilton, the former a returned veteran who has settled in the district.” The paper spelled the name incorrectly.

⁶² *University of Saskatchewan Archives*, Paddockwood Homemakers fonds, “A History of the Paddockwood Homemakers Club,” circa 1980.

⁶³ SAB R-183 I.290. Reports of M.D. McCloskey, Dominion Land Survey, 1920.

to be done on local road improvement before the needs of the vicinity will be supplied.”⁶⁴ He went on to comment specifically on the settlement at Paddockwood: “Road grading gangs are working at present... This township is badly in need of roads and another big bridge over the Garden River.”⁶⁵ Simply getting to the main road from a settler’s homestead was a trying job. Cart tracks and trails slashed through the bush were all that could be expected of a pioneer community. If a person was sick or injured and extra care was needed, the pace was even slower. As settlement moved east, west, and north of the little village, transportation difficulties intensified. A hospital within the community helped ease fears for local settlers. In addition, the Red Cross was a universally-recognized symbol of health and care. The cross-cultural appeal and recognition of the Red Cross no doubt helped the burgeoning community of Paddockwood draw settlers to the area. Its creation in 1920 may have offset local settlement concerns caused by the delayed railroad.⁶⁶

Railway Building

As soldier settlers poured into the north Prince Albert region, calls for a railway north of the city were renewed. The influx of soldiers gave added regional pressure to the railway push. If Paddockwood was to be a preferred soldier settlement area, promoters argued, it needed a railway. The Prince Albert *Daily Herald* reported demands coming from the original settlers, the soldier settlers, businesspeople and the Prince Albert board of trade. The headlines for 13 March 1919 read: “New Railways for Prince Albert. CNR Gives Promises of North Line. CPR is Keen on the Northern Territory.” The paper reported a “definite promise” of immediate construction of a line north to Paddockwood, and held out hope that it would go even further, to “usher in a new era of prosperity for a country of unlimited possibilities in agriculture, lumbering, fishing and mining.”⁶⁷ Boosters of the north Prince Albert edge landscape automatically melded the agricultural story with potential forest resources. No one knew exactly how far north the limits of

⁶⁴ McCloskey report, Township 51, Range 25, West of the 2nd Meridian.

⁶⁵ McCloskey report, Township 52, Range 25, West of the 2nd Meridian. The village of Paddockwood was (is) in this township.

⁶⁶ A young Swedish mother was quoted in a Red Cross campaign: “I am engaged to my husband five years. He is out here, my people won’t let me come – no good place, no doctor, no nurse. Then one day he write, ‘The Red Cross has come, they have hospital.’ We know Red Cross. I come by next boat.” *Glenbow Archives*, Canadian Red Cross Society fonds, M-8228-226, “The Story of the Red Cross.”

⁶⁷ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 13 March 1919. It was understood that a settlement railway would be built following the north bank of the Saskatchewan, through Meath Park and the White Fox plain, following the White Fox River, where other soldiers were settling the land. The spur to Paddockwood was finished in 1924; the eastward line, from Henribourg to Nipawin, was finished in 1929, just in time to carry Depression refugees and their effects.

agriculture might be, but resource industries were expected to provide equal, if not greater, opportunities.

District Superintendent O’Leary’s assessment of soldier settlers ‘making good’ in the north Prince Albert region was probably overenthusiastic. The soil may have been first-class on some farms, but soil quality was not uniform. Some quarters, with more leached grey podzolic soil and less black chernozem, would have been less arable. Muskegs and other problems of low-lying land limited cereal agriculture potential, but provided important hayland. O’Leary’s main description of the Paddockwood area – ‘timbered country’ – told the tale. As the Buckland history book recorded, “those having places easily cleared, which had had light brush on them or had been well burned over, had a great advantage over the owners of land still covered with heavy bush or large stumps. These latter had a hard struggle to keep the pot boiling, let alone to pay off debts.”⁶⁸ The large stumps, leftovers of the extensive timber berths, had to be pulled out. Some stumps left holes deep enough to serve as root cellars.⁶⁹ Extensive fires had made excellent headway for clearing purposes, but the remaining deadfall, brush and roots had to be cleared by hand, piled and usually burned. Sometimes, such burns resulted in runaway forest fires that killed more forest acres.⁷⁰ In other cases, fires went underground and consumed precious topsoil. Regardless, settlers on the heavy bush homesteads had one commodity in demand on the open plains to the south: the vigorous aspen regrowth could be converted for sale as cordwood.

Local advocates understood that the CNR, as a business, was only interested in putting in *profitable* railways. The best commodity for short-term profit was the extensive tracts of cordwood. Local residents, the mayor of Prince Albert, and the board of trade united in their tactics. A railway would offer heavy transport capabilities so that homesteaders could turn their liabilities (trees) into assets (cordwood). To that end, these groups argued: “Paddockwood district alone can supply thirty carloads of cordwood a week for the next ten years if the railroad is built into this district. At \$15 a car or \$450 a week – freight charges shows what revenue will be derived from this one commodity.”⁷¹ The implication was that other commodities, such as grain and cattle, would increase local revenue even further.

⁶⁸ “From Ox-Team to Combine,” p. 5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ See *The Saskatchewan Farmer* Vol. 8, no. 8 (1918), “Bad Year Ahead in Forest Fires,” p. 9. “Settlers’ fires continue to be the very worst source of forest conflagration, although campers and careless smokers are close competitors.”

⁷¹ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 15 March 1919, “Paddockwood.”

The communities waited in vain. By July 1919, the *Herald* asked, “what is wrong with the proposed railroad which was to be surveyed and graded this summer by the Dominion. A large amount of money has been invested and land has been taken up [at Paddockwood] with the expectation that these promises would be fulfilled.”⁷² The CNR replied that the line had not been started because they were unable to find an engineer to survey and grade the road, but that work would commence soon. By early August, the engineers and their crews were busy.⁷³ For the next couple of years, expectations were high, but results on the ground were disappointing. Surveying and grading was one thing; laying steel and opening the track was quite another. The post-war recession ground progress to a halt. By 1923, there was still no railroad. Local residents were indignant. In a meeting between Sir Henry Thornton, President of the CNR, and the Prince Albert board of trade and local representatives, Major J.H. Lindsay spoke for the board of trade:

We do not expect you are a wizard to just come along and lay the steel, but so far as the Paddockwood line is concerned, in 1919, the Government of Canada, as represented by the Soldier Settlement Board considered that was a place which should be settled. That being so, they placed in that district, two hundred, if I may say, returned men. These men went into that district on a full understanding that the line was to be constructed. These men have been waiting patiently for its construction. They have seen the line graded but not finished. If that line was finished then these people would be satisfied and surely, if anyone is entitled to any consideration, then the returned men who have settled in that district are entitled to the very best consideration possible.⁷⁴

The pressure of public guilt and loyalty to returned soldiers worked. The CNR succumbed and finished the line. The first train rolled into Paddockwood late in 1924.⁷⁵

⁷² Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 15 July 1919, “Paddockwood.”

⁷³ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 25 July 1919. “Start Survey North Line in About Two Weeks. Canadian National Railway Wires Board of Trade.”

⁷⁴ SAB, Department of Agriculture files, B11 13. PA Board of Trade. “Report of Meeting. Held at Empress Hotel.”

⁷⁵ The coming of the railway led to the erection of elevators and a huge spike in the local cordwood industry. See *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 10, 26-27. The settlement of soldiers in the Paddockwood area raised demand for local businesses. Settlers had been in the habit of traveling for supplies to Prince Albert or Henribourg, a slightly older and more established village. With the soldiers, business began to boom in Paddockwood. During the war years, in anticipation of the incoming soldier settlement and as the last (or first) stop on the Montreal Lake Trail, two stores, a log dance hall, and the first school were built. The hospital soon joined this nucleus, and the post office (which had been in a settler’s log shack a mile away), moved as well. These businesses comprised the village of Paddockwood which straddled the Montreal Lake Road for four years, until the railway was finally finished. As happened in so many prairie towns, the railway bypassed the established community and created its terminus one mile to the east. Merchants Hayhurst and Snow promptly skidded their store over the hill and down to the tracks. Doc Nichols built a new store at the new townsite, which took over postal duties as well. The log hall, the school, and the Red Cross Outpost Hospital remained, for many years, inconveniently far away from the rail line.

Impact of the Dryland Disaster

Throughout the hot, dry summer of 1919, as soldier settlement mushroomed, a severe drought took hold in the so-called ‘drylands.’ The ‘dryland region’ was the accepted term that expressed roughly the boundaries of the old Palliser Triangle of southwestern Saskatchewan and southeastern Alberta, the ‘pre-emption’ area that had been opened for homestead settlement only in 1908. Despite early enthusiasm, out-migration from the region was almost as high as immigration. Year after year of dry conditions leading to poor grain and fodder crops, punctuated by a few spectacular years that did little more than extend the agony, initiated a disaster of epic proportions. Appropriately termed the “Dryland Disaster,” thousands of families who had settled the arid pre-emption area in anticipation of years of wheat profits were defeated by the land and its harsh climate.⁷⁶ Almost from the first, disaster hit many farms, but by 1919 and throughout the 1920s, at least ten thousand people – and probably a much higher number – abandoned the Saskatchewan drybelt region; a further sixteen thousand abandoned their lands in Alberta.⁷⁷ The large-scale abandonment initiated a massive internal migration from the prairies to the northern forest edge, noted in stories published in major community and agricultural newspapers.⁷⁸ These migrants typified the debate between wheat farming versus mixed farming. In the face of environmental disaster, many chose to abandon the prairie wheat monoculture to seek resilience and risk management through mixed farming at the forest edge.

As the drought quickly intensified, the north received more and more attention. Letters poured into the Dominion Lands Office at Prince Albert asking for haying and grazing permits

⁷⁶ Historians who have examined this disaster knew that many residents relocated to northern homesteads, but no historian has as yet traced the northern migration and settlement, which began as early as the 1890s as settlers from the Estevan area relocated to Prince Albert. As well, there has been no detailed investigation of homesteads taken by those who cancelled their first entry. It seems clear from the homestead entries at Paddockwood, for example, that there was a distinct northern drift in second entries, where homesteaders cited southern Saskatchewan as their point of origin.

⁷⁷ These numbers are estimates at best, derived from census statistics and other sources. See David Jones, *Empire of Dust: Settling and Abandoning the Prairie Dry Belt* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2002) and Curt McManus, “Happyland: The Agricultural Crisis in Saskatchewan’s Drybelt, 1917-1927,” unpublished MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2004. These numbers do not include the high rate of cancellation noted prior to 1917. The early cancellations were often dismissed as merely people who were not established or were poor farmers in the first place.

⁷⁸ Not all of the migrants went north, of course. Historian David Jones called the exodus somewhat “directionless.” Those who had come to the drylands from the United States, for example, “slunk back into the States from whence they had come.” Others moved to the parkland, to Washington, or to the forest edge. Chain migration, with several farmers from a region moving and relocating together, often applied. See Jones, *Empire of Dust*, p. 212-213. Clearly, though, those who stayed within the Canadian west deliberately moved either to irrigated farms or ecologically mixed parkland and forest edge landscapes.

on Crown land, to alleviate a major feed shortage in the dryland.⁷⁹ Interestingly, it was the drought that in fact helped turn the north Prince Albert region into suitable hay and ranching country. The brutal and devastating fires in the north in 1919, which in effect decapitated the local lumber industry, recreated the landscape. The fires cleared the forest floor of years of accumulated slash and debris, leaving room for a lush growth of wild hay, pea vine, fireweed and vetch. The dominion government stepped in to alleviate the feed shortage, either in the form of relief hay or subsidizing the movement of cattle north to graze, offering grazing permits in the forest reserves.⁸⁰

Each week in the spring of 1919, the editor of the Prince Albert *Daily Herald* commented on the extent of the dryland disaster. He declared that the dominion government bore much of the responsibility for opening up that arid land to homestead settlement in the first place. For the first time, and long before the 1930s, the Prince Albert newspapers began to use the term ‘trek’ to refer to the incoming railcars and wagons of settlers moving from the south. The paper noted, with a sense of satisfaction: “The north-bound trek of the southern farmers continues, and daily four or five carloads of settlers effects arrive. These are permanent settlers who are taking up farms ...intending to carry on mixed farming.”⁸¹ The editor claimed that the movement “is most rational. It is almost inexplicable that men should continue to attempt farming in areas that have proven year after year that they are unsuitable.”⁸² It was inexcusable, the editor charged, that the government had opened the lands in question in the first place. Such lands “might have filled the bill for grazing and ranching but once the prairie sod was destroyed by frequent cultivation the country was converted into a potential desert.” These farmers were losing a battle against nature, insisted the editor, and it would be better for all if the government would “recognize this

⁷⁹ Permits to ship hay to the south, or stock to the north, were common as early as 1914. See *The Saskatchewan Farmer* Vol. 8, no. 12 (1918), p. 1. In 1918, using the provisions of the War Measures Act, the Dominion outlawed the burning of straw stacks. The feed situation was so important for the war effort that it became a criminal code offense to burn straw stacks left over from harvest. See *The Saskatchewan Farmer* Vol. 9 no. 1 (1918), p. 17.

⁸⁰ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 1 August 1919. “Complete Plan to Aid Drought Suffer’g Farmers. Dry Area is Defined and Conditions of Aid Announced. In view of the serious situation with respect to feed for livestock that has arisen in certain parts of the western provinces owing to the drought, it has been found necessary for the government to give some assistance to farmers and stockmen in the dry area in order to carry their cattle over the winter. The dry area may be defined as all that part of the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba lying roughly south and west from a line drawn from Wetaskiwin to Camrose, north to Chipman, east to Lloydminster, south to Chauvin, then to Elbow, Moose Jaw, Weyburn, Virden, Souris and south to the international boundary.” This area was much larger than the classic Palliser Triangle, including parts of central Alberta and east to Manitoba. The article explained that each farmer could expect two cars of hay or a freight deduction to move cattle.

⁸¹ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 21 August 1919. The term ‘Rush to North’ was also used, alluding to the Great Land Rushes of the southern prairie.

⁸² *Ibid.*

situation before further disaster is encountered and encourage the rapid removal of these people to the areas in the north where their sustenance is assured.”⁸³ Prince Albert boosters viewed the coming of drought refugees with an attitude of “I told you so,” reiterating their long-held views on the advantages of mixed farming and self-sufficiency over wheat ‘mining’ monoculture.



Figure 45. SAB A-2727. Settlers from the Vanguard district trekking north in 1919.

The Alberta government understood the nature of the disaster more clearly and instituted emergency measures to help settlers relocate to better land. The Saskatchewan government was reluctant to do so. Saskatchewan’s provincial efforts concentrated instead on finding the proper crop rotation and farming techniques to farm the drylands successfully. The land was farmable, the government literature insisted, if done ‘properly.’ Efforts to find the proper techniques included continuing the Dry Farming Congress work of previous years through the Better Farming Congress of 1920, in an attempt to scientifically support farming the land.⁸⁴ The Saskatchewan government’s reluctance to fully appreciate the extent of the dryland disaster

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ See *Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry Into Farming Conditions*, Province of Saskatchewan, 1921. In this report, it was noted: “The conditions during these years [1917-1919] have been such that the people upon the farms have not been able to produce a crop sufficient for the necessities of life, for feed for their stock and for seed for the succeeding year,” p. 9. Despite these stark conditions, the provincial government remained reluctant to intervene. The province and dominion government were embroiled in debate regarding who was responsible for the dryland disaster and who should bear the brunt of the costs involved in solving it. This debate was part of the ongoing fight between the province and the federal government over Crown land. See “Federal Government Gives But Little Hope of Relinquishing Control of Natural Resources,” *Regina Morning Leader* 16 December 1920.

meant that Saskatchewan experienced much higher migration and relief problems than Alberta during the Great Depression.⁸⁵

Despite the ongoing drought issues, some soldier settlers were allowed to take dominion land in the dryland region.⁸⁶ Many of these soldiers relocated to northern forested or parkland farms throughout the 1920s.⁸⁷ Overall, though, returning soldiers were acutely aware of the extent of the dryland disaster in the spring and summer of 1919 and for this reason, sought farms in parkland and forest edge regions northeast of Regina, east and north of Saskatoon, near North Battleford, and around Prince Albert. Soldier settlements sprang up across the forested region, including the augmented settlement at Paddockwood.

The Prince Albert Stockyards

Supporters of the ideals of mixed farming jubilantly celebrated when the Burns family of Calgary announced it had chosen Prince Albert as the site of their new stockyard and meat packing plant in 1919. Securing the stockyards was a tremendous achievement for the city, and the Prince Albert *Daily Herald* reported with jubilation, PRINCE ALBERT GETS STOCKYARDS.⁸⁸ The result of intense negotiation and heated rivalry among several cities, the stockyards heralded a significant rise in local fortunes and contributed to the popularity of the Prince Albert region as a soldier settlement and dryland resettlement destination. Farmers were expected to do well through diversification into mixed farming/stock raising. Cattle ranchers, long associated with southwestern Saskatchewan, started to look north. Those farmers and ranchers hard-hit by the drought were supported by the dominion government in their efforts to secure feed or move their cattle north to graze. The temporary northern refuge became permanent for many, as the local resources and the new market at Prince Albert drew ranch migrants. The Prince Albert *Daily Herald* exulted: “This whole north country is fine pasture land, and watered by innumerable lakes and streams. Grass grows in all the bush land ...and hay is cut around every little lake and slough...It will soon be a great cattle country.”⁸⁹ Environment and local economics combined to recreate Prince Albert as the new ranch country.

⁸⁵ As noted by Greg Marchildon, unpublished paper, “History of the Special Areas of Alberta: Institutional Adaptation to Climate Change,” presented at Canadian Association of Geographers, Prairie Summit conference, 4 June 2010.

⁸⁶ Regina *Leader*, 2 October 1919, “140 soldiers settled at Swift Current.”

⁸⁷ “Soldier Settlement on the Land,” 1926, p. 5.

⁸⁸ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 25 January 1919.

⁸⁹ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 1 February 1919.

The stockyard announcement renewed interest in the scrub land north of the soldier settlement land at Paddockwood, past township fifty-three. This land was believed by surveyors to be unfit for agricultural homesteading, with podzolic soil, rock, and muskegs throughout. Interest in stock raising and ranching changed the general consensus. It became common to suggest that the land would make a good complement for established farmers who just needed a bit more pasture or hay land. The Dominion Land Surveyor, M.D. McCloskey, reporting in 1920, refuted this notion. He cautioned that “cattle would [not] find sufficient grass until the summer is fairly well advanced.”⁹⁰ McCloskey was ignored. By 1922, many homesteads – not hay permits or range permits – had been filed in township 54, range 25, directly north of Paddockwood.⁹¹

Soldier and drought settlers brought more and more cattle to the north Prince Albert region. The growing stock population led to both ecological and political distress, necessitating new farming techniques and intensifying local debates. In the first place, despite the praise of northern boosters, the supply of natural hay fell short of demand. One method commonly applied to stimulate extra hay involved manipulating the ecology of the Spruce River and Garden River. Dominion Land Surveyor M.D. McCloskey reported, “Numerous beaver dams existed along the streams, and smaller watercourses. To ensure a crop of hay in dry season [some of the settlers] close the beaver dam and keep the land flooded until June, or thereabouts, then open the dam and release the water.”⁹² To access the hay potential of the rivers, settlement generally followed the Spruce and Garden River watersheds, or other well-watered quarters, before spreading out to other land.

In addition to pressure on hay resources, increased stock numbers necessitated debate regarding herd laws and fencing versus free range pasturage. Stock would benefit from accessing “waste places” that were not suitable for farming, but it was important to stop the cattle from grazing on newly-sown oat, barley, and wheat fields, and keep them out of areas designated for the winter hay crop.⁹³ At times, a mixed farmer was torn: was his primary role to raise stock, or

⁹⁰ SAB R-183 I.290. Report of M.D. McCloskey, Dominion Land Surveyor, on Townships 54, 55, and 56, Ranges 23 through 27, west of the second meridian, August 1920.

⁹¹ At least fifteen men from Mozart, Saskatchewan, of Icelandic descent, filed on land in this township. It would have been a large colony, but only a few of the men who filed actually went to their northern homesteads, and none of them stayed. Any outstanding homestead entries not actively worked were cancelled in 1927 in preparation for the new National Park borders. See SAB post-1930 settlement files, R 2004-220 S43 File S10140.

⁹² SAB Department of the Interior files. R-183 I. 290. Report on surveys completed in 1920. M.D. McCloskey, Dominion Land Survey to E. Deville, Esq., LL.D., Surveyor General, 30 March 1921.

⁹³ The provincial government had established a herd law, stating that all land north of a line between Saltcoats and Turtleford should be maintained as free range land. The RM of Buckland council spent hours in hot debate, trying to

grow crops? The ongoing drought in the drylands, the shipment of carloads of cattle north to the forest reserves to graze, and requests for hay and feed permits from desperate southern farmers, led to physical manipulation of the landscape through fences and flooding. The opening of commercial cattle facilities confirmed the connection between the edge landscape and more intensive diversification into stock raising, a hallmark of mixed farming as well as ranching.

The Poor Man's Paradise

The majority of settlers who initiated the considerable movement out of the Saskatchewan portion of the drybelt made this move under their own steam, with no provincial and limited federal help. A few were given railcar relief to move their goods or pasture their cattle.⁹⁴ Settlers who managed to sell their farm in the south were able to move their stock and machinery north. If they had already homesteaded in the south and had proved up, they could not homestead again and so were forced to purchase or rent improved land.⁹⁵ In 1923, the Department of the Interior allowed "second homesteads" in the northern settlements for those who had to abandon the drybelt. Second homesteads were a targeted and strictly controlled measure by the federal government "to provide for the removal of homesteaders from the southern part of Saskatchewan, the drought area, to the northern part."⁹⁶ Too many, though, after years of trying to hold on in the south, arrived in the Prince Albert region with little or no capital left, their stock sold and machinery repossessed by creditors.⁹⁷ It was a difficult prospect, at best, to start again under such conditions.

Determined advertising, however, transformed the north Prince Albert region into a mecca for those with little capital. Prince Albert advocates repositioned the region as a 'Poor Man's Paradise.' In 1919, land settlement advisor A. McOwan, writing in the Prince Albert

balance the needs of the stockmen with those of grain farmers. An editorial in the Prince Albert *Daily Herald* succinctly summed up the issue: "Owners of farms in Northern Saskatchewan have within the past few years very thoroughly debated the question as to whether they should all fence their holdings and pass herd laws or should permit cattle to run at large in order that the stock may have the benefit of the large amount of grazing available in the waste places of sparsely-populated areas." A compromise was reached at Buckland whereby herds were allowed to range until June 15th, after which the cattle had to be fenced to protect crops. Decisions could be renegotiated by the municipality and as the land was cleared for farming, the open herd law was changed in favour of closed herds and fences. See Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 1 April 1916; 8 March 1919.

⁹⁴ SAB, Department of Agriculture files, AG 2-7, General File. Application for Free Shipment of Settler's Stock and Effects from points in Dry Area, 1923.

⁹⁵ *Prince Albert Historical Society, Bill Smiley Archives*, "From Ox-Team to Combine," unpublished history of the Buckland district, p. 5.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Chester Martin, "*Dominion Lands*" Policy (Carleton Library reprint, edited by Lewis H. Thomas, 1973), p. 167. The original legislation can be found in the Statutes of Canada, 13-14 George V, c. 44.

⁹⁷ "From Ox-Team to Combine," p. 5.

Daily Herald, claimed that in the north, “There may be no bonanza but from the first day of entering it the adaptable man with initiative is assured of sustenance through all seasons and the reward of industry and thrift is the certainty of a margin and ultimate independence.” The promise of small but incremental gains, providing self-sufficiency and leading to independence, was a hallmark of the mixed-farming rhetoric. McOwan went on to grandly claim: “The north country is no country for the slacker or the faint-hearted... I often think that the man who has least to lose progresses most rapidly.” The north region, McOwan believed, would reward brave men who worked hard – which was a positive way of positioning the backbreaking work of making a living on a forest homestead. Economic success would be found by marketing the following list of products: “grain, potatoes, small fruit, vegetables, Seneca root, hay, cattle, hogs, sheep, poultry, fish, venison, eggs, butter, furs, lumber, cordwood, fence posts, and such a seasonable necessity as Christmas trees.”⁹⁸ McOwan advocated a mixed farming base that combined not only products typical of a mixed farm (eggs, butter, cattle, hogs, sheep and poultry), but products particular to the forest edge environment: venison, furs, lumber, cordwood, fence posts, seneca root and Christmas trees. Potential soldier settler Robert Picand, wistfully asking about game and fishes, probably would have approved.

To the weary drylander wrung out by crop failures and drought, McOwan’s list of northern products seemed a cornucopia of simple but basic delights. Unfortunately, the variety of products blithely listed belied the underlying need to have at least some money to invest. A good milk cow cost forty to fifty dollars, a yoke of oxen one hundred dollars, and a team of horses three hundred and fifty dollars. Stock diversification was expensive.⁹⁹ The natural products of the land – seneca root, fish, venison, furs, lumber, cordwood, and fence posts (and Christmas trees) – were supposed to make the difference for incoming settlers with little capital. The fact that permits and licenses, guns, ammunition, traps, knives, saws, axes and grubhoes were needed – and cost money – was glossed over. It was painfully ironic that the First Nations families at Little Red, well-versed in utilizing local resources for sustenance and for profit, were denigrated for doing so. Despite broadly diversified landscape use, which would eloquently satisfy observer McOwan’s list of forest and farm resources, their reserve continued to be under attack from those

⁹⁸ A. McOwan, “The Great Northland. The Poor Man’s Paradise,” Prince Albert *Daily Herald* 14 January 1919.

⁹⁹ These numbers were supplied by Dominion Land Surveyor Ernest Hubbell, based on his knowledge of prices in northern Saskatchewan in 1908. By 1919, just before the post-war slump, these prices would have been much higher. See *Sessional Papers* Vol. 25 8-9 Edward VII A 1909.

who wanted to take it away. At the same time, non-Native homesteaders were encouraged and applauded for tenacity and inventiveness in pulling a living from the local landscape.

The Post-War Depression

The settlement at Paddockwood – original homesteaders, soldier settlers, and incoming dryland disaster refugees – faced the same agricultural pressures as other farmers across the dominion. Despite the best intentions of the SSB to ease loans by negotiating farm prices and purchasing supplies in bulk, the soldiers took their loans and bought machinery and stock when prices were at their post-war peak. In the fall of 1920, agricultural commodities began a long, deep financial slide that affected both stock and grain prices for several years. Historian Kent Fedorowich claimed, “The cost-price squeeze ushered in a period of failure, foreclosure, abandonment and indebtedness which haunted soldier settlers and politicians alike throughout the inter-war period.”¹⁰⁰ The post-war recession hit those who had purchased their farms – the majority of Soldier Settlement Board clients – particularly hard. As the hard years went on and prices continued to plummet, soldiers with substantial loans either abandoned their farms or demanded the government re-evaluate the land, stock and machinery.¹⁰¹

Settlers in places like Paddockwood on a combination of homestead and soldier grant land carried less debt than their counterparts elsewhere and so were somewhat better off than those who had purchased not only stock and equipment, but entire farms at wartime high prices. The Toronto *Globe* reported on the successes and problems of soldier settlement in 1922. Major Barnett of the Soldier Settlement Board was quoted as saying “The men that are getting along best and the men that are paying best are quite clearly and unmistakably those who are working slowly, who have no large cash crops of any kind, but whose revenue is made up of dribbles from this and little dabs from that, a few dollars here and a few dollars there.” Barnett continued, “These men are paying their way as they go. Their success from year to year is not large, but neither are their disappointments great, and there is never the bitter disillusionment that follows when the crop that was expected to realize thousands of dollars turns out an utter failure.” Barnett was mouthing the mixed farming rhetoric. The SSB continued to believe that mixed farming provided soldiers with resiliency and a sure path. The *Globe* went on to generalize from Barnett’s observations. It suggested that “the settlement of the West will proceed on a more

¹⁰⁰ Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes*, p. 81.

¹⁰¹ Determined demands for re-evaluation were heeded. The first loan writeoffs occurred in 1922, and a massive re-evaluation was completed in 1927-1928. See McDonald, “Soldier Settlement and Depression Settlement,” p. 41.

secure foundation if the “one crop” idea is relegated to the background and the land is used primarily for the purpose of raising a sufficient variety of foodstuffs for man and beast to assure the tiller of the soil against the catastrophe that in recent years has too frequently overtaken the land miners of the prairies.”¹⁰²

Even those settlers with few or no loans, working mixed farms according to the tenets of the SSB, faced adversity. When M.D. McCloskey toured the Paddockwood region in 1920, he found “all the settlers interviewed were satisfied with their holdings but stated that the land was difficult to clear and that without capital a settler would be obliged to spend a portion of that time working out in order to obtain funds to carry him along when improving his homestead.”¹⁰³ The Paddockwood soldier settlers may have had fewer loans to pay back, but they, along with other soldier settlers across the forested regions of the Dominion, also had the hardest uphill battle to clear and open their land to make it pay.¹⁰⁴ Historian Kent Fedorowich noted that “the enormous amounts of time, energy and money required to bring the land under cultivation proved too much for some. [As well] natural calamities such as frequent and early frosts, hail, flooding and drought wiped out even the best and most determined soldier settlers.”¹⁰⁵ Overcome by the dual prongs of agricultural price deflation and natural calamities, many soldier settlers across Canada (including those who took land along the forest fringe) were forced to give up, leaving historians with little choice but to call the overall program a failure.

In the Prince Albert region, however, the statistics tell a somewhat different tale. While not justifying the booster-style exhortations of mixed farming supporters, the local story adds an important layer of detail to the overall soldier settlement story. By 1927, the Prince Albert office of the SSB had almost twice as many soldier settlers on soldier grants established *without* loans as it did men *with* loans. It also had a higher number of overall settlers compared to Saskatoon and Regina combined: active entries in 1927 were 2,112 in Prince Albert, 1,294 in Regina and only 494 in Saskatoon. Of course, there were also cancellations from the Prince Albert office: from an original 3,458 soldier grants in the Prince Albert district to 1927, 1,346 had been

¹⁰² *The Globe*, 28 September 1922, “Land Settlement Plans.”

¹⁰³ SAB R-183 I.290, M.D. McCloskey, Report on Twp. 52, R. 25, W. Of 2nd Meridian.

¹⁰⁴ An advertisement in the Prince Albert *Daily Herald* June 1919 read: Be Sure and See the LAND CLEARING DEMONSTRATION At the same time and place as the P.A. Agricultural Society Annual Plowing Match. THE MACHINE USED WILL BE A KIRSTIN, CLUTCH TYPE, ONE-MAN STUMP PULLER.

¹⁰⁵ Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes*, p. 83. Fedorowich references the work of McDonald, “Soldier Settlement and Depression Settlement.” See also Wood, *Places of Last Resort* for many anecdotes of the problems of northern settlement.

abandoned or cancelled.¹⁰⁶ The cancellation numbers (thirty-nine percent) were – despite the aims of the Soldier Settlement Board, the supposed advantages of mixed farming, and the policies of intensive ongoing support through loans, advice, and the Home Branch – similar to the abandonment and cancellation averages from all of Saskatchewan (including what was considered good agricultural land) of the pre-war years. On the surface, it would appear that the intensive and ongoing support was not making a difference. Abandonment, cancellations and desertions were not any worse, though, despite complications of forested land and a severe economic deflation.¹⁰⁷ These statistics (which, at over sixty percent, should be seen as successful) stand in contrast to those who tend to refer to soldier settlement as a failure – failure depended at least in part on *where* the farm was located and *what* kind of farming was done there.

Land Settlement Branch and the Canadian National Railway

Soldier land abandonment created a new set of problems for the Soldier Settlement Board. Farms reverted to the SSB, which found itself the owner of empty, unproductive farms. The SSB had a support structure suitable for facilitating extensive agricultural settlement, including its successful Home Branch, loan system, purchasing system, land base, and inspectors. As early as 1922, various groups were calling for the SSB to expand its services to look after the needs of civilian settlers. The *Globe and Mail* pointed out the wisdom of accessing SSB experience for general land settlement: “The placing of thousands of returned soldiers on the land involved the consideration of many difficulties that [also] confront the civilian settler. The solution in both cases must be the same.” Since the methods of soldier settlement have “proven successful,” the *Globe* went on, “there is every reason to suppose that they would be equally effective in continuing the work of settlement hereafter for the benefit of civilians.” The paper urged the government to make the SSB service available in a broader mandate.¹⁰⁸ In conjunction, pressure was brought to bear to open dominion land previously held exclusively for

¹⁰⁶ See “Land Settlement,” p. 22, 23. By 1929, the soldier settlement statistics for the Prince Albert region were, from a total of 3,876 soldier grant entries, 1,657 had been abandoned or cancelled, leaving 2, 219 active entrants and just under forty-three percent cancellations.

¹⁰⁷ I calculated the homestead entries between 1904 and 1914 to be 288,782; cancellations in that same period, 108,678, almost thirty eight percent. These statistics were from the document “Saskatchewan Homestead Entries 1905 to 1943 by Land Agencies.” Soldier settlement abandonments, at forty percent, were far less than overall Saskatchewan abandonments between 1911 and 1931, which economist Chester Martin calculated at a horrifying fifty-seven percent. See Chester Martin, *‘Dominion Lands’ Policy* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), p. 174. In comparison, the soldier settlement scheme in Prince Albert was a resounding success.

¹⁰⁸ *The Globe*, 28 September 1922, “Land Settlement Plans.”

soldiers to civilian settlement. In response, the Soldier Settlement Board was transferred to the auspices of the Department of Immigration and Colonization. It was reformed to encourage civilian settlement, becoming the Land Settlement Branch.¹⁰⁹

One program developed to take over forfeited SSB land was the “3000 British Family” scheme.¹¹⁰ To alleviate continued shortages in Britain in the post-war era, British families were encouraged to emigrate to Canada to take up farming. The British government advanced loans of \$1500 and the Canadian government supplied land and support through the Land Settlement Branch using the old SSB infrastructure.¹¹¹ The railways also pushed for a return to pre-war immigration. They petitioned the government to give the railways a more active role in recruiting immigrants. The federal Railways Agreement, signed in 1925, allowed the CNR to create their internal Department of Colonization and Agriculture. Actively engaged in promoting agricultural immigration, the CNR’s move into colonization and recruitment complemented the CPR land settlement branch. The CNR, however, supported primarily northern development areas where CNR main and branch lines could be found.¹¹² The CNR owned the railway north from Prince Albert to Paddockwood, and brought in settlers along that line.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, p. 153. See also Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes*, p. 102.

¹¹⁰ The 3000 British Family Scheme was seen as a way to bring British people to Canada, to combat the floodtide of immigration from non-English speaking eastern European countries. See Chris Kitzan, “The Fighting Bishop: George Exton Lloyd and the Immigration Debate,” unpublished MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1996. Although the Prince Albert area was not as popular as other places, it nonetheless had over 200 families come to the region through this scheme.

¹¹¹ There has been scarce academic work on the 3000 British Family Scheme. See, for example, J.A. Schultz, “Canadian Attitudes Toward Empire Settlement, 1919-1930,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* Vol. 1, no. 2 (1973): 237-251. More information can be found in the annual reports of the Soldier Settlement Board throughout the 1920s. An MA thesis on the scheme would be welcome.

¹¹² For an excellent overview of the work of the Canadian National Railway and its Department of Colonization and Agriculture, see Brian Osborne and Susan Wurtele, “The Other Railway: Canadian National’s Department of Colonization and Agriculture,” *Prairie Forum* Vol. 20, no. 2 (1995): pp. 231-253. The head of the CN Department of Colonization and Development, Dr. W.J. Black, was a Manitoba chairman of the Soldier Settlement Board. The CNR colonization platform declared it would “encourage in every way possible the development of mixed farming and better farming methods.”

¹¹³ Julius Androchowicz was a Colonization Agent for the CNR, working to establish families along the Prince Albert-Paddockwood line. He was interviewed by the Saskatchewan *Royal Commission on Immigration and Settlement* 25 April 1930 in Prince Albert. See *SAB R249* Vol. 35, 87-103. See also the interview with A.J. Hanson, also a CNR colonization agent, same evening and venue, p. 65-83. Mr. Arthur William Hilton arrived under the British Family scheme in 1928; he testified to the Commission on the same evening.



Figure 46. SAB R-A32659 M. Brodacki family, 1929. Settled at Paddockwood through the CNR land settlement scheme.



Figure 47. LAC RG 30. CNR graphic material from Department of Colonization. C-017793. Walenty Korczak, Henribourg, c. 1928.

The majority of the CNR settlers took over homesteads that had been proved up, then put up for sale. Real estate agent E.T. Bagshaw of Prince Albert claimed: “Often where a small shack had been built, and a few acres cleared and broke round about the buildings the

abandonment of the farm meant the buildings were falling to pieces, and what small piece of land had been cultivated in the past reverted to seeds and sod, and desolation reigned.”¹¹⁴ Real estate agencies had many quarter sections for sale in the north Prince Albert region, proved up for title and hastily put up for sale. Once a quarter was proved up and patented, it was open to taxation. To pay taxes, a farmer *in situ* often traded work service to the municipality or local improvement district, doing such jobs as building roads and bridges.¹¹⁵ Off-farm owners had to pay taxes out of their own pocket; often, they were anxious to sell. Some land changed hands for little more than taxes owing.¹¹⁶ To their credit, though, titled farms near developed communities usually offered better farmland and prospects than the new homesteads further north that edged the swamps, muskegs and rocks into township fifty-four.

The two colonization schemes epitomized a major divide within Canadian post-war colonization. The first, the 3000 British Family scheme, favoured British settlement and built on the infrastructure of the SSB (which was used by both Canadian and British soldiers). The railways, in contrast, pushed for immigration from wherever it would come, including continental and eastern Europe.¹¹⁷ The CNR colonization agents were particularly accepting of the ethnic ‘group settlement’ strategy. As a result, the north Prince Albert region, with its existing network of Ruthenian (Polish and Ukrainian) settlement along the Garden River, was targeted for more settlers from these countries. Henribourg and the east Paddockwood district drew extensive eastern European immigration.¹¹⁸

Both colonization schemes also encouraged internal migration and re-colonization within Canada, particularly within Saskatchewan. Settlers from southern regions could apply to either

¹¹⁴ SAB R249 Vol. 35, p. 113-115. Testimony of E.T. Bagshaw, Managing Director of Bagshaw-Holroyde Agencies Limited, General Financial Agents, Prince Albert to the *Royal Commission on Immigration and Settlement*, Prince Albert hearings, 25 April 1930.

¹¹⁵ Such work-for-taxes prevailed in the north Prince Albert region well into the 1940s. See “McGowan, Sargent Hugh and Muriel,” *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 355: “Taxes on land were often purposely left unpaid, so that the debt could be cancelled by providing horse and man-power to build the many roads needed in our district.”

¹¹⁶ The homestead files for the north Prince Albert region list many quarter sections sold for little more than the taxes owing, and sometimes less.

¹¹⁷ See Osborne and Wurtele, “The Other Railway.” See also Chris Kitzan, “Preaching Purity in the Promised Land: George Exton Lloyd and the Immigration Debate,” in R. Douglas Francis and Chris Kitzan, *The Prairie West as Promised Land* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007), pp. 291-312; D.A. MacArthur, “Immigration and Colonization in Canada, 1900-1930,” in *Pioneer Settlement: Co-operative Studies by Twenty-Six Authors* (American Geographical Society 1932; 1969), pp. 22-30. McArthur noted: “public opinion has been apprehensive lest immigration from continental Europe should increase to such an extent as to threaten the dominance of British ideals and institutions in the Western Provinces.”

¹¹⁸ See LAC, Canadian National Railways fonds, Graphic material (RG 30) for photographs of families who came via these CNR colonization schemes.

the dominion Land Settlement Board or the CNR and access land and loans, facilitating an easier transition to the ecologically mixed landscape of the northern regions.

Forest Fringe Economy in the 1920s: Cordwood

While mixed farming propaganda, soldier settlement, drought migration, dominion land settlement and CNR colonization sent settlement to the north Prince Albert region, the ecotone landscape of the forest edge offered enticing non-traditional farm products and off-farm opportunities, drawing immigrants. Pre-1919 homesteaders in the north Prince Albert region often made extra money working in or supplying the lumber camps. Extensive fires during the dry spring of 1919 effectively shut these businesses down, leaving settlers (along with their First Nation counterparts) searching for other options. Possibly the most popular option was to cut and haul cordwood. Settlers pursued this industry either on their own, cutting from their own homestead, or working for a cordwood contractor who leased and operated a cordwood berth, similar to the old timber berths. Such jobs were paid by the month or as piece work.¹¹⁹ The cordwood industry was more profitable closer to the city. Heavy hauling over long distances – Prince Albert was at least twenty miles away – meant profits were low. The private cordwood industry did not explode in the new settlements until the coming of the railway in 1924.

In 1926, Prince Albert commercial photographer William James travelled to the ‘end of the steel’ at Paddockwood. The little village, with its four false-front frame buildings and assortment of log shacks, was the last village on the new CNR line, but that was not its claim to fame.¹²⁰ What brought James to Paddockwood that cold winter day was cordwood, stacks of firewood for sale and barter, piled along the tracks and down the main street in every direction.

¹¹⁹ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 6 January 1919. Cordwood camps paid \$50 per month and board. One offered “first class accommodation” as an extra inducement. Men could also earn \$1.75 per cord to cut by the piece, but this was low compared to the retail prices. An advertisement on 18 March 1919 read: “Wood! Wood! Wood! If you are in the market for Wood whether it is for one cord or one car it will pay you to look over our stock consisting of Poplar, Spruce, Tamarack and Jack Pine at prices ranging from \$6.00 to \$8.50 per cord.”

¹²⁰ For years, both Prince Albert and Paddockwood residents believed that the rail line would eventually be extended further north, through the boreal forest to tap into the mineral resources of the Shield near La Ronge, or swing east through the rich Flin Flon region and become the long-sought railway to Hudson Bay. Various newspaper articles in the Prince Albert *Daily Herald* from the opening of the bridge in 1909 and throughout the next twenty years, as well as notes from the Prince Albert board of trade, suggested this. See, for example, *University of Saskatchewan Archives*, Davis family fonds, “City Gateway of Wealthy and Fertile North Country,” Newspaper article, no date, circa 1926.

To capture the sight, James climbed onto the railway car to snap a panoramic view of Main Street, cordwood, and a countryside fast becoming denuded of its trees.¹²¹



Figure 48. Paddockwood, 1926. Photograph by William James. From copy held in author's collection. Each small pile of cordwood was owned by a local resident. After bartering with local merchants, the cordwood was transferred to the merchant's pile for sale and transport by the railway.

Cordwood was the basis of Paddockwood's commercial success after 1924, a local product that could be cut by farmers and hauled to the railhead.¹²² At a time when all cooking and heating was done with either coal or wood, cordwood was an important commodity, particularly on the open plains where homesteads and farms could not provide their own fuel source. Paddockwood, and other forest fringe towns, capitalized on the demand. It was, in many ways, a double-win situation for forest edge farmers: the land had to be cleared of trees in order to farm and to gain patent; cash could be made from selling the cleared logs and timber. Cordwood became the main local commodity, a bulky substitute for cash. Settlers traded the wood to local stores for supplies, to each other in exchange for labour or services, and even to the local hospital, in payment of fees. Cordwood exemplified Paddockwood's identity as a hybrid place, at the juncture between prairie/farming and forest/resources. A barter item similar to the eggs, butter, and cream common to mixed farms, cordwood in some ways replaced the cash wheat crop of the prairie south. The difference was that cordwood was a local currency geared to subsistence needs and local barter situations with merchants, but could not be mortgaged. Banks and implement dealers were willing to offer loans based on future wheat production, but not cordwood production. Although cordwood drove the local subsistence economy, it was not conducive to long-term economic development.

¹²¹ The photograph became so well-known, and so iconic for the town, that many regional residents purchased a copy. When I showed this photograph to a non-Saskatchewan-born colleague, she commented, "you don't think of Saskatchewan as having trees." To take a similar picture today would be difficult; the rail line has been taken out, and the landscape has once again filled in with poplar trees.

¹²² Cordwood was stove or firewood. A 'cord' is a measure of wood, four feet square by eight feet long.

Forest Fringe Economy: Commercial Fishing

During the First World War, northern inland commercial fishing grew. Prices for fish rose, allowing better profits and improvements such as fish boxes and cold storage, which ensured a better end product. Between 1920 and 1940, the annual commercial production of northern Saskatchewan almost doubled.¹²³ A newspaper article dated c. 1926 on the Prince Albert region trumpeted: “Fishing in the northern lakes and streams is important and last year more than 5,673,650 pounds of northern pike, pickerel, trout and whitefish, valued at about \$450,000, were shipped to the eastern markets. The output from this area [Prince Albert] comprises annually about ninety percent of the fishing activity of the province.”¹²⁴ Fishing camps, strung out along the large lakes such as Doré, Lac La Plonge, Churchill and Peter Pond, were operated by large commercial interests such as Big River Consolidated or Waite Fisheries. Local lakes such as Candle, Montreal, Waskesiu, Crean and Kingsmere were also fished, but less extensively. In 1919, there were 684 commercial licences, and 842 domestic licences sold to fishermen. By 1929, those numbers had more than doubled.¹²⁵ Like work in the lumber camps, jobs in the commercial fishing camps lasted for the winter months, and suited primarily single men without extensive stock on their homesteads. The value of commercial fishing to the northern Saskatchewan economy was enormous: landed value of the fish regularly exceeded a quarter of a million dollars per year throughout the 1920s.¹²⁶ Commercial fishing helped drive the forest edge economy.

¹²³ Gary Donald Seymour, “A Geographical Study of the Commercial Fishing Industry in Northern Saskatchewan: An Example of Resource Development.” Unpublished MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1971, p. 25.

¹²⁴ “City Gateway of Wealthy and Fertile North Country.”

¹²⁵ Seymour, p. 32.

¹²⁶ Seymour, p. 22.



Figure 49. Commercial fishing on a northern lake. www.jkcc.com.

Forest Fringe Economics: Freighting

Overland freighting became a major component of the Prince Albert commercial enterprise. Contracts to haul supplies north came from the HBC, Révillon Frères, the Canadian government, First Nations reserves, fish and mining camps, stopping places and private trappers throughout the north. Supplies heading north ranged from food to kerosene and oil, household items, canoes, and machinery. Freighting was a subsidiary enterprise that allowed companies such as lumber and fishing camps to concentrate on their businesses, and leave the logistics of supply freighting to others. Overland freighting on the northern winter roads provided employment to a wide range of people. In fact, the growth of fishing as a commercial enterprise throughout the 1920s and 1930s led to an intriguing shift in freighting contracts. Hauling fish *back* for the large commercial fisheries or as private enterprise came to be viewed as the primary freight, offering the best profit. Other supplies going north were of secondary consideration.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ An example is the Sigfusson family in northern Manitoba. They developed an overland freighting industry built on commercial fishing. Any supplies going up were for their own use in the fish camps, but often loads would go north empty and return full. They expanded their enterprise to include road building and became experts in ice roads over the vast inland lakes, particularly Reindeer Lake in northern Saskatchewan, which was linked to the Manitoba rail system at Lynn Lake. See Svein Sigfusson, *Sigfusson's Roads*, (Winnipeg: J. Gordon Shillingford Publishing, 2003).



Figure 50. Freight swing loading boxes of frozen fish, heading south. www.jkcc.com.

Freighting was of particular importance in First Nations communities, both along the forest edge and deeper in the boreal forest. In addition to work as teamsters in the winter, First Nations men were often engaged to cut and stack hay for stopping places and barns along the freight trails. In summer, many had employment improving the trails, laying corduroy roads, stacking cordwood, and building or fixing barns and shacks. Hudson's Bay Company magazine *The Beaver* noted in its 'Stanley Notes' of December 1920, "There was plenty of work all summer at Stanley Post and vicinity. The Brooks Construction Company was engaged in repairing and making stables, leveling portages, and putting up hay..."¹²⁸ Men from Little Red River reserve could commonly be found on the freight trail or helping operate the stopping place on the reserve. Willy Bear engaged several of his neighbours in his freighting business, in addition to his farm operations.

¹²⁸ *The Beaver*, "Stanley Notes," 1920. H.M.S. Kemp described freighter R.D. Brooks' attempt to take a horse freight swing from Stanley to Lac du Brochet, on the north end of Reindeer Lake in 1919. The trip was disastrous, and many horses died on the route for lack of feed. See *Northern Trader* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1956), p. 210-213. This trip was also reported in the *Prince Albert Daily Herald*, 15 January 1919.

At railway points such as Big River or Prince Albert, the noise was deafening in the early winter. John Brooks, who homesteaded in the Meath Park area of the north Prince Albert region, recalled the scene: “Every train into Big River was now swelling the population of this distributing centre to the north. It was the third week in November, 1928 and the town was a hive of activity.” Everyone from commercial fishermen, freighters, and “tie hackers” who cut railway ties “were everywhere getting lined up for a job, getting their winter gear or just waiting for enough ice to travel. Blacksmiths were a busy lot, their anvils’ ringing could be heard at all the major Companies’ barns where horses were being shod all round in readiness for the freight road.”¹²⁹ Brook’s description underscored the economic impact of northern freighting on forest edge communities. As an example of the scale of the industry, on 15 January 1919, sixteen teams left Prince Albert in one day.¹³⁰ The Prince Albert *Daily Herald* reported steadily throughout each winter on the departure and arrival of freight swings, conditions along the trails and across the lakes, and news from the northern communities. The freight trails became a critical point of connection and exchange between the prairie south and the boreal north.



Figure 51. R.D. Brooks Company freight swing leaving Prince Albert. No date, c. 1920s. Photograph taken by William James. *Prince Albert Historical Society, Bill Smiley Archives J 1043.*

Individual freighters had two choices: they could hire their services to a freighting company as a teamster (driver) for a base-pay of \$20-\$40 per month, or sometimes \$1 per day; or, they could become private contractors and use their own team and sleigh, negotiating with a supplier for rates based on load weight and distance. Professional freighting companies negotiated transportation contracts with large businesses, then hired teamsters to take to the trail. The R.D. Brooks Company of Prince Albert, for example, held contracts with the HBC.¹³¹ A

¹²⁹ John A. Brooks, *Strange Hunters: Life and Adventures in Northern Saskatchewan During the 1920s and 30s* (Port Alberni, B.C. printed by Coast Printers, 1982), p. 9. Brooks’ book recounted hair-raising and interesting tales of northern life and spoke of the integration of commercial fishing and overland freighting.

¹³⁰ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 15 January 1919.

¹³¹ I was unable to travel to Winnipeg to access the HBC archives for the limited purposes of this chapter, but numerous local sources spoke of this business relationship. The Prince Albert *Daily Herald* reported that Brooks started out working for Colin and Stanley McKay, who had the contract in 1919, but it was clear that in later years, the Brooks Transportation Company took over. See Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 15 January 1919. Brooks’ winter

private contractor with his own team and sleigh could expect to earn about \$300 to \$400 dollars per trip. Most hoped to make two to three trips in a season, each lasting from two-to-four weeks, depending on distance, ice pack, and weather.¹³² Private freighters looked to haul pay loads in both directions to earn the most pay. Empty boxes were constructed to ‘knock down’ flat to conserve space, so freighters could include them in their loads going north. After dropping off supplies, teams would visit local fish camps to load these boxes. Frozen fish, usually whitefish or lake trout, were hauled back and shipped to both Canadian and American cities. Each sleigh could carry about seventy fish boxes, each weighing one hundred and fifty pounds.¹³³ Freighters sold the fish for between one and five cents per pound.

A high proportion of income for a private freighter went into horse feed, warm clothing, food and other supplies for the trip. Farmers who already had feed, horses, and a good sleigh could earn more than those who had to purchase such goods. But the risks were higher, too. The trail was a harsh way to make a living. Broken equipment, and dead or weakened horses, had to be replaced by the contract freighter out of his pocket. Men who took up freighting as a winter occupation took paying loads up the Montreal Lake Trail to La Ronge, Green Lake or other points along northern routes. Soldier settler David Dunn was a typical example.¹³⁴ Despite its risks and drawbacks, freighting fit well with northern homestead operations, as the men were away on a freight haul for a shorter period of time than a winter commitment to a cordwood, tie, or commercial fishing camp. Wives and children left on the farm could manage, with the help of neighbours, to keep the farms running for a few weeks.

Choosing to build a farm on unimproved Crown land at the forest edge meant that soldiers settlers and drought migrants were able to access extensive non-traditional farm resources particular to the forest edge landscape. Occupational pluralism combined farm income

freighting outfit was captured on film in 1928 by the Canadian Film Board. See *LAC*, V1 2008-12-0004 “Freighting in Northern Canada.” See also numerous photographs in the Prince Albert Historical Society collection.

¹³² It is difficult to discuss wages, since they varied widely depending on the length of the trip, the year, and the local economy. These figures were suggested in local history books: Anna-Marie DiLella (in collaboration with the settlers of Dore Lake), *A Look at the Past: A History of Dore Lake, Saskatchewan* (Dore Lake Historical Society, printed by Friesen Printers, 1983); *Buckland’s Heritage, Cordwood and Courage*.

¹³³ These are the numbers provided by the essay “Freight Swing Era,” <http://www.jkcc.com/brfreight.html> 28/01/2008.

¹³⁴ See “David Dunn and James Stoddart,” *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 186-187. See also advertisement, Prince Albert *Daily Herald* 7 January 1919, “Wanted immediately: 20 or 25 teams for freighting to Montreal Lake, Lac la Ronge and Stanley. Apply W.C. McKay or Star Livery.” The *Herald* reported on many freight-swings of men and horses heading north or returning home throughout the winter, every year until the 1940s when roads improved and caterpillar tractors took over the heavy hauling.

with wages or contract work earned in cordwood and railway tie cutting camps, commercial fishing, and freighting. Although many researchers have characterized the pursuit of off-farm income as indicative of the marginal nature of forest edge farms, those who recorded their stories in local history books viewed off-farm income as a significant aspect, and part of the draw, of forest fringe life. The opportunity to earn cash wages or the equivalent through the barter economy gave forest edge residents an added measure of resilience.

Second Homesteads

The ongoing work of the SSB as the Land Settlement Board, the colonization work of the CNR along the Paddockwood branch line, and continuing south-to-north migration from the arid regions throughout the 1920s, swelled settlement in the north Prince Albert region. Between 1925 and 1927, the Department of the Interior noted a steadily rising demand for new homesteads in Saskatchewan, rising from 2,363 in 1925 to 2,961 in 1927, the majority of these taken along the parkland and forest edge. New homesteads were fuelled by a combination of natural growth, northern drift of southern migrants, and immigration from outside of Canada.

The northern push of settlement and development in the western interior fascinated the editorial staff of *Saturday Night* magazine. The magazine consistently reported on the “trek northwards” throughout the 1920s. In 1927, writer F.C. Pickwell quoted federal Member of Parliament (and former Saskatchewan premier), the Hon. C.A. Dunning. Dunning’s new slogan was “Go North, Young Man,” which the magazine claimed was “more truth than poetry.” Not only was the northern surge an agrarian movement, according to *Saturday Night*, but the movement reflected a growing interest in minerals, timber, furs and fisheries.¹³⁵ The provincial and federal governments, caught up by the northern fever, initiated extensive reconnaissance surveys of the north throughout the 1920s. To facilitate northern prospecting, the government blasted several large boulders out of the Montreal River to open the river for heavier traffic loads. A well-publicized canoe trip by provincial Attorney General T.C. Davis in 1928 showcased the new river route. Davis and several colleagues, along with their wives and four Indian guides, made the trip. Traveling overland from Prince Albert to Montreal Lake, the group canoed up the Montreal River to La Ronge, then down the Churchill River system to Amisk

¹³⁵ F. C. Pickwell, *Saturday Night*’s Western Correspondent. “Saskatoon and the North,” *Saturday Night* 16 April 1927.

Lake, Cumberland House and The Pas.¹³⁶ Their trip capitalized on the growing resource development of the provincial north, such as the Rottenstone mine near La Ronge and the mineral development at Flin Flon/Creighton on the Saskatchewan/Manitoba border.

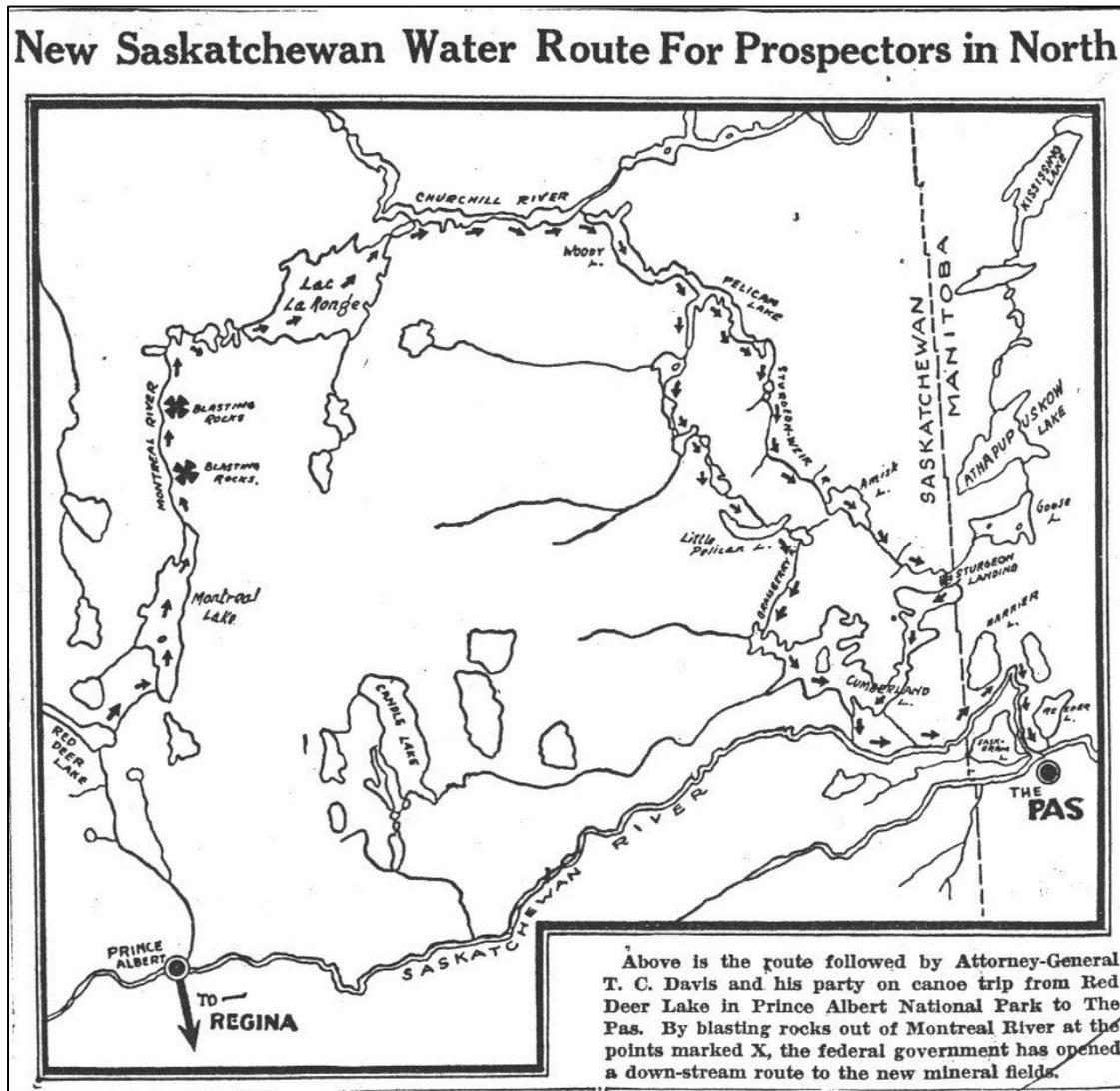


Figure 52. Regina Daily Post 17 September 1928.

The steadily-rising homestead numbers throughout the 1920s were swamped by a rapid increase in 1928, when a whopping 5,808 homesteads were taken, and a further 6,089 in 1929.¹³⁷ The increase came when the Department of the Interior opened Crown land to permit second

¹³⁶ Regina Daily Post 17 September 1928, "New Route in North Success;" 20 September 1928, "More Details of New Route to the North." See also Regina Leader 12 August 1929, "North's Growth Greatly Aided by Government." The Regina Daily Star 1 November 1928 predicted a "sensational race" between the CNR and CPR to develop northern rail lines. See "Rail Lines to Develop Rich Field."

¹³⁷ Canada, Department of the Interior, Lands Branch, *Annual Reports 1923-1930*. Reports were presented to the end of the fiscal year, March 31, so the calendar year did not exactly correspond to the fiscal year.

homesteads to the general population. Farmers who had successfully completed all the requirements for their first homestead by 1 January 1925 could apply for a second homestead grant. By far, the majority of these second homesteads were taken in northern regions.¹³⁸

The northern movement in the latter half of the 1920s was *not* built on either economic crisis or environmental disaster. For a brief period, prosperity, rather than paucity, led the movement. Agricultural returns on the prairies had improved, as had prices and markets. Saskatchewan farms were diversifying at a fantastic rate, expanding the crop base beyond wheat to include more oats, barley, and other grains, and expanding animal production. Although the diversification movement could be found across the province, it was a noticeable aspect of the northern surge. Owing in part to a concurrent growth in urban areas, the number of milk cows in Saskatchewan rose dramatically from 225 thousand in 1918 to almost half a million in 1925.¹³⁹ Oats and barley, crops that grew well in northern conditions, also increased. Wheat remained the major cash crop on *all* farms, prairie and northern. After 1925 when wheat prices recovered from their post-war slump, wheat contributed significantly to the overall wealth of the province's farmers.

One outlet for that wealth was mechanization, and historian Bill Waiser claimed that mechanization in the 1920s "began a revolution in Saskatchewan farming whose repercussions are still being experienced today."¹⁴⁰ Larger acreages could be planted and harvested far more quickly, adding to farm wealth and security. With the adoption of the gasoline tractor and the development of brush breaking equipment, the prospect of clearing and breaking a northern bush homestead was less daunting.¹⁴¹ Researchers at the University of Saskatchewan actively engaged in developing and testing brush cutting machines, finding a mechanical solution to clearing

¹³⁸ For example, the Department of the Interior records indicated that in Saskatchewan in 1928, 5,808 homesteads were filed. Of those, 4,197 were filed at the Prince Albert district land office, and of those, 1,262 were second homesteads. In 1929, Saskatchewan had 6,089 homesteads, 4,873 at the Prince Albert office. Of those, 1,435 were second homesteads. These reports differ from the homestead entries recorded by census division found in *SAB R-266 IV.40*. This document lists 8,007 homesteads taken in Saskatchewan in 1928, of which 5,615 were filed at the Prince Albert land office. In 1929, 8,374 homesteads were filed, 6,480 at the Prince Albert office. The balance were recorded at Moose Jaw, the only other active land agency in those years.

¹³⁹ See table V, "Number of Milch Cows in Prairie Provinces," R.W. Murchie, *Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier* (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, 1936), p. 26. The number of milk cows moderated between 1926 and 1929, but averaged a respectable 434,500 animals, or one milk cow for every two people.

¹⁴⁰ Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, p. 273.

¹⁴¹ See Robert Ankli, H. Dan Helsberg, and John Herd Thompson, "The Adoption of the Gasoline Tractor in Western Canada," *Canadian Papers in Rural History* Vol. II, (Gananoque: Langdale Press, 1980), pp. 9-39. See also *SAB*, Department of Agriculture fonds R.266.1. Evan Hardy, Professor of Agricultural Engineering, University of Saskatchewan, to F.H. Auld, Minister of Agriculture, 28 September 1928.

acreage for agricultural purposes on northern land. Evan Hardy, Professor of Agricultural Engineering, wrote to Deputy Minister of Agriculture F.H. Auld in 1928, noting “ten acres was all that one man could cut by hand in a year, and that [one farmer] was almost able to cut 10 acres a day with his John Deere tractor and brush cutter.”¹⁴² Brush cutting was necessary on land where the trees were too small to be valuable for timber or cordwood, but far too large to permit agricultural development. Land with recent burns, willows and rank young poplar growths could be cleared efficiently with the technology. The move to northern farms in the latter half of the 1920s was facilitated by the opportunity to acquire a second homestead, contemporary agricultural affluence, and mechanization.



Figure 53. Brush breaking equipment c. 1928-1930. Courtesy Western Development Museum photo 1-DA-1.

The northern surge showed western inhabitants flexing their muscles, broadening their resource base and settling into the *whole* province, rather than just the southern half of it. Resource potential of the northern boreal and Shield regions drew extensive interest across the country. Freighters visited far northern points such as Reindeer Lake and Lake Athabasca on a more regular basis, and prospectors, trappers, and government survey teams could be found. By August 1929, the north was touted as the province’s – and the country’s – place of future wealth

¹⁴² SAB R-266.1. Department of Agriculture fonds. Evan Hardy to F.H. Auld, 26 September 1928.

and growth.¹⁴³ Fish, furs, and minerals, in particular, drew interest and investment. If the potential of the far north lay wrapped in the dreams of investors, internal colonization along the forest edge, or “colonization within Canada,” advanced the northern push. Moving from place to place to take advantage of different opportunities or to try something new – whether mixed farming at the forest edge, or resource opportunities even further north – drew increased attention, not only from individuals, but from government and business leaders.¹⁴⁴ A major platform for the CNR immigration department, internal colonization facilitated the relocation of Canadian farmers to potentially more productive lands in the mixed farming areas, at the jumping-off point for northern exploration and development.¹⁴⁵ Pushing the line of settlement ever further north would allow increased knowledge of and access to northern resources. Agricultural colonization schemes, as well as the land settlement policies of the province of Saskatchewan and the dominion government, helped both government and industry to be at least partially prepared for the onslaught of internal migration that arose during the Great Depression.

Conclusion

The experience of the Soldier Settlement Board and its soldier settlers laid the foundation for later settlement strategies, including the Land Settlement Branch, the British 3000 Families scheme, the colonization departments of the railways, and the opening of second homesteads. All of these schemes were important for their role in opening new agricultural and potential resource land along the forest edge. Support from the Soldier Settlement Board for mixed farming practices directed soldier settlers onto ecologically mixed land that contained forest, meadows, and water, if and when possible. The push for mixed farming meshed well with the promotional activity provided by the Prince Albert board of trade for the region north of Prince Albert. Moreover, the devastating fires of 1919 helped to purge the old timber berths. Renewed green growth enticed mixed farmers and ranchers to the northern regions, encouraged both by the landscape and the economic opportunities brought forward by the new stockyard and meat packing plant at Prince Albert. The ongoing drought in the southwest corner of the province, the old Palliser Triangle, also redirected settlement efforts to the forested, mixed farming region.

¹⁴³ Regina *Post* 10 January 1929, “Sees Future in Far North;” Regina *Leader*, 12 August 1929, “North’s Growth Greatly Aided by Government.”

¹⁴⁴ “Ninth Report of the Soldier Settlement of Canada,” Ottawa, 1931, p. 9.

¹⁴⁵ Osborne and Wurtele, p. 95.

Northern settlement was not simply a Depression phenomenon. The foundations for northern settlement were already in place.

For northern settlers, economic prospects included not only potential mixed farm products, but other products drawn from the local forest edge landscape. Completing the spur rail line through the north Prince Albert region in 1924 opened the cordwood economy, which allowed homesteaders to reap non-agricultural profit from their land. The growth of the commercial fishing industry, as well as trapping and prospecting led to a rise in overland freighting opportunities. Off-farm economic prospects melded with on-farm work to produce a local, occupationally pluralistic society. The concept of ‘mixed farming’ at the forest edge adapted to include both on-farm and off-farm income – Mr. McOwan’s list of farm and forest products suitable for ‘poor man’s land.’ By the late 1920s, provincial and national commentators boasted that the future of the province would be found in the north: “Go North, Young Man,” politician Charles Dunning declared. Striking scenery, green trees, freshwater lakes, camping, and fishing opportunities awaited travelers to the north. The north stood ready to turn tired and dusty prairie residents into intrepid, healthy, tourists. Building on the contrast between the agricultural prairie south and the boreal forested north, tourism enticed travelers to northern Saskatchewan. Even if farms were full of trees and difficult to develop, or potential northern resources such as mines a distant dream, the northern forest still had something to offer: it was culturally remade as Saskatchewan’s own place of beauty.

Chapter Five: “See Saskatchewan First”: The Rise of Tourism in the North Prince Albert Region

Future Canadian author Lucy Maud Montgomery visited the Prince Albert region as a sixteen-year-old girl in the fall of 1890. Already a fledgling writer, Montgomery kept a diary to record her experiences. Prince Albert, she penned, was a “straggly” town, strung out along the south side of the North Saskatchewan riverbank for several miles. “Across the river,” she wrote, “are great pine forests, and the views upstream are very beautiful.”¹ Montgomery’s observations on the forested landscape across the river were both apropos for the time and prophetic for today: to cross the Diefenbaker Bridge at Prince Albert is to cross from the prairies into another world, a northern boreal world of trees and lakes.

The north Prince Albert region is best known today as “Lakeland,” a tourism destination encompassing the resort communities of Christopher, Emma, Anglin, and Candle Lakes, and Prince Albert National Park.² The cultural force behind the development of tourism in this region exploited an unusual paradigm. Outside Saskatchewan, tourism literature often featured an urban/rural divide, enticing those who would flee the concrete jungle to find a restful holiday in idyllic, green surroundings. Within the province, however, a different call prevailed. North Prince Albert tourist promoters found their strongest voice exploiting a narrative of Saskatchewan’s ecological duality – treeless, dry, open plains versus the watered, lush, and forested landscape. Visitors from the plains region were encouraged to view the boreal forest as the natural “playground of the prairies.” In part, the narrative of duality aimed to keep precious tourist dollars at home, exhorting prairie residents to be patriotic, to “See Saskatchewan First.”

Intriguingly, the north/south contrast narrative was used to promote fundamentally different uses of the landscape *at the same time*: cut down the trees for lumber and to make farms; or, keep the trees as majestic examples of vigorous northern health and beauty, a landscape of relaxation and refuge. Although these uses seem to be in opposition, each piece of land was judged on the microlocal level. Ponds, lakes, pockets of good soil or large stands of trees could be best utilized for different purposes, depending on their situation, nearness to

¹ L.M. Montgomery, *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery Volume I: 1889-1910*, Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston, eds. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 30.

² Weather reports, real estate listings, provincial advisories and community events designate the area as ‘Lakeland.’

transportation, and ownership. Setting aside swaths of territory for forestry reserves, parks, or homestead land inserted state intervention and modernity into the landscape.

Although western Canada was well-known as a tourism destination for British sportsmen throughout the nineteenth century, sustained tourism development that exploited the north/south contrasts of Saskatchewan and drew visitors from the provincial south began after the introduction of better roads and, later, motor cars in the early twentieth century. The opening of Prince Albert National Park in particular signaled Saskatchewan's response to the rise of the commercial tourism industry. Despite the economic disturbance of the Depression, tourism continued to play a strong role in local development. Tourism wove a vision of northern beauty that gave refuge to thousands of Saskatchewan citizens burned out – economically and emotionally – by the ravages of the drought. Tourism development based on recreational opportunities of fishing, hiking, canoeing and camping expressed the aesthetic and non-extractive economic aspects of the north Prince Albert region, selling the “beauty” of the landscape Montgomery admired.

Picturesque Prince Albert

Montgomery's depiction of Prince Albert's pine forest and river landscape as “beautiful” mirrored the thoughts of the Lorne Agricultural Society of Prince Albert. In the same year as Montgomery's sojourn, the society published their advertising pamphlet, “Prince Albert and the North Saskatchewan.” It confidently boasted that one of the most significant selling features of the Prince Albert region was its beauty: “The country is beautiful in its general appearance,” full of lakes, trees, and hills, notably different from the “plain country to the south.”³ Settlers in the north country were assured that their properties would enjoy added value in the “charm [of] the beautiful groves of aspen...and in the abundance of small but refreshing ponds or lakelets, one of which is almost certain to be found in every settler's ‘park’.”⁴ The Society pamphlet presented a vision of a landscape remodelled and controlled, identified as ‘park’ rather than ‘wilderness.’ It also suggested that the beautiful and the picturesque held an unknown but tangible economic worth.

³ “Prince Albert and the North Saskatchewan.” Lorne Agricultural Society. Printed by the *Prince Albert Times*, 1890. CIHM 29478.

⁴ “Prince Albert and the North Saskatchewan.”

The idea of an Edenic garden or a park landscape built on British ideals has been well-served by historians.⁵ Concepts such as ‘picturesque’ or beautiful, as specific aesthetic comments on landscape carried multiple meanings. Within the British context, owning a ‘park,’ or land kept for enjoyment rather than economic benefit, denoted the upper-middle to upper classes of society. Only the very rich could own land whose sole purpose was beauty. In the colonial context, picturesque idealism was often combined with a sense of economic end-use or potential exploitative possibilities, such as farming. The picturesque ideal identified richness and riches in good soil, water, trees, and game – beautiful, but also necessary for colonization.⁶ Suggesting that the North Saskatchewan area was picturesque and park-like would have been immediately understood as an aesthetic comment within the colonial context, representing its potential value for *both* beauty and future riches. The dual ideal of use *and* beauty would reverberate through both the mixed farming literature and the development of tourism.

A Sporting Paradise

Although Montgomery and the Lorne Agricultural Society promoted Prince Albert’s beauty, it had much else to offer. Lumber industrialist Captain Moore, who opened the first steam-powered mill in the district in 1879, found his way to the fledgling settlement first as a sportsman. On a hunting expedition across the West, Moore and his group stopped at Prince Albert to purchase supplies.⁷ Moore was just one of many British men of class, enticed by newspaper articles and brochures, who visited the Canadian West to hunt.⁸ Sportsmen-tourists

⁵ See, for example, Greg Gillespie, “The Imperial Embrace: British Sportsmen and the Appropriation of Landscape in Nineteenth Century Canada,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Western Ontario, 2001; I.S. MacLaren, “The Influence of Eighteenth-Century British Landscape Aesthetics on Narrative and Pictorial Responses to the British North American North and West, 1769-1872,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Western Ontario, 1983; Colin M. Coates, “Like ‘The Thames Towards Putney’: The Appropriation of Landscape in Lower Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* Vol. 74, no. 3 (1993): pp. 317-343; Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture and Tourism in Ontario 1790-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); I.S. MacLaren, “The Limits of the Picturesque in British North America,” *Journal of Garden History* Vol. 5, no. 1 (1985): pp. 97-111; Doug Owrarn, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); and R. Douglas Francis, *Images of the West: Changing Perceptions of the Prairies, 1690-1960* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989). For an Australian interpretation, see Simon Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁶ See Gillespie, “The Imperial Embrace,” chapter III.

⁷ Moore’s group was unsuccessful in getting flour, although Prince Albert harvests had been good and grain was available. The mill, however, operated only on wind power and as there had been no adequate natural breezes, there was no milled flour available in the whole settlement. Moore saw the opportunity to develop a business, and took it. See chapter two.

⁸ Another British sports-tourist was James Carnegie, the Earl of Southesk, whose travels and exploits in 1859-1860 through what was then still Rupert’s Land were published as *Saskatchewan and the Rocky Mountains: A Diary and Narrative of Travel, Sport and Adventure in 1859 and 1860*, (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1875).

created an imperialistic image of the old North-West as idyllic and Edenic, overflowing with a wealth of game.⁹ Western Canada developed a reputation as a sportsman's paradise, a tourist destination for the idle rich.¹⁰ In its 1890 brochure, the Lorne Agricultural Society promoted natural abundance, which meant both scenery *and* game: "The sportsman and the tourist will find within our borders all the keenest could desire. Game of all kind in abundance, and scenery which has already excited the admiration of the English and Canadian explorer."¹¹ Primed with such advertising, sportsmen and tourists arrived at Prince Albert with pre-conceived notions of a landscape both full of game and inherently beautiful.

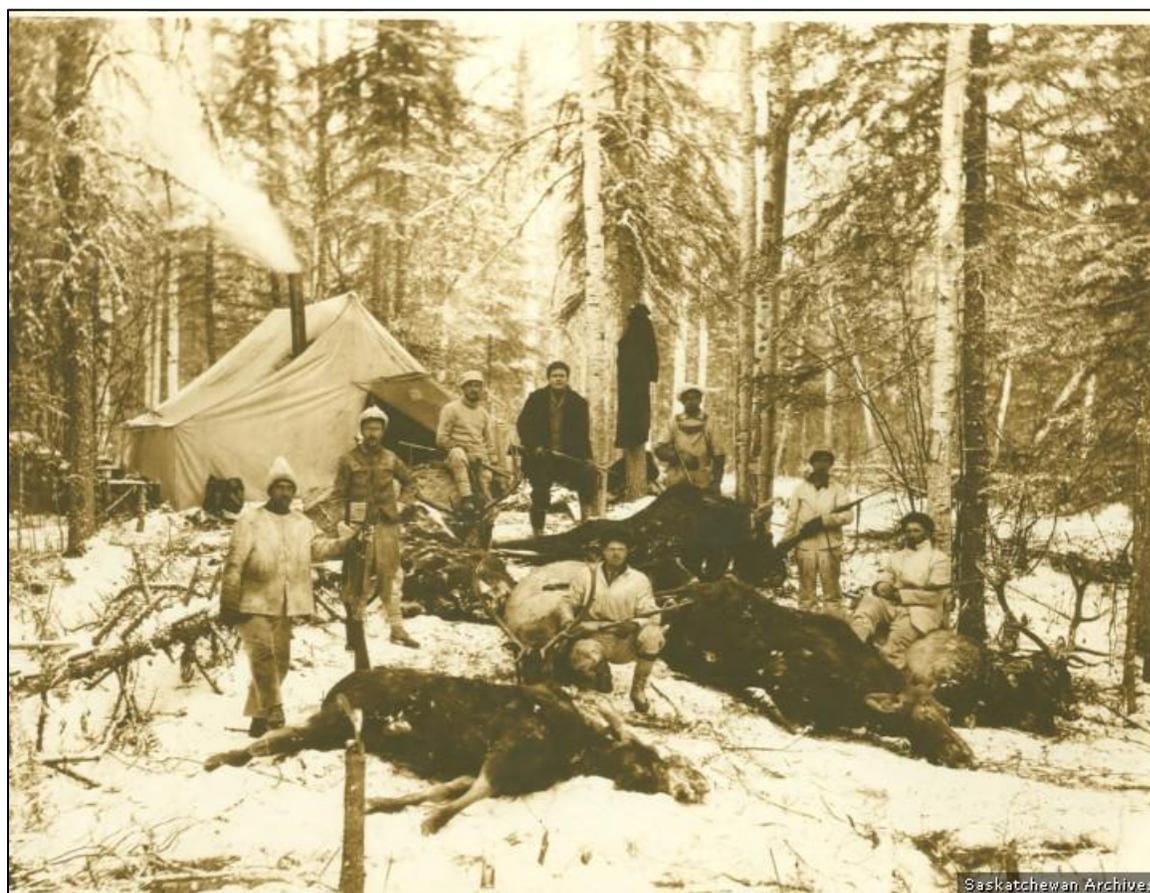


Figure 54. Spoils of the hunt, north of Prince Albert, 1917. SAB R-B3507-1.

⁹ For an exceptional overview of the concept of sport and game in western Canada, see George Colpitts, *Game in the Garden: A Human History of Wildlife in Western Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002). See also Tina Loo, *States of Nature: Conserving Canada's Wildlife in the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Canadian politician Peter Mitchell visited the North-West in the late 1870s. He wrote "The West and North-West: Notes on a Holiday Trip: Reliable Information for Immigrants, with maps, etc.," published in 1880. A sixty-three page pamphlet, it combined tourism promotion with immigration. CIHM 11139.

¹¹ "Prince Albert and the North Saskatchewan."

In a practical sense, and for the purposes of Prince Albert merchants, both tourists and sportsmen required lodging, food, transportation and guiding.¹² Advertisements from hoteliers, general merchants, and livery barns catered to this market, offering rooms, supplies, and rentals of horse teams and outfits. Throughout the leaflet, scattered references lauded sparkling lakes, good fishing, and excellent game on both hoof and wing to entice the reader. To add to the general picture, Prince Albert's local newspapers participated in the presentation of the region as a sportsman's paradise, continually reporting good game hunting, trapping, and fishing. The Prince Albert *Advocate* reported, for example, that: "Prairie chicken and duck are very plentiful this year, and local sportsmen come home with large bags of game as a rule."¹³ Tourists and sportsmen, Prince Albert merchants recognized, brought wealth.

The close of the nineteenth century saw the opening of several northern lakes, such as Montreal, Candle and Red Deer (Waskesiu) Lake, to a burgeoning commercial fishery.¹⁴ Although commercial fishing and sport fishing were entirely different endeavours, stories of immense fish wealth would reinforce the idea of Prince Albert and the North Saskatchewan region as a sport paradise. Moreover, those interested in northern development continued to make a connection between sportsmen and potential economic possibilities. The Prince Albert newspapers continued to cajole upper class sport tourists to visit, in the hope that they would stay in the region to develop economic industries. Major Ernest J. Chambers, in his report to the Senate on the resources of western Canada, pointed out that the "tourist sportsman, the cultured business men, who find their greatest pleasure, relaxation, and physical benefits from trips into the wilds, are quick to discern the commercial value" of such 'wild' lands, in addition to their aesthetic qualities of "park-like groves of fine trees, its sylvan lakes teeming with fish, and every prospect a gem of nature's own perfect landscape."¹⁵ While walking through the woods, scouting game or portaging to the next lake, sportsmen would keep an eye firmly on the economic potential of the landscape, quick to spot exceptional timber resources, future mines, or water

¹² The Lorne Agricultural Society, despite its name, was essentially a forerunner of the later Prince Albert board of trade. The Society consisted primarily of Prince Albert businessmen.

¹³ Prince Albert *Advocate*, 25 September 1899.

¹⁴ See Prince Albert *Advocate*, 28 November 1894; Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan's Playground: A History of Prince Albert National Park* (Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1989), chapter one.

¹⁵ Ernest Chambers, "Preface," *The Unexploited West: A Compilation of all the authentic information available at the present time as to the Natural Resources of the Unexploited Regions of Northern Canada*. (Ottawa: 1914). Chambers seemed unable to distinguish between north and west.

power. Tourism and sport, in this context, could potentially lead to more intensive and extensive economic development.

Prospecting and the Potential of Mining

Prospecting for potential minerals and mines was an increasingly profitable activity in Canada throughout the late nineteenth century. Major finds in British Columbia and the Yukon, northern Ontario, Quebec, the Maritimes and Manitoba spurred further reconnaissance trips into northern boreal and Shield landscapes. Gold fever in particular gripped the entire nation in the late 1890s. As the lure of the Yukon took hold and prospectors from all over the world were searching for the best route to Dawson City and the gold fields, Prince Albert merchants capitalized on the town's 'northern' identity, situating the town as a logical jumping-off point to northern destinations. A pamphlet from the local board of trade advertised "Yukon Via Prince Albert: How to Get to the Klondike. The Safest, Best, and Cheapest Route to the Yukon Gold Fields."¹⁶ The route was "unanimously recommended" by the Legislative Assembly of the North-West Territories in 1897. The pamphlet charted a route through Prince Albert, Green Lake, and Fort MacMurray using old fur trade water highways. Each week, Prince Albert newspapers reported Klondikers passing through.¹⁷

Saskatchewan prospectors not aiming for elusive Klondike gold had much to keep them busy. Local reports of amber, silica, coal and other commodities excited interest. Gold dredging in the North Saskatchewan was pursued, although it soon became clear that the placer gold recovered during the process barely covered expenses.¹⁸ Prince Albert newspapers reported prospecting activity, claim staking, and rumours of big finds with breathless excitement, always hoping for the next lucky strike. Mineral claims had to be registered at Prince Albert, an added advantage to entice this clientele.¹⁹ Local advertisers pursued the prospector dollar with as much zeal as tourist and sportsman profits.

¹⁶ "Yukon Via Prince Albert," CIHM 15253.

¹⁷ See, for example, the Prince Albert *Advocate*, 9 March 1897. Gold was also found at Rat Portage (presumably in Saskatchewan) as well as in the Birch Hills near Prince Albert, which led to a short-lived local gold rush.

¹⁸ References to the gold dredge are found in local newspapers, and are reported in Garry Abrams, *Prince Albert: The First Century* (Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1966).

¹⁹ The claims office was moved to The Pas in 1920, a move that was vigorously protested in Prince Albert.



Figure 55. Mandy Mine, 1917. SAB R-B3553-1.

In fact, prospecting was clearly related to tourism. Merchants solicited custom, and local businessmen expected future development. The *Prince Albert Advocate* reported in 1897:

Capt. Bell and Mr. White were in town a few days ago last week, on their way through on a prospecting tour for gold in the limitless and untrodden country to the north. They are proceeding on their journey overland and by canoe with Indian servants and guides, expecting ultimately to arrive at Norway House, from there proceeding by boat to Winnipeg... The tourists expect to make some valuable finds of mineral in the country they are to traverse.²⁰

This story raised several key points. One, it showcased the growing self-identity of Prince Albert as a ‘gateway to the north,’ a natural point of departure for anyone heading into the forested wilderness north of the prairie region. Two, it reiterated the old fur trade narrative of First Nations as guides, as experts in wilderness and forest navigation by canoe or trail. This role remained a complex combination of guide and servant, navigator and employee, but although the article explained the background of the potential prospectors, the Indian men were not named. Such narrow-minded reporting, focused only on the Anglo participants, was a common product of colonial thinking. First Nations were the labouring class, worthy of work but unworthy of name and respect. In many ways, First Nations labourers were part of the ‘wilderness’ scenery, akin more to trees and animals than Anglo humans. Three, the story presented a specific link between prospecting for potentially precious finds of ore through “limitless and untrodden

²⁰ *Prince Albert Advocate*, 15 June 1897. The *Advocate* reported each week another one or two men off to the gold fields of BC and the Yukon. For an oral history of prospecting and mining in Saskatchewan, see *Gold and Other Stories as told to Berry Richards: Prospecting and Mining in Northern Saskatchewan* W.O. Kupsch and S.D. Hanson, eds. (Regina: Saskatchewan Mining Association, 1986)

country,” and tourism. A tourist would be someone who would travel to wild places to appreciate its scenic beauty; a prospector looked for sites of future potential wealth. Conflating the two needs reiterated the combination, within the colonial context, of sublime beauty and picturesque scenes with economic future potential.

Prince Albert’s Back Yard

Not all of the people moving through the landscape of the north Prince Albert region were from far away. The majority of people found in the region were local. The ‘wild’ areas across the North Saskatchewan River were a favourite destination for day hikes, berry-picking excursions, picnics, and hazelnut hunts in addition to more prosaic uses such as tourism, hunting, fishing, prospecting and firewood berths or commercial timber limits. Such usage showcased the local and domestic, rather than the commercial or sport aspects of the landscape.



Figure 56. SAB R-A1579-3 Picnicking north of Prince Albert, 1918.

Author L.M. Montgomery took a trip across the river in 1891. The ferry did not accept passengers other than farmers or freighters with loads of goods, so Montgomery and her party of female friends had to beg canoe rides across the river from passing canoeists (going over), and local First Nations women (to get back). Taking “enough cans and buckets for an army,” Montgomery and her companions crossed the North Saskatchewan to near the mouth of the Little

Red River, then hiked along the “road to the Indian camp” and on to the “berry barrens,” a distance of over five miles. The blueberries, unfortunately, were “few and far between,” probably already picked over and dried by the First Nations women.

Montgomery waxed rhapsodic in her journal regarding the scenery: “What a wilderness it was! Steep banks covered with mighty, heaven-sweeping pines, weird with age; below, a thick undergrowth of poplar through which we forced our way to a most romantic little spot...that wild yet beautiful wilderness, where nature ran riot in untrained luxuriance.” The ladies returned late that night to Prince Albert completely exhausted, with sore feet and limbs. “No more over the river excursions for me if you please!” Montgomery declared.²¹ Clearly, the beauty she had witnessed was not enough to entice her a second time on such a lengthy excursion.²²

Montgomery filled her journal with comments on the scenic beauty of the Prince Albert area; in fact, the highest compliment she could pay was that the scenery reminded her of Prince Edward Island. Other comments contrasted the northern greenery with the plains area of the south, through which she traveled on her train journey. She claimed she was “delighted to see that it was fair and green and fertile-looking – altogether unlike those dreary wastes around Regina.” Within months of her arrival, Montgomery penned an article for the *Saskatchewan Times* newspaper on the Saskatchewan country, “a flowery peroration on the possibilities of the country as a whole,” she admitted.²³ Montgomery, despite her comparatively brief sojourn at Prince Albert, duplicated the prevailing local habit of tying scenery with economics, and noting the contrast between the open plains and the lush northern forests.²⁴

Early Commercial Tourism: Round Lake

The boom period in western Canada after 1896 and into the first decade of the twentieth century saw rapid industrial growth in the Prince Albert region: lumber, commercial fishing, prospecting and gold dredging initiatives, and freighting. Of these, the commercialization of the local lumber industry was particularly important. The lumber mills at Prince Albert were

²¹ For this particular excursion, see *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery Volume I*, pages 60-61, 13 August 1891.

²² Other Prince Albert citizens, however, were more hardy than Montgomery and continued to utilize the blueberry and raspberry grounds across the river, organizing picnics and expeditions. One child was lost on such an expedition, and was not found for four days. Over three hundred people participated in the search. See *Prince Albert Advocate*, 3 September 1900.

²³ The Saskatchewan district, centered at Prince Albert. The Assiniboia district centered at Regina/Moose Jaw.

²⁴ *Selected Journals* Vol. I., p. 29, 52. The Prince Albert Historical Society (Bill Smiley Archives) has an original copy of this newspaper, which was handwritten rather than set with type.

modern, industrialized businesses that employed hundreds of workers on the concept of wage labour and shift work. Industrialism on this scale led to a disconnection between urban life and an older, pre-industrial and rural life.²⁵ With structured work hours came structured free time, and industrial workers – and their bosses – were quick to find ways to fill it. As the lumber industry expanded north of the city, trails into the north were continuously improved. Those drawn across the river to pick berries, hunt, or otherwise amuse themselves could safely and quickly expand their explorations.

The most important trail leading north was the original artery of the Montreal Lake trail. From the ferry at Prince Albert, the trail angled west through the jack pines and wove past a body of water known to the local First Nations as Moon Lake, but to the freighters, lumbermen, and settlers as Round Lake. About eighteen miles north and west of the city, the small lake was filled with fish and populated by wild fowl. From Round Lake, the trail struck north towards Sturgeon Lake, the Little Red River reserve, and the heavy wood basket, eventually leading to Red Deer Lake and Montreal Lake over the winter freighting trail.

By 1905, probably at least partially in response to the industrial pollution of the North Saskatchewan by city effluence and the lumber mills, Round Lake was drawing attention from Prince Albert residents as a picnic and recreational destination.²⁶ Local lumbermen James Sanderson and Mayor William Cowan, along with merchants, druggists, real estate agents and lawyers from the city created the “Prince Albert Outing Club,”²⁷ which purchased land around the lake.²⁸ The group built a Club House in 1911 which housed a common recreational area,

²⁵ For an excellent and concise overview of the change from pre-industrial to industrial life, see Rosemary E. Ommert and Nancy J. Turner, “Informal Rural Economies in History,” *Labour/Le Travail* No. 53, (Spring 2004): pp. 127-157. The work of E.P. Thompson is also important here, particularly his *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: New Press, 1991) and *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: V. Gollancz, 1980). For the connection between urbanites and rural tourism in a specific context, see Aaron Shapiro, “Up North on Vacation: Tourism and Resorts in Wisconsin’s North Woods,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* Vol. 89, no. 4 (2006): pp. 2-13.

²⁶ The local newspapers reported on the state and quality of the water in the North Saskatchewan for drinking. See, for example, the Prince Albert *Advocate*, 20 January 1909 which reported a typhoid epidemic in the city’s east end, downstream from where the city released its untreated sewer effluent.

²⁷ The club was originally called the Round Lake Outing Club but was incorporated as the Prince Albert Outing Club, reflecting its urban origins and customers. See *Prince Albert Outing Club, Round Lake, Saskatchewan 1905 to 1990* (Prince Albert Outing Club, 1990).

²⁸ This land would have had a township survey completed because of the lumber interests, but it is unclear whether the land was subdivided by the quarter section survey. Certainly it would have been subdivided by 1907 at the latest. For an overview of township surveys for settlement purposes, see chapter four. The club in fact purchased Métis scrip to buy the land. Scrip was an important commodity in the Prince Albert region. Scrip hearings were regularly announced and debated in Prince Albert, which had a strong mixed-blood community. See Camie Augustus, “The Scrip Solution: The North West Metis Scrip Policy, 1885-1887,”

kitchen and dining area, and a store. In 1918, a dance pavilion was erected. Lots were leased from the club and modest cabins built. Docks, swimming platforms and slides were also added, as well as a tennis court in 1930.²⁹

Despite its proximity to the Dakota Sioux reserve at Wahpehton, the Outing Club and Round Lake recreational activities remained tied to private, non-native use. Although the primary shareholders in the Outing Club came from the city's merchant class, the families of lumbermen (particularly foremen and clerks, for example) came to use the facilities as well. It soon grew in fame, drawing tourists from southern Saskatchewan. The *Prince Albert Daily Herald* reported in 1916 that "Round Lake is Wonderful to Prairie People. Many Campers Expected at the Local Resort This Summer." An unidentified mayor from one prairie city was quoted: "If the people living in the south of the province only saw this beautiful lake with these trees surrounding it, and within a distance of 15 miles from a city, with good trails leading to it, through all those pine trees, well I do not know what they would say." He went on, "You know I have been sending my family to a small lake on the prairie where the only shade trees we have are small willows and the heat and wind, well there really was no pleasure in it."³⁰ The words of this unknown mayor, contrasting prairie recreational opportunities with those found in the north Prince Albert region, were almost prophetic.



Figure 57. Two ladies fishing on an unidentified lake in Saskatchewan, c. 1900. SAB R-A5628-2.

unpublished MA thesis, University of Calgary, 2006; Paget Code, "Les Autres Metis: The English Metis of Prince Albert Settlement 1862-1886," unpublished MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2008. See also *Prince Albert Advocate* 1897-1900, numerous articles.

²⁹ See *Prince Albert Outing Club*, p. 22.

³⁰ *Prince Albert Daily Herald* 11 April 1916.

After homesteads were surveyed and opened in 1906 and 1907 north of the city, roads and trails were continuously created and improved. The majority of these trails, however, were cut on a north-south axis. There were few east-west cross trails, isolating the new communities from each other. The main lumber and freight trail that went past Round Lake bypassed Christopher, Emma, and Anglin Lakes to the west.³¹ As a result, these lakes could be visited only by determined trailbreakers. The Sand Hills trail northeast of the city, toward the burgeoning communities of Henribourg and Paddockwood, led to the “new” Montreal Lake trail cut during the First World War, and the Mosher trail to Candle Lake. Emma, Christopher, Montreal and Candle lakes were much further away from the city over uncertain bush trails. They did not draw early tourists or corollary development to any appreciable level. Round Lake remained the primary developed tourism spot until after the First World War.³²

³¹ Christopher, Emma, and Anglin Lakes were often depicted on maps as a single lake, generally referred to as “Little Bittern Lake.” Christopher Creek was known as “Little Bittern” Creek and the community that developed on the creek was known as “Little Bittern” throughout the 1920s. See Dawson map of western Canada, 1885; Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 1920s.

³² For an overview of roads and trails in the north Prince Albert region, see Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan's Playground: A History of Prince Albert National Park* (Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1989), chapters one and two. See also *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 6.

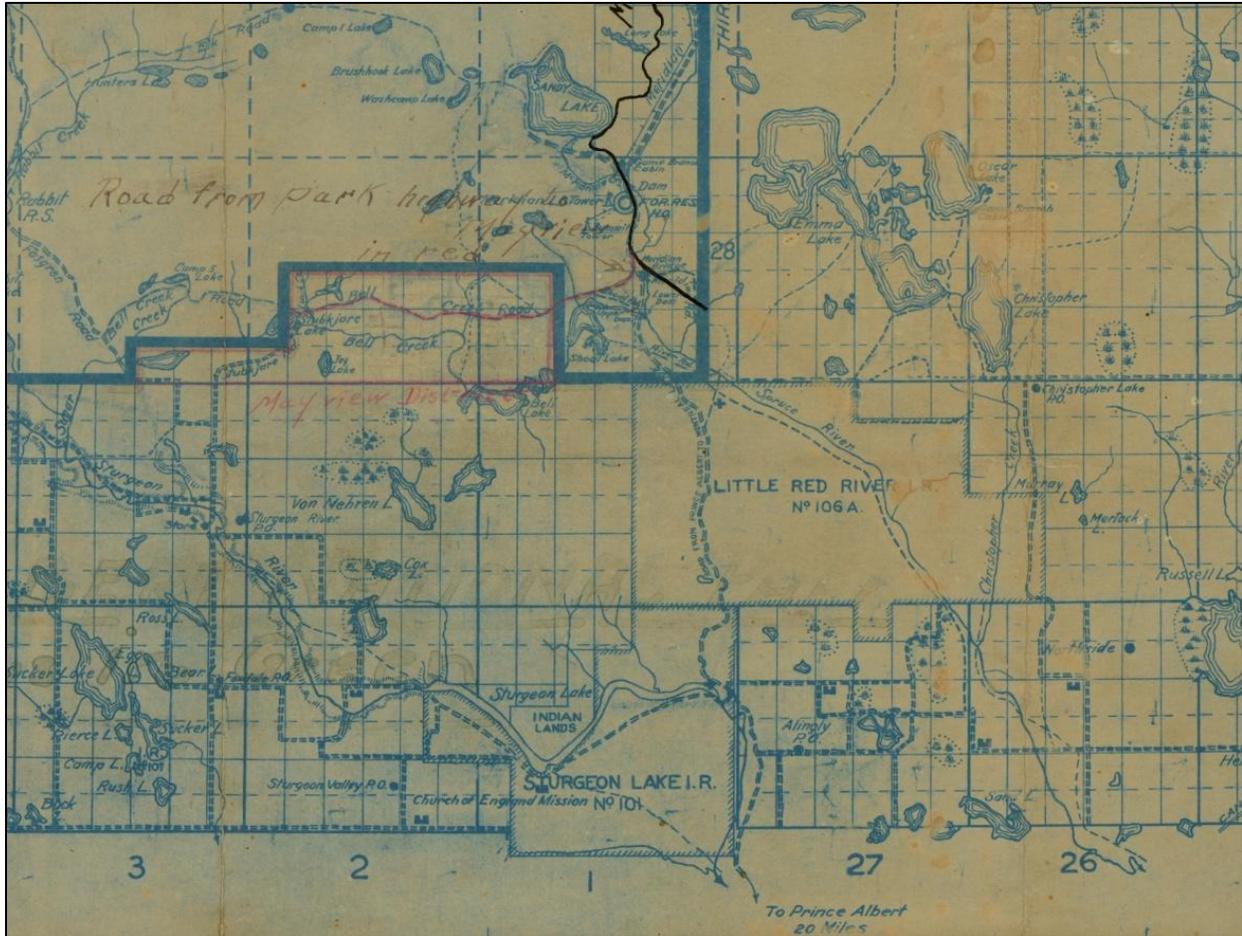


Figure 58. Trails prior to major highway development. The main trail ran along Sturgeon Lake and through Little Red River, heading north. Map c. 1925, Sturgeon River Forest Reserve. Friends of Prince Albert National Park.

After the First World War, the recreational site at Round Lake boomed. Churches and schools met there for picnics, and the annual sports day with swimming, diving, sailing, canoeing and motorboat races (and prizes) created lots of excitement.³³ Stuart Anderson, whose family owned a cabin at the lake, recalled, “As a young boy coming from Prince Albert, I was amazed at the number of tin signs nailed to jackpine trees in promotion of businesses.”³⁴ Outdoor camps for children were organized at the lake, and by the mid-1920s, weekend trips to Round Lake were common not only for Prince Albert residents, but beyond. Round Lake continued to attract visitors and commercial development on a small scale until the 1950s.³⁵

³³ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 7 July 1923.

³⁴ *Prince Albert Outing Club*, Stuart Anderson memories, p. 92-94. Round Lake remained essentially a private destination, its advertisements and notices confined primarily to the ‘Society’ pages of the Prince Albert *Daily Herald*.

³⁵ With developed roads blocking drainage patterns and increased agricultural clearing, water levels receded in Round Lake. Lower water levels led to a commercial decline for the Club and many cabins were abandoned from

Transition from Freight Trails to Tourism Roads

The functional infrastructure of trails leading north advanced increased recreational use throughout the north Prince Albert region. In 1919, Christina Bateman, a clerk at the University of Saskatchewan Registrar's Office, took a trip from Prince Albert north to Lac La Ronge. She traveled in the company of her friend, Nan McKay, whose father was the Hudson's Bay Company factor at La Ronge. Bateman gaily recorded her trip and took numerous photographs.³⁶ Billy Bear of the Little Red River reserve transported Bateman and McKay in his wagon from Prince Albert to the south end of Montreal Lake. Bear navigated the more familiar freight road that led through the Little Red reserve, stopping to sleep at his own farm instead of taking the newer and more direct Montreal Lake trail that led through the Paddockwood region. Bateman noted that the landscape had been devastated by the May firestorm of that year: "Not very far from Prince Albert we came upon miles and miles of burnt over woods – only blackened trunks left – a very sad sight." "But," she noted with optimism, "the fireweed was springing up making a bright pink carpet for the black tree trunks. The road was terribly rough – nothing but tree roots and rocks, bump, bump, bump."³⁷ Two nights of camping on the trail brought them to the settlement at Montreal Lake. From there they hired two First Nations men to take them via canoe to La Ronge.³⁸

the 1950s on. However, the Club remained viable, and there has always been a tourism and recreational presence at the lake, although not on the same scale as in its earliest years. In the late 1990s, water levels rose and recreation enthusiasts once more began to frequent Round Lake for both summer and winter fishing.

³⁶ SAB A-281 Christina Bateman fonds, "Northern Saskatchewan Holiday." Bateman's typewritten document and its accompanying pictures can be found on the Our Legacy website, <http://scaa.sk.ca/ourlegacy>, database ID 27383.

³⁷ Bateman, "Northern Saskatchewan Holiday."

³⁸ After staying for some time in La Ronge, Bateman and McKay went down the Churchill River system to The Pas, where they boarded a train and returned to Saskatoon. The entire trip took over a month. When they reached The Pas, it was "decorated in honour of the duke and Duchess of Devonshire," who were in town on a duck shooting expedition, further proof that game hunting was a major tourism industry for northern towns within the boreal forest and lake region of western Canada.



Figure 59. S-B510. Christina Bateman fonds. Billy Bear with Christina Bateman and Nan McKay, 1919.



Figure 60. SAB S-B491. Christina Bateman and Nan McKay, canoeing north to La Ronge, 1919.

Bateman's trip was an example of a broad redefinition of the tracks and trails leading north of Prince Albert as a new, albeit primitive, tourist route. The girls utilized personal connections with church leaders at Prince Albert and merchants of the Hudson's Bay Company to facilitate and organize their trip. On the road, they were accompanied, guided and transported by First Nations men familiar with the route. These men set up their tents and conveyed their belongings, but the girls reciprocated by doing much of the cooking. Bateman presented the trip as a congenial tourist adventure, "the most interesting, the most unusual, and most beautiful holiday I ever had."³⁹ Bateman's story reflected a curious blend of old and new. Her transportation – wagon and canoe – were traditional conveyances, recalling the romance of voyageurs, First Nations, and freighters. The women received favours from or employed First Nations men. They followed the wagon road/canoe route into La Ronge that had been in use for thirty years, since the Indian Department had completed the road to facilitate treaty supplies for the Treaty Six adhesion. Yet, aspects of their journey were new: Bateman clearly considered the trip a holiday, as opposed to a 'visit' or work; the women travelled alone, without white male chaperones; they dressed in overalls and pants as it suited their circumstances, something which aroused comment; they provided their own tent and supplies, camping and cooking with humour and ease; and they were keenly interested in and aware of their surroundings, from the devastation of the forest fires and the danger of stormy water on the lakes to the beauty of the natural world around them. In many ways, Bateman's trip was a bridge between traditional and modern uses of the north Prince Albert region: the old freight trail to La Ronge viewed with a new, tourist gaze.⁴⁰

By 1920, in response to the exploding new soldier settlement and incoming settlers from the prairie, local roads and trails received attention and improvement.⁴¹ Motor vehicle traffic was on the rise, and roads began to be judged by their ability to permit cars. The Prince Albert *Daily Herald* reported a fascinating story in 1920:

³⁹ Bateman, "Northern Saskatchewan Holiday."

⁴⁰ Bateman's trip also showcased an important gender shift. Whereas Montgomery was chaperoned on her rail trip across Canada to Prince Albert, Bateman and McKay were not, despite their more primitive mode of travel. Women's emancipation, clearly represented by Bateman in comments on clothing, tenting, and cooking in the outdoors, reflects a post-war change in women's behaviour and realm of possibility. For an overview of the women's movement and its relation to tourism, see Jasen, *Wild Things*.

⁴¹ From 1910 on, reports from the RM of Buckland in the Prince Albert *Daily Herald* remarked on road conditions and the need for improvement. Each year, citizens (either on their own or with municipal funding) built bridges, filled holes, and created drainage systems to improve road conditions.

To Montreal Lake. Jack Woods Drives to Within Twenty Miles of the Place. J. Woods of the City Auto Livery made a trip by car into the north country last week and succeeded in reaching a point within 20 miles of Montreal Lake, having passed the Bear Trap by 7 miles. This is considered to be the most northerly point in the province yet reached by an automobile and Mr. Woods intends next spring to try to reach the lake itself. The journey which covered 93 miles was made in 7 hours, which is not considered a bad record, as Mr. Woods says that the last 15 miles of the trail was pretty bad. The trip is another evidence of the invasion of the northern territories by the advancement of progressive civilization, which is gradually bringing settlements, at one time considered remote, in easy contact with the city.⁴²

Although his trail is not specified, it would have been the same trail taken by Bateman in 1919, passing through the Little Red River reserve and the Sturgeon River Forest reserve, where Bear Trap Lake was a notable feature.⁴³ Neither Woods nor Bateman mentions any of the smaller lakes near that road, with the exception of Montreal Lake as their destination. Yet, both parties made their trips for no other purpose than leisure and travel tourism. It seems somewhat odd that the lakes now considered key points in the Lakeland landscape – Emma, Chistopher, Anglin, or Red Deer Lake (Waskesiu) received no reference. The trails, made for purposes other than leisure and tourism, obviously bypassed the lakes. Whereas Bateman and McKay’s trip blended traditional transportation with tourism, Mr. Woods’ trip (partly in advertisement of his business, City Auto Livery, which rented cars to motorists for short term jaunts), introduced modern motor tourism to the north Prince Albert landscape.⁴⁴

Emma Lake and Christopher Lake

In response to the drive for soldier-settlement land following the First World War, the dominion government initiated an in-depth land classification survey of Canada in 1918. Dominion Land Surveyor M.C. McCloskey investigated the north Prince Albert region. His

⁴² Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 12 October 1920.

⁴³ Bear Trap Lake was dammed by the Prince Albert Lumber Company and a canal constructed south to the Spruce (Little Red) River to facilitate water flow and handle log volumes. See Waiser, *Saskatchewan’s Playground*, p. 16-19. If Woods reached a point seven miles beyond Bear Trap, he did not reach Waskesiu, although he would have been close to The Forks, where the trail branched off one way to Montreal Lake and the other to Green Lake.

⁴⁴ A map owned by the Friends of Prince Albert National Park showed the Forest Reserve boundaries prior to the creation of Prince Albert National Park. The map, issued originally in 1923 and revised several times, showed roads in the region as of the mid-1920s. The road “from Prince Albert to Montreal Lake” bypassed Sturgeon Lake, snaked through the west side of the Little Red Reserve and into the Forest Reserve. This main road branched at The Forks to go east and north to Montreal Lake. Although a trail is shown leading to “Waskesiu Summer Resort” and “Primeau Road,” the original freight road did not deliberately access resorts or lakes. Drawn in ink on the map is the “Motor Road” built when the Forest Reserve became the nucleus of Prince Albert National Park. This road took a slightly different route, deliberately passing the shores of Sandy Lake and ending up at Waskesiu Lake. Also on the map, leading north from Paddockwood, is the “New Montreal Lake Road.”

report continually commented on the north-south direction of trails and the lack of cross-trails.⁴⁵ He and his surveyors were forced to change from wagons to pack horses to complete much of their survey work. Of particular interest for McCloskey, aside from ascertaining soil and potential agricultural lands, were the smaller, regional lakes in the area. McCloskey appraised these lakes not only for their situation and amount of water, but their fishing potential and scenic beauty. Emma Lake was singled out as “beautifully situated among rolling hills,” with “all the features desirable for a summer resort. A broad sandy beach with gentle slope extends around the southern part, with excellent facilities for boating. The water is clear and fresh. Whitefish, pike and pickerel are reported plentiful.”⁴⁶ At the time, the majority of the land around the south, east, and west portions of both lakes were either homestead quarters (or partial quarters), or leased by trappers.⁴⁷

The potential of Emma and Christopher Lakes as resorts was already attracting local interest. In September 1920, the Northside correspondent to the Prince Albert *Daily Herald* reported a couple and their baby spending a weekend at “Lake Emma.”⁴⁸ By the mid-1920s, numerous local residents from Henribourg, Northside, Alingly, and Paddockwood jaunted to both Emma and Christopher lakes. A typical community report would state: “Quite a number of parties from this district have been away camping this summer at Christopher Lake.”⁴⁹ Surveyor McCloskey’s call for more cross trails to connect the communities on an east-west access facilitated access for Paddockwood residents. A road was built in 1925 on the fourteenth baseline, connecting Paddockwood with Christopher Lake and bridging the Garden River. The Paddockwood correspondent to the Prince Albert *Daily Herald* reported, “Riley, Endicott and Gould motored to the lake on Sunday...the first car to traverse the road direct from Paddockwood to Christopher Lake.”⁵⁰

⁴⁵ SAB R-183 I.290. Department of the Interior fonds. M.D. McCloskey to E.E. Deville, 30 March 1921.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ In 1922, only a few quarters at the south end of Christopher Lake had been homesteaded. By 1930, George Neis had taken all the land between Emma and Oscar Lakes and was a central figure in the development of resort property at Emma Lake. J.B. and H. Jarvis had taken the partial quarters at Sunset Bay and Sunnyside Beach. See SAB, Cummins Map Company, map no. Sask. 258, 1922 and 1930.

⁴⁸ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 11 September 1920.

⁴⁹ Prince Albert *Daily Herald* 8 August 1925.

⁵⁰ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 8 August 1925. See also SAB R-183 I.222 J. Hardouin General Report 15 April 1921. Although the road had been cut by surveyors in 1919, it needed grading and extensive improvements, including gravel and corduroy over muskegs and a bridge over the Garden River before it could be used by motorcars.

The growing reputation of Round Lake, combined with increased mobility through motor cars and extensive road construction and improvements from local homesteaders and municipal governments, led visitors from further afield to Emma and Christopher Lakes. G.A. Crowley of Northside wrote to the Department of the Interior in 1925, urging the department to make a surveyed road to Christopher Lake for tourists heading north. Christopher Lake, he wrote, “has the prospect of being one of the Greatest Summer Resorts in Saskatchewan. I’ve counted as many as 38 cars to this Lake on one Sunday and road not fit for a team on account of hummock and temporary corduroy for about four miles south of lake...cars run on low gear and are pulled or pushed through low places.”⁵¹ The conceptual redevelopment of the north Prince Albert region as a tourism destination required a spirit of adventure, as outlined by Christine Bateman, Mr. Woods and others who put their cars through miles of mud to get to their destination. The trappers and homesteaders who owned lakeshore property soon converted part of their energy into building camping, boating and bathing facilities, improving access, and providing services.

Sturgeon River Forest Reserve and Tourism

After the devastating fires of 1919, which effectively halted large-scale lumbering in the area, the Sturgeon River Forest Reserve remained.⁵² Local residents continued to lease areas within the reserve to operate sawmills, cordwood berths, and railroad tie camps, as well as hay and grazing permits, but the large-scale economic benefits for Prince Albert businesses from the lumber industry – supplies, food, clothing, transportation, and entertainment – melted away. Prince Albert businessmen were left with a forest reserve landscape on their doorstep that was frustratingly underutilized for their purposes.

Promotional work by the Department of the Interior through their forestry branch emphasized the increasing public connection between forest reserves and recreation across the

⁵¹ RG 10 Vol. 7766 File 27107-4 Pt. 1. G.A. Crowley to Department of the Interior 20 April 1925. As the letter was primarily another call to open all or part of the Little Red River reserve to homesteading, the letter was forwarded to the Department of Indian Affairs.

⁵² The dominion government established the Sturgeon River Forest Reserve in 1914 on lands east of the Sturgeon River to the Third Meridian, south including much of Township fifty-three and north to Township fifty-seven. The forest reserve was primarily imposed to allow better control of the lumber interests operating almost wantonly in the region, but it had other repercussions. The forest reserve stopped agricultural settlement – land could not be taken for homestead within its boundaries. Forestry reserves, the Department of the Interior insisted, were set aside to promote monitored forest production and reproduction, including a program of silviculture. The idea was to maintain healthy forests that could be continuously and economically exploited for human benefit – a “gospel of efficiency” and “wise use” of forest resources. An emphasis on fire suppression and reforestation anchored the dominion’s interests. Other uses included permit-controlled grazing and haying in the open glades. For an overview of the creation of the Sturgeon River Forest Reserve, see chapter two.

dominion. Interest in federal forest reserves and what they offered for tourists focused less on the spectacular beauty of the mountain parks and more on the domestic, everyday experience of camping: hiking, photography, tenting, canoeing, cooking, eating ice cream, swimming, boating, and fishing. These experiences could be had just as easily on short weekend trips to forest reserves as expensive month-long rail adventures to the mountains. The forestry department encouraged such recreation, despite the increased risk of forest fires: “Legitimate use of the forest reserves for recreational purposes is not injurious to the reserves but rather is an advantage...this practice enables many citizens to see the forests, and thus leads them to appreciate their importance,” and heed calls for fire prevention strategies, officials hoped.⁵³ To facilitate the growing demand, the Forest Service began to provide camping and picnic facilities “at favourable points.”⁵⁴ They also spent more energy on road maintenance and direction signage to encourage this new traffic.⁵⁵



Figure 61. Camping in forest near Prince Albert. SAB R-A1777 no date.

⁵³ Canada, Department of the Interior *Annual Report 1922*. Report of the Director of Forestry, R.H. Campbell, p. 139.

⁵⁴ The Forestry Department laid out resort areas at Clear Lake in Manitoba and at points in British Columbia in the early 1920s; similar work was carried out in Saskatchewan between 1922 and 1925.

⁵⁵ Canada, Department of the Interior *Annual Report 1926*. C. MacFadyen, District Forest Inspector, Dominion Forests in Saskatchewan. p. 75-78. The push for more recreational use of forest reserves was expressed in E.H. Finlayson, Director of Forestry, Report for 1926. He wrote of the “eager manner in which the public have grasped the possibilities for holidaying and recreation.” p. 69.

Increased tourist interest in forest reserves had an impact in northern Saskatchewan. The forestry department took on an “ambitious programme of improvement work,” geared not only to improving roads and developing camping areas within the Sturgeon River Forest reserve, but also highlighting canoe routes. Canals were dug on the Montreal River, portages were cleared and widened, campsites were improved, log cabins for shelter and wood storage were built, and signs were erected at portages and other important trail points along the way.⁵⁶ The forestry department knew that “our northern watercourses are extremely bewildering to a traveller not perfectly familiar with them,” so they put up signs and widened trails so that “they could be followed by even a novice.”⁵⁷

The promotion of forest reserves for tourism tapped into a growing commercial market. During the 1920s, tourist recreation rocketed to public consciousness across North America in conjunction with the spread of motor vehicles and improved roads.⁵⁸ The surge of interest in tourism during the post-First World War years reflected a dynamic change in social expectations, leisure time, and modest affluence. It was no longer necessary to be a member of the upper classes to enjoy a holiday. Railway excursions, promoted extensively in newspapers and reported faithfully in society pages, were giving way to the car tourist. The affluence required to take a first-class holiday to the Rocky Mountain parks, by train, and stay in a hotel placed such holidays beyond the reach of most people. The advent of motorcars, tents and other camping supplies left over from the war effort, and an increasingly improved road network, encouraged the rise of auto tourism on a more modest budget. The 1922 annual report from Canadian National Park Commissioner J.B. Harkin noted with pleasure and expectation, “the prosperity that has followed

⁵⁶ Canada, Department of the Interior *Annual Report*, Forestry Report, 1922, p. 156.

⁵⁷ Forestry Report, 1922, p. 156.

⁵⁸ To understand the rise of motor tourism in North America, see Amy Larin, “A Rough Ride: Automobiles in Banff National Park, 1905-1918,” *Alberta History* Vol. 56, no. 1 (2008): pp. 2-9; Anny Hyde, “From Stagecoach to Packard Twin Six: Yosemite and the Changing Face of Tourism, 1880-1930,” *California History* Vol. 69, no. 2 (1990): pp. 154-169; Michael Dawson, “Taking the ‘D’ Out of Depression: The Promise of Tourism in British Columbia, 1935-1939,” *BC Studies* Vol. 132 (2001): pp. 31-59; Alisa Apostle, “Canada, Vacations Unlimited,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Queen’s University, 2003; Hal K. Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998); John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage, 2002); David Louter, *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads and Nature in Washington’s National Parks* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002). An excellent article that is a good comparison to the north Prince Albert region is Aaron Shapiro, “Up North on Vacation.”

the building of motor highways [*sic*] have convinced everyone that tourist travel pays, and that it can be developed like any other industry.”⁵⁹

Tourism Promotion: Urban, Rural, North and South

Harkin expressed an appropriate comment: tourism was an industry. As pointed out by historian Aaron Shapiro who studied the rise of the Wisconsin tourism industry, tourism – despite being rooted in landscape – was not a natural product. It was “developed, managed, and packaged by people and organizations,” particularly on a large scale.⁶⁰ One of the most convenient ways to package and sell landscape was to promote it to those for whom it was unique. In most cases, landscape tourism appealed most strongly to the rural-urban divide. By 1921, Canada found half of its population residing in urban centres, working wage or salary positions with set hours and set leisure time. Excursions to nearby lakes or resorts – for day trips, weekends, or a few weeks – became affordable mini-holidays that could be taken with little preparation and modest investment.⁶¹ Historian J.M. Bumsted noted that during the early twentieth century, “urban Canada revelled in its neighbouring wilderness,” flocking to lakeshores and forested camping areas across Canada.⁶² Brochures, maps, films and information promoting tourist destinations were distributed in cities to receptive audiences.⁶³ The Department of the Interior expressed the opinion that tourism was becoming popular due to “alarm at the changes in the face of the country due to the rapid extension of our present industrial civilization, [which] has emphasized the necessity of conserving a few untouched areas.”⁶⁴ National and

⁵⁹ Canada, Department of the Interior *Annual Report* 1922. Report of the Commissioner J.B. Harkin, Canadian National Parks.

⁶⁰ Shapiro, “Up North on Vacation,” p. 8.

⁶¹ Canada, Department of the Interior *Annual Report* 1924, Forestry Division. The rise of camping and picnic use of Forest Reserves in 1924 was “becoming a regular habit of the people even from long distances, and this traffic is particularly heavy on Sundays and holidays.” See report of H.I. Stevenson, District Forest Inspector for Manitoba report, p. 97.

⁶² J.M. Bumsted, *The Peoples of Canada: A Post-Confederation History* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 142.

⁶³ The Department of the Interior was largely responsible for tourism literature on a national level. The National Resources Intelligence Service compiled and created tourist information for both the National Parks and Forestry Branch. See Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report* 1926, p. 23-25. The Department of the Interior annual reports are valuable resources for tourism historians, as they chart the change from railroad to car tourism, and report visitors by country of origin. By the end of the 1920s, the Department of the Interior reported that Canadians were more inclined to use cars, but foreign visitors often saw the country via train travel, even though visitors could cheaply bring their own cars to Canada by boat.

⁶⁴ Canada, Department of the Interior *Annual Report* 1928. Report of the Commissioner, J.B. Harkin, Canadian National Parks.

provincial parks, forestry reserves and other ‘natural’ areas would provide charm, peace, and solace, as well as a healthy vacation in the outdoors, away from the urban jungle.

Saskatchewan, however, bucked the national trend toward urbanization. The rural-urban divide was still very wide in 1921, with seventy percent of the Saskatchewan population living in rural areas.⁶⁵ Where other provinces could promote the rural-urban divide for tourism purposes and create marketing campaigns promoting tourist destinations as a panacea and rest from busy urban lives, that rhetoric had limited mileage in Saskatchewan. Recreating the north Prince Albert landscape as a tourism destination depended largely on a different model. The Saskatchewan model focused on a domestic, localized and regional audience. In addition to enticing nearby residents, north Prince Albert tourism promotion exploited Saskatchewan’s north-south divide, open plains/agriculture versus northern forest/resources.

Prince Albert MLA T.C. Davis, the newly elected representative for the Prince Albert region, rose during one of his first sessions in the Legislature in Regina in 1925 to expound on the north-south divide in Saskatchewan. It was a divide that was “as crippling as the East-West divide in Canada,” he argued, where all the development, investment and knowledge went to one part and not to the other. The divide within Saskatchewan, Davis claimed, was both physical and economic. The Saskatchewan north presented a non-agricultural landscape that did not fit the prairie development model. The result was “a lop-sided province. For those who don’t wish to farm, there is little to do.” Davis believed that the best way forward was through interaction: “The cleavage between the North and South in this province can be avoided by the people of the South getting acquainted with the people and the conditions of the North and the people of the North getting acquainted with the South.” As the northerners were already acquainted with the south, he believed, only the opposite was really necessary. To facilitate this new acquaintance, Davis advocated tourism:

We are becoming...a nation on wheels. During the summer time we are away seeking beautiful spots to visit. We go to Banff and Jasper Park and Yellowstone National Park and to the Lake of the Woods and Muskoka, and leave right here in our own province, a country which rivals them all to great advantage in point of

⁶⁵ See table, “Urban and Rural Population of Saskatchewan,” Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House Publishers, 2005), p. 498.

natural beauty. We want first of all to get you to know that great country and we best do this by inducing you to go there on a pleasure bent.⁶⁶

Davis' speech outlined a program of Saskatchewan-based tourism, appealing to a growing sense of Saskatchewan patriotism. It was not necessary to travel far away, he argued, when beauty spots "which rivals them all" could be found closer to home. Where it once had appeal for British sportsmen and prospectors, Prince Albert merchants – primarily through the board of trade and promoted by MLA Davis – branded the north as a new vacationland, targeting prairie dwellers to discover and explore the northern boreal landscape on their own doorstep.

Improved roads and recreational facilities, as well as increased promotion of the region, drew people from farther and farther away. "Whereas in former times visitors were mostly persons residing in the neighbourhood," the forestry department asserted, "the records now show use by people living at considerable distances," including tourists coming from the United States.⁶⁷ A 1925 article in the Prince Albert *Daily Herald* reported that tourism had become Canada's third most important industry, and claimed that in Saskatchewan, this industry was worth about ten million dollars.⁶⁸ Such stories tended to focus on the financial boon of tourism, including merchant sales of food and equipment, and opportunities to provide services, from boat rentals to boarding houses or full-scale tourist camps. For Prince Albert businessmen, supplying the new tourist trade would offset the losses experienced by the end of the lumber industry. The merchants believed that the north Prince Albert region offered as good a recreational landscape as any. If people were willing to travel and spend money to visit a lake, do some fishing and enjoy trees, then Prince Albert businessmen set out to recreate the north Prince Albert region as the logical recreation destination of choice for prairie residents – and Prince Albert as the point of departure.

⁶⁶ See Saskatchewan, *Sessional Papers*, 1925. Speech delivered by Mr. T.C. Davis, MLA Prince Albert in the Debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne in the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, 7 December 1925.

⁶⁷ Canada, Department of the Interior *Annual Report* 1926. Report of Charles Stewart, Minister of the Interior, Ottawa 1925-1926.

⁶⁸ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 23 July 1925.

A “Saskatchewan Banff”: Prince Albert National Park

The forestry department created a cottage lot subdivision at the beach at Primeau Landing at Red Deer Lake (Waskesiu) in 1925.⁶⁹ The new development was intended to capitalize on increased tourist interest and looked to the success of similar developments at Clear Lake in the Riding Mountain forest reserve in Manitoba for its model. “The population of the summer colonies is growing constantly and better and more attractive cottages are being built. The recently opened summer resort at Clear Lake has now a comfortable inn, and all resorts welcome the tourist to their camping grounds and picnic parks,” the forestry department reported.⁷⁰ Cottage leases, camping fees, permits and other revenue could be used to offset fire control and other operational costs. O.M. Lundlie, a Prince Albert resident who owned a large machinery dealership with a branch at Henribourg, visited the newly-created resort at Red Deer Lake in early July 1925. He reported with enthusiasm: “in Red Deer Lake,” quoted the *Daily Herald*, “Prince Albert has an Asset which will More Than Repay Development.” The article declared that the lake would be an “Ideal Site for a Saskatchewan Banff.”⁷¹

A “Saskatchewan Banff” carried connotations that had nothing to do with mountains and everything to do with recreation and tourism, particularly the economic benefits of tourism. Tourist traffic, Lundlie exclaimed, would involve not just recreational tourists, but hunters, trappers, and prospectors as well. Lundlie envisioned a cottage community in the forestry reserve that would combine landscape recreation with the provisioning trade. In essence, he believed the resort community would become a new “jumping off point” for northern exploration and exploitation. Lundlie called on the Prince Albert board of trade to take up the cause of resort creation. Calling Red Deer Lake a “Saskatchewan Banff” foreshadowed the move to change the Sturgeon River Forest reserve into a national park.⁷² Lundlie’s enthusiasm put a public face on an idea that was already in the making.

⁶⁹ The Forestry Department had five resorts within three forest reserves in Manitoba. The department also had a new resort subdivision at Fish Lakes in the Moose Mountain forest reserve in Saskatchewan, opened in 1923. This new subdivision was an expansion to an already existing resort, now known as Kenosee.

⁷⁰ Canada, Department of the Interior *Annual Report*, 1926. H.I. Stevenson, District Forest Inspector for Manitoba, Dominion Forests of Manitoba report, 1925-1926, p. 75.

⁷¹ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 4 July 1925.

⁷² The National Parks branch had already expressed some interest in Saskatchewan. In 1922, in keeping with the recreational aspect of the new car tourism, the National Parks annual report announced the creation of “recreational areas.” These were areas “adapted for public use and enjoyment for summer resort and recreational purposes but which do not possess scenery of sufficient importance to justify their creation as national parks.” Canada, Department of the Interior *Annual Report* 1922, Report of the Commissioner J.B. Harkin, Canadian National Parks,

Managed by the Department of the Interior, the Sturgeon River forest reserve was a large, federally-managed landscape on Prince Albert's doorstep. The movement to change that landscape from forest reserve to a national park was rooted in the mercenary desire to capitalize on the lucrative tourist trade. The enthusiasm of Lundlie and others who wished to turn the area into a "Saskatchewan Banff" provided the idea and the willpower; political circumstances added possibility. The north/south ecological divide between prairie and forest (where the forest became the 'playground of the prairie') gave the argument. The subdivision at Waskesiu, reported C. MacFadyen, district forest inspector for Saskatchewan, suited "residents of the prairie districts...more than ever casting about for summering places within the province," summering places different from the already-established resorts on the prairie lakes such as Moose Mountain (Kenosee) or Vidal's Point (Katepwa).⁷³ Building on the rising popularity of car tourism, local success of Round Lake, and the emerging possibilities of Emma and Christopher Lakes, the Prince Albert boosters already had some strong bargaining power.

National park creation, however, involved extensive political manipulation. Historian Bill Waiser documented the creation of Prince Albert National Park in his book, *Saskatchewan's Playground*. Only a brief overview is necessary here.⁷⁴ Prince Albert politicians and businessmen knew that a national park commanded greater dominion involvement than a forest reserve, particularly financially, to build infrastructure and create an advertising campaign. Local merchants and entrepreneurs would ride the tourism wave with less effort on their own part. The national park idea was pursued with vigour but was given a particular boost by political circumstance: in the fall of 1925, Prime Minister W.L. Mackenzie King lost his seat in the general election. The Prince Albert candidate, Charles McDonald, had won his seat handily. At

p. 100. Lands suitable for recreation but not large enough to create a national park usually fronted a lake. As such, they were not conducive to agriculture and were unalienated Crown lands owned by the Dominion. The first such reservation in Saskatchewan under this scheme was Vidal's Point, now known as Katepwa Point on Katepwa Lake, within the Qu'Appelle Valley chain of lakes known as the Calling Lakes. Although not called a national park, the area came under the protection and administration of the Parks branch. The point had been in use as a recreation site for years. The National Parks branch gave the point increased status and publicity. It was popular: by 1929, 17,000 visitors registered annually, far more than the 10,000 or so who journeyed north to the new national park. The area was turned over to the Saskatchewan provincial government in 1930 with the transfer of all remaining Crown land. For yearly reports, see the *Annual Reports* of the Canadian Parks Branch, 1922-1930. See also LAC, "Vidal's Point Park, History and Establishment", micro reel T-11266. For a personal view and history of the park, see J.H. Archer and the Lake Katepwa Historical Society, *Lake Katepwa: memories of yesterday with notes for today* (Fort Qu'Appelle: Lake Katepwa Historical Society, 1984).

⁷³ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report* 1925. Report of C. MacFadyen, District Forest Inspector, Dominion Forests in Saskatchewan, p. 81.

⁷⁴ The overview is drawn from Waiser, *Saskatchewan's Playground*, Chapter Three: The Political Art of Park Making, p. 25-35.

the instigation of the local Liberal association, McDonald agreed to step aside for Mackenzie King to run. Bill Waiser suggested, as was common in such cases, the local Liberals presented Mackenzie King with a “shopping list” of demands in return for a successful by-election, one of which was the creation of a new national park. Prince Albert Liberal MLA T.C. Davis, the local Liberal association, and the board of trade took specific steps toward the creation of the park, including striking a national park committee and continued lobbying efforts. King formally requested, at a cabinet meeting in May 1926, that a park be created in Saskatchewan.

The only stumbling block was the placement of the park: national park officials were unconvinced of the merits of the Sturgeon River Forest reserve as sufficiently beautiful. An internal memorandum suggested instead that the Lac La Ronge region would be better suited:

...before a successful national park can be created, you must have a natural park. The territory lying north of and within easy reach of Prince Albert is not naturally a park country, so it requires a critical selection to choose any area which might form a satisfactory national park. ...the territory in the Lac La Ronge district and north is much more attractive as a natural park area than the area which lies to the south of it.⁷⁵

Prince Albert advocates were appalled. Such a park would be beyond Prince Albert’s reach. In fact, it would be beyond anyone’s reach, as there were no roads further than the south end of Montreal Lake – and that was only a winter freight trail, unfit for summer vehicle traffic. The only tourists able to access a park at La Ronge would be occasional canoe adventurers such as Christina Bateman or those able to pay for an airplane flight, not the far more lucrative weekend car excursionists or cottage leaseholders. This fact gave the Prince Albert group leverage in their fight to create a park closer to Prince Albert. Not only did a national park need to have “scenic wonders and beauties in sufficient abundance,” but promoters argued that it also must be “sufficiently accessible.” By 1926, accessibility referred to motor roads.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ LAC, Parks Canada fonds, Vol. 1726. Memorandum to file, F.H. Peters to J.B. Harkin, 27 October 1926. Referenced in Waiser, *Saskatchewan’s Playground*, p. 29. Quoted at length in SAB S-Q80, S2000-51, John Webb, unpublished document, “Forward: Legal Surveys of Prince Albert National Park, Waskesiu, Saskatchewan.”

⁷⁶ J.B. Harkin, 26 April 1926. Quoted in Webb, “Legal Surveys.” The Department of the Interior annual reports between 1925 and 1930 reiterated the need for accessibility for motor traffic, and the new trend to motor tourism. “While the national parks movement has its root in the instinct for beauty and love of wild places...the economic importance which outstanding scenery has come to possess as a result of the remarkable development of tourist travel is very great and constitutes a potential source of wealth which has as yet been barely touched.” Canada, Department of the Interior *Annual Report* 1925-26. Report of the Hon. Charles Stewart, Deputy Minister of the Interior. The Order-in-Council creating Prince Albert National Park had just been signed, but there was no reference to it in the Department of the Interior yearly report dated to the end of fiscal year 31 March 1927.

It may have been more convenient to deny the park and continue with the burgeoning recreational use of the forest reserve, or, conversely, to merely convey national “recreational status” to Waskesiu, rather than a full-fledged national park. In the end, however, Prince Albert interests prevailed. National park status allowed both lakeshore activities as well as protection for regional flora, fish and game.⁷⁷ Conservation of natural areas was of growing international and national political importance. The general suggestion was that each province should have a national park set aside within its borders. The Department of the Interior and Minister of National Parks relented. Prince Albert National Park was created by Order-in-Council 524 on 24 March 1927. The justification for the park, aside from the requests from “prominent people and organizations” in Prince Albert interested in developing the tourist dollar, was formally stated: the park was desirable “to provide recreational areas for the prairies.”⁷⁸ If the north Prince Albert boreal landscape was not necessarily “sufficiently beautiful” in and of itself, it certainly was when viewed in contrast with the open plains. Prince Albert National Park was created to provide a “playground” for prairie residents, exploiting the physical and cultural contrast between the north and the south of the province.⁷⁹

Impact on First Nations

Prince Albert National Park may have been meant as the playground of prairie residents, but a signed order-in-council could not change thousands of years of First Nations history in the north Prince Albert region. Nearby First Nations had already been struggling with legislative restrictions on land and land use. Game and bird laws, open and closed seasons and other ordinances imposed by both the territorial assembly and the provincial administration after 1905 created previously unknown restrictions on First Nations communities. Little Red River reserve was particularly hampered by the creation of the Sturgeon River Forest reserve in 1914, which

⁷⁷ Many of the advocates for National Park status were also members of local Fish and Game leagues. See Webb, “Legal Surveys;” Waiser, *Saskatchewan’s Playground*.

⁷⁸ *The Canada Gazette*, 4 June 1927, Vol. 60, no. 49. Copy found in RG10, Volume 7766 File 27107-4 Pt. 1.

⁷⁹ The area included the original Dominion Forest Reserve as well as adjoining areas to the east and north, for a total of 1377 square miles. As large as it was, the Dominion actually set aside even more land for investigation. Homesteads north of Paddockwood in the Forest Gate district were removed from settlement purposes for more than a year, pending investigation of the region as an addition to the park. This reserved area stretched past Candle Lake to the Whiteswan Lakes region. See Webb, “Legal Surveys;” see also *SAB*, Post-1930 settlement files, R 2004-220 S43. The land was assessed and released back to the Crown for regular homestead or other purposes in 1928. The park borders continued to expand. A major addition in 1929 of several townships north of Waskesiu added another 400 square miles.

restricted hunting, trapping, and gathering activities. By 1920, hunting and trapping licences had been imposed. Lydia Cook of Little Red River reserve, interviewed in 1997, claimed:

The hunting and trapping went on for many years, people were free to hunt and trap where they always had, until one day, resources put a restriction on hunting and trapping and gathering. The people couldn't trap or hunt just anywhere anymore, they were told to move away from their usual trapping areas, but they refused to move. The resources then went around snapping the traps, so that trappers wouldn't catch anything. Eventually, the poor trappers were forced to leave their trapping areas. As a result of this invasion many of our people suffered from hunger, some were near starvation, and some became very sick, and died. ...This was no doubt a conspiracy to weaken the Indians, but it only brought the people closer together and made us a stronger nation.⁸⁰

Mrs. Cook's words provided a chilling and poignant reminder of the power of government regulations to create a severe disconnect between humans and landscape, with tragic results. For the inhabitants of Little Red, the creation of the Sturgeon River Forest reserve and the increased regulation of trapping, hunting, fishing and gathering (including gathering birds' eggs, outlawed in 1914) led to hardship. Such hardship was particularly noticeable, and growing, after the great fire of 1919 and the loss of the lumber industry in the north Prince Albert region. Jobs in nearby lumber camps disappeared. Throughout the 1920s, some inhabitants of Little Red turned to freighting and farming on an increased scale, but forest resources of furs and game remained important to the family economy.

The formation of Prince Albert National Park in 1928 was devastating for those who relied on the products of the land. No hunting or trapping, even within season, was allowed within the park boundaries. With increased agricultural use of the landscape around the reserve to the east, west, and south, and a national park to the north, Little Red River reserve was surrounded and cut off from its traditional forest edge resource base. Those who continued to hunt and trap, as Mrs. Cook noted, could be caught and fined or even jailed for poaching.⁸¹ Prince Albert National Park contained the original Sturgeon River Forest reserve plus two tiers of townships further north. In addition, a vast area east of the third meridian was included, encompassing all of Bittern Lake and Clearsand Lake, and surrounding the west, south, and east

⁸⁰ Mrs. Lydia Cook of Little Red River, Interview with Vicky Roberts, La Ronge Long Term Care Hospital, May 1997. In Vicky Roberts (ed), *Historical Events of the Woodland Cree* (Lac La Ronge Indian Band, 1997), p. 47.

⁸¹For a lyrical example of this problem, see Maria Campbell, *Halfbreed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973). Campbell writes about her father's experience hunting within the park, and being sent to jail.

portions of the vast stretches of Montreal Lake.⁸² The new park, in effect, placed hundreds of square miles of traditional territory beyond the reach of its original inhabitants. It had an immediate impact on the reserve residents at Montreal Lake reserve no. 106, which was surrounded by the new park, as well as the farming reserve at Little Red River.

⁸² For maps of the original creation and later additions, see Waiser, *Saskatchewan's Playground*, p. 18, 23, 53. See also Shortt, "A Survey of the Human History of Prince Albert National Park," p. 112, 113. The part of the new park east of the third meridian was never part of the original Sturgeon River Forest reserve, and so had never experienced hunting or trapping restrictions. This area encompassed Bittern, McPhee and Clearsand Lake. These waters were only indirectly connected to the "chain of lakes" at Waskesiu, through the Montreal River to Montreal Lake, a route that was hazardous in a dry season. The lack of connected water routes, as well as poor trail conditions, reduced the tourism potential of this eastward extension of the park. The primary purpose of this section appeared to be as a large game preserve, although fishing was good at Bittern Lake. Despite its limited tourism potential, the eastern extension may have been added in the hope of a proposed railway extension from Paddockwood. The track had indeed been surveyed, and partly graded, to several miles north of the village. The projected line would probably have gone up the east side of Bittern and Montreal Lakes to La Ronge. Local promoters had high hopes that the rail line would be extended. Prince Albert was the first national park to not have railroad access. The rise of auto tourism for the most part offset the lack of a railway, but it seems probable that park designers may have had rail links in mind. The eastern extension, despite the fact it was recovering from damage from the 1919 fire, may have been made in part on the hope of facilitating a future link by rail. See also James M. Harris, *A Masterpiece in Our Midst: A Review of a Stanley Thompson Masterpiece: Waskesiu Golf Course 1935-2010* (Altona: Printed by Friesens, 2010). Harris argued that both the CPR and the CNR were battling to control northern Saskatchewan. The CNR, planning to build a railway to Lac La Ronge and a luxury hotel at Waskesiu, built the golf course in an effort to compete with the luxury courses in Jasper and Banff.

There was a concerted drive to transform the "new" Montreal Lake Trail north of Paddockwood into a provincial highway, both to facilitate increased homestead traffic and to provide a second road into the national park. Ultimately, the road would connect to Waskesiu via Montreal Lake, providing a "loop" drive through the park. The road was never completed. Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 11 July 1931. "New Tourist Highway to North Looms. Barnett expects 2,000 North Homestead Filings by September. Depending upon the reaction of the federal authorities in the matter, there is a possibility that the much talked of road from Waskesiu to Montreal Lake and then south to Bittern Lake and Paddockwood and Prince Albert, will be started this year as a relief measure. John Barnett, deputy minister of natural resources intimated today. If the federal government favours the proposal it is understood the provincial government is ready to go ahead with the provincial portion from the park boundary to Paddockwood, and link up with the existing park highway. Both governments would undertake the project as a relief measure, and it is felt this would create considerable employment. The deputy minister is keenly enthusiastic about this proposal. He visualizes the proposed road as serving a double purpose. The first would create a loop highway making it possible for park visitors to have the choice of two routes into the park, both of them being scenic. The other viewpoint is from the utility angle. The present land settlement movement is verging into the north via Paddockwood to a considerable extent and future settlement as well as the present would justify a road as proposed."

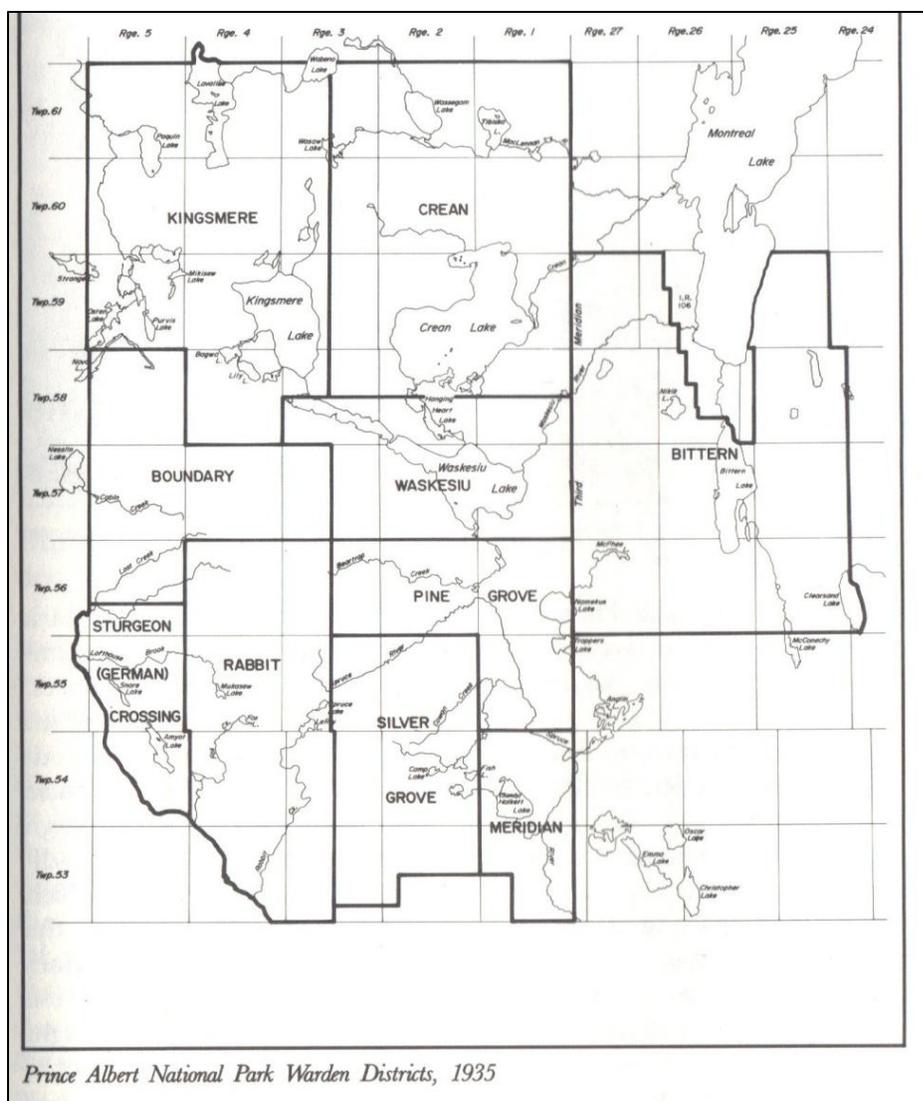


Figure 62. From Waiser, *Saskatchewan's Playground*, p. 53. Indian Reserve 106 is on the southwest side of Montreal Lake, encompassed by Bittern warden district. Little Red is south of Meridian warden district.

The Department of Indian Affairs, along with the Anglican Bishop of Saskatchewan George Exton Lloyd, immediately moved to protest the park. Since the park was already signed into existence, they tried to leverage special consideration for the First Nations people affected by the park borders.⁸³ Hunting of any kind was prohibited within national park boundaries, which operated as national game preserves. Fishing was allowed, but limited to recreational permits and limits, which were of no use to the First Nations communities who derived considerable dietary subsistence from netting and smoking or freezing fish in large quantities. In

⁸³ RG 10, Volume 7766 file 27107-4 Pt.1, Bishop of Saskatchewan George Exton Lloyd to Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs Duncan Scott, 11 July 1927; W. Graham, Indian Commissioner to Secretary, Department of Indian Affairs, 8 July 1927; J.D. McLean, Assistant Deputy Secretary Indian Affairs to Canadian National Parks Branch, Department of the Interior, 15 July 1927.

a letter to Indian Affairs' Superintendent Duncan Scott, Bishop Lloyd noted with disgust, "all of which may be quite all right for the National Park, but what about the Indians who were there before the National Park and surely are entitled to the right to live." It was one thing to make a park right at Waskesiu, Lloyd maintained, but quite another to create a national park of nearly 1,400 square miles in extent. At the very least, Lloyd suggested, the band at Montreal Lake should be allowed to fish on alternate years on Bittern Lake and Trout Lake, but would leave Red Deer Lake "entirely free for the summer tourists, which is the object of the National Park."⁸⁴

National park Commissioner J.B. Harkin flatly refused to consider Lloyd's reasonable request. After all, he noted, the Indians could still fish, within Park regulations "as this is a privilege extended to all." As for game hunting, the creation of the park would, in effect, strengthen game stocks in the region. The animals protected within the game preserve would provide a "constant overflow" to the surrounding area, he argued.⁸⁵ Harkin's haughty and condescending opinion did not fit reality on the ground: the majority of the band's sustenance was derived from white fish, which were taken in quantity by net, and not game fish such as jackfish or pickerel. The national park granted a short-term reprieve to the bands to continue their normal practice of fishing, as long as they did not take game fish. Regardless of restrictions, however, isolation and lack of roads meant the northern band operated much as usual for both hunting and fishing. The game wardens found themselves on constant watch for poaching and band members devised strategies of stealth and misdirection.⁸⁶ By 1947, in response to years of

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, Lloyd to Scott, 11 July 1927.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, Commissioner J.B. Harkin to Duncan McLean, 21 July 1927.

⁸⁶ The creation of the park reignited treaty land entitlement issues in the north Prince Albert region. It was believed that the future of these northern-based First Nations bands lay not in their traditional hunting and fishing grounds but in the already-established farming reserve at Little Red. In many ways, the creation of the park recreated the 'north' in the mind of the southern, white public as a place of recreation and relaxation, not a place to live permanently. It gave added strength to the continued push to move the northern bands to Little Red to engage in farming. Indian Affairs began to push for additional lands to be attached to the Little Red Reserve for the Lac La Ronge band, in lieu of lands in the north that had still not yet been surveyed as reserve land. The band at Little Red wanted the new land in a bloc added to the west of the original reserve. Even though the soil quality was marginal, it was "as satisfactory for farming purposes as any other that could be obtained in the vicinity." Settlers were reaching the end of good homestead land in the Paddockwood region and interest was shifting west, so Indian Affairs believed there was a high degree of urgency to secure the land before it was filed for homestead. RG10 Volume 7766 File 27107-4 pt.1, Secretary, Indian Affairs to W.M. Graham, 25 July 1927; W.M. Graham to Secretary, Department of Indian Affairs, 5 August 1927.

Adding more farmland to Little Red was easier said than done. The new park boundaries encroached on the reserve to the west and north. Negotiations between Indian Affairs and National Parks ensued, which Commissioner Harkin misunderstood. He thought that the Montreal Lake band was willing to give up their reserve at the northern lake in return for an addition to Little Red and possibly a reserve at Candle Lake. Such an exchange of land would facilitate both a southern exodus of reserve residents to the farming reserve and an extension of national park

debate and lobbying by wardens and the park commissioner, Prince Albert National Park was downsized. The area east of the third meridian, encompassing the Montreal Lake reserve, was declassified as national park.⁸⁷

Although the creation of Prince Albert National Park and the growth of the tourism developments at the new 'Lakeland' region had an adverse impact on traditional resource use of the local landscape, it also offered new opportunities. First Nations residents along the forest edge and at the Montreal Lake reserve could participate in the tourist economy, as provisioners, employees, and as tourists themselves, culturally shaping the local green landscape as a First Nations inheritance. First Nations cultural stories of the region, particularly the legend of the Hanging Heart lakes and stories of forest denizen Wisk-ee-chack were prominently told in the Prince Albert *Daily Herald* park commemorative edition and found their way into Department of the Interior promotional brochures. Montreal Lake residents made annual visits to Waskesiu, usually in conjunction with the annual regatta where band members handily won canoe races. Band members often participated in ceremonies, speeches, and pow-wow dances throughout the 1930s.⁸⁸

In 1931, the National Parks branch of the Department of the Interior created a short silent film entitled "Modern Voyageurs" to advertise the new Prince Albert National Park. The main characters in the film were the white tourists and the First Nations men hired by the tourists to take them on a canoe journey through the park. Film viewers were encouraged to come and "circumnavigate the park under the protection of the Indian guides skilled in the use of rod, paddle and frying pan." Certainly, it seemed idyllic for non-native audiences – the Indian guides were shown carrying and loading all the gear, and doing all the paddling while the tourists put

boundaries to include all of Montreal Lake and eliminate the main boreal reserve completely. Indian Affairs was quick to present the terms more clearly, pointing out that the extension of Little Red was not in fact a negotiated exchange with Montreal Lake but a simple proposal to finally bring the La Ronge band up to its treaty land entitlement. Harkin was upset. Montreal Lake reserve was a problem for park staff. Poaching issues from band members rightly unwilling and unable to change their subsistence and hunting activities within their traditional territory put excessive pressure on the game guardians. The proposal to extend the park to include all of Montreal Lake within the park would engulf the reserve at Montreal Lake, exacerbating the poaching problem. Harkin considered such a move, without the elimination of the reserve, "entirely objectionable." See *ibid.*, Harkin to Scott, 28 February 1928; Graham to Indian Affairs, memorandum, 8 March 1928; Mackenzie to Fairchild, 30 March 1928; Harkin to Scott, 28 November 1928; Scott to Harkin, 12 December 1928; Harkin to Scott, 27 December 1928. Northern extension at Montreal Lake never materialized, no exchange was negotiated, nor did the idea of a new reserve at Candle Lake come to be. Negotiating with the Department of the Interior and later the Saskatchewan government (after 1930) for available homestead land, the borders of Little Red were, over time, revised and extended west and north, but the reserve at Montreal Lake remained.

⁸⁷ Bill Waiser gives a crisp overview of the boundary debates in *Saskatchewan's Playground*, p. 40-41, 103.

⁸⁸ See Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 2 August 1928; 9 July 1929; 5 July 1932; 21 July 1932.

their feet up and read books in the middle of the lake. Other duties included putting up the tents, cooking (and fish cleaning), and serving tea. Even the most laborious tasks were trivialized, as “The Indians carry the big canoes as if they were steamer trunks on the shady portage to Crean Lake.”⁸⁹ Although it is unknown how many First Nations people capitalized on tourist opportunities, it was a way to use traditional outdoor skills for a new audience and become a part of the new tourist economy. Some of the members of Little Red River and Montreal Lake spent their summers working at Waskesiu, either for the park as cooks or general workers, or as guides.⁹⁰

The connection between First Nations and the outdoors was exploited by the owners of the “Teepee Tea Room” (built in the shape of a traditional tepee) near Emma Lake and Little Red River reserve on the highway leading to Waskesiu. It offered meals and confectionery items, an auto camp, supervised guides, cottages and boats for rent, camping and fishing and souvenirs made from antlers and wood.⁹¹ Women from the Little Red Reserve, Fish Lake community (a nearby Métis community), and Montreal Lake participated in the tourist economy by making moccasins and other handicrafts such as purses and shopping bags. Some were sold at the Tea Room, more at Waskesiu and at a specially-built store on the roadside between Waskesiu and Montreal Lake. Despite the economic depression during the 1930s, there was a strong demand for the products. One Waskesiu business owner claimed he could have sold over \$1000 worth of Indian crafts one summer if he could have gotten a sure supply.⁹² In addition to crafts, First Nations and Métis ladies took babysitting, cleaning, and cooking jobs around the lakes during the summer tourist season.⁹³ In some ways, summer work within the burgeoning tourist economy

⁸⁹ See *Modern Voyageurs*, Department of the Interior, 1931. I viewed this movie courtesy of the Prince Albert National Park Archives, Waskesiu.

⁹⁰ See “James Brown and Family,” *Tweedsmuir: Community and Courage* (Tweedsmuir History Committee, 2006), p. 40-42.

⁹¹ See *Prince Albert Historical Society, Bill Smiley Archives*, H series H-515 for an advertisement of the Teepee Tea Room.

⁹² Supplying handicrafts was a delicate issue: in the depths of the Depression, under pressure from trapping and hunting restrictions, it was difficult for the crafters to afford the money to purchase supplies. To help out, the Indian Agent at Carleton requested a fund to offset and underwrite these costs, which was granted. See file, “Handicrafts on Little Red, Montreal and Sturgeon,” RG 10 Volume 7553 File 41,107-1 C14818. The fund was a non-refundable loan in the amount of \$300.00. The proceeds of craft sales were to be put back into the fund to purchase more supplies. The Agency also purchased a stamp that read “Guaranteed Indian Handicraft, Carleton Agency, Leask, SK”, a stamp that promoted the agency and its involvement in the crafts rather than the First Nations women who did the work.

⁹³ See *Tweedsmuir: Community and Courage*.

offset the losses caused by the end of the large-scale lumber industry and reduced hunting and trapping returns.

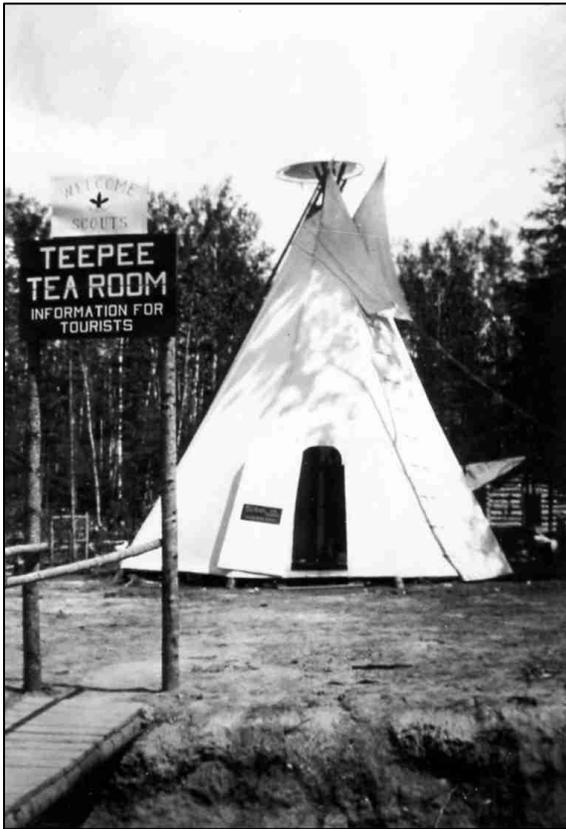


Figure 63. Teepee Tea Room, Emma Lake. *Prince Albert Historical Society Bill Smiley Archives E-301*

Up North On Vacation

The creation of Prince Albert National Park, despite the deep concerns registered by local First Nations communities, led to a bold new campaign to entice tourism into the region. This campaign developed from two sources: the businessmen of Prince Albert anxious to create and cash in on resort tourism; and the Department of the Interior, National Parks branch, desperate to find a way to promote the best features of the new park. Promotion of the new park centered on enticing residents of the open prairies to go north, presenting the park as a prairie ‘playground’ that epitomized the Saskatchewan contrast of boreal north and prairie south. Building on resort success elsewhere, including the development of Clear Lake at Riding Mountain in Manitoba, Waskesiu and the national park became known to prairie residents for its trees, lakes, camping, fishing, boating, and swimming.

The tourism campaign for the park and Lakeland region also tapped into a growing movement, epitomized by MLA T.C. Davis, that Saskatchewan had its own beauty spots, well

worth visiting by tourists eager to spend their time at a relaxing lakeshore resort. Provincial secretary S.J. Latta, at the park opening in 1928, suggested the new slogan should be, “See Saskatchewan First!” He declared: “Nothing will serve more to create that love of country upon which national patriotism is founded, or have greater influence upon the ultimate solidarity of our people, than an intimate knowledge of the Province which is our home.”⁹⁴ Although stirring, such rhetoric only tried to hide the fact that Saskatchewan politicians and merchants were eager to see potential tourist dollars spent at home.

Advertisements that specifically targeted a national and international audience beyond prairie residents zeroed in first and foremost on canoeing expeditions, recalling the romance of the fur trade voyageurs and placing the park firmly as the gateway to the northern wilderness. In the annual report following the creation of the new park, National Parks Commissioner J.B. Harkin blended the prairie/boreal divide with the northern wilderness ethos:

North of the great fertile belt devoted to agriculture there lies in this province a region of rocks, woods and water which seems almost to have been formed by nature as a special playground for man. Here are found thousands of crystal lakes, from tiny rock basins...to great bodies of fresh water. Between, tying one to another into an intricate network of waterways, run innumerable little rivers and streams offering to canoeists and lovers of the wilderness water routes extending for hundreds of miles...irresistible to the adventurous, [these] lakes and streams form a natural gateway to the...hinterland of Canada.⁹⁵

The message of northern beauty and northern vacations was a familiar theme in Canadian public life. In Ontario, for example, the northern wilderness ideal powered much of the northern cottage movement and the development of Algonquin and other rugged northern parks.⁹⁶ The Canadian public consciousness, however, did not have a vision of northern wilderness for Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan, of course, was a flat, treeless prairie. That “mental map” of prairie has continued (despite repeated exhortations to the contrary) to the present.⁹⁷ Many people in southern Saskatchewan, as well, defined the province as ‘prairie’ and, as T.C. Davis’ comments in the Saskatchewan legislature in 1925 revealed, few had ever been north of the treeline. Acknowledging the ‘prairie’ mentality, the Department of the Interior wrote in a natural

⁹⁴ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 2 August 1928.

⁹⁵ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report* 1928. Report of the Commissioner J.B. Harkin, National Parks of Canada, p. 78.

⁹⁶ For a superb look at the wilderness concept in Ontario and its impact on tourism, see Jasen, *Wild Things*.

⁹⁷ For a discussion of mental maps, see Peter Gould and Rodney White, *Mental Maps* (New York: Penguin Books, 1974).

resources publication in 1925, “though it may seem like a paradox to refer to the forests of the Prairie Provinces, the wooded sections...are nevertheless very extensive.”⁹⁸ During the opening of Prince Albert National Park, one visitor wrote: “To many people the word “Saskatchewan” calls up a mind picture of great stretches of open prairie, unrelieved by lake or forest. To them a description of the beauties of the new Prince Albert National Park will come as a surprise.”⁹⁹

The Department of the Interior recognized the importance of image. Its tourist campaign consistently worked to overcome regional stereotypes.¹⁰⁰ The Canadian National Parks branch invested in a wide variety of promotional material, from pamphlets and maps to enlarged and framed photographs, lectures and articles to sheet music, magic lantern slide and moving pictures. The silent documentary “Modern Voyageurs” about Prince Albert National Park was filmed and distributed in 1931; other films, such as “Prairie Land to Fairy Land,” (1933) and “Summer Days at Waskesiu” (1936) were also created to advertise the “playground of the prairies.”¹⁰¹ In addition, several moving pictures were filmed at Ajawaan Lake, showcasing the celebrated public speaker and author, Grey Owl, and his beaver friends.¹⁰² These moving pictures were shown to audiences across Canada and the United States, as well as around the world, in part to overcome the assumptions and stereotypes surrounding Saskatchewan.

By far the largest source of tourist visitors to the park, however, were provincial residents. J.A. Wood, newly-appointed park superintendent, “embarked on a one-man campaign”

⁹⁸ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Natural Resources of the Prairie Provinces. A brief compilation respecting the development of Manitoba Saskatchewan and Alberta*, 1925.

⁹⁹ Prince Albert *Daily Herald* 2 August 1928. Inspiring Messages from the Public. Message from W.J. Patterson.

¹⁰⁰ “The perception held by a potential visitor about an area may have significant influences upon the viability of that area as a tourist recreation area. Although a region may contain a wide spectrum and high quality of tourist-recreation resources, a distorted image may detract from realizing potential use or optimum economic development.” John D. Hunt, “Image as a Factor in Tourism Development,” *Journal of Travel Research* Vol. 13, no.1 (1975): pp. 1-7. Although Hunt’s work postdates the Department of the Interior promotional material by fifty years, Hunt’s argument that image was a major factor in tourist development was clearly well understood.

¹⁰¹ The “Lake Waskesiu Foxtrot” was also written in 1935. See Canada, Department of the Interior *Annual Report*, National Parks of Canada report, “Publicity,” 1931-1936.

¹⁰² Grey Owl, or Archibald Stansfield Belaney, was an intriguing figure in the early tourism promotion of Prince Albert National Park. Despite the recent movement by academics to denigrate Grey Owl and his false identity as a person of First Nations ancestry, Grey Owl was the rock star of environmentalism in his time. He spoke to sold-out audiences in eastern Canada, the United States and Great Britain and his books were bestsellers. Several books offer biographies of Grey Owl and outline his impact on Prince Albert National Park and the environmental movement. In particular, see Waiser, *Saskatchewan’s Playground*, chapter seven; Shortt, “A Survey of the Human History of Prince Albert National Park;” A.G. Ruffo, *Grey Owl: The Mystery of Archie Belaney* (Regina: Coteau Books, 1997); G. Hutchinson, *Grey Owl: The Incredible Story of Archie Belaney 1888-1938* (Breda: Hastings, 1985); for a critical review of Belaney’s self-identity as Indian, see A. Braz, “The Modern Hiawatha: Grey Owl’s Construction of his Aboriginal Self,” in *Auto/biography in Canada: Critical Directions* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005).

through Saskatchewan on a lecture tour to promote the new park.¹⁰³ Illustrated with slides and moving pictures, Wood gave fourteen lectures in major centers of the province.¹⁰⁴ Historian Bill Waiser noted, “Wood knew that Canadians had to be shaken out of their image of Saskatchewan as one large wheat field,” a message that most likely would appeal to, and win over, prairie residents first.¹⁰⁵ Certainly, there is no record of Wood going to any northern communities such as La Ronge or Stanley Mission to advertise the new park. Clientele would be drawn first and foremost from prairie residents with cars, able to make the drive north through Prince Albert and on to the park.

Road Improvement

Car tourism requirements forced both national and provincial authorities to give immediate attention to the state of the roads to and through Prince Albert National Park. In fact, historian Bill Waiser suggested that the Prince Albert merchants pushed for national park status in large part because the dominion would be responsible for major road improvements.¹⁰⁶ The park’s first order of business was to build a road from its south entrance to the budding resort at Waskesiu. The freight road existed, but it was never built with beauty or scenery in mind. Its main use as a winter freight road required it to follow level, rather flat land as much as possible; in summer, parts of it were all but impassable through the muskeg and swamp.¹⁰⁷ A better road, more scenic and crossing higher ground, built for car traffic, was necessary.

¹⁰³ Waiser, *Saskatchewan’s Playground*, p. 38-39.

¹⁰⁴ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report*, National Parks of Canada, 1929.

¹⁰⁵ Waiser, *Saskatchewan’s Playground*, p. 38.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁷ Harkin noted in the annual report for 1928-1929 that over 5,000 people visited the park the first year, “a large number, considering the fact that its reputation was as yet largely local and that parties traveling had to bring with them tents and camping equipment.” Moreover, “road conditions were not good,” that first year, as the new highway had been graded, but not yet opened to traffic. See Department of the Interior, *Annual Report*, National Parks of Canada, Report of the Commissioner J.B. Harkin, 1929.

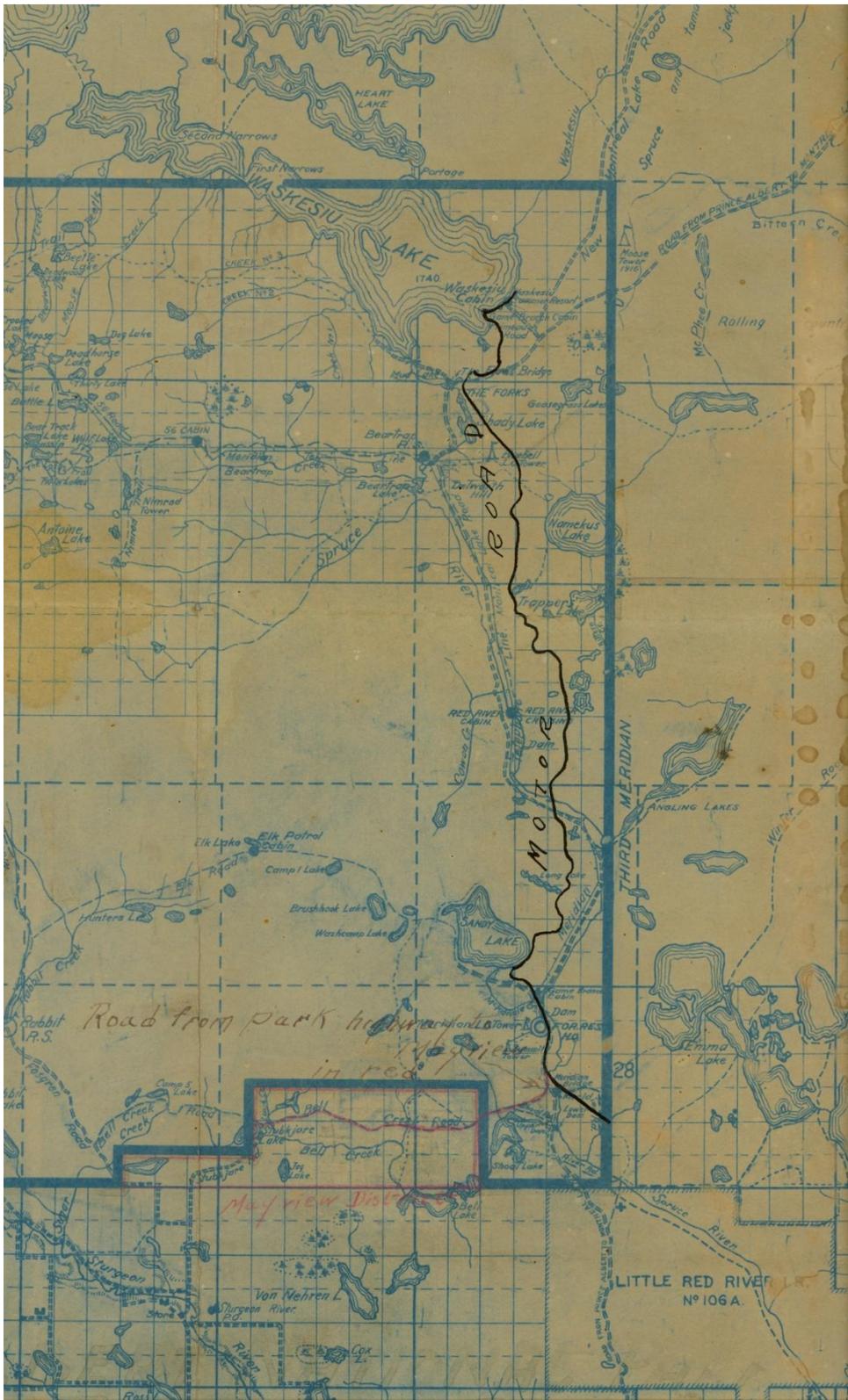


Figure 64. From Friends of Prince Albert National Park, Waskesiu, Sturgeon River Forest Reserve map. The motor road was hand-drawn on this map to contrast the freight trails that existed before. Today, cyclists and hikers can still use the old 'Freight Trail' section of the park, to the west of the auto road.

While the park executed their road, engineered with “as many curves as possible,”¹⁰⁸ the provincial government agreed to improve the road leading to the park entrance. Disregarding the oldest route past Sturgeon Lake and through Little Red River reserve, the government chose to improve the road straight north from Prince Albert, giving better access to the agricultural communities at Buckland, Alingly, Spruce Home, Henribourg and Northside. It swung west at the Fourteenth Base Line, passing just south of Christopher and Emma Lakes. Resort owners at Christopher and Emma lobbied strongly for this route.¹⁰⁹ The road hooked up with the park road at its southern terminus. Having a provincial-grade road led to an explosion in tourism traffic and economic expansion for both the burgeoning Lakeland region and Prince Albert National Park.

Following the official ‘opening’ of the national park in 1928, the number of visitors to the north Prince Albert region skyrocketed. Over 5000 people visited the park in 1928; in 1929, that number doubled. In 1930, it almost doubled again, with over 17,000 people visiting, but that number was dwarfed in 1931, when a staggering 29,537 tourists registered at the Park.¹¹⁰ “That the people of Saskatchewan, and tourists generally, appreciate Prince Albert National Park is clearly indicated by statistics,” exclaimed the park report for 1931.¹¹¹ Prince Albert businessmen eagerly championed the new tourist industry. They turned to outfitting tourists, selling everything from bathing suits and tents to fishing supplies and canoes. Business boomed for the R.D. Brooks Company, which specialized in freight hauling into the north. The company initiated a truck hauling service to move camping outfits from Prince Albert to Waskesiu, with stops in the Lakeland area.¹¹² The Saskatchewan Motor Club turned its attention to providing information and taking care of signage along the way, to direct tourists both through Prince Albert and up to the Lakeland and park region.

¹⁰⁸ Waiser, *Saskatchewan’s Playground*, p. 42.

¹⁰⁹ Saskatchewan. Department of the Environment. *A Study of Land and Water Use at Emma and Christopher Lakes* Final Report March 1976, p. 44. The original park road is now Provincial Highway no. 263, advertised as the “scenic route” to Prince Albert National Park.

¹¹⁰ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report*, Canada Parks Reports, 1928-1935.

¹¹¹ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report*, 1932. Prince Albert National Park report.

¹¹² See advertisement, Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 9 July 1929. “Ever Progressing. Pioneers of Northern Transportation. Brooks Construction and Transportation Co. Ltd. Tourists, Campers, Hunters, Prospectors and Traders Supplies transported to any point. Special passenger service for the North. Cars, trucks and canoes in daily service. Direct connections with Western Canada Airways and Cherry Red Airline plane flying into the North. Daily truck service to Emma, Christopher and Waskesiu Lakes.”

BROOKS' AIRWAYS LTD.

TOURISTS', HUNTERS', PROSPECTORS' SUPPLIES and EQUIPMENT TRANSPORTED TO ANY POINT

Special Passenger Service to the North

Aerial Tours Arranged In The
NATIONAL PARK AND TO LAC LA RONGE
These Trips Offer Scenic Beauty of a Rare Nature

Summer Bases:—
WASKESIU and LAC LA RONGE
Winter Bases:—
PRINCE ALBERT and TASHOTA, ONT.

R. D. BROOKS, President

Associated Companies

Brooks Fish Company Ltd.
WHOLESALE DEALERS IN FRESH WATER FISH
LAKE TROUT A SPECIALTY
FISH CONVEYED TO MARKETS BY AIR
(Winter Season)

Brooks Construction and Transportation Company Ltd
Builders of
RAILWAYS AND GOVERNMENT HIGHWAYS
"Pioneers of Northern Transportation"

HEAD OFFICES: PRINCE ALBERT
SECOND AVENUE WEST

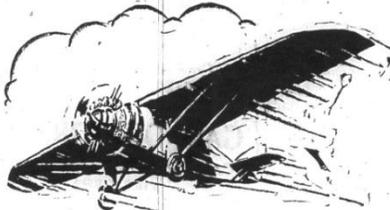



Figure 65. Prince Albert *Daily Herald* advertisement for Brooks suite of businesses, 9 July 1929.

The Lakeland region, on the road to the national park, grew as tourist traffic expanded.¹¹³ Developments outside the park boundaries were unfettered by the limitations at Waskesiu, where strict national protocols were in place. Resort and cottage development outside the park, as well as fishing regulations, were monitored by provincial and municipal authorities. A group of citizens formed the Emma Lake Outing Club sometime in the late 1920s and purchased land around the south end of Emma Lake.¹¹⁴ Development at Sunnyside beach, Macintosh Point, Neis' beach and Sunset Bay at Emma Lake was mirrored by resort work at Christopher Lake, particularly at Johnson's (now known as Bell's) beach. Daily correspondence throughout July and August from both Emma Lake and Waskesiu, reported in the Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, gave fishing reports, weather updates, cabin building, dances, news and events throughout the

¹¹³ A road was built from this provincial highway between Christopher and Emma Lake heading north past Oscar Lake to the excellent fishing to be found at Anglin Lake, linking the three resort areas (Oscar Lake was never developed – it is essentially a big slough with few fish). Thus Anglin's development kept pace with Christopher and Emma. A small portion of Anglin Lake falls within National Park boundaries, so its history has always been intimately tied with park issues.

¹¹⁴ SAB, NR.1/1 Department of Natural Resources F-400-F/EL Forestry, Emma Lake, 1930, "Emma Lake Outing Club."

1930s. The 1930s, researchers and local residents reported, were a boom period of recreational development in the north Prince Albert region.¹¹⁵

The phenomenal growth of tourism in the new northern Saskatchewan vacationland carried on despite the severe economic effects of the Great Depression. It was “striking evidence of the fact that the people realize the necessity for recreation in a period of economic stress even more, perhaps, than at other times,” national parks Commissioner J.B. Harkin believed.¹¹⁶ It was also cheap. In comparison to lengthy car trips or railway excursions west, east, or south into the United States, a visit to Lakeland and Prince Albert National Park was an inexpensive holiday for both local and prairie residents. The majority of visitors recorded at the park gates registered from Prince Albert and surrounding towns; the next largest group came from cities, towns and farms on the prairies. The Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, eager to promote the park to a broader audience, consistently sought out travelers from other provinces or the United States, soliciting their comments on the park. Invariably, the paper recorded positive, enthusiastic reviews which declared Prince Albert National Park among the best recreational facilities and beauty spots anywhere.¹¹⁷ Such reviews catered to the local and provincial audience, assuaging their fear that due to the Depression, they were missing out on something wonderful elsewhere. On the contrary, the paper contended. Prince Albert National Park, and the trip to the park through Lakeland, offered the most beautiful – and affordable – trip possible.

Tourism and Permanent Settlement

As early as 1922, the National Parks branch proclaimed that tourist travel should be valued not only for tourism development but in its role “as a forerunner of permanent settlement and financial investment...tourist travel, in fact, is one of the best immigration agencies, one of the best methods of attracting ...capital.”¹¹⁸ People traveling to or through a region for tourism purposes would be more inclined to return and build a permanent abode or invest in development

¹¹⁵ Saskatchewan, Department of the Environment report, *A Study of Land and Water Use at Emma and Christopher Lakes*, 1976, p. 45. “Lake water levels were considerably higher than at present, and there was easy access from one lake to another. During the 1930s close to one hundred cottages and approximately seven day-use resort areas had emerged. In addition, several institutional camps were formed [such as church camps and the Art Camp at Murray Point]. In less than ten years the land had totally changed its character from wilderness trapping to recreation.”

¹¹⁶ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report* 1932, Prince Albert National Park report.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Prince Albert *Daily Herald* 3 July 1931; 5 August 1932; 2 July 1934.

¹¹⁸ Canada, Department of the Interior *Annual Report* 1922, Report of Commissioner J.B. Harkin, Canadian National Parks.

schemes. Certainly, the Department of the Interior (of which National Parks was a branch) promoted permanent settlement.



Saskatchewan Unrolls Northward

PROVINCE BECOMES NORTH-MINDED AS SETTLEMENT AREA EXTENDS

Provincial Control of Natural Resources has made possible this year, the largest bona fide Settlement Activity North of the North Saskatchewan, in the History of the Country.

564 ENTRIES HAVE BEEN GRANTED IN THE PRINCE ALBERT DISTRICT, ALONE, SINCE NOVEMBER 1, 1930.



SOUTH LOOKS TO NORTH FOR NEW RECREATIONAL PLAYGROUNDS

With the National Park already firmly established as one of Canada's Premier Tourist Resorts, the North has additional recreational attraction to offer at Emma Laké Provincial Forest—

EMMA LAKE PROVINCIAL FOREST IS 150 SQUARE MILES IN EXTENT, AND HAS MANY DISTINCTIVE FEATURES.

Lands Posted For Settlement And Pasture Purposes

Nipawin District	200
Witchehan Lake and Big River District	700
North Prince Albert District ..	200
Total Quarter Sections	1,100

In addition, there are 100 quarter-sections to be posted in T.54,R.12, West of 3rd Meridian.

MINING ACTIVITY

As at June 30, 1931, the following are the number of Mining Leases and Claims in good standing:

Alkali leases	45
Coal leases	158
Petroleum and natural gas leases	544
Quarrying leases	62
Quartz leases	318
Quartz surface leases	22
Quartz claims	1007
Miners' licenses issued	155

Emma Lake Is Accessible From Highway To Park

The Provincial Forest is 30 miles north of Prince Albert; has heavy stands of White Spruce, Poplar and Jack Pine; and many varieties of Wild Fruit.

Moose, deer, bear, partridge and ducks abound; its lakes teem with pike and pickerel, while bathing beaches enhance the lure of the many lakes within the forest bounds.

**FINGERS OF SETTLEMENT PUSHING NORTHWARD WILL
HASTEN DEVELOPMENT OF NORTHLAND'S MINERAL WEALTH**

THE DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. J. T. M. Anderson, D.Paed.,
Minister.

Broder Building, Regina, Sask.

Major John Barnett,
Deputy Minister

Figure 66. "Saskatchewan Unrolls Northward." Prince Albert *Daily Herald* 5 July 1931.

The interrelationship between permanent settlement and scenic park areas was highlighted by the Paddockwood board of trade in 1933.¹¹⁹ This group, made up of local businessmen, created a booster-style immigration pamphlet to advertise Paddockwood as a destination of choice for dried-out prairie farmers heading north.¹²⁰ During the 1930s, an estimated 45,000 people moved from the open plains north to the forest fringe, fleeing the dual prongs of agricultural depression and drought. Paddockwood merchants saw this movement as an opportunity to grow their businesses, and set out to draw settlement.

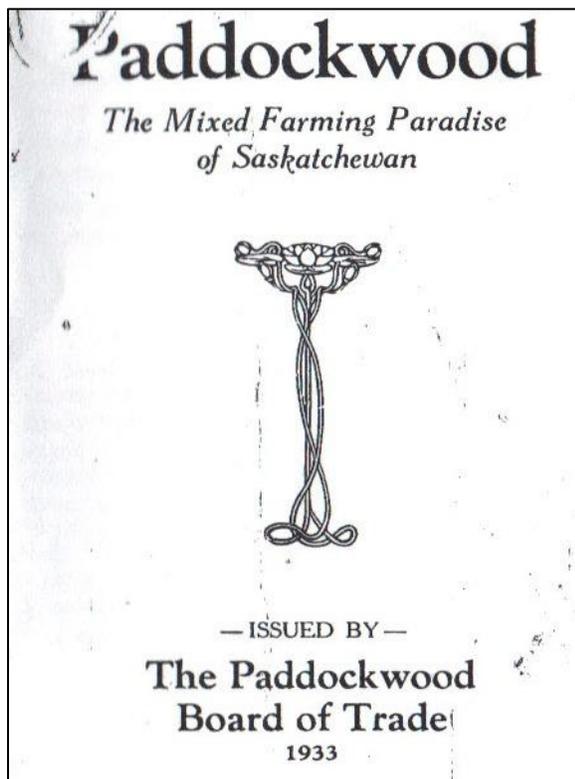


Figure 67. “Paddockwood: The Mixed Farming Paradise of Saskatchewan.” Courtesy the *Paddockwood Museum*.

To entice prairie refugees, the pamphlet promoted Paddockwood’s situation adjacent to the Lakeland region, just off the “National Park all weather highway.”¹²¹ The burgeoning resort at Candle Lake featured centrally in the pamphlet, particularly the fact that the new road to Candle Lake passed through Paddockwood. That new highway “passes through miles of virgin

¹¹⁹ The Paddockwood board of trade formed in 1932, and operated throughout the Great Depression, disbanding in 1938. For its formation, see Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 6 September 1932.

¹²⁰ The Hon. President of this Board of Trade was T.C. Davis, M.L.A. for the Prince Albert region. The Hon. Vice President was W.W. Whelan, once a Dominion Lands agent and homestead inspector. Other members included merchants, real estate agents and postmasters, as well as local farmers who operated large threshing businesses or cordwood camps.

¹²¹ “Paddockwood: The Mixed Farming Paradise of Saskatchewan,” found in the Walter Whelan Scrapbook, *Prince Albert Historical Society Bill Smiley Archives*, Prince Albert.

forest, untouched by the ravages of fire and unblemished by the axe of man...without equal for scenery.” The road, built to allow car traffic, “will attract tourists to Candle Lake, one of the finest lakes in the Province for size, beaches, and fishing.”¹²² Clearly, the Paddockwood merchants believed that people would be more likely to immigrate to places that were not only economically viable, but beautiful. Situating Paddockwood in close proximity to Lakeland and the national park pushed an aesthetic agenda that was intimately tied to economic development. The resorts offered beauty and recreation on Paddockwood’s doorstep, and a market for farm products from local homesteaders.

Science of Settlement

Of course, the Paddockwood pamphlet primarily promoted agricultural settlement which would hew the trees to ‘make land’ for cereal crops. Its rhetoric mixed extractive and essentially destructive development with concepts of virgin beauty unblemished by human intervention. Yet, the Paddockwood board of trade felt no qualms about the obvious conflict. The dominion government quarter-section surveys of 1920 identified the best use for land at the microlocal setting, an intensive “science of settlement.” The creation of the Sturgeon River Forest reserve and later, Prince Albert National Park, evoked spatial boundaries of landscape usage.

When the federal government transferred the natural resources of Saskatchewan to provincial control in 1930, the province initiated the Saskatchewan *Royal Commission on Immigration and Settlement* to determine the best use and disposal of the land. The commission believed in scientific settlement. Studying the general malaise in agriculture and the deficiencies of the homestead system (where farmers sometimes took poor land without knowing its crop-growing potential), the commission determined that part of the solution was to examine the land more closely. Questioning the Reeve of the RM of Buckland during the royal commission proceedings at Prince Albert, the commission representative asked “Don’t you think [settlement] should be directed a little more scientifically to stop this waste of effort ...more directed settlement before the people should be allowed to go in. That the character of the land should be determined by experts, so that people would know what kind of land they are going on to?”¹²³ The Reeve agreed. Soil testing and extensive land studies were needed to determine land capability and best-use practices across the province.

¹²² “Paddockwood: The Mixed Farming Paradise of Saskatchewan.”

¹²³ SAB R249 Vol. 36. *Royal Commission on Immigration and Settlement (Saskatchewan)* 1930. Evidence taken at Prince Albert, 26 April 1930. Testimony of Duncan McLeod.

The commissioner's question revealed not only the obvious agricultural aspect of scientific settlement, but an underlying belief that land could have usage other than agriculture. Some land was not suited for farming, but might support recreational pursuits, grazing land, timber, cordwood, hunting, or berry picking, the commissioner suggested.¹²⁴ Localized and site-specific understanding of best practices for land use allowed for a nuanced and sometimes conflicting representation of the landscape as both recreational and agricultural. Sometimes, both could exist on the same quarter of land. For instance, those farmers whose land straddled the Garden River or contained large bodies of water could provide diving platforms, docks, and even boats for neighbours and children to use for recreation. That same river could provide water for stock diversification. In winter, the Paddockwood hockey team, The Muskeg Elks, practiced on that same frozen river.¹²⁵

Localized landscape use that could combine economic pursuits with recreation contributed to the social capital of the community, not necessarily the economic capital of the individual farmer.¹²⁶ During the Depression, such instances of social capital drew people to the forest fringe. The overall message, such as presented by the Paddockwood board of trade, was that farmland in the north Prince Albert region offered settlers beauty, water, greenery, and trees – an enticing contrast to the open plains. The Paddockwood board of trade attempted to draw people north using a combination of agriculture and recreation, mixing the message of agricultural hope (mixed farming) with relaxation and leisure, both ultimately as a contrast to the stress and pain of prairie life during the Depression.

Murray Point Art School

The contrast between the boreal north and the prairie south fuelled much of the tourist boom of the 1920s and 1930s in the northern vacationland. The contrast also provided a key element in a new cultural endeavour launched in 1936 – the Murray Point Art School at Emma Lake, headed by artist Augustus Kenderdine. Kenderdine, professionally trained and mentored in Europe, immigrated to Saskatchewan in 1908. He started working as an art instructor at the University of Saskatchewan in the mid-1920s and soon after built a cabin at Emma Lake. His

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ See *Cordwood and Courage*, various family stories. For reference to the Muskeg Elks, see “McGowan, Sargent Hugh and Muriel,” p. 355.

¹²⁶ For a recent analysis on the concept of social capital, see Irene Van Staveren and B. Knorringa (eds.), *Beyond Social Capital: A Critical Approach* (London: Routledge, 2008). For a Saskatchewan evaluation and case study of the concept in action, see Polo Diaz and Mark Nelson, “The Changing Prairie Social Landscape of Saskatchewan: The Social Capital of Rural Communities,” *Prairie Forum* Vol. 30, no. 1 (2005): pp. 43-54.

northern excursions fundamentally shaped the future of art in Saskatchewan. He convinced the University of Saskatchewan to build an art camp on a secluded peninsula jutting into Emma Lake, renamed Murray Point.¹²⁷ Reporters followed the creation of the art school with great enthusiasm. Kenderdine, one Saskatchewan reporter asserted, showed prairie residents “the way to the resorts, and he leads them into beauty.” His canvases, depicting the northern landscape, offered “beautiful glimpses into the lovely lakelands.”¹²⁸

Art historian Keith Bell argued that the prairie landscape, with its overtly agrarian settlement grid, was perceived as less and less “natural.”¹²⁹ The north, with its trees and lakes, by contrast, was perceived as more natural and wild. The prairie environment throughout the 1930s was increasingly disfigured by drought. The disfiguration was not only economic and physical, but cultural as well. University of Saskatchewan president J.S. Thompson summed it up in 1947: “Life was becoming grim and weary [in Saskatchewan during the Depression]. It was then, of all times, that [Kenderdine] thought of beginning a summer school of art to let the young folk of Saskatchewan see beauty in a land that men were coming to hate as a place of darkness and defeat.”¹³⁰



Figure 68. Augustus Kenderdine painting at Emma Lake. www.scaa.usask.ca.

¹²⁷ Walter Murray was the first President of the University of Saskatchewan. Murray promoted the development of the art department at the University and hired Kenderdine.

¹²⁸ *University of Saskatchewan Archives*, RG 13 S.2 Year Books, Murray Point, 1936. Newspaper article, no name, no date, entitled “Kenderdine Pictures are vivid stories of western progress.”

¹²⁹ Keith Bell, “Augustus Kenderdine: Representing the Northern Saskatchewan Landscape,” in *Augustus Kenderdine 1870-1947* (Kenderdine Gallery, Agriculture Building, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, 1991), pp. 13-19.

¹³⁰ Excerpt from Memorial Tribute to Augustus Kenderdine, given by University of Saskatchewan President J.S. Thompson, 5 August 1947. Quoted in Ann K. Morrison, “Beginnings: The Murray Point Summer School of Art 1936-1955,” in *The Flat Side of the Landscape: The Emma Lake Artists’ Workshops* (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1989), p. 21.

Kenderdine's art school in a northern, forested landscape provided a contrast familiar to both Canadian and British eyes. For Ontarians in particular, northern 'cottage country' was well established through growing tourism and the work of the Group of Seven. For British audiences, Scottish landscapes were wild and northern, "visited and experienced as a tourist in the summertime, and then left for the south when the season was over."¹³¹ Planting an art school in what was becoming cottage country was a Saskatchewan version of similar activities elsewhere. Reflecting in large part a nineteenth-century Romantic notion of the wilderness landscape as a primeval cathedral within which to commune directly with God, students would come north and find spiritual rebirth, sanctuary and peace. Kenderdine believed that Murray Point offered a cultural renaissance for drought-stricken southerners: green and fresh would contrast dry earth; the mixed boreal forest with the treeless landscape; hope with despair.

The main participants in the summer art school were high school art teachers drawn from prairie agricultural communities hit hard by the Depression. Kenderdine's vision of northern beauty would shake and reinvigorate the Saskatchewan identity to look beyond its current dry dustiness and develop a broader cultural inclusion of Saskatchewan's north. "Having absorbed this transcendental experience, artists and art teachers from drought affected farming areas would be able to return home after their classes at Murray Point with both a strong personal experience and a new optimism about life in the province," art historian Keith Bell suggested.¹³² The optimism would ideally feed back through the school system to the students who would, in future, incorporate both solitudes of the provincial landscape into their cultural paradigm. Kenderdine used art to do what T.C. Davis called for in 1925 – make the south acquainted with the north.

Kenderdine's efforts to establish an art school in Saskatchewan in the middle of the Great Depression has been met with bewilderment by most commentators. A deeper analysis of the north Prince Albert region, in particular the rise of the resort culture and tourism, balances this picture. The Great Depression and the classic images of dust and despair represented, in part, what Kenderdine and the art students were running *from*; Emma Lake and the northern forested landscape showed what they were running *to*.

¹³¹ Bell, "Augustus Kenderdine," p. 13.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Conclusion

Tourism to the north Prince Albert region was promoted using a unique cultural paradigm. Whereas traditional tourism promotion generally rested on an urban/rural divide, tourism within the Lakeland/Prince Albert National Park region drew its force primarily from Saskatchewan's prevalent north/south ecological divide. Tourism promoters understood that the majority of tourist clientele would be Saskatchewan prairie residents with access to motorcars. "Northward Ho!" was the slogan some used, eager to exchange "the bleak and dusty regions" for "the luring vista of vast expanses of forest land with silvery glimpses here and there of the small lakes." After a tremendous holiday spent fishing, boating, camping, swimming, dancing and enjoying the landscape, the prairie holidaymaker would head "back to the dusty south with fond memories of the short holiday trip and with many resolutions to be back again next year determined to see the holiday paradise of the north to its fullest extent."¹³³ To entice prairie tourists, promoters consistently referred to the northern and forested landscape, emphasizing contrast with the southern prairies and the ecological duality of Saskatchewan.

The narrative of duality and contrast was also used by those who promoted mixed farming agricultural settlement along the edge of the forest. While agriculture and trees/beauty may on the surface appear conflicting, those conflicts broke down at the microlocal setting. The science of settlement and highly-governed state intervention in the north Prince Albert region included evaluating and setting aside large areas for forest reserves, national parks, or resort development. Only land considered fit for agriculture was left open to homestead regulations. Mixed farming promoters such as the Paddockwood board of trade advocated a landscape-based lifestyle that invoked both use and beauty – reminiscent of author L.M. Montgomery's "flowery peroration on the possibilities of the country" and HBC servant Anthony Henday's invocation of the future Prince Albert region as "pleasant *and* plentiful." Intensive local knowledge and use of space accommodated both concepts – farming and recreation – within the same general region and sometimes on the same quarter of land.¹³⁴

Artist Augustus Kenderdine's vision of a northern landscape of idyllic beauty resonated as a bold and hopeful contrast to the devastation of the dust bowl of the southern plains, using art

¹³³ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 24 July 1934. "Going North as the Holiday Maker Sees."

¹³⁴ Resort owner George Neis at Emma Lake provided a classic example of this duality. Although he worked to develop Neis' Beach resort, he also operated a farm on the same quarter, raising and selling eggs, chickens, milk, cream, and butter to tourists. See Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 7 August 1931.

to construct a new concept that incorporated both solitudes of the provincial identity. The narrative of contrast and connection provided a point of leverage not only for local tourist development, but ultimately for all non-agricultural development in the north. Responding to T.C. Davis' claim that Saskatchewan had experienced a 'lop-sided' development strategy, the tourist and agricultural push into the north Prince Albert region (along with cordwood and lumber, fishing, mining, and freighting ventures) combined to provide a strong sociocultural foundation that underscored the pull of the north for refugee migrants of the Great Depression. It also set the stage for later northern development after the Second World War.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ For northern development in Saskatchewan post-1945, see David Quiring, *Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers and Fur Sharks: CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).

Chapter Six: “Even the Turnips were Edible”: Depression Refugees and Resilience at the Forest Edge

April, 1934. Tenant farmer Sargent McGowan of the east Weyburn district loaded his settlers’ effects into a boxcar: horses, cows, chickens, a wagon and a plow, other implements, seed grain, household furniture, kitchen supplies, bedding, and provisions. When everything was loaded, McGowan climbed in, to keep the animals fed and watered on the three-day journey. He left Weyburn black and whirling, wrapped in a dust storm so intense he could not see the caboose, although his settler car was just in front of it. McGowan’s journey took him north to Paddockwood, to the forest fringe region north of Prince Albert. When McGowan arrived, there was still two feet of snow on the ground. The contrast between the violent prairie duststorm at Weyburn and the sight of snow at Paddockwood was “enough to put the memory of Weyburn back behind a huge cloud of dust, and there it stayed.”¹

In Saskatchewan, an estimated 45,000 people moved north during the Great Depression.² The massive internal migration, known as the Great Trek, changed the face of the province: prairie farms were abandoned or sold to neighbours, parkland regions filled to capacity, and agriculture pushed back the eaves of the forest. Great Trek refugees moved, not just away from the dried-up prairie, but toward a place of hope, a place with potential water, trees, garden produce and hay. Trekkers defined their new landscape in terms of the old, comparing what they

¹ Sarge McGowan, “Gee and Haw,” *Cordwood and Courage* (Paddockwood and District History Book. Altona: Printed by Friesen Printers, 1982), p. 634-35. For the McGowan story, see “McGowan, Sargent Hugh and Muriel,” *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 354-357.

²This number was conservatively calculated by G.E. Britnell, *The Wheat Economy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1939), p. 202-203. Census material between 1930 and 1936 showed an increase of 9,438 farms in the parkland and forest zones. A further two thousand homesteads were filed from 1935 to 1940. Britnell noted that the actual number of settlers who moved was “in excess of” 45, 000 but that many of the resettlers could not be traced. The estimated number of 45,000 has been repeated by most researchers, including Denis Patrick Fitzgerald, in his unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, “Pioneer Settlement in Northern Saskatchewan,” University of Minnesota, 1966; T.J.D. Powell, “Northern Settlement,” *Saskatchewan History* Vol. 30, no. 3 (1977): pp. 81-98; and John McDonald, “Soldier Settlement and Depression Settlement in the Forest Fringe of Saskatchewan,” *Prairie Forum* Vol. 6, no. 1 (1981): pp. 35-55. McDonald points to Census records which indicate that forest fringe population in 1941 (excluding Prince Albert) “exceeded 80,000, just over half of whom had migrated north during the 1930s.” R.A. Stutt produced an exhaustive study of the forest fringe in 1946 and argued that of those interviewed, nearly one-third had “migrated from the farming districts of southern Saskatchewan.” One-third was an average: in the north west (Meadow Lake and region) one half were migrants; in the north east (Nipawin-Carrot River area) only one quarter were prairie migrants. See R.A. Stutt, *Land Settlement in Northern Pioneer Areas of Saskatchewan* (Agricultural Institute of Canada. Reprinted from “Agricultural Institute Review,” January 1946), p. 4.

left behind with what they found in the north. The forest edge landscape was desirable because it was *not* the prairie.

The ecology and the economy were different along the forest edge than the southern prairie. In the midst of the worst Depression in living memory, forest fringe towns across Saskatchewan, including those in the north Prince Albert region, became oases in a desert landscape. “The 1930s were boom times for Paddockwood,” local residents remembered.³ Mixed farming, lumber and cordwood, freighting, commercial fishing, wild game and berries, and tourism – all industries, forest products, or activities that had a long history at the forest edge – combined to offer Depression migrants an economic as well as an ecological refuge.

For some, moving north was a temporary retreat; others found long-term resilience, drawing back full circle to traditional First Nations use of the north Prince Albert region. The ecological edge had provided a seasonal place of refuge for prairie First Nations in times of stress, such as a harsh winter or when bison were scarce. Forest-adapted bands found long-term resilience at the ecological edge, but *only* for small bands operating on a much smaller scale than plains bands. During the Great Depression, wheat farmers – like their bison-dependent First Nations counterparts sixty years before – edged near starvation and were forced to rely on government assistance. Many chose to move north to the forest edge simply to obtain the basic essentials of life: food, shelter, and warmth. There, they encountered a small, but temporally deep culture embraced by both First Nations and newcomers. It was a northern paradigm of long-term resilience that drew heavily on mixed farming, occupational pluralism, and forest resources to provide a practical, self-sufficient way of life where subsistence was the first priority.

As analysts have indicated, some migrants experienced worse conditions and soon moved away, overwhelmed by the attempt to bring agriculture to the forest landscape. Overall, though, northern migration – while difficult – was successful. Families at the forest edge required less relief than their southern counterparts. In many places, migration continued to climb until the Second World War, after which both the southern prairies and the northern parkland/forest fringe experienced extensive out-migration. Increased farm mechanization and consolidation, urban industrialization and the post-war population shift to urban centers were important factors underlying the movement away from both prairie and forest fringe farms. Those who stayed expanded their acreage and, in time, some farms at the forest edge became indistinguishable

³ Paddockwood Museum. Paddockwood *Pow-Wow*, Diamond Jubilee edition, 1965, “Down Memory Lane.”

from those in the adjoining parkland and prairie. The experiences of the Great Depression resonated strongly, though, and the forest edge culture continued to embrace self-sufficiency as a primary hallmark of success.

Historiography

Much has been written about the Great Depression in Canada, and in particular its effects in Saskatchewan, where environmental and economic disaster spelled ruin for many.⁴ The Great Depression has been categorized as “ten lost years,” a time when “our world stopped and we got off.”⁵ Certainly, the defining image of those years came from the prairies, the immense dust storms that simply blew the land – and the people – away. That image, however, has obscured the story of forest edge migration, northern boom, adaptation and hope within the province in the face of the Depression.



Figure 69. Tractor buried in drifting soil. *Glenbow Archives*, NA 2291-2.

⁴ Some of the most interesting texts include: *The Dirty Thirties in Prairie Canada* (B.C. Geographical Series no. 26, History Department, University of Calgary, 1980); James Gray, *Men Against the Desert* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1967); J.H. Thompson with A. Seager, *Canada, 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985); James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983); *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R.B. Bennett* edited by L.M. Grayson and M. Bliss (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971). Numerous theses have been written on various aspects of the Depression in Saskatchewan, including Alma Lawton, “Urban Relief in Saskatchewan During the Years of the Depression, 1930-1939,” unpublished MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1969; D. G. Matheson, “The Saskatchewan Relief Commission 1931-1934,” unpublished MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1974; Dawn Bowen, “‘Forward to a Farm’: The Back-to-the-Land Movement as a Relief Initiative in Saskatchewan during the Great Depression,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Queen’s University, 1999. For an overview of the decade, including the Great Trek migration, see Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2005), “Nothing of Everything.”

⁵ Both these quotes are taken from well-known book and article titles. Barry Broadfoot, *Ten Lost Years 1929-1939* (Canada: Doubleday/Paperjacks, first printing 1975); “Our World Stopped and We Got Off,” chapter one of James Gray, *The Winter Years* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1966).

Tempted by stories of desperation and despair, Great Trek analysts have focused on hungry and frantic families, devastated by drought and poor agricultural prices, forced north to a “place of last resort.”⁶ Historians and geographers have presented the migration through government relief and resettlement policy analysis, agricultural hazards, and the shocking stories of loss, brutal conditions, and bewilderment of urban and prairie people trying to eke out a living in the bush.⁷ Although there is ample evidence to support these characterizations, the story is incomplete. To assume that northern lands were taken only when the better agricultural land of the prairies had all been settled negated the experience of northern migrants who had already tried prairie farming and found it wanting. For those who abandoned the prairies, which was the more ‘marginal’ landscape? The ‘place of last resort’ narrative also dismissed the extensive ‘pull’ factors that drew people north. Depression migration was not, in fact, a radical reaction to particular environmental and economic circumstances. The Great Trek was a proactive response to improve living conditions and open new possibilities for earning a living. Drought migration was a continuation and escalation of practices that had been in place for a long time.

Prelude to the Great Trek

The first reference to a ‘trek’ of southern refugees was in 1919 – ten years before the start of the Great Depression. Northern migration gained strength throughout the 1920s, as ‘trekkers’ from the Palliser Triangle or other drought regions found their way to the parkland and forest edge. Northern settlement throughout the 1920s was augmented by soldier settlement, the 3000 British Families scheme, and the work of the Department of Colonization of the Canadian National Railway (CNR). Mechanization, agricultural prosperity in the latter half of the 1920s, and the new provision for second homesteads led to an explosion of interest in northern regions.⁸ The branch line from Prince Albert to Paddockwood, owned by the CNR, was a favourite northern route.

⁶ Geographer J. David Wood in particular advocated the theory that hapless migrants occupied northern farms “in desperation after the more accessible land further south had been colonized.” See *Places of Last Resort: The Expansion of the Farm Frontier into the Boreal Forest in Canada, c. 1910-1940*, (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006), endcover.

⁷ In particular, see Bowen, “Forward to a Farm”; Powell, “Northern Settlement”; McDonald, “Soldier Settlement and Depression Settlement”; and Wood, *Places of Last Resort*. Fitzgerald also examines some of the government schemes, but not in great detail.

⁸ The Prince Albert land agency recorded a respectable 2,162 homestead applications in 1927. In 1928, that number more than doubled, to 5,615 and gained again in 1929, with almost 6,500 new homestead entries. See SAB R-266 IV.40 Homestead Entries. “Saskatchewan Homestead Entries 1905 to 1943 by Land Agencies and Census Divisions.” The opening of second homesteads caused a virtual land rush in northern districts across Saskatchewan, which contained the vast majority of remaining homestead quarters.

The surge in second homestead applications in 1928 and 1929 has often been blurred by memory and faulty analysis, and presented as part of the Depression migration. The two, however, should not be intertwined. A large number of families filed on second homesteads prior to the Depression, when the agricultural situation in Saskatchewan was buoyant. Families moved to those northern homesteads only when economic and environmental conditions in the south imploded.⁹

Second homesteads were popular for several plausible reasons. A homestead, through hard work and good luck, could become a patented farm, to be kept and farmed or sold for profit. Much prairie land changed hands in this way, as a business endeavour rather than a lifestyle choice. Some prairie farmers, with enough capital to expand and diversify, took northern homesteads or purchased farms in an active bid to change their physical environment from prairie to parkland/forest edge. The northern environment was promoted as better suited to mixed farming practices. A few of these farmers may have been interested in owning two farms, one on the prairies devoted primarily to wheat farming, one near or at the forest edge to access resources of timber, fuel, and hay, as well as wild game. The north Prince Albert region was a popular hunting area, and some Depression migrants claimed their first experience with the region from hunting trips. Others came to visit the new national park and the northern vacationland, and liked what they found. A few families commuted between prairie and northern farms (depending on the season) throughout the Depression as finances and situation permitted. Finally, some may have experienced a pull towards the trees as a place of beauty and recreation. All of these factors contributed to the popularity of second homesteads.

Interest in forest edge farms was dominated by the inherent contrast between the prairies and the forest. In some cases, the move was a rejection of the prairie environment; in others, taking a northern homestead allowed diversification and access to resources to supplement and balance prairie opportunities. In either case, second homesteads could only be taken by those who had already fulfilled the requirements of their original homestead. Those interested in second homesteads were coming from the prairies, not elsewhere.¹⁰

⁹ There are numerous family histories in the Paddockwood history book, *Cordwood and Courage*, that explain how the family filed on the homestead land in the late 1920s but made the move north at a later date.

¹⁰ Until 1930, immigrants from outside Saskatchewan could still take first homesteads in northern Saskatchewan.

Northern Resource Development

The creation of Prince Albert National Park led many to speculate on the imminent rise of tourism and the possible ‘opening’ of the provincial north to resource development. During the park’s opening ceremonies in 1928, Prince Albert MLA T.C. Davis and several other prominent men commented on this theme. “The park will not only serve as a place of recreation for all time,” Davis declared, “but as a step nearer to the greatest period of development that northern Saskatchewan has yet experienced.” Rosthern MLA J.M. Uhrich added, “Standing virtually at the gateway to the great northern hinterland with its wealth of mine, of forest, lake, and river, the new Park stretches out a beckoning and inviting hand.” Uhrich went on:

The proposed utilization of Churchill River power sites in this province for the mining operations in the Pre-Cambrian zone, coupled with the timely opening of the new National Park, augurs, in my mind, a development of mining, timber, fish, fur and power resources of the province likely to be as inspiring and expansive as that which marked agricultural development of Saskatchewan’s fertile prairie belt.¹¹

Uhrich’s comments foreshadowed what historian Liza Piper has documented as an expansive boom period in northern Canada. In contrast to the dust and devastation in southern agricultural and manufacturing regions, the north experienced “a period of economic growth and expansion” during the 1930s. This story, she argued, “inverts classic accounts of the impact of the Great Depression in the Canadian west.” The north, she declared, followed its own “economic trajectory.”¹² Increased commercial fishing and extensive mining development (including the boomtown of Goldfields at Lake Athabasca in Saskatchewan’s far north), brought a measure of prosperity through extractive industrial development. Communities at the forest fringe, tied to northern resource development through employment, freighting opportunities, and provision of foodstuffs, experienced a significant boom.

An important aspect of the Great Trek migration and northern boom was the 1930 transfer of Crown land resources from the dominion to the three western provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta.¹³ The transfer led to extensive changes in homestead regulations and

¹¹ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 2 August 1928.

¹² Liza Piper, *The Industrial Transformation of Subarctic Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), p. 81.

¹³ A discussion of the Crown land transfer is found in Chester Martin, “*Dominion Lands*” Policy (Carleton Library Reprints, McClelland and Stewart, 1973). See also Nicole O’Byrne, “The ‘Answer to the *Natural Resources* Question’: A Historical Analysis of the *Natural Resources Transfer* Agreements,” unpublished MA thesis, McGill University, 2006.

land settlement practices. New homestead entries were suspended in the fall of 1929 to allow each province to create its own legislation. Saskatchewan initiated a *Royal Commission on Immigration and Settlement* to look into the issue of how to set up land, homestead, and immigration policies for the province. Instead of continuing the ten dollar filing fee and dominion regulations, the province decided that all remaining Crown agricultural land should be sold for no less than one dollar per acre, with a down payment of ten percent, or sixteen dollars. The balance was to be paid in yearly instalments. A legal agreement between buyer and seller, the new regulations seemed innocuous at first, but soon forced potentially cash-strapped northern settlers to make land payments each year with money that could otherwise have been put into land clearing or operation costs. Payments, in some cases, were soon in arrears.

Policymakers understood that Saskatchewan land was prized most of all by Saskatchewan residents, reflecting an in-depth knowledge of the intra-provincial south-to-north migration and the popularity of second homesteads during the 1920s. Land was offered on an inverted pyramid to Saskatchewan residents first, then Canadian, British, and other immigrants at the bottom of the list. The commission also recommended a detailed investigation of lands to determine suitability for farming or industrial development. But the economic devastation caused by the Depression, which manifested quickly in Saskatchewan, halted land investigation to the detriment of many drought refugees.¹⁴

Another casualty of the Natural Resources transfer was the effective demise of the dominion-sponsored Land Settlement Branch. This branch offered a series of land settlement schemes to soldiers and others, whereby families were offered transportation reductions and loans to promote settlement primarily on parkland and forest edge farms. The provincial government under J.T.M. Anderson moved with surprising alacrity to continue a provincial version of this scheme. The Land Settlement Act, proposed in 1930 after the formal transfer of Crown land from the dominion, gained formal assent in the spring of 1931. An assisted land settlement policy, this act targeted farmers intending to move north to the diversified mixed farming areas. In place with modifications for several years, the Land Settlement Act has consistently been interpreted as a Saskatchewan response to the Depression.¹⁵

¹⁴ Bowen argued that “Unfortunately, the Commission’s findings were released during a period of unprecedented economic turmoil, so in spite of the practical advice offered to ensure orderly and efficient settlement, most of its recommendations were ignored,” p. 30.

¹⁵ See Powell, “Northern Settlement.”

In light of the tradition of dominion land settlement schemes during the 1920s, it is more appropriate to think of the new land settlement act, at least initially, as a continuation of dominion schemes within a Saskatchewan framework. The Great Depression, however, changed its execution. Historian Dawn Bowen argued that the difference between the land colonization schemes of the 1920s (either sponsored by the Department of the Interior or the railway companies) and the relief land resettlement schemes of the Depression were that the Depression land policies were interpreted, administered, and used as essentially short-term relief measures rather than a promotion of permanent settlement.¹⁶ As northern migration continued and trekkers stalled in their attempts to convert the forest to farmland, the provincial government turned their attention to solving northern problems. The mandate of the Northern Settlers' Re-Establishment Branch, created in 1935, was to facilitate permanent settlement and resilience in the communities across the forest edge.

The Great Trek

Geographer Denis Patrick Fitzgerald coined the term "The Great Trek" to describe the south-to-north migration of prairie settlers into the northern forested environment during the Great Depression. His use of the term reflected the words of Depression migrants and contemporary commentators.¹⁷ As southern wheat and mixed farmers felt the dual prongs of dust and economic disaster, northern migration escalated.¹⁸ From 1931 to 1937, the worst year of the drought, northern migration was a part of the fabric of life in Saskatchewan.¹⁹

The process of moving was, indeed, a trek for many families. Although the McGowan family chose to move their settlers' effects north in a boxcar, thousands of migrants made the move overland, using their own cars, trucks, wagons – "makeshift vehicles constructed from old implement wheels and boards torn from an empty granary" – or the ubiquitous 'Bennett Buggies.'²⁰ Conveyances were loaded precariously with furniture, goods, children and

¹⁶ Bowen, "Forward to a Farm," p. 235-238.

¹⁷ Fitzgerald, "Pioneer Settlement," chapters V and VI.

¹⁸ Interpretations vary regarding which years saw the greatest exodus. Some, like Fitzgerald, argue that the strongest migration years were 1932 and 1933; others suggest that northern migration peaked in 1934 and 1935. Britnell noted the highest population movement in 1931 and 1932. For an overview of this debate, see McDonald, "Soldier Settlement and Depression Settlement," footnote 55.

¹⁹ See Mrs. Bailey, "The Year We Moved," *Saskatchewan History*, winter, 1967. See also Harold Fenske, *Riverlore: the headwaters of the Assiniboine will always be home* (self-published by Fenske, 2002).

²⁰ 'Bennett Buggies' were made by removing the engine of the family car (for which they had no cash for gas, oil, or repairs) and lashing a wagon tongue on the front to attach a team of horses. See the recreated Bennett Buggy at the

grandparents, food for the journey, as well as any agricultural implements, crates of chickens, or the family cat. Larger stock, such as horses, milk cows (if the family had such) and the family dog, walked alongside. Migrants likened their outfits to gypsies, or the great wagon trains that snaked across the Great Plains in an earlier time. Families, often several from one community making the move together, or several adult siblings moving as an extended unit, camped out each night, their fires dancing along the roadsides for miles. Soldier settlers commented that the exodus reminded them of war refugees in Europe.²¹

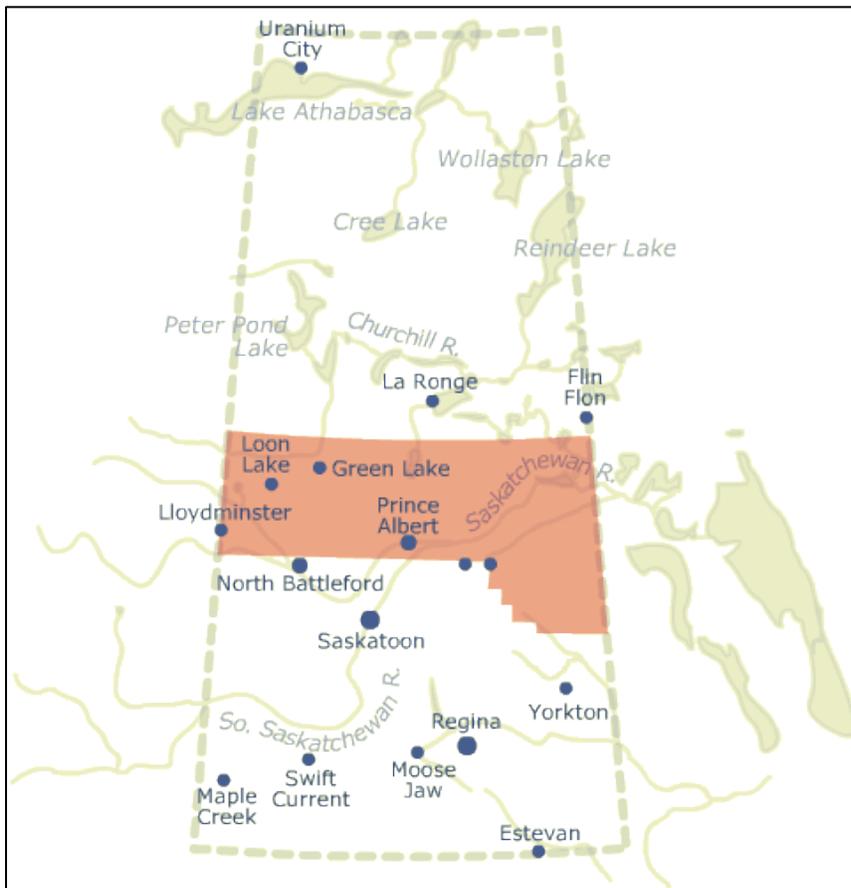


Figure 70. Great Trek destination in Saskatchewan. Adapted from Fitzgerald, “Pioneer Settlement.”

Western Development Museum, Saskatoon. Quote from Jim Wright, *Saskatchewan: The History of a Province* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart for The Saskatchewan Golden Jubilee Committee, 1955), p. 225.

²¹ Fitzgerald, p. 314-315.

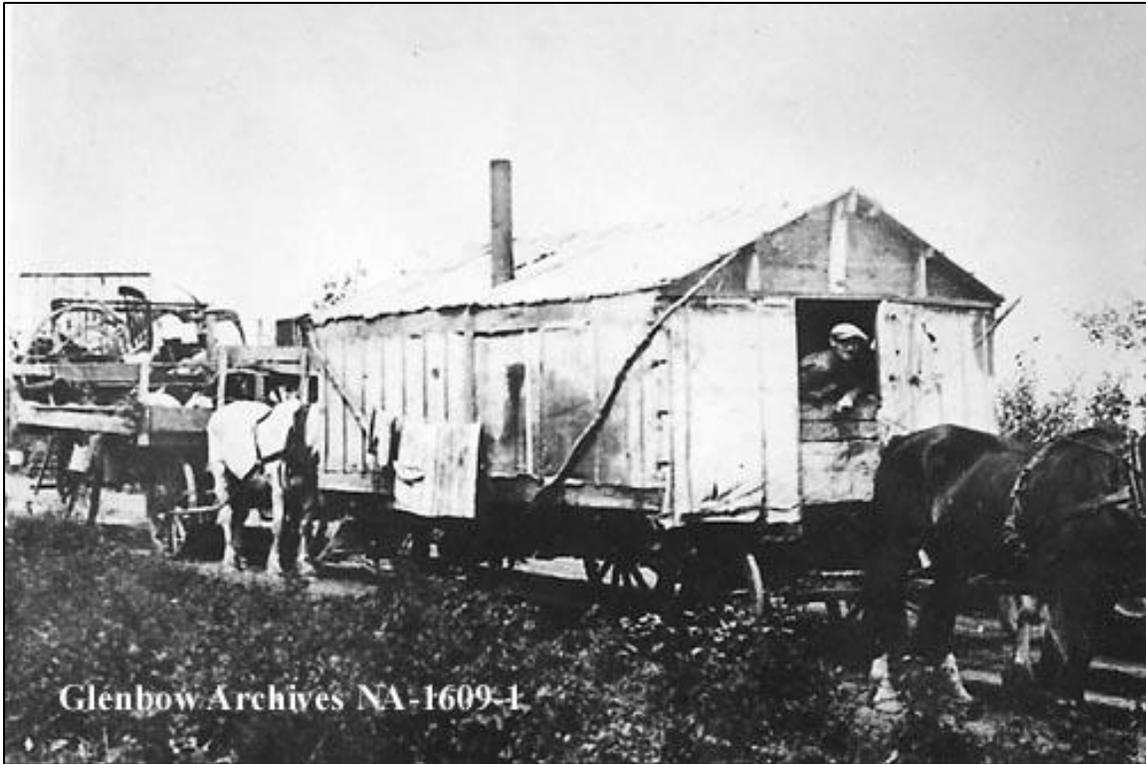


Figure 71. Trekking north. *Glenbow Archives NA-1609-1.*



Figure 72. Trekking north. *SAB NAC-a044575.*

There are many people in Saskatchewan today who remember those trek years, both those who participated and those who watched the caravans go by. Drought and economic devastation had brought the Weyburn region virtually to its knees. Bill Grohn of Weyburn declared, “Our community was broken.”²² Lila Sully of Biggar, on the Number Four highway from southwestern Saskatchewan to the Meadow Lake region, remembered roads choked with northern migrants, stopping to water their animals, eat a picnic lunch or camp for the night.²³ Depending on place of origin and destination, the trek would take anywhere from two to six weeks, barring unforeseen circumstances.

Edna Dobie (née Brook) of Prince Albert was a twelve-year-old girl when her extended family made the move from a farm near Moosomin to the north Prince Albert region in late 1931. A flat tire on the first day caused the overloaded Model T to roll, smashing the windshield and top and tumbling all those inside. Edna recalled her mother screaming when she saw her children splattered in bright red in the backseat. Blood? No! A quart of precious strawberry jam had smashed, spraying the children liberally. Her parents and uncles righted the car, used barbed wire to hold things together, poured oil into the engine and all was ready to continue. The family eventually arrived at their homestead about fifteen miles north of Paddockwood, into an area bypassed by fire. Tall spruce and deep moss greeted the prairie children, who thought they had moved to fairyland – it was green, damp, and filled with Christmas trees.²⁴

The contrast between the environmental devastation of the prairies with the green northern forests resonated in family histories published in *Cordwood and Courage* and other local history books from forest fringe communities. Trekkers – even those who eventually moved away – reminisced about the transition from dust to mud (or snow), and brown to green.²⁵ The striking contrast formed a large part of Mrs. A.W. Bailey’s published account of her

²² Bill Grohn, interview with Merle Massie, September 2009. Grohn went with neighbours to cut feed and to pasture horses and cattle in central Manitoba. As well, he participated in the Dominion ‘hired hand’ program where farmhands earned \$5 per month. For an overview of this program, see Cecilia Danysk, “No Help for the Farm Help: The Farm Employment Plans of the 1930s in Prairie Canada,” *Prairie Forum* Vol. 19, no. 2 (1994): pp. 231-251.

²³ Lila Sully, interview with Merle Massie, September 2009.

²⁴ Interview, Edna Dobie with Merle Massie, November 2008. See also Brook, Arthur John and Bertha, by Edna Dobie, *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 126-127. Dobie has written a memoir of these events with her sister, which is unpublished.

²⁵ “How green everything looked!” said Elsa Blumer of the Paddockwood district, when compared to the south in 1931. “I really did not care where we moved to as long as we could get away from that windy dust-bowl prairie,” she declared. Esther Craig remembered that when she arrived at their Paddockwood farm in 1930, “The clear air and the green trees were lovely after the dusty prairie.” See *Cordwood and Courage*, “Blumer, Jack and Elsa,” p. 100; “Craig, Frederick and Esther,” p. 150.

family's move north: "we talked of moving to a place where there were green grass and shade. It would be a veritable heaven after so much dust and wind," Bailey recalled.²⁶ When the family arrived, Mrs. Bailey, a born prairie girl, was overcome with homesickness but her children delighted in climbing trees, making forts in the brush, and swimming in the lakes and ponds. For the parents, though, a rough bush homestead meant an enormous amount of work. Historian Jim Wright commented, "Once more the log cabin with earthen floor swept by a broom made of willows became a reality in Saskatchewan. Dad ploughed the grey bush soil for a garden plot. The lads tracked and snared bush-rabbits, and rabbit pie appeared with monotonous regularity on the family table."²⁷

The dual environmental devastation and economic depression slammed prairie farmers in a double whammy. Wheat prices slumped, then plummeted after the stock market crash in the fall of 1929. In addition, extreme drought conditions devastated cereal cash crops. Farmers reaped a poor return. Those who had taken mortgages, purchased equipment or had other loans in the boom years of the mid-to-late 1920s were faced with payments they could not meet. Nor did they have enough crop to keep any for seed for the following year. Those who relied on wheat returns to meet payments or purchase basic supplies were soon in trouble.

Perhaps even more devastating, the drought burned fodder crops such as oats and hay to a crisp. Farmers faced the real dilemma of owning animals they could not feed. Relief feed and fodder – the majority of it from northern regions that had not been hit by the drought – eased the burden, but hundreds of animals perished from malnutrition and starvation. Others were taken north, or into Manitoba to graze, reinforcing the image of the north as a place of natural abundance. Animals were also shot to save feed and fodder costs.²⁸ "I thought of our stock trying to get feed off the sand-filled pasture," Mrs. Bailey said. Moving north, where feed and water were more accessible, seemed the only humane option.

Drought conditions and sand storms shredded prairie gardens. Historian Peter Russell suggested that drought-prone farms "had a limited capacity for either subsistence or diversification," preferring to use their cash-crop (wheat) to purchase all household staples, including food. Some cereal monoculture farmers neither kept animals nor grew gardens prior to

²⁶ Mrs. A.W. Bailey, "The Year We Moved."

²⁷ Wright, *Saskatchewan*, p. 226.

²⁸ For an example, see *The Western Producer*, 31 January 1932, "Five Hundred Horses Die over Winter."

the Depression, he noted.²⁹ The economic slump pushed many to retreat to those traditional farming practices, but environmental devastation stymied those attempts. The same drought that shattered the wheat economy would not allow diversification or even simple subsistence strategies such as growing a garden, keeping a flock of hens, or feeding a milk cow. For many, the viable, proactive option was to move.

Each family's situation or inclination dictated the decision to make the move, but economics and drought were two primary motivations. "For the past six or seven years crop failures have occurred...and once prosperous farmers who had fairly large bank accounts were reduced to near poverty. Seeing their savings dwindle every year, with no returns from the land or their livestock, they decided to leave," reported the *Regina Leader* in 1934.³⁰ G.J. Matte, minister of the Northern Settlers Re-establishment Branch (created in 1935) explained that trekkers included farmers from every class:

All manner of people were to be found in this movement. There was the rich farmer, owner of vast acres of wheat fields turned overnight into a drifting sea of sand. There was the small landowner who made a fine living from a small farm which cost little in effort and gave large returns. There was the man who had been expanding, farming many acres in which he had a large equity. We might call this man the greatest loser because he not only lost all he owned, but was left with enormous debt which he despaired of ever paying. There were the renters, and those who had always been on the edge of poverty but found themselves now in equal circumstances. They were all completely destitute.³¹

The decision to move north was an adaptation strategy that addressed the immediate needs of the farmer and his family: the choice was either to accept relief and stay on the prairie or move to a

²⁹ Peter Russell, "Subsistence, Diversification, and Staple Orientation on Saskatchewan Farms: Parklands vs. Prairie, 1911-1926." *Saskatchewan History* (Fall 2005): pp. 15-28.

³⁰ "60 Families Move North From Farms. Stoughton District Land Abandoned as Feed Situation Becomes Serious." Special Dispatch to the *Regina Leader*, 30 August 1934. Although this article suggests that seasoned farmers were making the trek, researchers studying land settlement patterns in northern Saskatchewan in the 1940s determined that at date of settlement, two-thirds of the farm operators were less than forty years of age, although most had previous farming experience. The Dominion Department of Agriculture (Economics Division) and the Department of Farm Management, University of Saskatchewan teamed up in 1941 to study the economics of land settlement across the so-called 'pioneer fringe' of northern Saskatchewan. The study involved detailed interviews with residents in selected areas. Taken after the massive influx of southern refugees and just before out-migration, their results were intended to measure the progress of settlers, isolate specific factors related to successful settlement, and to appraise further settlement possibilities along the northern agricultural fringe in preparation for soldier land settlement following the Second World War, in progress at the time. Published as "An Economic Study of Land Settlement in Representative Pioneer Areas of Northern Saskatchewan," (Canada: Technical Bulletin no. 52, 1945), the study looked at the economic aspects of successful agricultural settlement. Age of farm operator data can be found on pages 29-30.

³¹ SAB, MA.3.8 Local Improvement Districts Branch, Northern Settlers Re-establishment Branch. Address given by G.J. Matte, Commissioner, Northern Settler's Re-establishment Branch over Station CJRM on 31 January 1939.

place where at least part of the family's needs could be met with garden produce, natural hay to feed stock, and local forest resources of fish, game, and berries. Those who moved north in the early years, 1930 or 1931, generally had more savings and established a firm hold. Others hung on in the south, breaking more prairie land and hoping each year for a crop until their savings were exhausted.³² By the time they trekked north, some were virtually destitute.

Analysis of the Great Trek

W.J. Mather, writing for *Maclean's* magazine in 1932, called the Great Trek "the greatest internal migration Canada has seen." Compared to such a migration, he noted, "the movement of the historic Barr colony of 1,200 persons to the country around Lloydminster is small."³³ Surprisingly, despite Mather's description, there has never been a detailed, scholarly examination of The Great Trek.³⁴ Articles, theses, and government reports abound, along with stories in local history books, but for the most part, the story of the depression migration in Saskatchewan (as well as a somewhat smaller movement in Alberta and Manitoba) has almost disappeared from the Canadian public memory. Saskatchewan provincial historians Jim Wright, John Archer, and Bill Waiser each devoted some attention to the movement, but it deserves broader investigation.³⁵ Even public historian James Gray, known for his swashbuckling storytelling style, denied the Trek its depth and impact. He claimed: "there was no massive migration or general exodus; there was only a steady trickle."³⁶ Clearly, he was wrong. Gray went on to note, in a spectacular case of analytical mediocrity, that "the prairies lost 247,000 people between 1931 and 1941; that the short grass country of Saskatchewan alone lost 73,000."³⁷

Not only were Gray's numbers shockingly incorrect, but their presentation glossed over the nuances of what really happened. Saskatchewan's population continued to climb throughout

³² The number of acres farmed in Saskatchewan went up during the 1930s across most of the census divisions. The rising acreage reflected a three-fold expansion: the surge north to develop new farms; opening more acres within the parkland regions; and the expansion of prairie acreage to grow more crop. When wheat prices declined dramatically, farmers increased their acreage to grow more bushels on newly-broken, fresh land.

³³ W.J. Mather, "Trek to Meadow Lake," *Maclean's* 1 April 1932. Mather estimated that 10,000 people made this move in 1931 alone; if so, then the estimate of 45,000 people over the whole of the migration is probably too small.

³⁴ J. David Wood's book crosses too much territory and too much time. It does not concentrate on the Trek. In 2005, Peggy Durant self-published a children's book, *The Long Trek*, based on stories told by Depression refugees who went north. Although entertaining, it is not available in bookstores for a broader audience.

³⁵ See Wright, *Saskatchewan*; John Archer, *Saskatchewan: A History* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1980); Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*.

³⁶ Gray, *Men Against the Desert*, p. 189.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

the Depression, peaking in 1936, contrary to Gray's popular depiction.³⁸ The provincial population stood at 921,785 in 1931. By 1936, despite the effects of the Great Depression, the population grew by ten thousand people, to 931,547. There was a population decline in the southern census regions, but a corresponding increase in communities and municipalities across the forest edge.³⁹ As well, there was a drop in the urban population of Saskatchewan from 1931 to 1936 of over ten thousand people. Overall, these numbers show a preference for rural life in the forest fringe over either prairie or urban options during a time of social and economic upheaval.⁴⁰ By the end of the 1930s, largely as a result of northern migration between 1919 and 1937, it was estimated that one-third of the province's population lived in 'northern' areas.⁴¹ Saskatchewan's population fell to 895,992 in 1941, due in large measure to the war effort and the opening of manufacturing, service, and military positions elsewhere. The net out-migration of 35,555 people, while significant, was far less than Gray's gross overestimate of 73,000 plus.

Back-to-the-Land

The social safety net Canadians enjoy today did not exist prior to or during the Depression, when the inability to feed or clothe yourself or your family was generally a source of shame.⁴² For many, the move north allowed a measure of pride and self-sufficiency, to provide (at the very least) food, shelter, and fuel for their families.⁴³

³⁸ For an accurate analysis of population trends in Saskatchewan during the Great Depression, see Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, p. 302.

³⁹ Professor Robert McLeman of the University of Ottawa had a team of SSHRC-funded researchers working on the Great Trek in both Alberta and Saskatchewan. Part of their findings were published as McLeman, R., Herold, S., Reljic, Z., Sawada, M., & McKenney, D. "GIS-based modeling of drought and historical population change on the Canadian Prairies." *Journal of Historical Geography*, Vol. 36, no. 1 (2010): 43-56. Their research, based on census data, revealed 'hotspots' where more than fifteen percent of the population left the southern prairies, and corresponding 'hotspots' along the forest fringe that experienced high net in-migration.

⁴⁰ See Alan Anderson, 'Population Trends,' *The Encyclopaedia of Saskatchewan* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2005), p. 705-708.

⁴¹ SAB, MA.3.8 Local Improvement Districts Branch, Radio Address by Mr. Matte on the Northern Settlers Re-establishment Branch, 31 January 1939.

⁴² For a discussion of the social shame of relief, and its impact on the human psyche, see Bill Waiser, *Who Killed Jackie Bates? Murder and Mercy during the Great Depression* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2008).

⁴³ For the first few years of the Depression, relief measures were municipal matters, handled at the local level, with considerable assistance from churches and other volunteer groups which ran soup kitchens, shelters, or organized clothing drives. As the Depression wore on, the provincial government took over and co-ordinated direct relief efforts with substantial loans from the federal government. Government aid in the form of agricultural loans such as seed grain or fodder relief, direct relief for families, or assistance in moving north was recorded as a loan or lien and as such was expected to be repaid by the recipient as soon as possible. Many of these loans were eventually reduced or cancelled, which did much to improve farming conditions in the 1940s and 1950s across Saskatchewan. The best analysis of the early years of the welfare system is found in Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*. Researchers such as Struthers have tended to paint the Great Depression as a time when private and voluntary charities were overwhelmed, so a benevolent government took over to provide basic necessities. This simplistic interpretation has

One of the key drivers of northern migration was a back-to-the-land idealism, a “mixture of romanticism and practicality” that emphasized self-sufficiency for families.⁴⁴ Hallmarks of self-sufficiency included growing a large garden, keeping livestock (particularly milk cows, pigs, chickens, and sometimes sheep, goats, or turkeys), and generally ‘living off the land,’ or utilizing the natural produce of the local environment, including fish, game, or berries. Historian Dawn Bowen studied the urban back-to-the-land movement in Saskatchewan during the Depression, which accounted for approximately 1000 families who went into the northern bush.⁴⁵ The majority of those who participated in these schemes were urban residents already on relief. Their stories of success and dismal failure were avidly followed by urban newspapers, particularly those from Saskatoon, Moose Jaw, and Regina. In the final analysis, Bowen claimed, the programs were successful. They cost less than direct relief and neither the government nor the participants expected land settlement to be permanent. Despite hardships and continued relief payments, Bowen argued that bush homesteads offered a chance for land ownership, self-respect, a measure of self-sufficiency for families and their animals, and a place of refuge to ride out the Depression until times were, once again, good.⁴⁶

Urbanites were exchanging city sidewalks for country landscapes, but not just any landscape. Saskatchewan newspapers consistently described the devastation of the open plains by dust storms and recurrent drought, grasshoppers and cutworms. Who wanted to move there? Urban families hoping for short-term self-sufficiency headed for the northern landscape. Stories of the back-to-the-landers who left their farms after only a few years, however, have contributed to the overall assessment of the northern migration as a failure, as if the sole purpose of northern migration was to build a new farm which a family would occupy for several generations. This

been challenged by a more nuanced investigation recognizing that “the voluntary sector was active and innovative” in responding to the escalating needs of the Depression, often hand-in-hand with government agencies. For an investigation of combined public and voluntary efforts, see James Pitsula, “The Mixed Social Economy of Unemployment Relief in Regina during the 1930s,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association/Revue de la Societe Historique du Canada* Vol. 15, no. 1 (2004): pp. 97-122. In this interpretation, welfare comes from four sources: the state, the voluntary sector, the family, and the market, which all played a role.

⁴⁴ Bowen, “Forward to a Farm,” p. 34. Bowen’s work traces the social call of back-to-the-land movements, where the country is put forward as a panacea to the ills of the modern city. Country life, (a return to a more rigorous, healthful, and wholesome life), would alleviate crime and other despicable aspects of city life.

⁴⁵ Bowen, p. 128.

⁴⁶ Bowen noted that twenty-three percent of the participants abandoned their land within two years, but only twenty-seven percent had abandoned after four years. At the “Little Saskatoon” settlement at Loon Lake, two-thirds eventually gained title to their homesteads, although the settlement at Tamarack (Moose Jaw relief recipients) was more disappointing, with fewer than half gaining patent. After ten years, twenty percent remained on the land. See Bowen, p. 243-244. If two-thirds gained title to their homesteads but, after ten years, only twenty percent remained on their farms, over forty percent of the land had been sold.

assessment is flawed. A proportion of northern migrants, urban relief recipients or prairie farm migrants, viewed their northern homesteads as a temporary refuge – a few months to, at most, a few years, until a job came up again or the prairies had rain. As such, the bush homesteads, for the most part, fulfilled their role.

The Northern Boom

The village of Paddockwood, at the end of the CNR railway line running north of Prince Albert, experienced a significant boom during the Depression in part because of the influx of southern and urban refugees. In a risky move, the local board of trade issued a pamphlet in 1933 that crowed “Paddockwood: The Mixed Farming Paradise of Saskatchewan.”⁴⁷ Relief at the time was a municipal burden. Actively recruiting migrants during a major economic depression was acutely ironic. Southern municipalities were overburdened by relief requests and discouraged destitute individuals and families from relocating to nearby towns or empty farms.⁴⁸ In contrast, Paddockwood not only encouraged migrants, but enjoyed a boom:

At this time Paddockwood had five general stores, a butcher shop, a drugstore, two harness repair shops, a lumber yard, hardware store, two blacksmith shops, one pool room, two hotels, three restaurants, a bakery, a second hand store, a barber shop, and twice weekly the ladies of the community could visit a beauty parlor operated in the hotel. The implement companies were represented by agents for International Harvester, Case, Massey Harris, Oliver and Cockshutt. A resident MD set bones and performed minor surgery (without anesthetic) for the people, at most reasonable rates. Talent abounded in other fields too. There were men who filed saws, repaired radios, practiced veterinary medicine, tanned robes, made illegal spirits and told fortunes. One individual was known as the ‘Pea Man.’ He made a living of sorts by growing and selling seed peas.⁴⁹

Paddockwood was full of bustle and hustle, with piles of cordwood for trade and barter, garden produce and berries in abundance, easy access to resorts and water recreation, the Red Cross Outpost Hospital, and plenty of stores and services. The nearby communities of Henribourg,

⁴⁷ *Prince Albert Historical Society, Bill Smiley Archives*, “Paddockwood: The Mixed Farming Paradise of Saskatchewan,” found in the Walter Whelan Scrapbook, oversize shelf. The pamphlet emphasized what dust-covered prairie citizens wanted most: trees for shelter and fuel, water, mixed farming, recreation, garden produce and a low cost of living.

⁴⁸ Some northern municipalities did express concern with northern migration. The community of Medstead, for example, raised the issue at various meetings of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, confronting the provincial government and asking for guarantees that northern migrants would be supported by the provincial government and their municipality of origin, should they need relief, and not their new host community. *The Western Producer*, 28 February 1935. Soon after Medstead raised these concerns, northern relief fell under the auspices of the Northern Settlers Re-establishment Branch.

⁴⁹ “Down Memory Lane,” Paddockwood Pow-Wow, Diamond Jubilee Edition, 1965.

Albertville, and the growing resort communities at Christopher and Emma Lake shared the north Prince Albert boom. They were islands in an ocean of Depression despair. The boom created an economic and cultural flow, a movement of goods and services at odds with the “broken” communities of the open plains.

Just like the urban back-to-the-landers, prairie families looked to the northern ecological edge to provide a landscape of diversity and resilience through the mixed farm ideal. The McGowan family’s experience was an excellent example. On their newly-purchased quarter section near Paddockwood, Sargent and his wife, Muriel, concentrated on self-sufficiency, using a combination of ingenuity and exchange:

We exchanged ‘clucking’ hens for an orphan ewe lamb from our neighbor. This was the nucleus of a small flock kept for a few years until coyotes became a nuisance. Dairy cattle provided us with milk, meat, cream and butter for home use, as well as some cash from butter sold, or whole milk sold to a cheese factory at Henribourg, or cream sold to dairies in Prince Albert. Pigs thrived on surplus skim milk and provided meat, especially the cured pork so necessary for summer protein before refrigeration. Chickens provided meat and eggs. Turkeys, although more difficult to raise, provided meat as well as some cash when sold in the fall. Sheep gave us meat and wool. We learned how to clip the sheep, wash and card wool for quilt batts. The garden soil produced a bountiful supply of vegetables. Wild fruit and some hardy tame ones were usually available. Blueberry, Saskatoon, and raspberry picking expeditions were not only necessary but a pleasant break from our daily routine. Everyone canned food of every kind – fruit, meat, vegetables, and pickles.⁵⁰

Muriel McGowan’s description (although idyllic) of the techniques of barter and exchange, and the combination of cash and subsistence strategies, were essential components of back-to-the-land practicality. The ideal subsistence farm was a mixed farm.

The majority of those who heeded the call to move to the forest edge found their land in one of three ways. Some found a farm to rent. Others, such as the McGowans, purchased a farm through a private deal with the landowner, with a down payment and yearly payments until the debt was cleared. Farms that had been patented with only the minimum acreage cleared were cheaper than a developed farm with a larger acreage. Deals between buyer and seller were often private, as banks were reluctant to issue mortgages. Lastly, a migrant could enter on a homestead claim and build their place of residence. The primary method of farm acquisition varied from one region to another along the forest fringe: in older settlements, such as Paddockwood or the Carrot

⁵⁰ “McGowan, Sargent Hugh and Muriel,” *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 355.

River country, thirty-six percent of the farms were homesteaded, while almost half were purchased. In areas that were developed as brand-new settlements, such as Pierceland in the northwest, almost ninety percent of the farms were new homesteads.⁵¹

PAGE EIGHT THE DAILY HERALD, PRINCE ALBERT, SASKATCHEWAN Tuesday, July 28, 1931.

WHEN WHEAT PRICES CRASH

THE CREAM SHIPPING FARMER DOESN'T WORRY

THERE IS NO GAMBLE AND NO DELAY

Each Day He Receives His Cheque. Cream Shipping Is A Reliable and Consistent Money Maker.

IF YOU HAVE NOT STARTED TO SHIP YOUR CREAM, DO SO NOW AND PUT YOUR FARM ON A STEADY PAYING BASIS



It Pays Well and Pays Best To Ship To The

PALM DAIRIES LIMITED

Where the farmer is given a square deal every day. Money orders are sent out by return mail; cans by return train.

WE WANT YOUR CREAM AND ASSURE YOU SATISFACTION IN EVERY SHIPMENT YOU MAKE

ASK YOUR GROCER FOR



LENDALE CREAMERY BUTTER

A PERFECT PRODUCT

WE OPERATE OVER FIFTY CREAMERIES IN WESTERN CANADA

And Have Thousands Of Satisfied Shippers

SHIP YOUR CREAM TO

Palm Dairies Limited

(BURNS & COMPANY LTD.)

CASH BUYERS OF CREAM, EGGS AND POULTRY

EAT

PALM ICE CREAM



"The Cream of Them All"

A delicious refreshment with a flavor that has no equal.

Figure 73. "When Wheat Prices Crash, The Cream Shipping Farmer Doesn't Worry." Prince Albert *Daily Herald* 28 July 1931.

Years of mixed-farming boosterism and advertising proclaimed a difference between cereal wheat monoculture and a more diversified, stable, and resilient mixed farm at the forest edge.⁵² Yet, creating a mixed farm took time, energy, luck, and investment. Each family of southern refugees experienced better or worse conditions depending on several key factors: the family's previous residence and vocation (particularly farming experience); their method of acquisition of land (purchased or homesteaded); their age and family composition when they came north; their net worth when they started (including implements, tools, stock, and furniture); the family's progress in clearing and breaking the land; and the productivity of the soil. A family with some cash, stock, and equipment who purchased a partly-cleared farm with moderate to

⁵¹ R.A. Stutt and H. Van Vliet, p. 30.

⁵² See Catherine Mary Ulmer, "The Report on Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada in 1932: Charlotte Whitton, R.B. Bennett, and the Federal Response to Relief," unpublished MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2009, chapter three, "Whitton on Tour."

good soil generally did better than a virtually destitute family with few resources or stock that ended up on a new homestead with 160 acres of heavy bush covering grey podzolic soil.⁵³

The Great Trek migrants spread out across the forest fringe. In some cases, as in the north Prince Albert region, the migrants both filled out the existing land base by purchasing patented farms from previous residents, as well as entering onto new homestead land. In other areas, brand-new communities and service centers sprang up virtually overnight. In the north-west, for example, communities such as Goodsoil and Pierceland, along with the urban back-to-the-land communities of 'Little Saskatoon' and Tamarack near Loon Lake, grew exponentially as a result of the Great Trek. In the north-east, the communities east of Albertville along the new railway to Nipawin in the White Fox valley (Shipman, Snowden, and Choiceland, for example) exploded with Depression refugees. In general, older communities such as those in the north Prince Albert region absorbed the newcomers with more ease and less social and economic distress. An established service base, transportation system, schools and hospitals provided infrastructure. In brand-new communities, everything from roads to homesteads, schools and service centers had to be built, straining the limited local resources.⁵⁴ In every case, the northern boom created economic opportunities similar to those experienced on the prairies during the immigration boom between 1896 and 1910.

⁵³ Stutt and Van Vliet, p. 36-40. See also E.C. Hope and R.A. Stutt, "An Economic Study of Land Settlement in the Albertville-Garrick Area of Northern Saskatchewan, 1941," (Dominion of Canada, Department of Agriculture Multilith Report, January 1944). The second report added, "There are some of these factors which cannot be measured statistically, but which are very important, such as the personal ambition, energy, and initiative of the settler," p. 27.

⁵⁴ Regional, even microlocal, variations in northern settlement success and failure has skewed historical interpretation. The push to present a broad analysis of the Great Trek, combined with an over-reliance on provincial relief and re-settlement information, has favoured stories of hardship and need over success. While some communities experienced tough conditions, others found long-term success. The north Prince Albert region experienced both, which makes it an ideal case study.

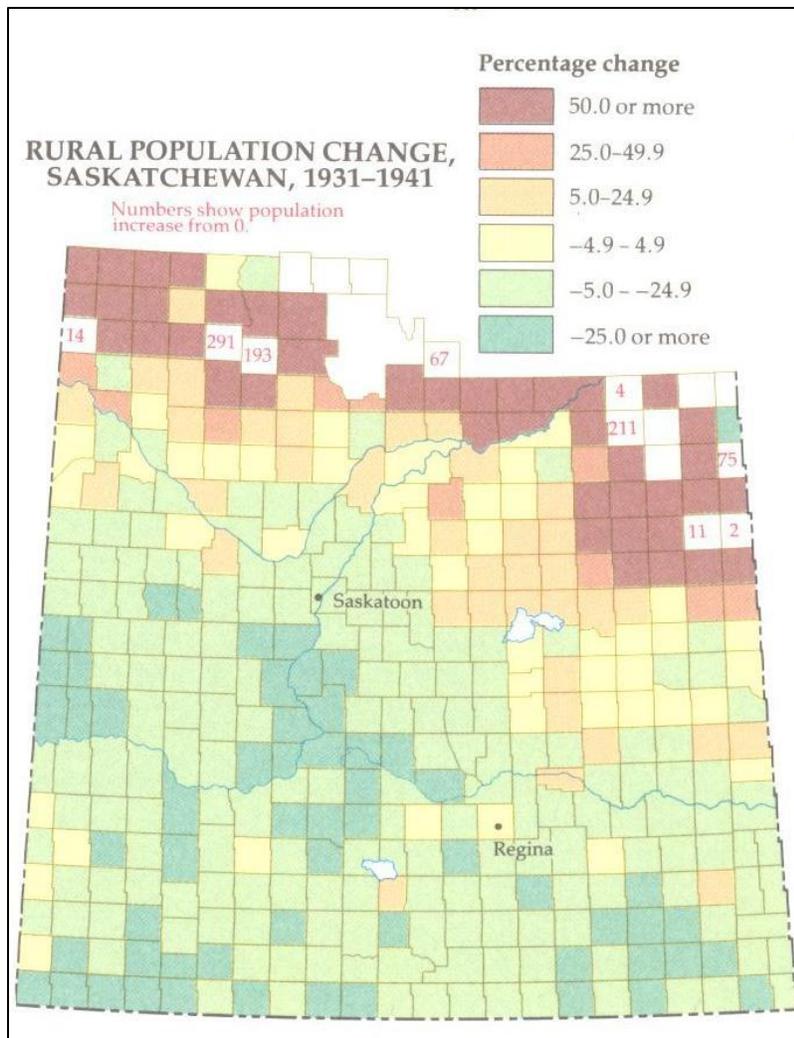


Figure 74. "Rural Population Change, Saskatchewan, 1931-1941." From *The Historical Atlas of Canada Vol. III: Addressing the Twentieth Century*. D. Holdsworth and D. Kerr (eds), p. 152.

Environmental Difficulty

On each farm or homestead, agricultural progress varied. Those facing heavy scrub and trees took longer to clear less acreage. Those who rented or purchased partly-developed farms, or found new homestead land with light scrub or open glades could clear more land in less time. In five years, a homesteader on light scrub might clear sixty acres; those who faced heavy clearing and breaking would accomplish less than half that. As well, clearing rates quickly went down over time. A homesteader would clear the easiest areas of the farm first. Clearing and breaking became more difficult once the farmer encountered the larger trees and scrub.⁵⁵ Although mechanized methods of land clearing were available, few prairie refugees had the capital to

⁵⁵ Stutt and Van Vliet, p. 36-41.

invest in, operate, or hire tractors to do the work. Clearing, pulling stumps, picking stones and roots and other duties were done by hand or with horse-power. It was as if “the clock of history had been turned back” to a more primitive type of agriculture.⁵⁶

The amount of land each family managed to clear, break, and turn to productive agriculture meant the difference between continued need for relief help, or the ability to eke out a living. During the Depression, later analysts noted, a family on black or transitional soil needed at least fifty acres cleared and worked to manage a bare living; on grey podzolic soil, eighty-eight acres would support a family without any off-farm income. Unfortunately, it took as many as ten years – or even fifteen – to clear that many acres on the heavy bush land common to grey podzolic soil.⁵⁷ Even if a family moved north to a new homestead early in the trek – 1930 or 1931 – they may not have found economic sufficiency strictly from agricultural pursuits until the end of the decade, when farmers once more could afford mechanized land clearing techniques. A family who moved later in the trek, with no cash reserves or resources left, faced an even more difficult battle.⁵⁸

The amount of time and back-breaking work it took to clear and break enough land to make a farm profitable was the single most important factor in encouraging or discouraging those who tried northern settlement. In the bush, as little as ten acres cultivated and seeded was sometimes enough to convince the homestead inspector to approve a farm patent. Patent, however, did not make a profitable farm. Settlers had to choose between continuing their clearing, breaking, and seeding activities while also accessing off-farm cash labour opportunities, or, conversely, sell the land and move. As with the initial choice to migrate away from the prairies, the choice to stay or leave a northern farm varied from family to family as circumstances and inclination – and opportunity – dictated.

⁵⁶ Fitzgerald, p. 318. Land clearing in northern areas to 1928 was completed primarily by the farmer, but just over twenty percent of the land was cleared by hired labour. During the Depression, farmers cleared more of their land on their own, as much as eighty-seven percent. Hired labour rose again between 1938 and 1940, to pre-Depression levels. Stone and root picking, however, was overwhelmingly completed by the farm family, with a tiny proportion – between one and three percent – picked by hired help, often local First Nations casual day labourers. See Hope and Stutt, p. 26.

⁵⁷ Stutt and Van Vliet, p. 68.

⁵⁸ The post-1930 settlement records showed that many quarters in the north Paddockwood district were homesteaded several times, particularly throughout the 1920s to early 1930s. Each homesteader might clear a few acres, put up buildings, build a fence, or dig a well. If they subsequently abandoned the land, they would be paid for any improvements made by the next homesteader. Sometimes, the homesteader who finally succeeded in gaining patent was building not only on their own efforts, but on the efforts of those who preceded them on the land.

Southern refugees had much to learn about their new northern environment. Although optimism and hope infused most of those who went north, the reality of trying to establish a viable mixed farm in the bush produced much adversity. Historian John McDonald suggested: “many half-truths about conditions in the north continued to be circulated, engendering an optimism ...which was based on a distorted image of true environmental conditions in the forest fringe.”⁵⁹ Another historian, T.J.D. Powell, suggested that people who moved north “received assurance through the media, government officials and word-of-mouth that the northern lands would certainly provide the necessities of life if not improve their standard of living. Some families, in fact, did improve their economic status, but others experienced poverty or even worse conditions.”⁶⁰ The difference, later analysts declared, lay in the combination of experience, rate of land clearing, soil profile, and sheer good luck.⁶¹

Indeed, northern refugees “had much to learn before becoming adapted to living in bush country,” wrote “Prairie Immigrant” for the Paddockwood local history book. To clear the land to create the farm, they “first had to learn to use swede saw, axe and grub-hoe without endangering life or limbs.” Fire, although a useful tool for clearing scrub brush, had a dark side: “an innocent-looking fire, started in a brush pile, can smoulder all winter under feet of snow, consuming much of the good topsoil.” Not just people, but prairie animals had a tough transition from prairie to bush. Prairie immigrants “watched and wondered as animals began chewing on sticks, bones, harness and sweat-pads, until realization dawned that the poor beasts were in need of salt, an ingredient that was seldom lacking in their diet on the prairie.” Although the mixed farming movement and other promoters might laud the lush northern hay crop, trekkers learned that it “proved to be more filling than nutritious and compared unfavourably with the prickly prairie wool. Brome grass and alfalfa had to be seeded to keep the animals satisfied.” Stock farmers and their animals valued the northern water sources, but farmers soon learned to fence their animals “away from dangerous muskegs, after some had become mired more than once and dragged out by the neck to dry land.” Unlike the open prairie, where a farmer could see for

⁵⁹ McDonald, p. 44.

⁶⁰ Powell, p. 81.

⁶¹ Stutt and Van Vliet, p. 7, 68.

miles, stock hid in the northern bush. Farmers learned to “hang a bell around the neck of the ‘boss’ cow, if ever they hoped to find the herd.”⁶²

In the north Prince Albert region, homestead land with grey podzolic soil had been avoided or abandoned, for the most part, by soldier settlers and other northern recruits during the 1920s. The demand for land created by the refugees flung north during the Great Trek, however, overwhelmed the available land base. In the Paddockwood region, a tongue of settlement north following the Montreal Lake trail passed beyond the last vestiges of transitional soil and found itself on grey podzolic land. The area became known as Moose Lake, and, to the west of Moose Lake, Hell’s Gate.⁶³

⁶² “Rambling Thoughts by a prairie immigrant,” *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 636-637. Other nasty surprises included ‘swamp fever,’ an infectious anemia that was thought to reside in wet marsh grass. Many horses and cattle died, which placed incredible pressure on farm families. With agricultural commodity prices still at an all-time low, where would a family find the money to replace valuable beef or milk cows, or (more importantly) horses, the main mode of transportation and motive power for the farm? Any one of these calamities could wipe out a family’s sense of hope or optimism, and place them in even more desperate straits than they had felt on their prairie farm. Many loans from the Northern Settlers’ Re-establishment Branch went to purchase horses.

⁶³ “Hell’s Gate” was west of the Montreal Lake Trail, across the Garden River. Its isolation, muskeg, mosquitoes and tree cover became legendary in Paddockwood. It carries the name “Hell’s Gate” to this day.

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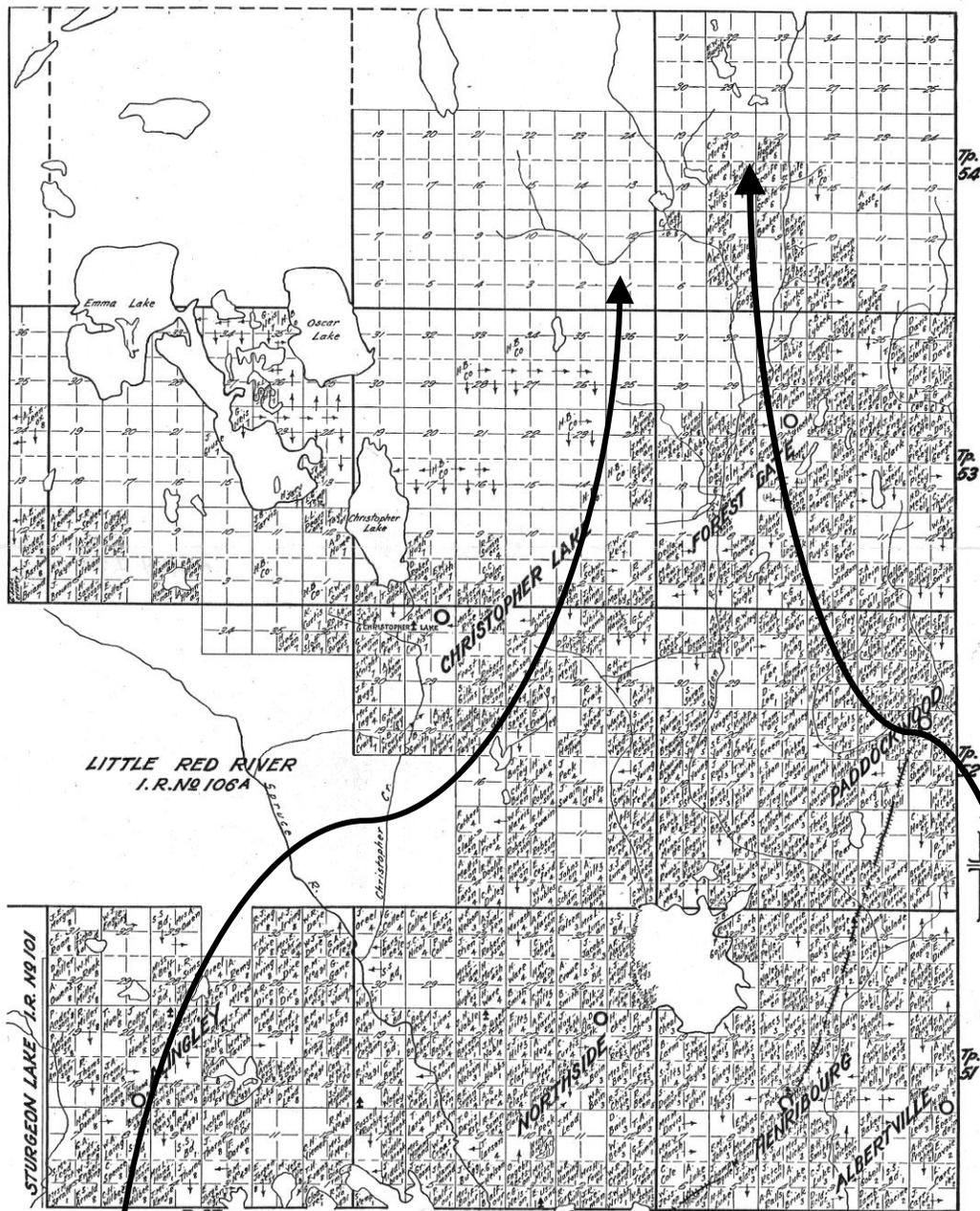
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POST OFFICE LIST FOR ADDRESSES FOR TOWNS 21-24 RANGES 25-27
1 PRINCE ALBERT 2 ALBERTVILLE 3 HENRIBOURG 4 NORTHSIDE 5 PADDOCKWOOD 6 FOREST GATE 7 CHRISTOPHER LAKE 8 ALINGLEY

LEGEND: ↑ Schools □ Cities □ Towns △ Villages ○ Post Offices ● Sidings
Number below owners name refers to Post Office address, which follows same number at bottom of Map

Hell's Gate

Moose Lake

Families in Hell's Gate eked out a harsh and meager existence, their land covered in knee-deep moss and muskeg, surviving on wild game and continued relief until a better farm or job came up somewhere else. As early as 1920, Dominion Land Surveyor M.D. McCloskey characterized the entire township (which encompassed the Hell's Gate settlement) as not "well adapted to farming." He elaborated by noting, "While there are some areas of fair soil ...these areas are comparatively small and are isolated. The land is badly broken by spruce and tamarack swamps. Sandy ridges and banksian pine are prominent, with a mixed forest of aspen, spruce and pine. Boulders are plentiful in places." Not even grazing, McCloskey noted, would be a good idea in this area. Cattle would not find sufficient grass "until the summer is fairly well advanced." Thick forest growth, much of it untouched by the 1919 fires, shaded the ground. It stayed colder and wetter longer into spring and summer than the areas further to the south.⁶⁴

Cold and wet conditions plagued many northern homesteads. As settlement pushed north, the growing season, or average number of frost-free days necessary for cereal grain ripening, shrunk. Late spring or early fall frosts hit farmers hard. Cereal crops, particularly wheat, suffered. Just as on the prairies, expected income from wheat disappeared when environmental disaster struck. As Muriel McGowan noted, the grain grown on their northern farm was more often than not converted to animal feed. Wheat prices were abysmal throughout the Great Depression and so meagre wheat crops were rarely worth the cost of harvesting.⁶⁵

Flooding was a problem in some areas or on some quarters. The homestead inspector for the north Paddockwood area, James Barnett, commented on a homestead at Moose Lake in 1931: "The wetness of this country probably appeals to those from the dried out areas. This may prove the other extreme and not turn out so pleasant as it first seems."⁶⁶ In a wet season, the settler had to wait longer to get seed in the ground, further courting the risk of frost. Over time, settlers noticed that as more land was cleared, roads built, and ditches dug, drainage and frost issues improved. As tree cover and roots were removed, the land warmed and dried. Soldier settlers and other older residents assured newcomers that they had also faced bush, frost, and water. Their larger acreages, somewhat more prosperous despite the ravages of the Depression, offered hope.

⁶⁴ SAB R-183 I.290. Reports on individual townships in the north Prince Albert region, M.D. McCloskey.

⁶⁵ See "McGowan, Sargent Hugh and Muriel." Freight deductions were also higher for northern farms. In addition, northern grain typically graded lower. In some years, after deductions and fees, grain cost more to ship than to keep. Farmers found themselves facing a bill rather than a cheque.

⁶⁶ SAB, S43, 2004-220, S10184 Post-1930 Settlement Records. Jas. Barnett, Inspector Dominion Lands, 4 July 1931 regarding NW ¼ 26 54 25 W 2. Eventually this quarter was successfully homesteaded and patented, but the land was taken over by the provincial government to create a community pasture in the 1960s.

As Depression refugees pushed north along the Montreal Lake trail it would have been difficult to tell at a glance the difference between the relatively prosperous farms near Henribourg and Paddockwood and the land further north. Few to none of those refugees would have had access to the information provided by the original surveyors. For the Hell's Gate region, the dominion land inspector report unfortunately turned out to be accurate. Settlers abandoned their holdings within a few months or, at most, a couple of years. Many, however, did not go far. After The Great Trek, few were willing to move on such a massive scale again. The majority of Hell's Gate settlers relocated just a few miles south to better farmland at Forest Gate or Paddockwood.⁶⁷ In their study of northern land settlement, analysts R.A. Stutt and H. Van Vliet noted that across the forest fringe, an average of thirty percent of the settlers originated from southern Saskatchewan. Astoundingly, though, over two-fifths of the settlers, or forty-four percent, came from other places within northern Saskatchewan. If their first choice of land did not work out, many settlers merely relocated to another part of the forest edge, continuing to reject the open plains.⁶⁸

Like the urban back-to-the-landers at Loon Lake, though, it is difficult to tell if land abandonment and out-migration represented failure, or merely short-term success as a refuge for a few months, a few seasons, or a few years. Initial enthusiasm and in-migration at Hell's Gate led to a short-lived attempt to create a new school, the Deerness School District no. 5056, in 1934. Logs had been cut and piled but by 1936, the idea had to be abandoned. Mr. Crispin, the secretary, wrote to the Department of Natural Resources claiming that "most of the settlers have moved out and more are going...at the present time there is not enough to form a school board."⁶⁹ Other Hell's Gate residents were denied loans or other support from the Northern Settlers' Re-establishment Branch because their farms were too remote – they still did not have a decent wagon road or proper bridge connecting them to the Montreal Lake Trail. The Hell's Gate community crumbled, to live on primarily in the memory of Forest Gate and Paddockwood residents as the epitome of the worst that could happen, even to those homesteaders who had come north full of hope, looking for the promise of a better life.

⁶⁷ The Austin family of Forest Gate is an example. See *Cordwood and Courage*, "Austin, Harold and Mary," "Austin, Lester and Rita. See also interviews, Merle Massie with Miriam (Austin) Swenson, November 2008 (MMPC); Merle Massie with Lester Austin, November 2008 (MMPC). Lester and Miriam, brother and sister, both noted in separate interviews that most of those who ended up at Hell's Gate soon moved south, to rent or purchase farms on better soil.

⁶⁸ Stutt and Van Vliet, p. 28-29.

⁶⁹ SAB S43 2004-220. In addition to not enough people, two men from the original school board were in jail.

Relief

Settlers may have hoped that the ecological edge environment would allow a measure of self-sufficiency, but the forest did not yield its living easily. The economic impact of the Great Depression was too severe. For those on poor land who faced difficult clearing with few resources, hope soon turned to resignation, almost despair. Although garden produce was usually more than sufficient, families required clothing and other supplies. Most northern families – at one time or another in their sojourn – required help, whether in the form of food, clothing, or medical relief.⁷⁰ Analysts have pointed to relief records, newspaper accounts, and letters from northern settlers desperate for help as further indication of the north's marginality and its inability to adequately support the newcomers.⁷¹ Within the context of the Depression, however, that analysis was unfair. No place was free of the Depression's heavy hand. Prices for all agricultural products, not just wheat, were depressed. Although a northern farmer usually found a greater degree of self-sufficiency consuming rather than selling farm products, agricultural returns were necessary for certain expenditures or services that could not be negotiated without cash. Relief vouchers filled that gap.

Relief was actually a malleable tool. One family may have lost its garden crop to frost, requiring interim food relief to get through the winter. Another may have had a bountiful garden, but needed warm clothing. A third may have been doing well, but an unexpected illness or hospitalization gave them a bill they were unable to meet. One family might require relief for several months or years; their neighbour might need only occasional or specific help. Although it has been common to speak of Depression families "going on relief" for prolonged periods of time, relief payments were generally more sporadic. Relief was tailored to each family's situation and operated on a month-to-month basis. Officials (and personal pride) encouraged families to provide as much as possible for themselves. Through operating a mixed farm where subsistence, fuel, barter, and exchange were common, relief could be kept to a minimum.⁷²

⁷⁰ Relief requirements were noticeable in the municipal files, the Northern Settler's Re-establishment Branch files, LID #959 files at the RM of Paddockwood, and the notes of government inspectors and other branches in charge of relief efforts.

⁷¹ Powell, "Northern Settlement;" McDonald, "Soldier Settlement and Depression Settlement."

⁷² Unlike modern welfare, relief was registered as a loan by municipal or provincial authorities. Families and individuals tried to keep their relief requirements to an absolute minimum, loathe to accumulate debt that would be difficult to pay back. For stories of relief officers and their charges, see *SAB Municipal Affairs, Northern Settlers Re-Establishment Branch files*.

A reporter for the *Regina Leader* investigated the northward trek to the Meadow Lake region in late 1931. The article claimed that the majority of trekkers had hopes of “making their living, arduous as it may be, with less government assistance than would have been required to maintain them on their original holdings.”⁷³ Less government assistance, but assistance if and when necessary, the reporter emphasized. The optimism the reporter found in 1931 dimmed as the years went by. Agricultural conditions stemming from poor soil, heavy bush, frost, water, and the continued economic depression cast a pall over early enthusiasm. As the Great Trek continued, later migrants had fewer resources. Relief vouchers and relief work entered the northern picture in ever-increasing amounts.

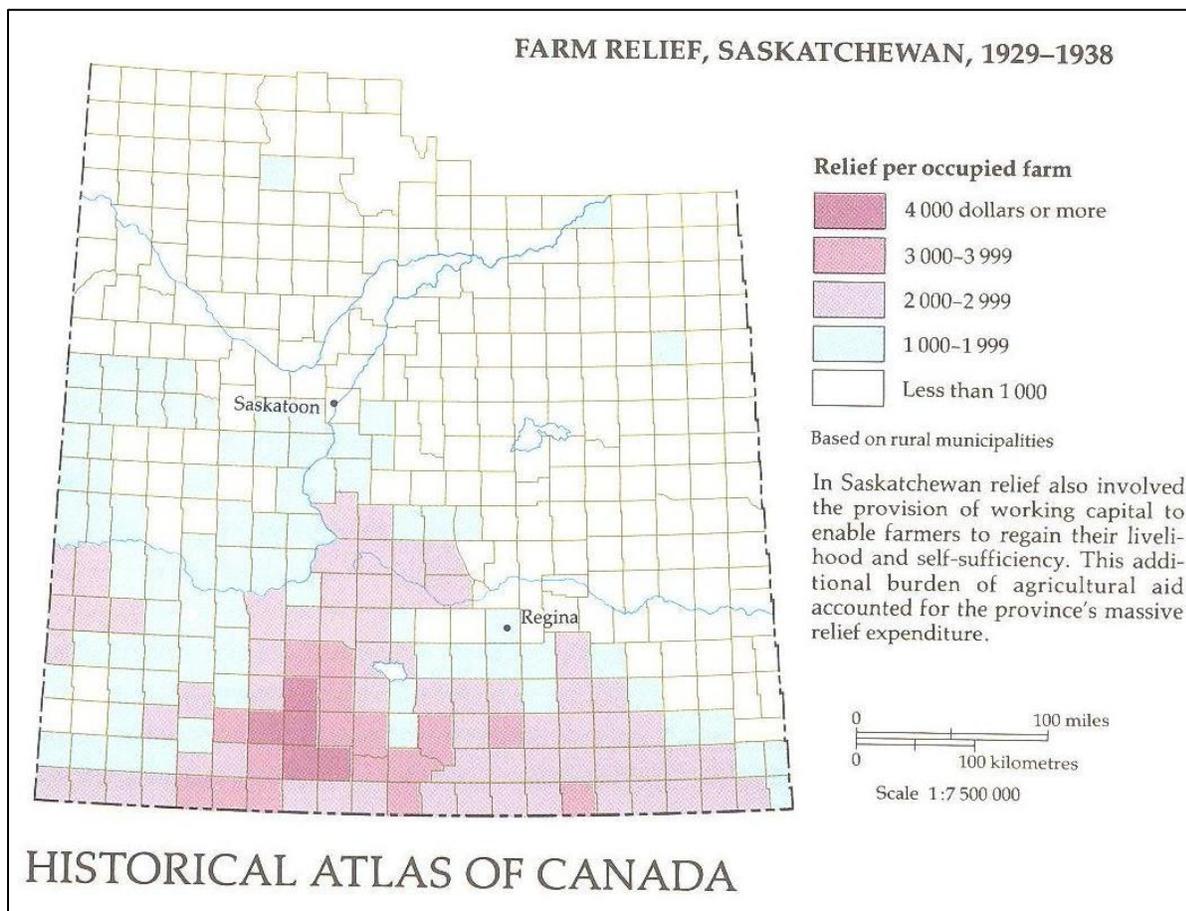


Figure 75. “Farm Relief in Saskatchewan, 1929-1938.” From *Historical Atlas of Canada Vol. III*, p. 152.

But the flame of northern hope never died out completely. Northern relief was, in fact, minimal by comparison to the seemingly endless relief rolls of prairie and urban centers. Geographer Denis Patrick Fitzgerald calculated a “startling difference between the amount of

⁷³Regina *Leader* 17 October 1931.

relief required in the prairies and the parklands compared with the pioneer region.”⁷⁴ The amount of per capita aid per year between 1930 and 1937 averaged \$385.64 on the prairies and an astounding two dollars and eighty-eight cents along the forest fringe.⁷⁵ Fitzgerald’s calculations may be high. The Saskatchewan report to the Dominion *Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations*, however, calculated that northern relief (both direct relief and agricultural aid and re-establishment) was less than one-tenth the cost of aid to the drought regions.⁷⁶ The difference, Fitzgerald noted, lay in the northern environment. Food and heating fuel, in particular, were easily procured at the forest edge landscape. Fitzgerald contended that the relief records provided “a very clear illustration, and abundant proof, of the north’s attractiveness during this period, repudiating some common beliefs.”⁷⁷

Analysts have typically pointed to government resettlement schemes as evidence that both the provincial and federal governments actively encouraged northern migration. Certainly, in the case of urban back-to-the-land schemes, forest edge agricultural settlement was an important part of municipal relief management. In terms of prairie agricultural resettlement to northern farms, government aid cannot be categorized as overtly encouraging. Although loan and other aid schemes were in place, the provincial government made it more difficult for settlers to obtain land in the north through their new purchased-homestead policies. It screened applicants for the available northern resettlement schemes prior to 1935 and rejected more people than it accepted.⁷⁸ Historian and economist G.E. Britnell claimed in 1939 that “government assistance

⁷⁴Fitzgerald, p. 353.

⁷⁵Fitzgerald, p. 354. The Hudson Bay region averaged just over five dollars per person per year; Bjorkdale and Carrot River less than two dollars per person per year. Stutt and Van Vliet noted that settlers in the northwestern districts of Saskatchewan received more aid; those in the northeastern areas, less. The average amount of aid per settler *family* totalled \$630 dollars in the northwest, and only \$235 in the northeast. These numbers were substantially higher than Fitzgerald’s calculations, but still far less than the majority of prairie farmers or urban residents who required relief for many years.

⁷⁶ Province of Saskatchewan, “A Submission By the Government of Saskatchewan to the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations.” (Canada, 1937), p. 185-187. In 1934-35, direct relief in the drought area cost \$6,500,000.00 while in the northern relief areas, costs were \$690,083. Agricultural aid that year cost \$14,000,000.00 for the whole province. In 1935, direct relief and agricultural aid cost about \$8,000,000.00, divided evenly between the two, while northern areas required \$793,028. In 1936, costs escalated. To the end of the relief year in August, 1937, costs were an astronomical \$8,000,000.00 for direct relief and \$10,000,000.00 for agricultural aid in the drought regions. Government assistance in northern relief areas amounted to \$1,030,976. Government aid for the north increased over the years, reflecting the growing population base, but clearly, northern settlers required far less relief than their counterparts in the drought regions.

⁷⁷ Fitzgerald, p. 353.

⁷⁸ Britnell, p. 207. Fitzgerald noted that the provincial government made Crown land *less* easy to obtain, increasing the size of forest reserves and screening purchasers to be sure they had enough capital to develop the land quickly. See Fitzgerald, p. 321.

in the form of loan schemes can scarcely be said to have been an important factor in northern settlement from 1930 to 1935 ...even after allowance has been made for government aid in meeting the costs of transferring settlers' effects and livestock."⁷⁹

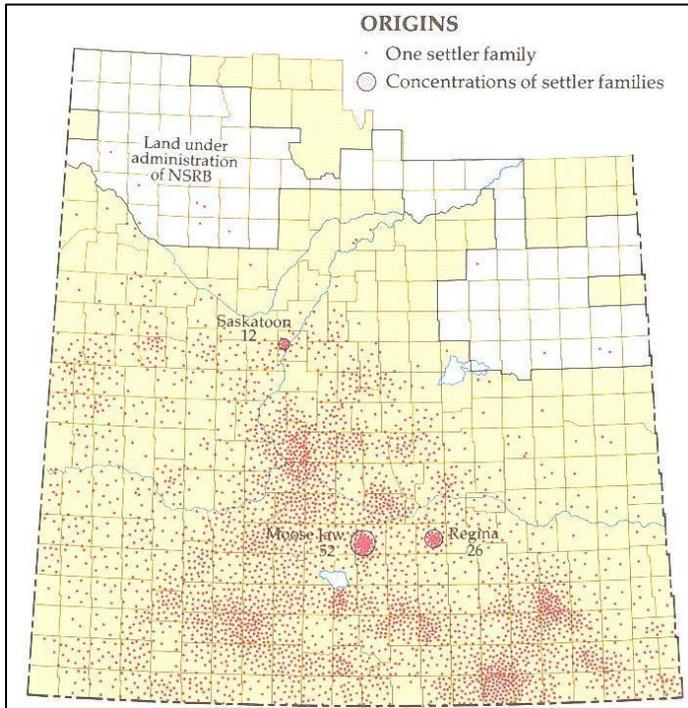


Figure 76. Origin of settlers who participated in government relocation schemes. *Historical Atlas of Canada Vol. III*, p. 152.

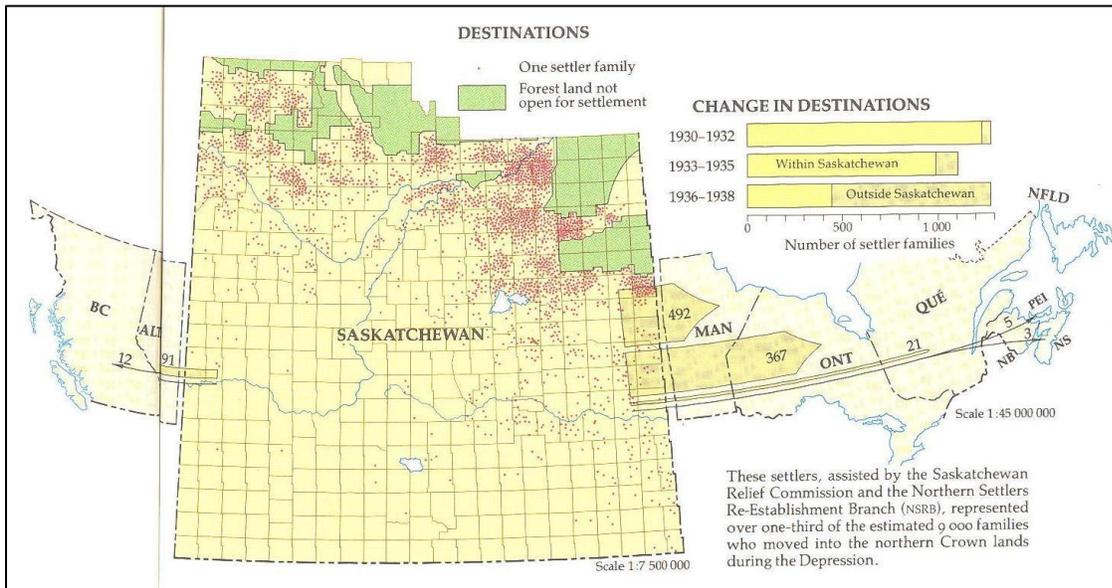


Figure 77. Destination of settlers on government-assisted relocation schemes. As the Depression worsened, more and more people moved by the government went outside the province. Source: *Historical Atlas of Canada Vol. III*, p. 152.

⁷⁹ Britnell, p. 208.

Despite substantially reduced relief requirements in northern settlements, both the provincial and the federal governments were, in fact, reluctant to abandon the once-profitable prairie wheat economy. In 1931, the Soldier Settlement Board of Canada sent a circular letter to its field superintendents, and copied the letter to the Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture, which endorsed it. The letter clearly stated: “We do not wish to encourage a general or even an individual exodus from the south country. In fact, every effort should be made by our Supervisors in the south country to discourage settlers from moving north unless under the most exceptional circumstances.”⁸⁰ The creation of the federally-sponsored Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA) in 1935 to investigate the drought problem and initiate erosion control and water solutions proved the importance of the prairie wheat economy. As late as 1939, despite the economic, social, and environmental havoc wreaked by the Depression, the provincial minister of agriculture defended the importance of the grain-growing open plains. Astonishingly high expenditures on southern relief efforts in the drought regions were acceptable, the minister contended, as those expenditures were “small in relation to the wealth produced in this drought area” in the years prior to 1930. Although it was a good idea to promote “thinning out the settlement of submarginal areas,” the minister steadfastly argued that “complete depopulation is not the solution to the problem.”⁸¹ Northern settlement during the 1930s found its impulse on past northern migration, word-of-mouth, and the pull of mixed farming and off-farm opportunities available at the forest edge, less so on government support.

The Northern Settlers’ Re-establishment Branch

The movement of thousands of drought refugees on their own, to sometimes precarious or dismal northern situations, forced the provincial government – reluctantly – to act. Some who went north, “in despair had merely stopped in their tracks. They were found squatting on road allowances, on forest reserves, or in any other spot where they hoped to remain undisturbed for the time being.” Squatting meant setting up a camp, digging and planting a modest garden, and living, as much as possible, off the land. “Trappers’ cabins, old sawmill camps, and shacks of all

⁸⁰ SAB R-261 File 26.5. Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture, Soldier Settlement branch. Soldier Settlement Board circular letter 24 June 1931. The “exceptional circumstances” included tenant farmers or those on “extremely poor farms.” Northern farms, “whilst presently better so far as moisture is concerned, may not be all as he believes them to be.”

⁸¹ SAB R-5 F.H. Auld papers, Miscellaneous Correspondence no. 11, “The Problem of Saskatchewan,” paper presented by J.G. Taggart, Minister of Agriculture and E.E. Eisenhauer, Irrigation Specialist, at the General Professional Meeting of the Engineering Institute of Canada at Ottawa, Ontario, 15 February 1939.

descriptions were occupied by this latest army of pioneers,” declared Northern Settlers’ Re-establishment Branch commissioner G.J. Matte.⁸²

With settlers squatting on unsuitable (and illegal) places, northern settlement was described as “chaotic,” even “intolerable.”⁸³ Administrators were besieged with requests for assistance. Settlers refused to pay taxes, interest, or land payments. Wild reports declared that some northern settlers burned government offices or threatened officials. Officers sent to evict squatters were met with force.⁸⁴ For those facing years of clearing marginal land, prospects were daunting, even overwhelming, and their anger and frustration boiled over. In response, the new Liberal Gardiner government made three critical policy changes in 1935 that affected northern settlers. First, the government changed its Crown land policy. Homestead fees rolled back to the traditional ten-dollar filing fee, and the government refunded all land payments that had been made between 1930 and 1935 to the settler.⁸⁵ For some, the refund gave a much-needed cash infusion. For others, the land on which they had been ‘squatting’ could be converted to a legal homestead. In the first year, ten thousand inquiries regarding northern land were received.⁸⁶ Between 1935 and 1939, almost 2000 homesteads entries were filed across the forest edge, indicating continued public pressure for northern land, despite its – by then – well-known drawbacks and hardships.⁸⁷

Second, the Land Utilization Act of 1935 gave the government sweeping power to convert land already under homestead or purchase agreement back to public land.⁸⁸ Across the forest edge, land considered too marginal for grain farming purposes – poor soil, excessive tree cover, or waterlogged – was evaluated by municipalities, often with one eye on their relief rolls. The government then required municipalities to halt financial assistance to occupants of inferior lands, essentially forcing those that had not already moved, to do so. The Hell’s Gate region was an example. Such land reverted to public control.

Third, the government consolidated the various programs and policies administered by several departments under the Northern Settlers’ Re-establishment Branch (NSRB). Relief aid

⁸² *SAB*, MA.3.8 Radio address 31 January 1939.

⁸³ McDonald, p. 5; Powell, p. 95.

⁸⁴ Fitzgerald, p. 325.

⁸⁵ Except for the original sixteen-dollar down payment. See Fitzgerald, p. 326-328.

⁸⁶ Fitzgerald, p. 328.

⁸⁷ Stutt and Van Vliet, p. 59.

⁸⁸ Most of the land ceded to the Land Utilization Board was, in fact, marginal prairie land. It was turned over the PFRA and eventually converted to pasture. See *SAB*, “The Problem of Saskatchewan.”

for northern settlers was co-ordinated through this branch. Settlers whose land had reverted to public control received re-settlement assistance to move to better land. Drainage projects, initiated to create both employment and more arable land, were established in places like Shand Creek and the Carrot River Valley.⁸⁹ Most importantly, settlers gained access to “re-establishment” funds. These funds bought everything from horses and other stock, equipment and tools, to land clearing and breaking. The government realized that settlement schemes from the 1920s – soldier settlement or land settlement – succeeded in large part because of loans and ongoing support to farmers. Much of the northern land (after the backbreaking work to clear it) was, in fact, capable of growing crops – including the best of the grey podzolic soil.⁹⁰ The NSRB purchased mechanized land-clearing equipment to break land or authorized payment to private contractors to clear and break larger acreages. From 1935 to 1940, over six thousand families received re-establishment funds; of those, well over five thousand had become entirely self-supporting by 1941.⁹¹

The creation of the Northern Settlers’ Re-establishment Branch signalled a major change in policy for the provincial government. Whereas earlier relief and resettlement schemes were regarded as little more than ‘stop-gap’ measures to alleviate conditions in the short term, the NSRB represented a return to land settlement policies constructed to provide long-term resilience for Saskatchewan farm families. Relief records often separated direct relief from agricultural aid, and much of the aid required during the Depression was for seed grain, feed and fodder relief for stock, tractor fuel and oil, and repairs to farm machinery. Agricultural aid was calculated to help a farmer in the short term. Re-establishment aid looked to the future, providing loans for a farmer to build up stock and make machinery purchases. The NSRB initiated educational campaigns

⁸⁹ Powell, p. 96.

⁹⁰ A farmer required more cleared grey soil to make a viable farm than on black or transitional soil. Grey soil also needed adequate fertilization. Stutt and Van Vliet claimed, however, that government investment in land clearing would pay off, as farmers could easily carry the debt load caused by land clearing. Stutt and Van Vliet, p. 68. Costs for land clearing had declined throughout the 1930s. As mechanization increased, cost per acre for clearing and breaking decreased from fifteen to ten dollars per acre of heavy bush. See E.C. Hope and R.A. Stutt, “An Economic Study of Land Settlement,” p. 25. Increased mechanization and decreased costs helped post-Depression northern farmers clear acreage quickly, making northern farms viable.

⁹¹ Stutt and Van Vliet calculated that of the northern families interviewed in 1941, an average of one-third had received re-establishment funds. On a microlocal level, these numbers broke down even further. In the brand new communities such as Goodsoil-Pierceland, seventy percent received re-establishment assistance. Settlers in older communities such as Carrot River or the soldier settlement community of Carragana required less, from five to fifteen percent taking loans. See Stutt and Van Vliet, p. 59-60. In the north Prince Albert region, re-establishment loans could be found primarily in the most northerly districts, around Emma and Christopher Lake, Beaton, Forest Gate and Moose Lake school districts. Any northern resident, not just drought trekkers, could apply for Re-establishment funds. See *SAB*, Municipal Affairs fonds, MA 3.31, Northern Settlers’ Re-establishment Board files.

that promoted mixed farming as the most secure base for northern settlers, and provided the support and funds to allow land clearing and diversification. A policy shift from relief to re-establishment indicated the provincial government's commitment to overall northern development and expressed a measure of hope for future success.

Forest Resources

Although northern settlement initiatives sponsored by the various levels of government focused primarily on agriculture and its successes and failures, trekkers and established settlers relied on – and expected – non-farm income to supplement mixed farming, relief, and re-establishment measures. Although drought and depression sent many trekkers looking for water, green grass, and trees to contrast the dry dust of the plains, trekkers were also drawn to the economic and cultural prospects offered at the forest edge.

Of all the non-agricultural resources and opportunities found at the forest edge, the most important was the forest itself. The 1933 Paddockwood board of trade pamphlet declared: “All through the brief history of Paddockwood there can be little doubt that the great beckoning force has been the trees – the timber.” The primary farm product, more important than grain or stock, came from the trees: “Thousands of cords of wood and millions of feet of lumber, ties and fence posts are sold annually to nearby points.”⁹² Clearly, in the north Prince Albert region, wood was a crop to be harvested whilst clearing the land and sold for profit. The concept of ‘mixed farming’ within the forest edge landscape took on a new meaning: not only was the landscape suited to stock raising and cereal grain growing, but the landscape *itself* could be turned to profit.

Local men Pat O’Hea and Herb Endicott wrote a history of Paddockwood for the *Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life* in 1953. Cordwood was the bedrock of the Paddockwood economy during the Depression, they insisted:

Came the lean and hungry 30s: Up to this time the forest growth, made up principally of white poplar, was a barrier to a settler being granted title deed to his homestead. There being no mechanized method of clearing the land, it was a monotonous, ding-dong battle of chopping, clearing, and grubbing. One did well to have five acres ready for breaking in a year. Then our enemy, the poplar, became our ally when turned into cord wood, and was a big factor in our weathering or surviving the thirties. ... We beat the 30s, also the bush, thereby winning two battles, but “ ‘twas a tough fight.”⁹³

⁹² “Paddockwood: The Mixed Farming Paradise of Saskatchewan.”

⁹³ SAB RC 236, File C67 box 12, Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, Community Brief, Paddockwood.



Figure 78. Maurice England hauling cordwood at Paddockwood. *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 618.

As the Depression deepened, the cordwood industry symbolized both the ecological and the economic struggle. Trees were the enemies of progress for homestead development, but became the ally when converted to fuel for sale. Cordwood became the Paddockwood equivalent of the Made Beaver currency of the old fur trade; all else was measured against it.

During the Depression, the cash economy virtually disappeared, particularly in southern Saskatchewan. Communities were paralyzed. Without some form of a flowing economy outside of relief payments, families were unable to go to dances or the lake, pay a teacher's salary or buy a new teapot. Bill Grohn pointed to this paralyzing effect when he claimed that the east Weyburn district was broken by the Depression. In contrast, the cordwood economy and healthy system of cash and barter that existed along the forest edge meant that communities could thrive, even boom. Cutting and hauling cordwood was hard and dangerous work, with sometimes pitiful cash returns, but most residents agreed: it was better than nothing and for some, it kept them off relief. If a farmer did not have adequate trees on his own farm, he could hire on to work in a cordwood or railway tie camp, leased from the provincial government. Several operated along the Montreal Lake trail and the Mosher trail to Candle Lake, just south and east of the boundary of Prince Albert National Park.

The cordwood economy allowed community members to organize and build schools, invest in social and recreational clubs, take short holidays to the lakes or even build a cabin,

support sports days and hockey clubs, and allow musicians to play for pocket change at dances held in homes, schools, and halls. The importance of the cordwood economy resonated through the years, leading the Paddockwood History book committee to call their local history *Cordwood and Courage* when it was published in 1982. Geographer Denis Fitzgerald commented, “the psychological role of forest resources might well have been of more significance than the material. Many pioneers ...felt that the forestlands themselves were a type of insurance policy; they acted as a safe refuge or shelter.” The trees, as well as other forest resources, acted to sustain the morale of northern homesteaders, even when life was particularly grim.⁹⁴

The forest edge environment provided household resources, particularly food through berry picking, wild game, and fish. Indeed, the Paddockwood pamphlet expressly advertised products of the landscape as a way to supplement household diet cheaply. Local history books from the area proudly displayed photographs of these resources, including several canners full of blueberries from 1931, wild game piled on the railway station platform, and strings of fish from successful expeditions to local lakes. Numerous family histories recount excursions to hunt, fish, and pick berries as a way of adding to and varying diet. Some, however, admitted defeat in this regard. Muriel McGowan noted, “although living in this area where fish and game are plentiful neither Sargent nor I became enthusiastic hunters or fishermen.” Although Sargent accompanied a neighbour on a highly successful fishing expedition, Muriel was perplexed by the sheer amount of fish. Some were eaten fresh, some canned and the rest salted, “and later buried in the bush.” A hunting expedition also went awry, when Sargent became hopelessly lost. He “vowed never to go again, that he would pick his own meat, on the hoof, in his own farmyard, which he did.”⁹⁵ Although hunting regulations were in place throughout the Depression, game wardens were encouraged to look the other way when it came to families clearly harvesting elk, moose, and deer populations as a food resource – unless, of course, those animals were shot within the boundaries of the national park.

In addition to mixed farming, forest-based food resources and the cordwood economy, the forest edge landscape supported labour opportunities from freighting, fishing, lumber and railway tie camps, mining camps, the tourism industry and trapping. These opportunities allowed occupational pluralism that combined on-farm with off-farm income. Such pluralism was

⁹⁴ Fitzgerald, p. 410.

⁹⁵ “McGowan, Sargent Hugh and Muriel.” Interestingly, their son Sargent Ernest became a prolific and highly successful hunter, fisherman, and trapper.

characteristic of the northern boom and more particularly for those who homesteaded within the grey wooded soil zone. These farms, the majority of which were homesteaded during the 1930s, rarely exceeded a quarter section and most had only a few acres cleared, grubbed, and broken for cultivation.⁹⁶ Off-farm cash income supplemented mixed-farming returns and relief vouchers, and contributed to the general northern boom.

Ernest Wiberg took his homestead at Paddockwood in 1931, a prairie boy from the east Weyburn district whose brothers either farmed with Ernest's parents or rode the rails across the country. Not yet married, Wiberg worked for fifteen years in the commercial fishing industry operating on the large lakes in north-eastern Saskatchewan.⁹⁷ Typically, fish camps operated from freeze-up in late fall to the spring thaw. Wiberg recalled walking into the camps in early winter over frozen rivers, or poling scows loaded with Hudson's Bay Company freight up the rivers in late fall.⁹⁸

Other forest edge farmers made cash during the winter by freighting. Throughout the 1930s, freighting went through a transitional phase. Sleighs pulled by teams of horses were used but increasingly, companies began diversifying into mechanized caterpillar tractors. Cat tractors were efficient -- they could run day and night and did not require rest, as did horses. They could also pull far more freight. A small cat tractor could pull thirty tons of frozen fish or goods and push a plow to open a road. Another cat immediately behind on a clear road could haul even more.⁹⁹ The extra power provided by caterpillar tractors meant that northern posts, fishing camps, towns, schools, and the new mining camps could order heavier items. Indeed, much of the equipment at the Rottenstone mineral region near La Ronge, the Anglo-Rouyn mine, and Goldfields on Lake Athabasca was freighted in with cat-swings. The northern commercial

⁹⁶ Stutt, "Land Settlement," p. 13. This article claimed, "not only did the amount of land under cultivation depend upon the type and density of scrub and bush but also upon the number of persons in the family. The smaller family had the least cleared ... full tribute for progress must be shared with the wife and members of the family." Researcher Robert McLeman noted that on average, larger families were more inclined to make the Great Trek north, while smaller families stayed on their southern farms. The chance to grow a garden, operate a mixed subsistence farm or access forest resources appeared to be a stronger pull factor for larger families. Robert McLeman, "Climate-Related Human Migration: Enhancing our Understanding Through Use of Analogues," unpublished conference paper presented at Canadian Association of Geographers annual meeting, *Prairie Summit 2010*, Regina, 3 June 2010.

⁹⁷ For an overview of the rise of commercial fishing on the northern lakes, see Gary Seymour, "A Geographical Study of the Commercial Fishing Industry in Northern Saskatchewan: An Example of Resource Development," unpublished MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1971. See also Liza Piper, *The Industrial Transformation of Subarctic Canada*.

⁹⁸ See "Wiberg, Ernest and Jean" in *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 508-509.

⁹⁹ Svein Sigfusson, *Sigfusson's Roads* (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1992), p. 49.

fishing and mining resource industries boomed during the 1930s and propelled the move to caterpillar tractors. Cats could haul equipment and supplies too heavy for water barges or horses. In the absence of rail lines in northern Saskatchewan, cat-swings filled a specific need for power, speed, and heavy transport.



Figure 79. Cat train near Prince Albert, 1929. *Glenbow Archives PD-356-1132.*

As technology advanced and caterpillar tractors became the motive force of the freight-swings, there was a shift in the social and economic dynamics of freighting. Although some farmers continued to work as freighters in the winter to supplement their income, freighting as an industry de-coupled from farming – horses, hay, and oats were no longer needed, and the skills required were not horse-skills, but machinery skills. The change to cat tractor technology escalated northern development. Cats used to haul freight in winter were hired to make extensive road improvements or agricultural brush cutting in the summer. These changes transformed both the freighting industry and forest edge communities. Agriculture expanded rapidly in the late 1930s and throughout the 1940s, as farms expanded and consolidated. Better roads opened the way for intensive development in the once-remote far north following the Second World War.

Homestead families in the Alingly, Spruce Home, Albertville, Paddockwood, Forest Gate and Christopher Lake districts also engaged in the burgeoning tourism industry. Men with extensive bush experience became park wardens; others worked on park roads, cooked for the

hotels (or relief camps) or opened tourist facilities such as cabin or boat rentals, bus services, or grocery and supply stores.¹⁰⁰ Others loaded up their wagons with meat, eggs, milk, butter, and fresh garden produce and sold it to the camps, hotels, or door-to-door at the cabins and on the beaches at the lakes. Earl Daley, for example, sold his milk for ten cents a quart, and had enough cows to offer fifty to sixty quarts per day to picnickers and beachgoers. Mrs. Oscar Anderson of the Elk Range school district (between Northside and Paddockwood) took butter and eggs to Neis Beach on Emma Lake in 1931. But George Neis, who homesteaded the land and owned the resort, had his own butter and eggs to supply the campers. When he physically removed her from his property so she could not sell her wares, Anderson charged Neis with assault.¹⁰¹

The Jacobsen family, who initiated much of the tourist development at Anglin Lake, moved from Frontier, Saskatchewan in 1930. “As soon as the car stopped [after the three-day Trek north] one little brother grabbed a hatchet and claimed territory by cutting down a small tree. As I look back I realize that no one minded leaving the prairie, we loved the forest and lakes.”¹⁰² For the Jacobsens and many others, the move away from the open plains reflected what geographer Robert Rees called “The Cult of the Tree.” For many immigrants to western Canada, the strangeness of the prairie landscape – treeless, flat, dry, hot, and immense – caused an intensely negative reaction.¹⁰³ For prairie-born children, that landscape was home, but became disfigured and alien by the drought. The love of trees and a connection between forest and beauty pervaded Anglo-Canadian culture.¹⁰⁴ The Trek north was, in part, a move from poverty to subsistence, brown to green, despair to hope, but also from ugly to beautiful.

Trapping furs was another important activity along the forest edge. A number of north Prince Albert region residents earned extra cash in the winter and spring by operating trap lines on their homesteads or on nearby Crown land. They sought primarily squirrels, weasels, skunks, rabbits, muskrat, wolf, coyote, fox, and lynx. Pelts could be bartered at local merchants or turned

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, “Arne Jacobson and family,” *Tweedsmuir: Community and Courage* (Tweedsmuir History Committee. Prince Albert: Campbell Printing, 2006), p. 85-90; the Merrell family, *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 369-370; Bryce Dunn’s memoirs, “Yesteryears Reflections: A Pictorial and Written History of Times Past Seen Through the Eyes of a Boy who Lived Those Times to the Fullest,” (self-published by the author, no date); “Daley, Fred and Thelma,” *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 167-168.

¹⁰¹ Neis hired John Diefenbaker as his lawyer, and succeeded in having the case dismissed, as Anderson was clearly trespassing. *Prince Albert Daily Herald*, 7 August 1931; 14 August 1931.

¹⁰² “Arne Jacobsen and family,” *Tweedsmuir: Community and Courage*, p. 85-90.

¹⁰³ Ronald Rees, *New and Naked Land: Making the Prairies Home* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1988), p. 95-96.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 96-99.

to ready cash. With squirrels at ten cents a pelt and a muskrat pelt worth sixty-five cents, a kid with a trap line could easily earn considerable cash. Bryce Dunn of Paddockwood, whose father claimed soldier settlement land, remembered taking his spring pelts to Prince Albert in 1933 and receiving a tremendous twenty-one dollars and forty-five cents. Dunn splurged on new leather boots, went to the movies and loaded up a gunnysack of both urgent groceries and treats at the store. Jam, for example, could be bought at twenty-five cents for a four-pound pail. Bryce brought home six.¹⁰⁵ Paul Hayes of Candle Lake claimed unconditionally that “trapping was the key to survival in the hungry thirties.” Hayes claimed that a winter’s take of the more lucrative fox, lynx, otter, marten, and wolf pelts “could gross \$3500.00,” an immense amount of money during the Depression.¹⁰⁶

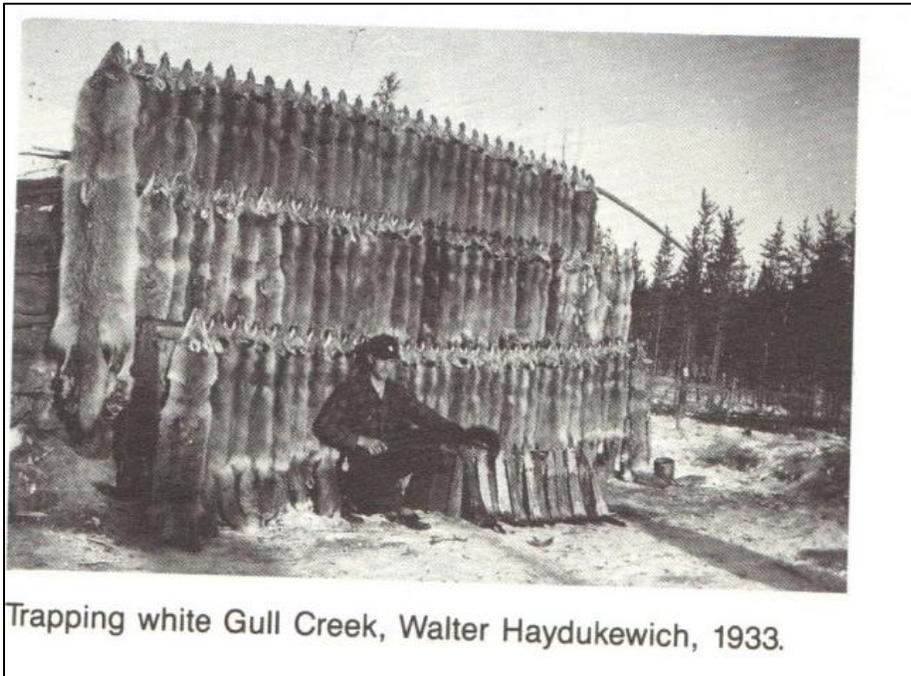


Figure 80. “Trapping at White Gull Creek, Walter Haydukewich, 1933.” From *Fur, Fish, and Game: A Candle Lake Legacy*, p. 27.

The Depression placed significant stress on the fur industry. The sheer number of homesteaders moving into the forest fringe placed increasing pressure on fur resources. As well, prices dropped. Muskrat pelts worth a dollar-and-a-half in 1928 dropped to sixty-five cents; mink from thirteen to less than four dollars. In addition, beaver were scarce, and trapping beaver

¹⁰⁵ Howard Andrews, who grew up north of Paddockwood, shot and skinned squirrels. See *Fur, Fish, and Forest: A Candle Lake Legacy* (Candle Lake History Book Committee. Altona: Friesen Printers, 1991), “Andrews, Howard and Ileen,” p. 120. Bryce Dunn, “Yesteryears Reflections: p. 24-28.

¹⁰⁶ See “Hayes, Paul and Dolly,” in *Fish, Fur, and Forest: A Candle Lake Legacy*, p. 180-182.

was officially prohibited in 1938.¹⁰⁷ Despite the drastic slip in prices, the number of trappers overall increased. The files of the Saskatchewan Department of Natural Resources show that the money earned by trapping in northern Saskatchewan grew from half a million dollars in 1930 to over one million by 1933-34, then declined slightly to 1937 when there was a severe drop. A spike in overall returns in 1939, just prior to the onset of war, reflected the return of good prices.¹⁰⁸ The number of trappers was highest in 1934 and 1936, but overall returns were not higher.¹⁰⁹ Even so, despite low returns, trapping offered an opportunity to increase cash flow or barter power for some northern homesteaders.

Since the publication of A.L. Karras' beautiful *North to Cree Lake* in the 1970s, there has been considerable interest in the history of white (non-native) trapping in northern Saskatchewan. Karras was perhaps the most well-known of men who, as a result of the Depression, went into the northern boreal forest to operate trap lines. Depictions of these men have spanned a narrative range. Archibald Belaney, or Grey Owl, wrote during the 1930s that "we...are seeing the last of the free trappers; a race of men who...will turn the last page in the story of true adventure on this continent, closing forever the book of romance in Canadian History. The forest cannot much longer stand before the conquering march of modernity, and soon we shall witness the vanishing of a mighty wilderness."¹¹⁰ Despite his opposition to trapping, Grey Owl believed that trappers (of all races) and other northern sojourners of the "Last Frontier" understood the wood and wilds best, and so would be in a position to defend it, and act as champions of the wild.

Those "Last Frontiersmen," or at least the non-native trappers who inspired the fulsome praise of Grey Owl, have been harshly condemned in recent historical work. Historian David Quiring criticized white trappers for lacking a "long-term commitment" to the north, harvesting furs in winter and drifting south after spring breakup. Their lack of foresight and commitment led to overtrapping and a severe depletion in fur stocks in northern Saskatchewan prior to 1945, Quiring suggested.¹¹¹ Overtrapping had a deeper impact on the First Nations population than on

¹⁰⁷ Fitzgerald, p. 436-437.

¹⁰⁸ Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management, Wildlife Technical Report Number 5, "A Century of Fur Harvesting in Saskatchewan," 1995, p. 32.

¹⁰⁹ Fitzgerald, p. 439, 439a.

¹¹⁰ Grey Owl, *The Men of the Last Frontier* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1931; paperback edition 1989), p. 26.

¹¹¹ David Quiring, *Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers and Fur Sharks: CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), p. 101. White trappers' disregard for northern resources was reiterated and strengthened by Frank Tough, *As Their Natural Resources Fail: Native Peoples and the Economic*

the itinerant trappers because it affected the whole region over a longer period of time. White trappers could take other jobs in other industries; First Nations people often could not. In this sense, the Depression story of trapping as a northern opportunity has evolved to emphasize First Nations hardship.¹¹² Increased trapping pressure from white southern trappers spread the resources thinly for everyone, particularly First Nations on whose traditional trapping areas the newcomers encroached.

The prolonged drought of the 1930s had a severe environmental impact on northern trapping. Drought, contrary to popular perceptions driven by images of dust storms, was not confined to the south. The northern boreal forest was also touched. Although the north was comparatively wetter than the devastated prairies and plains, the northern forests, streams and lakes did experience an overall drier era, particularly after 1935 and during 1937 when even the parkland and much of the forest fringe agricultural region experienced drought. Dry conditions set off massive forest fires, which affected the game and fur bearing populations drastically.¹¹³ Heavy smoke from the forest fires, it was claimed, cut off the sunshine, which led to low oxygen levels in the lakes. Thousands of dead fish were found floating on the lakes, and the beaver and muskrat populations plummeted. Beaver dams and ponds, an important part of a northern forest ecosystem, were burnt out and not rebuilt. Experiments were carried out to dam small lakes and streams to encourage muskrat and beaver populations.¹¹⁴ Streams normally used for transportation purposes either completely dried up or were too low to allow the passage of freight canoes or barges. As a result, northern communities demanded road work as relief projects to try and establish land links to the south.¹¹⁵ The environmental impact of the drought

History of Northern Manitoba, 1870-1930. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995). Both concede that northern trapping became popular following WWI, and increased throughout the 1920s. It was not a specifically Depression phenomenon, but part of a general push north.

¹¹² A fascinating series of articles by H. Clifford Dunfield in *The Western Producer* throughout the spring, summer, and fall of 1971 is a spectacular, if underutilized, source for First Nations history along the forest fringe and north to the Churchill River Basin. Titled "The Fur Forest of Saskatchewan," Dunfield provided a window into fur conservation and ecology, First Nations views and economics, as well as stories, anecdotes, characters and incidents from the western Churchill basin.

¹¹³ For an important examination of human-set forest fires by prospectors in northern Saskatchewan throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and their impact on First Nations, see Tony Gulig, "'Determined to Burn off the Entire Country': Prospectors, Caribou and the Denesuliné in Northern Saskatchewan, 1900-1940," in *American Indian Quarterly* Vol. 26, no. 3 (2002): pp. 335-359.

¹¹⁴ See "A Century of Fur Harvesting in Saskatchewan," p. 25. Beaver ponds provided important resources for both forest populations and humans, from waterfowl and animal use, ice harvesting, firebreaks, water sources for firefighters and hay resources for homesteaders.

¹¹⁵ SAB, MA 3.7, Northern Settlers Re-establishment funds.

and forest fires should be considered along with the surge in non-native trapping to explain the devastating drop in fur resources prior to 1945.¹¹⁶

First Nations and Métis

As homesteaders pressed north past the Forest Gate region into the grey soil zone at Moose Lake, Hell's Gate and east to Candle Lake, new homesteaders competed with trappers, cordwood and railway tie camps, hunters and berry pickers for available resources. All were constrained by the boundaries of Prince Albert National Park, which disallowed homesteading, trapping or hunting within its borders. First Nations families from Little Red River who traditionally used northern boreal territory had to share the trails and restricted resource base with an ever-increasing number of drought refugees. The results were devastating to the First Nations population. Moving further and further away from the reserve to access forest resources placed excessive strain on reserve families. Throughout the 1930s, increased hardship could be found.

Several Métis families, such as the Lavallées, were forcibly displaced by the creation of Prince Albert National Park. Louis Lavallée had a cabin on the shores of what is now known as Lavallée Lake, at the north end of the park.¹¹⁷ Lavallée at first found a measure of fame at his home, when journalists visiting the park arrived to take his picture. He was also featured in the Department of the Interior film *Modern Voyageurs* in 1931, as one of the more colourful denizens living in the park. Sometime in the 1930s, though, Lavallée was pressured to leave. Other families, such as the Clares, also lived within what became the park boundaries, where they made their living fishing, trapping, and hunting. When trapping and hunting were prohibited, the Métis families found their livelihoods severely diminished. Banished from their

¹¹⁶ Trapping licences were introduced in Saskatchewan in 1920. By 1922, over eight thousand licenses were issued; in 1928, over twelve thousand. These numbers moderated in the 1930s, from a low of 2600 in 1932 to a high of 10,400 licences in 1936. Indeed, overall there were *less* licences purchased in the 1930s (71,965 between 1920 and 1929 and 66,839 between 1930 and 1939). In some cases, people trapped without licences, if they could not afford to purchase one. Many traders would take furs without asking to see a licence. However, the overall drop in licenses could suggest that pressure from white trappers was perhaps *less* than previously charged. If so, the role of environmental stress on fur stocks should be re-examined. See "A Century of Fur Harvesting in Saskatchewan," trapper licence sales 1920-1940, p. 17, 26. See also *Fur, Fish, and Forest* and "Yesteryears Reflections." It should be noted that trapping generally increased in popularity throughout the 20th century. During the 1970s, 124,000 trapping licences were issued; in the 1980s, over 155,000 – but the overall population of Saskatchewan was about the same as it was in the 1930s.

¹¹⁷ The lake, originally called Pelican Lake for its tremendous pelican population, was not part of the park's original boundaries. When the boundaries were extended north in 1929, most of Lavallée Lake fell within the expanded park. See Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan's Playground: A History of Prince Albert National Park* (Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1989), p. 104. Because the lake was so remote, and only occasional canoeists found their way to the lake, Lavallée was not, at first, pressured to move.

homes, the families were eventually offered land at the Green Lake Métis settlement north and west of Big River under the direction of the Northern Settlers' Re-establishment Board.¹¹⁸ Several families eventually settled at Fish Lake, a Métis settlement that grew between Little Red River reserve and Prince Albert National Park within the Emma Lake provincial forest.¹¹⁹

The “road allowance” people, as many Métis were known, found themselves a people “in between.” They were not allowed to reside on the Little Red River reserve, as they were not status Indians of either Montreal Lake or Lac La Ronge bands, even though many had relations on the reserve. They were entitled to land consideration through their Métis heritage. The provincial government set aside otherwise unused Crown land for these small, family-oriented communities, such as Fish Lake or the Crescent Lake settlement south of Yorkton.¹²⁰

The nature of First Nations and Métis life at the forest edge reveals opposing and ironic twists in the way the story of the forest fringe has been told. Agricultural analysts considered the wheat monoculture the apex and norm of farming. As a result, occupational pluralism and off-farm income commonly found along the forest fringe – freighting, fishing, hunting, picking berries, lumber and trapping – became indicators of a marginal environment. Within the agricultural paradigm, families were “forced” to use off-farm resources to supplement meagre farm returns.¹²¹ At the same time, First Nations and Métis inhabitants of the forest fringe routinely combined landscape resources with occupational pluralism. Through cultural racism,

¹¹⁸ Fitzgerald, p. 338.

¹¹⁹ For an overview of the settlement at Fish Lake and its people, see *Tweedsmuir: Community and Courage*, p. 93-100.

¹²⁰ For an overview of Métis history in Saskatchewan, see Darren Préfontaine, “Métis Communities,” *The Encyclopaedia of Saskatchewan* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2005); Maria Campbell, *Stories of the Road Allowance People* (Penticton: Theytus Books, 1995). Two excellent documentaries include Jeanne Corrigan’s “Jim Settee: The Way Home,” (Jeanne Corrigan, 2009) and “The Story of the Crescent Lake Metis: Our Life on the Road Allowance,” (Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2002).

¹²¹ R.W. Sandwell presented an exceptional overview of recent rural/agricultural history, arguing that there is a growing understanding by historians that the wheat monoculture was perhaps *not* the norm for the majority of agricultural endeavour, at least in nineteenth century eastern Canada. Although focused on the absence of the family from traditional examinations of agriculture, Sandwell argued that the polarization of agricultural discourse (particularly subsistence versus market agriculture) has marginalized, at least theoretically, societies built on occupational pluralism, such as the agri-forestry societies of Quebec and New Brunswick. See “Rural Reconstruction: Towards a New Synthesis in Canadian History,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History* Vol. 27 no. 53 (May 1994): pp. 1-32. A similar point, that “the single job, single wage norm ... may come to be seen as a historical aberration,” is found in Rosemary E. Ommer and Nancy J. Turner, “Informal Rural Economies in History,” in *Labour/Le Travail* no. 53 (Spring 2004): pp. 127-157. Ommer and Turner argued that pre-industrial societal exchange and trading practises have not disappeared but have become “the rural informal economy,” an example of which would be the cordwood industry. The paper also argued that occupational pluralism was often found at sites of ecological pluralism. It was a pragmatic and flexible, usually localized response to place, landscape, and economic need.

their lifestyle was often denigrated. Yet during the Depression, off-farm occupations and forest products provided the key to the northern boom and were an important drawing card for many southern refugees. Racist explanations separated Aboriginal pursuits from homesteader practices by emphasizing the role of time: white homesteaders would use the resources of the landscape only until their farms were large and profitable enough to sustain their families; First Nations bands had no intention of changing their pluralistic pursuits where farming provided only a portion of their income or food.¹²²

The struggle to turn bushland into farmland, hard enough for white settlers, was almost impossible for First Nations families without access to government loans for tools, supplies, horses, or machinery. Land was owned by the band, and without some form of land collateral, loans to underwrite agricultural expansion were limited. Some reserve inhabitants, such as Billy Bear, succeeded in developing a prosperous mixed farm, but Bear combined farming with a successful freighting business and lumber interests, thereby accessing much-needed cash to allow for farm improvements.¹²³ For the Little Red River band, one way to capitalize on their land and realize income was to lease their farmland to neighbouring settlers. Non-native neighbours cleared and broke reserve land for agricultural purposes, and the reserve used the rent to fund much-needed services for the band.¹²⁴

Social Capital

A key aspect of the Great Trek, and an important part of trekker's success or failure in the north, was derived from social capital. Social capital is the spirit of connection and exchange between humans or social groups that facilitates networks and can provide extensive benefits. Although social capital is difficult to track or evaluate, it can be seen in knowledge exchange, co-operation, trust, sharing, security, acts of charity, chain migration, friendship, and kinship.

The experience of the Wiberg and McGowan families of Paddockwood and the exchange of services and help offered by friends, neighbours and relatives provided an excellent example

¹²² First Nations historian John Tobias declared that drought trekkers went north to "live like the Métis." Private communication, June 2008.

¹²³ Interestingly, one writer for the Tweedsmuir local history book thought that Billy Bear "must have been a white man" because he owned a farm. See "James Brown and Family," *Tweedsmuir: Community and Courage*, p. 41. For other aspects of Billy Bear's life, see the files of Indian Affairs, particularly RG 10 Volume 7766.

¹²⁴ "History of Little Red River Reserve," as told by Angus Merasty, *Saskatchewan Indian* Vol. 3, no. 6 (June 1972): p. 10. By the 1970s, Merasty claimed, leased agricultural land brought \$75,000.00 annually to Lac La Ronge, and likely a proportionate amount to the Montreal Lake band. By 2008, the land leases represented a significant portion of band income. Palmer Hanson rented and broke Little Red River reserve land, as did many of his neighbours in the Spruce Home and Northside districts. Interview, Palmer and Frances Hanson with Merle Massie, summer 2007.

of the importance of social capital to northern resettlement success. Ernest Wiberg rode with a neighbour from Griffin, Saskatchewan (east of Weyburn) on his trek north. At Paddockwood, he worked with another Griffin emigrant, Axel Goplen, for the first year on the new northern homestead. The Goplen family were there to offer a hot supper to Ernest and his brother-in-law, Sargent McGowan three years later, when McGowan came north with his settlers effects in the spring of 1934. The McGowans lived with Ernest on his homestead for the first six years, looking after Ernest's farm in the winter while he was away working at the fish camps. Ernest looked after chores when Sargent was away doing road work in exchange for paying taxes in the summer.

Sargent's brother, Norman McGowan, and his wife Mabel came north soon after Sargent and his family were settled. They stayed up north for three years, where Norman (a hulk of a man at six-foot, four inches and broad shouldered) worked at tie camps and other jobs. Mabel never adjusted to northern life, though, and when opportunity arose for Norman to run a Pool elevator they moved back to the Weyburn district. For them, their northern sojourn provided a short refuge until an opportunity came to facilitate their return south.

Clarence Wiberg, brother to Ernest and Muriel, went north in 1934. He stayed with his siblings while taking local jobs. The three Wibergs were joined by their parents and other family members in 1940. Clarence and another brother, Allan, did some fire fighting in the Candle Lake area before joining the war effort. Muriel's sister Dagmar came north in 1940 and soon started teaching at Elk Range school, where Sargent was a trustee and the McGowan children went to school. Dagmar's husband, John Bentz, joined the army and when the war was over, John, Allan, and Clarence all took land in the Paddockwood area through the Veteran's Land Act, an updated version of the original Soldier Settlement land scheme. Clarence later claimed, "upon returning to this warm and friendly atmosphere amongst loving relatives and congenial neighbours, I decided this was a good place to make my home."¹²⁵

Clarence Wiberg's sentiments played out for hundreds of other families across the forest fringe. For the McGowan and Wiberg clan, the social capital offered by friends and neighbours, and especially relations, provided shelter and food, hospitality, exchange of services, and local

¹²⁵ For the individual family histories, see *Cordwood and Courage*, "Bentz, John and Dagmar," "McGowan, Sargent and Muriel," "Goplen, Axel and Betty," "Wiberg, Ernest and Jean," "Wiberg, Clarence and Lorna," and "Wiberg, Allan and Clara." The Norman McGowan history is found in *As Far As the Eye Can See: Weyburn RM 67*, (Weyburn RM #67 History Book Committee, Regina: Focus Publishing, 1986).

influence to help each other adjust to northern life and build a new home in the north. Their story is just one of many that can be traced through the local history books, of neighbours and friends, siblings, cousins and hired help whose social capital provided the fabric of existence. Historian Dawn Bowen tracked urban Depression refugees in the communities of “Little Saskatoon” and Tamarack, both near Loon Lake, Saskatchewan. Her findings suggested that one of the reasons Tamarack was a far less successful community than Little Saskatoon (more abandonment, fewer homesteads achieved title, little sense of community over the long term, for example) was that “social ties among the settlers were poorly developed.”¹²⁶ Migrants did not know each other prior their arrival at Tamarack, nor did they develop strong bonds after taking homesteads. This lack of social capital, combined with poorer quality land, inadequate farming experience, lack of economic capital and lack of support and infrastructure, “severely hampered their farming efforts.” Bowen found comparatively more social capital in Little Saskatoon, which developed a more prosperous community built in large part on co-operative effort, sharing, exchange, and cohesion. Bowen’s work suggested that social capital brought by Depression migrants – such as the social capital between the Goplens, Wibergs, and McGowans, for example – helped to create an atmosphere conducive to success.

The “Great Retreat”?

Northern communities drew migrants because the forest edge, at least when compared to the prairies, had moisture. In 1937, that distinction disappeared. The prairies, the parkland, and the southern edges of the forest fringe had “the most complete crop failure ever experienced.” It was, for Saskatchewan, “the worst year yet.” Saskatchewan’s net farm income plummeted to negative 36,336,000 dollars and wheat acreage averaged an abysmal 2.7 bushels to the acre.¹²⁷ Although the Great Trek had been greatly reduced in the latter half of the 1930s, some southern farmers still felt the call of the north.¹²⁸ Others, however, saw the drought attacking even their northern refuge. For those who had fled dust and dry conditions to go north in search of moisture, the 1937 drought signalled the end of hope. Starting in 1937, geographer Denis Fitzgerald noted, a “thin trickle” of people began to leave.

That population loss was minor to the end of the Great Depression. In census division 15, which covered the Prince Albert region, two thousand people (just over two percent of the

¹²⁶ Bowen, “Forward to a Farm,” p. 226.

¹²⁷ Archer, *Saskatchewan: A History*, p. 240.

¹²⁸ Mrs. Bailey and her family went north in 1937. See “The Year We Moved.” See also Harold Fenske, *Riverlore*.

population) left between 1936 and 1941. In the Paddockwood region, however, population continued to climb. Over five hundred more people lived in the region in 1941 than in 1936, a population gain of almost thirteen percent.¹²⁹ Geographer Denis Fitzgerald commented, “The Great Retreat did not become apparent until after World War II.” The Prince Albert census district population sank by eight percent between 1941 and 1951, dropping to just over 80,000 people.¹³⁰ The North Battleford district shrank by fifteen percent of its population between 1941 and 1951; the Nipawin region, however, dropped by a mere five percent in the same period.¹³¹

These numbers cannot stand alone. Analysts have consistently – and incorrectly – attributed the “Great Retreat” to the abysmal farming conditions of the forest fringe. The Great Trek migrations, historian John McDonald asserted, overpopulated the northern forest fringe “relative to its true agricultural potential.”¹³² “Benighted settlers” left in droves, the narratives have consistently suggested, because they could not make a living.¹³³ Pushing agriculture beyond the forest edge had led to starvation and want; leaving became the only option, analysts have argued. Poverty and harsh agricultural conditions, combined with sharply declining cordwood and lumber income were, of course, contributing factors to northern out-migration. Compared to other areas of the province, however, the net out-migration during and after the Second World War was substantially *less* along the northern parkland and forest fringe than on the prairies. The Swift Current region lost eighteen percent of its population between 1941 and 1951; the Rosetown-Biggar district a staggering twenty percent. Of course, these numbers do not include depopulation statistics from those regions from the 1930s. Rosetown had lost fifteen percent of its population during the Depression, while the north was burgeoning; Swift Current lost thirteen percent.¹³⁴ In total, the Swift Current census district lost twenty-nine percent of its population between 1931 and 1951; the Rosetown-Biggar district thirty-one percent.

What, then, accounted for the population drop across all rural regions of the province after 1941? The war, of course, drew many thousands of people to serve in the armed forces and

¹²⁹ *Census of the Prairie Provinces 1946 Volume I Population* (Ottawa: Minister of Trade and Commerce, Census Division, 1946). Population by census subdivisions, nos. 519, 520, and 521.

¹³⁰ The Prince Albert census district population dropped from 89,036 in 1941 to 83,776 in 1946 and 81,160 in 1951. Its population in 1931 was 83,703. See *Census of the Prairie Provinces*, 1946. North Battleford census district dropped from 53,212 in 1941 to 45,211 in 1951. Nipawin dropped from 65,166 in 1941 to 61,615 in 1951.

¹³¹ *Census of Canada*, (Ottawa, 1951).

¹³² McDonald, p. 35.

¹³³ Wood, *Places of Last Resort*, p. 182.

¹³⁴ *Census of Canada*, 1951.

in war service industries. The general economy improved, and business was healthy and full of opportunity. As well, farming changed drastically. Farm consolidation, real estate values, the resurgence of prairie land after the dust, price controls during the war years, and other factors affected agriculture as a whole. Although mechanized methods of land clearing and farming were available, their use was limited until after the war effort. The post-war period saw intensive farm mechanization and a switch from horses to motorized machines. Farming changed, both on the prairies and at the forest edge. It turned from a way of life or a way to support your family, to a business. Farmers were encouraged, and expected, to track their farm income and net returns, identify areas of loss and gain, and to view their farms as economic – rather than social or cultural – endeavours.¹³⁵

During the 1940s, agricultural progress in western Canada overcame its homestead origins. Although there remained a distinct difference between northern farms and those on the prairies,¹³⁶ many forest edge farms on black or transitional soils enjoyed a large measure of success.¹³⁷ Fields continued to grow, year over year, as farms expanded and the forest acreage of each farm decreased. Paddockwood residents and local historians O’Hea and Endicott suggested that those homesteaders of the 1930s, “having beaten the wilderness and being granted patent to their holdings, numbers of settlers, not farmers, sold their homesteads. Their places were taken over by ...farmers [who] got off to a good start.” The new farmers cleared “all land suitable for the purpose [of] cultivation.”¹³⁸ Although out-migration was, indeed, a noticeable part of Paddockwood life after the Second World War, farms that had been settled and cleared between 1920 and 1940 remained in production.¹³⁹ Population density maps of the province produced for

¹³⁵ An overview of farm changes during the 1940s is found in M.E. Andal, *Changes in the Farms of West Central and Northern Saskatchewan, 1942-43 to 1947* (Dominion Department of Agriculture, Marketing Service Extension Division, issued September 1951).

¹³⁶ Northern farms continued to operate as livestock and mixed farms; on the prairies, farms closer to urban centers began to specialize. Many that had been mixed farms became exclusive dairy farms. Others remained grain farms. See M.E. Andal, *Changes in the Farms*, p. 6.

¹³⁷ Income on the farms in the northern areas exceeded that on farms in the west central area in 1947. See Andal, p. 35.

¹³⁸ SAB RC 236 C67 Box 12. Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life. Community brief, Paddockwood, p. 4. O’Hea and Endicott explained that the majority of these new farmers were Ukrainian and Polish. The Kiryuchuk family of Paddockwood was one example. They came to Canada in 1939 on the wings of the European war, and bought a farm north and east of Paddockwood. See “Kiryuchuk, Emil and Polly” in *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 309-310. More of the newly-patented land was sold to returned soldiers, such as Allan and Clarence Wiberg and John Bentz.

¹³⁹ The Red Cross Outpost Hospital closed its doors in 1949. Better roads to Prince Albert and a shortage of nursing staff, however, contributed more to its closure than local population statistics. See Merle Massie, “Ruth Dulmage Shewchuk: A Saskatchewan Red Cross Outpost Nurse,” *Saskatchewan History* Vol. 56, no. 4 (2004): pp. 35-44.

the Saskatchewan *Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life* in the 1950s showed a decided preference for parkland and forest fringe farms. Around Prince Albert, Nipawin, and north of Yorkton, the population density exceeded eight persons per square mile, while prairie regions rarely exceeded four.¹⁴⁰

By the 1960s, the Prince Albert *Daily Herald* noted with a measure of surprise, the landscape at Paddockwood was “like the prairies.”¹⁴¹ It had passed the early homestead and developmental stages, and the physical landscape of mixed, livestock, and cereal grain farms bore little resemblance to the original mixed boreal forest. Some farms, of course, were less “successful” than others. In the Moose Lake region east of Hell’s Gate and north of Forest Gate, the national Agricultural Rehabilitation and Development Administration (along with shareholders from the north Paddockwood region) initiated a community pasture project.¹⁴² Farms in the region were sold to the government and transformed into pasture. Buildings were moved or burned, trees cleared, land seeded to grass, and farmsteads erased. Though productive, Moose Lake farms produced a smaller living with more work than the provincial average. Measured against prairie wheat farms, agricultural receipts were low at Moose Lake. The land was classed as sub-marginal, even though the farms were occupied and the majority were viable. Engaged primarily in a mixed-farm, occupationally-pluralistic lifestyle geared to self-sufficiency, such farms were targeted for “improvement.” Farmers were bought out.¹⁴³ As in the 1930s Re-establishment movement, however, most of those who moved but continued farming stayed within the forest fringe, purchasing farms close by.¹⁴⁴ The majority of Moose Lake

¹⁴⁰ Province of Saskatchewan, *Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life*, “Movement of Farm People,” (Regina: Queen’s Printer, 1957).

¹⁴¹ Prince Albert *Daily Herald*, 29 April 1966. “Paddockwood Homesteads First Taken Up in 1911.”

¹⁴² The community pasture project along the northern parkland/forest fringe (other projects included Hafford and Fairholme, for example), was a late offshoot of the community pasture projects initiated by the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration during the 1930s in the drought regions. See Jane Abramson, *A Study of the Effects of Displacement on Farmers Whose Land Was Purchased for Two Community Pastures in Saskatchewan* (Saskatoon: Center for Community Studies. An ARDA research report, December 1965).

¹⁴³ Other reasons included the closing of the local school; Moose Lake’s situation at the edge of the forest (there was no agricultural development further north); the creation of highway Number Two which replaced the Montreal Lake Trail; and the need for additional pasture land to support the stock base of north Paddockwood farmers.

¹⁴⁴ Although the Paddockwood local history book does not record any traumatic stories or bad feelings in the aftermath, other community pasture projects at the time recorded problems. Positive response from the sellers when the projects were initiated over time turned to intensely negative reactions. The farmers questioned their self-worth, lost their personal ties to their land, found themselves severely disadvantaged economically (as it cost more to develop a new farm than they had been paid for their old one), or retired prematurely to town, where they were forced to live on the proceeds of their land sales. See Abramson, p. 74. It would make a fascinating MA project to study the effects of community pasture creation for forest fringe residents and compare their experiences with their prairie counterparts.

residents were Depression refugees or the children of refugees. For them, the cultural force of the forest edge as a place of refuge and resilience – where self-sufficiency and social capital were proven – remained strong.



Figure 81. Moose Lake – now the community pasture. Merle Massie 2009.

Conclusion

The Great Trek retreat from the prairies to the forest at a time of economic and ecological disaster signified the last time there was a broad cultural definition in Saskatchewan of landscape as the point of connection between humans and sustenance. Back-to-the-land ideals and subsistence trumped market-oriented agriculture, and both urban residents and farmers embraced the northern, forested landscape. Since the mid-1940s, the growth of agribusiness, large-scale farming and mechanization, and increased urbanization has moved Saskatchewan increasingly away from its farm roots and coloured the way the past has been viewed. The concept of subsistence farming has too often been denigrated – by historians, by agricultural analysts, by governments – as less successful and less desirable than large economic farm units tied to an export market. Too often, the Great Trek migration and forest edge agriculture have been measured against an agricultural ideal built on market orientation and business, rather than family self-sufficiency. Yet, the Great Depression severed the connection between agriculture and the external market. Aspirations narrowed, and both farmers and urban residents saw farming through a practical lens that focused on the products of the farm and the landscape:

shelter, fuel, and food. The majority of northern farms – owned by Depression trekkers, earlier prairie migrants, or soldier settlers – built their farms within a culture drawn from self-sufficient mixed farming, the ecological edge, and occupational pluralism. They were *not* prairie farms.

The Great Trek migration was, in many ways, the end-game of the battle between single-crop wheat farms of the prairies and the mixed farming of the parkland and forest fringe. Northern migrants, a *Regina Leader Post* journalist noted in 1931, knew that the northern country “cannot afford a rapid career to a prospective wheat grower, but it will at least afford a living to a family with pioneer instincts better than that promised at present in the districts they have been forced to abandon.”¹⁴⁵ The northern forest fringe did not offer single cash-crop agriculture, and the vast majority of southern refugees knew it. What they searched for, and what many found, was a way of life that offered some balance: wood and water, garden produce, game and fish, and hay to feed stock. At the forest edge, migrants learned that ‘mixed farming’ was more than just a mix of crops and livestock; it was culturally and economically embedded in the forest edge landscape, engaged in resource harvesting and the cordwood and barter economy. Like their First Nations antecedents, there were two groups of people who used the forest edge: those who accessed its resources as a refuge in times of ecological or environmental stress; and a smaller number who developed a broadly-mixed lifestyle that combined forest and prairie pursuits to find a measure of resilience.

Analysts who have used the government records of the Land Settlement Branch or the Northern Settlers Re-establishment Branch found the stories of those who most needed and accessed government help. Those sources do not record the experiences of those who went north without government assistance. Local history books, and the reminiscences of drought trekkers, offer a new perspective on life at the forest edge.¹⁴⁶ Their stories of barter and exchange, a

¹⁴⁵ *Regina Leader*, 17 October 1931. The journalist was probably W.J. Mather, who published a similar article, with similar phrasing, in *Maclean's* magazine, 1 April 1932.

¹⁴⁶ It has been suggested that using local history books as a historical source is problematic. Co-operative, community-based history books, noted anthropologists John Bennett and Seena Kohl, were written by the so-called “winners,” those who succeeded in building a new life and have proved their success by their longevity within that place. A cursory look at the Paddockwood history book reveals otherwise. Published in 1982, the Paddockwood history book executive spent countless hours tracking down former residents of the region for story submissions. Several of the executive members were themselves Depression refugees and retained a clear memory of past community members. In many cases, families who had move away retained ties to Paddockwood through Christmas letters or other types of social cohesion, and the executive could find their addresses and initiate contact. In history after history, it becomes clear that many of the families whose stories are included in the book in fact moved away from Paddockwood, within ten to twenty years of the Depression as opportunities became available elsewhere. Kohl and Bennett’s experience using local history books and finding only ‘winners’ in the stories does not transfer to the

booming local economy, social capital and hope, short-term refuge and long-term resilience within a mixed farming and resource base tell a story at odds with traditional interpretations. Those who moved north considered a myriad of ‘pull’ factors, primarily the contrast between the drought-ravaged open plains and the northern forested and wet landscape. They also wanted to access non-agricultural resources of fish, game, fur and timber from the forest. The rise of tourism throughout the 1920s and 1930s culturally reinforced a divided Saskatchewan identity, where the south was flat and treeless while the north was lush, green, and forested. Weary drought refugees remembered, and celebrated, this contrast.

Today, in the north Prince Albert region, the line between farmland and the Northern Provincial Forest is stark, obvious, and entirely man-made. Fields and pastures cut a straight edge along the quarter line. One step divides farmland from forest. Within that forest, past the agricultural edge, there remains Crown land that has either never been surveyed or was surveyed but not homesteaded. Hidden in the forest, though, are remnants of the northern push. Old sawmill sites, trappers’ cabins, and Hell’s Gate-type abandoned homesteads, with rotting shacks sinking into the bush, can be found. Acreages once cleared by axe or fire and cultivated have grown lush with poplar and willow in the ensuing years, to be succeeded once again by spruce, tamarack, and fir. The boreal forest stands, as always, at the ready to take over any farmland left temporarily or permanently abandoned along the forest edge. But the overgrown carragana, lilac bushes and patches of rhubarb, remnants of long-forgotten garden plots, remember the Great Trek migrants who “watched in amazement as late-seeded crops and gardens grew inches, it seemed, overnight. They were thankful for the flavourful, bountiful harvest from the small garden plot, enough to last until the next harvest, and even the turnips were edible.”¹⁴⁷

situation experienced at the forest edge. The Paddockwood history book reflects both those who moved north and established farms that continued for more than one generation, as well as the stories of families who moved north for a much shorter period of time. See John Bennett and Seena B. Kohl, *Settling the Canadian and American West, 1890-1915: Pioneer Adaptation and Community Building* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

¹⁴⁷ “Rambling Thoughts by a prairie immigrant,” *Cordwood and Courage*, p. 637.



Figure 82. Natural forest reclamation of abandoned agricultural land can be seen on land in the Paddockwood and Forest Gate area where active cultivation ceased, or animals were no longer pastured. Pictures taken in the area in 2008 and 2009 show many fields where the poplar have invaded to the point where the land would once again need to be logged, burned, and rooted to be returned to agricultural production. The forest edge continues to shift.

Conclusion: South of the North, North of the South

The forest fringe, as seen through the lens of the north Prince Albert region, is a transition zone between field and forest that has shifted over time. With extensive forestry and agriculture, the boreal forest edge – which once began on the shore of the North Saskatchewan River – moved north. The line of demarcation now sits between twenty to forty miles north of Prince Albert, a tongue of settlement that followed trails and rivers deeper into the forest. Government intervention, in the form of forest reserves and recreational areas, dictated land use, change, and development. The physical landscape now corresponds with human decisions, lines and boundaries drawn on maps: roads and road allowances, quarter-section divisions between farms, recreational land, First Nations reserve land, and the edge between agriculture and forest.

With human intervention, the local landscape shifted from boreal forest to the mixed fields of parkland/prairie, in contemporary terms, or from ‘north’ to ‘south.’ Yet, the description of the local landscape as ‘parkland’ defies a local identity that fits neither the prairie nor the northern paradigm. How can it be prairie when there are trees, lakes, and a local economy built in part on resource exploitation? How can it be north when there are farms? Residents of the north Prince Albert region are keenly aware of their in-between position, with attributes of both of the two main cultural and ecological paradigms. While interviewing forest fringe residents for this dissertation, I would end the interview by asking, “is this community part of the north, or part of the south?” Participants hedged their answers. Technically, I was reminded, it is south, simply because it lies south of the mid-point of the province. The geographical center of Saskatchewan is in the middle of Montreal Lake. Also, participants would point out the window at open fields, combines, and barns. It is, they would admit, a farming region. But without exception, all of the interviewees identified the north Prince Albert region as north. They offered a local identity with distinctive characteristics and a history that proclaimed and upheld its defining attributes as a place that was decidedly not the prairie. The default iconography, since they could not accept the Saskatchewan prairie agricultural paradigm, was north.

Canada, it is almost axiomatic to say, is a northern country. Its nordicity and northern identity is a defining characteristic. Geographer Peter Usher wrote, “Our national mythology suggests that our identity and purpose lie in the North, that a truly distinctive Canadian nationality will only be achieved through the development and settlement of our northern lands.

...To the North lie not only our economic destiny, but also our moral and spiritual renewal.”¹ From Group of Seven artistry to the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver, Canada is proud to “own the podium” of its northern distinctiveness.

The national northern character, closely identified with specific places such as the Arctic or the Canadian Shield, is absent from the Canadian public identification of Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan is the anchor province and epitome of the ‘prairie’ provinces. The Canadian penchant for dividing this vast country into easily-understood places called ‘regions’ has reduced the Saskatchewan identity to its southern denominator: prairie. Home of Tommy Douglas, medicare, the Roughriders, and endless fields of grain, Saskatchewan has become “The Land of Living Skies,” where space and openness are the defining characteristics. The reflexive nature of ‘prairie’ identification belies the truth of the Saskatchewan landscape, and has distorted cultural and historical interpretation to favour the prairie south. The north, as historians Ken Coates and William Morrison pointed out, has indeed been – all too often – forgotten.²

The ‘northern’ identity, in defiance of the national ‘prairie’ iconography of Saskatchewan, resonated through two distinctive local history projects from the Paddockwood region. The first was the local history book, *Cordwood and Courage*, published in 1982. Many of the people who worked on the book, such as Muriel McGowan, were Depression migrants who remembered and identified a northern and wooded landscape that was emphatically not the prairie. The new landscape was quickly transformed through axe and fire to amalgamate “prairie” agricultural characteristics and create a hybrid local identity that pulled from both farm and forest. It was not an easy life. Few writers who contributed to the community history book romanticized the work it took to build a farm and a life out of the forest. After the Second World War, non-agricultural opportunities drew many people north, south, east, and west. Yet their memories and stories, returned to the community and stored in the community’s history book, reflected gratitude for the refuge found at the forest edge at a time of intense need.

The edge identity surfaced again in 2005, when a group of local volunteers erected a memorial stone commemorating the Montreal Lake Trail which ran through the region. The bronze tablet on the memorial stone pinpointed the origins of the trail as a First Nations pathway,

¹ Peter J. Usher, “The North: One Land, Two Ways of Life,” in *Heartland and Hinterland: A Geography of Canada*. Edited by L.D. McCann. (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., 1987), p. 483.

² Ken Coates and William Morrison, *The Forgotten North: A History of Canada’s Provincial Norths* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1992).

a route that led past the lobster tree and took boreal bands to the prairies, and plains bands into the forest. Over time it became a freight trail, and a route into the north for natural resources, recreation, law enforcement, and fire control. The memorial stone also commemorated the homesteaders who pushed their way into rather unforgiving bush country to establish farms and homes and introduce mixed-farming agriculture into the area. In its inspiration, it drew heavily on stories from Hell's Gate settlers, and their battle to create viable farms. The defeat at Hell's Gate, and the erasure of much of the Moose Lake school district by the community pasture, revealed the harsh conditions and precarious lifestyle at the forest edge that too often skirted near abject poverty. The commemorative stone focused on the trail itself, placing Paddockwood securely as a conduit between the north and south, a place of transition and connection. The stone recognized the complexity of memory, and acknowledged success and failure, forest and farming, adventure and despair, at a place of hybrid influences, fluidity, transference, and cultural interchange. It celebrated the connections, acknowledging First Nations, mixed farming, natural resources and recreation, underscoring a hybrid understanding of the forest edge as an important and dynamic transitional zone that bound one way of life to another.



Figure 83. Remnant of the Montreal Lake Trail. Merle Massie 2009.



Figure 84. Charlie Elliott of Paddockwood at the Montreal Lake Trail stone, unveiling ceremony 2005. Photo courtesy John Dinius.

The story of the transitional zone, where the two halves of the province meet, has been revealed through the use of a specifically local historical methodology. Through deep-time place history, layering and comparing successive cultures within the same place, this dissertation cuts through traditional interpretations of Saskatchewan's prairie or northern past. Edge theory – where the forest fringe was viewed as both an ecological and a cultural edge where two distinct regions and peoples met and exchanged knowledge – offered a critical approach that bridged the constructed gap between the Saskatchewan dual northern/southern history. The regionally-defined 'prairie' and 'northern' narratives, when combined, gave a fresh view of the provincial story.

Each chapter revealed an aspect of Saskatchewan history that provided new nuances that alter the Canadian story and, perhaps, suggest some paths forward for future historical research. The story of First Nations history within the western interior showed a cultural use of the landscape that deliberately combined prairie and forest ecosystems – whether through meeting and trade/exchange, or through short-term or extended stays within the 'other' landscape. The forest edge was place of refuge for Plains bands, and contributed significantly to the resilience of the smaller boreal bands throughout the western interior. In the summer, the forest edge became

a place marked by a feminine, domestic lifestyle that drew on the aquatic landscape. First Nations history, both pre- and post-fur trade, would benefit by a critical gendered examination. This dissertation touched only the outer edge of the wealth of information that can be drawn from archaeological and historical sources.

As non-native settlement escalated in the western interior, traditional First Nations practices that combined boreal and plains landscapes were replaced by an exploitative model that developed the resources of one ecosystem to serve the needs of the other. The dominion government facilitated the division of land between agriculture and forest – the absence of wood on the open plains meant that forest resources in the western interior were too valuable for private/farm enterprise, and were kept within the public domain. The lumber industry, combined with commercial fishing, codified the north Prince Albert region as a place of resource wealth. Freighters stitched the two halves of the province together, taking commercial goods north and bringing resources south. Ironically, older First Nations models that combined prairie and forest set the stage for future agricultural development. As investors looked to exploit northern resources, the dominion was forced to make treaty with the region's boreal First Nations inhabitants. Boreal bands sought an adhesion to Treaty Six, thereby trading supplemental bison hunting traditions for agricultural practices, bringing farming to the forest. They folded farm produce into diversified forest edge resource extraction, reinforcing traditional subsistence and resilience strategies. To reinforce long-held practice of the forest edge as an important 'home' territory for boreal bands, and to ensure the development of agriculture, the Montreal Lake and Lac La Ronge bands succeeded in winning a second, agricultural reserve in addition to their boreal territory. The Little Red River reserve planted a firm foothold for the bands at the forest edge.

The agricultural history of the Canadian western interior has been dominated by the wheat story. The prairie, it has been told repeatedly, was the domain of King Wheat. The agricultural history of the north Prince Albert region, however, followed a different paradigm. The mixed farming movement dominated the region throughout its early history. Dominion surveyors, Prince Albert promoters, and local farmers sold and bought the forest edge landscape as an ideal place to create a mixed farm. Presented as morally and ecologically superior to straight grain farms, mixed farms spread a farmer's asset base over a range of crops, livestock and farm products. Mixed farms required a diversified landscape with a good water source, scrub

land to provide hay and shelter for stock, and good land for cereal grain production. Farming practices became tied to landscape, and debate raged over the advantages of mixed versus wheat farms. Those debates were central to the development of agriculture within the western interior. The opening of the ‘new northwest’ as the site of mixed farming contrasted the development of half-section ‘pre-emption’ farms in the Palliser Triangle. What has been analyzed as essentially a wheat story is shown, through the lens of local history, as a complicated ideological and cultural battle that played off against the backdrop of landscape.

When fire raged through the north Prince Albert region in 1919, its identification as a lumber basket collapsed. Remnants of the forest remained, along with a vigorous growth of aspen that helped underwrite the future of the region as a cordwood capital. Soldier settlement, supplemented by internal migration from the open plains, recreated the north Prince Albert region as a haven for farmers eager to trade the open plains for the forest edge. Like their First Nations antecedents, soldier and prairie settlers developed an economically diversified society that drew on both farm and forest. Although the lumber industry was diminished, cordwood production combined with post-war growth in other northern resource industries to create an occupationally pluralistic society, combining mixed farming with regional wage opportunities. Soldier settlement in forested regions, the north Prince Albert example showed, experienced success. As the decade drew to a close, the north was recast as a place of opportunity. Economic buoyancy, increased mechanization, and second homesteads brought a wave of new settlers to the forest fringe. Prospecting and potential mineral exploitation joined forest products and commercial fishing, contributing to the call to “Go North.”

With the rise of the car culture and increased municipal and provincial expenditure on roads and infrastructure, the north Prince Albert region developed a new identity. Tourism marketing reinforced the contrast between the prairie south and forested north. Promotion based on the rural-urban divide found little traction in Saskatchewan. Instead, the leverage to create Prince Albert National Park and the Lakeland region was predicated on the cultural and ecological divide. The north was recast as a place of beauty and relaxation, lakes and rivers, health and fun to contrast a dry, tree-less prairie south. As the “Playground of the Prairies,” the northern vacationland drew widespread public interest, primarily within the province, which waxed as the Depression deepened. As the prairie landscape became disfigured by drought,

writer Grey Owl and painter Augustus Kenderdine worked to present the northern landscape as an oasis of beauty and the last frontier of wilderness and natural splendour.

Given the cultural presence of Saskatchewan's north at the end of the 1920s as a place of opportunity and natural beauty, it should come as no surprise that refugees flocked to the north in droves during the Great Depression. Instead, historians have consistently expressed a large measure of shock and dismay at the sheer number of prairie migrants who made the Great Trek north to develop farms at the forest edge in the so-called 'place of last resort.' Through a deep-time history of the north Prince Albert region, it became clear that northern resettlement during the 1930s was an escalation of practices that had, in fact, been in place for a long time. Aboriginal landscape harvest practices, boreal resource extraction, mixed farming and northern tourism were important cultural and economic precedents that drew migrants north by the thousands when the wheat economy failed. The story of dust and devastation, the archetypal prairie 'Dust Bowl' narrative, broke open at the forest edge. While communities on the open plains hemorrhaged, the forest fringe – and the far north – boomed. Families moved north toward a place of hope and opportunity, a landscape of short-term refuge, for some; for others, long-term resilience.

After the dust, prairie farms returned to pre-drought productive capacity. Nonetheless, the rural population of both the open prairie and the forest edge fell after the Second World War. As mechanization and farm consolidation gained hold, farming began the long march toward agribusiness and the industrialization we see today. Technological advances in crop varieties, fertilization, herbicides, and insecticides combined with crop insurance and large-scale water reclamation schemes to give prairie grain farms more resilience. Farming as a way of life, to nurture a family and build a subsistence living over the long term, gave way. Logging, cordwood, freighting, fishing and other forest edge resource economies also surrendered to industrialization and mechanization, making a large-scale transition from independently-owned small businesses to commercial enterprises.

The northern push of settlement left a lasting mark on the Saskatchewan landscape. As of the 2006 census, settlement in the north Prince Albert region – despite the inclusion of a large amount of uninhabited forest reserve within the census region – averaged over 2.4 people per square kilometre. Corollary rural municipalities in the prairie south, such as Swift Current,

supported half that population base, while municipalities that have seen significant depopulation since the 1920s, such as Happyland, support one-tenth the number of people.

For Aboriginal inhabitants of the forest edge, the general agricultural retreat and rural depopulation after the Second World War eased pressure on traditional forest resources. In 1947, the borders of Prince Albert National Park were changed. The section east of the third meridian, which effectively enclosed the Montreal Lake reserve, was eliminated and reverted to Crown land. Aboriginal inhabitants at Montreal Lake and Little Red River could once again access the large area for fishing, hunting, and trapping purposes. In 1948, Little Red River once more fought off a petition to have the agricultural reserve released and its inhabitants sent back north. The land was officially divided between the Lac La Ronge and Montreal Lake bands, facilitating band governance.³ Through Treaty Land Entitlement settlements, Little Red River has continued to grow.

Along the forest fringe, vestiges of the mixed, ecologically pluralistic lifestyle remained. Some subsistence mixed farms were targeted as ‘marginal’ and purchased for conversion to rangeland during the 1960s. During the 1970s and 1980s, the ‘back-to-the-land’ movement brought a new wave of migrants to the region, looking to develop a “dream of people living in harmony with nature.”⁴ Forest edge farms, with their wealth of timber for building purposes and fuel, were once again popular. In the 1990s and after the turn of the twenty-first century, the cycle turned again. ‘Marginal’ forest fringe farms were targeted by government researchers as expendable, their ‘best use’ once again as forests to preserve and strengthen Canada’s carbon-trading footprint. Climate change scientists forecast, however, that the open plains will undergo increasingly severe droughts as the earth warms. Drought and decreased agricultural potential on the prairies may mean another ‘Great Trek’ into the forest, to develop the podzolic soil and take advantage of the comparatively wetter climate of northern Saskatchewan. Cultural explanations of the mixed forest edge economy will continue to swing on a pendulum between marginal and poor, to flourishing and attractive.

Interpretations of Saskatchewan’s northern history – and northern future – have reinforced a deep cultural contrast and divide between the boreal north and the prairie south. The north has been a place of resource exploitation, of colonialism and southern metropolitan control

³ Angus Merasty, “History of Little Red River Reserve,” *Saskatchewan Indian* Vol. 3, no. 6 (June 1972): pp. 10.

⁴ “The Claxton Family,” *Tweedsmuir: Community and Courage* (Tweedsmuir History Committee. Prince Albert: Campbell Printing, 2006), p. 52.

over a northern hinterland. Northern Saskatchewan is known for its ‘otherness,’ as ‘another country altogether.’ While these interpretations bear validity and need to be folded into the Saskatchewan identity, it leaves the provincial past deeply divided, as if there has been no point of contact or exchange. The north as the colonial fiefdom of the south has also consistently been a story of the recent past, a post-Second World War narrative of overt public control, transportation innovation, and resource exploitation. Prior to that time, historians have asserted, the north was ignored.⁵

This dissertation has shown that the north has consistently been an integral aspect of successful human adaptation in the region that became Saskatchewan. In fact, both biomes of prairie south and boreal north worked in concert to provide resources (whether natural or manipulated) for human adaptation, refuge and resilience. Economic and cultural development has often used the tension and interplay of Saskatchewan’s two solitudes, where the attributes and resources of one offset and complemented the deficiencies of the other. When historical interpretation rests solely on one region or the other, however, the connections and sense of interchange between the two are lost.

The cultural ramifications of forest edge settlement, particularly drought migrations from the 1920s to the end of the Great Depression, created and reinforced a Saskatchewan identity that was neither wholly prairie nor wholly northern. Communities along the forest edge became places that were defiantly *not* the prairies, though large-scale agricultural practices would transform the landscape. Resonances of the non-prairie identity can be found at places such as Meadow Lake, Big River, Paddockwood, Nipawin, and Hudson Bay, all places that share similar economies and histories built on a mix of farm and forest resources. A deep-time place history of the north Prince Albert region, through the lens of ecological and cultural edges, replaces the binary narrative of Saskatchewan with an inclusive perspective. From traditional First Nations use of the forest edge landscape through to the Depression migrants, resilience and longevity could best be found when both major ecological and cultural landscapes were folded together. Let this new view of Saskatchewan’s past provide a roadmap and lesson for the future of the province, and Canada as a whole.

⁵ See David Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan: Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004); R.M. Bone, “Saskatchewan’s Forgotten North: 1905-2005,” in *Perspectives of Saskatchewan* edited by Jene M. Porter (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2009).

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