"FORWARD TO A FARM"

The Back-to-the-Land Movement as a Relief Initiative in Saskatchewan during the Great Depression

by

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Abstract

During the early years of the Depression in Canada, political leaders relied on make-work projects and direct relief to alleviate distress among the unemployed. Unlike Franklin Roosevelt, the U.S. president who willingly experimented with bold and innovative programs, Prime Minister R. B. Bennett refused to take any political gambles, and assured Canadians that his tariff policies would enable Canada to "blast her way" into world markets. His reliance on traditional, but inadequate, economic stimuli only served to increase the suffering of indigent citizens. In the spring of 1932, Bennett's Labor Minister, W. A. Gordon, introduced a program of land settlement that held out some hope to individual families. Recognizing that many of the unemployed in the nation's cities were recent arrivals from the farm, officials formulated a scheme whereby those people could be returned to the land and provide for their own support. Although only a small number of the unemployed would actually be assisted in this manner, proponents of the plan believed that moneys spent to re-establish families were more worthy expenditures than direct relief. This back-to-the-land scheme was greeted with both optimism and skepticism, a view that was largely shaped by one's political persuasion.

This dissertation traces the development of the back-to-the-land policy in Canada, and examines the movement in Saskatchewan where unemployed families from Saskatoon and other Saskatchewan cities created new communities in the northern bush lands. Two communities of city people that were created in northwestern Saskatchewan through this process developed in different ways. One, known as "Little Saskatoon," benefited from its location on fairly good land, close ties of family and friendship, and the industriousness of its citizens to become a viable community that existed for more than two decades. Only a dozen miles away,

the settlement of Tamarack, plagued by poor soils, social disunity, and its residents poor work ethic, disintegrated after a few unhappy years. The experiences of these two places demonstrate the positive and negative outcomes of a policy of settling urban relief recipients on the land.

This study concludes that the back-to-the-land movement was not a panacea for the myriad problems associated with the Depression, but that it did offer some alternative to bare subsistence in the city, where the prospects for gainful employment were virtually non-existent. The dissertation further suggests that no government was willing to expend the funds necessary to support a full-fledged back-to-the-land movement, and that land settlement offered only temporary respite from a populace clamoring for action.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Migration in twentieth century North America has been a complex process. For the most part, it has involved the movement of rural populations along a well-worn path to urban areas. Increasing mechanization and farm consolidation forced thousands of farmers and agricultural workers off the land and into cities.[1] Throughout the twentieth century, the process of suburbanization created new flows, as urban populations made their way to developing fringe areas around the city.[2] A third route has been followed by people who moved from one rural locale to another. These movements have usually reflected the desire of farmers for new land and better opportunities and has ordinarily involved a push to the west.[3] Still another pattern emerged during times of economic depression. In contrast to the other movements, this one involved a return flow from urban centers to rural places, and is often referred to as the back-to-the-land movement. Many people simply returned to

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[1]See, for example, James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Black Southerners, Chicago, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Neil Fligstein, *Going North: Migration of Blacks and Whites from the South 1900-1950* (New York: Academic Press, 1981).

[2]See, for example, Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); John R. Stilgoe, *Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820-1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Richard Harris, *Unplanned Suburbs: Toronto's American Tragedy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

[3]See, for example, James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, *Rooted in Dust: Surviving Drought and Depression in Southwestern Kansas* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994).

their former homes, but others struck out for new locations where they hoped to forge new lives for themselves and their families.

Canada experienced a large scale back-to-the-land movement during the Depression of the 1930s. Here countless thousands of individuals simply left the cities of their own accord and set out for new homes in rural areas. But there was another, less well-known dimension of this movement in which governments assisted migrants by implementing policies to encourage land settlement, particularly by urban dwellers with agricultural backgrounds. This practice was carried out at all levels of government, from the local to the federal. In a number of provinces, the movement was initiated by cities actively seeking alternatives to direct relief. While individual decisions certainly played a role in determining who participated in the movement, it was often government that set the process in motion. The idea was not a novel one, for government had long taken a leading role in promoting settlement in the Prairie region, and had directed the placement of returned soldiers on the land following the First World War.[4]

Urbanization in the West, and particularly the rapidity with which cities emerged, provides an important context for this investigation.[5] Social problems associated with increased urbanization may well have triggered the process of urban to rural migration that is the focal point of this study. Urban growth depended on a

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[4]See, for example, Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984); John McDonald, "Soldier Settlement and Depression Settlement in the Forest Fringe of Saskatchewan," *Prairie Forum* 6:1 (Spring 1981): 35-55; E. C. Morgan, "Soldier Settlement in the Prairie Provinces," *Saskatchewan History* 21:2 (Spring 1968): 41-55.

[5]See, for example, Alan F. J. Artibise, "Exploring the North American West: A Comparative Urban Perspective," in *Cities and Urbanization: Canadian Historical Perspectives*, ed. Gilbert A. Stelter (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, Ltd., 1990), 246-267; Paul Phillips, "The Prairie Urban System, 1911-1961: Specialization and Change," in *Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development*, ed. Alan F. J. Artibise (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1981), 7-30; Donald Kerr and Deryck W. Holdsworth, eds. *Historical Atlas of Canada*, vol. 3, *Addressing the Twentieth Century, 1891-1961* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), plate 10.

productive hinterland from which it could draw both natural and human resources, but as cities continued to expand, concern mounted over the corresponding decline of rural areas. One aspect of urbanization that had widespread repercussions was the migration of rural people into cities. Newly-established, rapidly-growing Prairie cities were, for the first time, coming face-to-face with significant numbers of poor people who had little hope for the future. These young cities, with few mechanisms yet in place to resolve or at least ameliorate poverty, sought innovative ways to handle the emerging crisis. When the resources of private charities were exhausted, public institutions were forced to accept some responsibility for the poor, a situation that was only exacerbated by the Depression. Clinging to long-held views that the land could absorb surplus populations and act as a social safety net where no other existed, policy makers in Prairie cities believed that a land settlement policy offered economic and social benefits.

Canada had shifted from a rural society to an urban one after World War I, and its economy expanded from one rooted in agriculture to one based on industry. Rapid urbanization accompanied industrialization and seriously disrupted the balance of urban and rural populations. Writing about this process, John Herd Thompson quotes a popular tune, "How're you gonna keep 'em down on the farm after they've seen Paree?" but maintains that Groucho Marx was closer to the truth when he quipped, "How're you gonna keep 'em down on the farm after they've seen the *farm*?"[6] The social and economic gains made in cities far outpaced improvements in rural life and contributed to the exodus from the farm. Analyzing this process in the United States, Leon Truesdell claimed that superficial reasons such as the glitter and excitement of the city played minor roles, but that in fact there

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[6]John Herd Thompson with Allen Seager, *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1985), 96.

were three fundamental and far-reaching economic changes which made the migration from farm to city almost inevitable. These were: 1) the development of factory production which meant that the farmer and his farm were no longer self-sufficient enterprises; 2) the improvement of farming techniques through mechanization and specialization; and 3) a rising standard of living.[7] T. Lynn Smith, a prominent rural sociologist, agreed. The small farmer and farm laborer had become marginalized in the American economy. When people were crowded out of other industry or more rewarding agriculture, Smith believed, subsistence farms became the "employer of last resort."[8] The Depression simply reinforced this tendency.

In the 1930s, conditions throughout North America took a dramatic turn for the worse. The agricultural crisis, drought, and economic depression left few people untouched and resulted in widespread suffering. Farmers, plagued by years of low commodity prices and then drought, abandoned the land and made their way to urban areas. Cities, however, had their own problems. Growing ranks of unemployed urban workers and newly arrived rural migrants were often forced to accept relief in order to survive. A number of contemporary observers concluded that full employment in the nations' industrial plants would never be possible, and that some alternative means of subsistence had to be provided for the working class.[9] To this end, a number of ideas were promoted as solutions to the problem of unemployment

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[7]Leon Edgar Truesdell, "The Extent and Significance of Farm Migration," in *The Country Life of the Nation*, ed. Wilson Gee (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930), 39-53.

[8]T. Lynn Smith, *Studies of the Great Rural Tap Roots of Urban Poverty in the U. S.* (New York: Carlton Press, 1974).

[9]C.W. Peterson, "How're You Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm?" *MacLean's Magazine* 15 January 1928): 17,18, 32, 37; W. Burton Hurd, "Back to the Land," *Canadian Forum* 16:184 (May 1936): 19-20; Ralph Borsodi, *Flight from the City* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1933); Alvin Johnson, "Homesteads and Subsistence Homesteads," *Yale Review* 24:3 (March 1935): 433-447; "Wedlock for Town and Country," *Review of Reviews* 90:1 (July 1934): 54-55.

and economic dislocation. One option which was consistently advocated by business leaders, politicians, and reformers was land settlement. The frontier mentality was still pervasive in both the United States and Canada, as the settlement experiences in Alaska's Matanuska Valley and Alberta's Peace River country demonstrate. Despite increased industrialization and urbanization, both nations still had strong agrarian roots, and calls for a return to the soil were widely heralded as positive steps. In Canada, most first-class agricultural lands had already been claimed by 1930, but the frontier still held promise for hardy individuals willing to pioneer. With unemployment reaching epidemic proportions, the land offered hope to people who had exhausted their own resources and recognized that the bleak economic situation would not soon improve. As government officials looked in vain for new strategies to cope with the escalating crisis, relief settlement appeared to be the one way that would enable citizens to become self-supporting once again.[10]

The economic and social crisis triggered by the Depression was severe throughout Canada, but the western provinces, Saskatchewan in particular, suffered the greatest deprivation. Having already experienced a decade-long agricultural depression, the province had few resources at its disposal. Droughted-out farmers and unemployed farm laborers migrated to cities in search of work and added to an already overburdened relief system. Saskatchewan faced a two-fold problem. The first resulted from the profound drought that had affected much of province's land and the farmers who were its guardians. The second involved a rising number of unemployed workers in the cities. The provincial government, burdened with greater numbers of destitute citizens and an empty treasury, sought ways to alleviate the

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[10]*House of Commons Debates*, 20 July 1931, 3973-3976; 11 March 1932, 1054-1056; 21 April 1932, 2263-2265; 28 April 1932, 2448-2459.

economic crisis.[11] Public works were proving to be too costly and direct relief, the "dole," was demeaning, and, many feared, provided no incentive for those without work to help themselves. In March of 1931, Saskatoon's mayor, John W. Hair, announced his support for a plan to place 500 unemployed city men and their families on farms, where they could grow sufficient produce to meet their own needs. The objective of the plan was not to expend vast amounts of money to establish families, but rather to provide sufficient assistance so that these people could help themselves.[12]

With its vast northern frontier largely unsettled, provincial officials believed that plans such as the one noted above would encourage farmers and agricultural workers who had migrated to the city to return to the farm. Government officials and the public both favoured back-to-the-land schemes as a means of providing relief. Unemployed workers' associations were also interested in the idea and lobbied local authorities to adopt a back-to-the-land program for the urban poor.[13] City officials in Saskatoon, facing a crisis in the relief system, recognized that a back-to-the-land movement had some genuine advantages. Not only would a number of families be removed from the city and its relief rolls, but, they reasoned, those same families would be working toward a goal of self-sufficiency. Politicians acknowledged that the movement would be limited in scope, and could not include all of the unemployed, but back-to-the-land held out the possibility of "independence, health

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[11]John H. Archer, *Saskatchewan: A History* (Saskatoon: Western Prairie Producer Books, 1980), chapter 12.

[12]This plan is discussed in detail in chapter five. "Suggests Establishing 500 Jobless on Stocked Farms," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 4 March 1932, 4; "Hair Would Put Jobless on Farm Land," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 7 March 1932, 3.

[13]"Men Ask Cash to Settle on Farms," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 16 May 1931, 7; "Dr. Anderson Answers Macauley's Criticisms," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 29 March 1932, 12; "Unemployed Ask $400 for Each Family," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 3 May 1932, 3.

and happiness," whereas direct relief could only lead to "discontent, bitterness and despair."[14]

The Saskatchewan government, in conjunction with local municipalities, agreed to fund the placement of unemployed city people on the land in the spring of 1931.[15] This relief settlement scheme was not designed to be a land colonization measure where new areas were to be brought into agricultural production and funds would be spent to promote agricultural development and to develop infrastructure. Instead relief settlement was intended as a means to enable families living on relief in the city to become self-supporting, if only on a temporary basis, through the establishment of homesteads. Funds would not be spent to develop infrastructure nor was its purpose to increase agricultural production.[16] Relief would still be given to families as they worked toward self-sufficiency, but that cost would be less than maintaining those same families in the city. Money would not be spent on providing infrastructure that was an essential part of colonization efforts; instead funds would only be allocated for essential equipment and livestock. The savings in relief payments to the city were no doubt an important consideration, as newspaper reporters frequently mentioned in their columns.[17] The mayor of Saskatoon declared that large numbers of the city's residents "realize that they would be better off on a farm of their own than trying to make their way in the city under present conditions."[18] There was no illusion that they would become commercial grain

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[14]"Going to the Land," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 18 May 1932, 11.

[15]"Scores Now Planning to Obtain Land," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 20 April 1931, 3.

[16]"25 Families Seek Farms," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 14 April 1931, 5.

[17]"Back to the Land," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 22 March 1931, 15; "Unemployed Ask $400 for Each Family," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 3 May 1932, 3.

[18]"Scores Now Planning to Obtain Land," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 20 April 1931, 3.

farmers, but it was thought that through hard work they could feed their families and perhaps have a small surplus to barter for the items that they could not produce.

The back-to-the-land program created by governments during the Depression provided an alternative to traditional relief programs. Although such schemes had developed prior to the 1930s, it was the peculiar circumstances of this decade that made governments look to the land with renewed optimism. This study considers the social and economic context of the back-to-the-land movement in the 1930s, and explores the role played by both provincial and municipal governments in developing settlement schemes, as well as the later initiative undertaken by the federal government. It analyzes the process of assisted settlement in Saskatchewan, where the cities of Saskatoon, Regina, and Moose Jaw each helped relief recipients return to the land, and examines conditions in two settlements that were established as a result of this program. Investigation of these two distinct places makes it clear that continuing financial assistance, the provision of adequate infrastructure, and strong social linkages were all necessary to ensure the success of government-sponsored settlement programs. Where these ingredients were lacking or only half-heartedly supplied, the probability that a back-to-the-land settlement would experience any measure of success was exceedingly slim.

To understand the back-to-the-land movement, and its ramifications, is to come closer to appreciating what Canada was becoming during the 1930s. The nation was moving forward into the "modern" era, with a new economy, a changing society, and a more interventionist state, but at the same time, all levels of government were facing an unprecedented economic and social crisis, and were confronted by a citizenry clamoring for decisive action. These circumstances were introducing new problems that required innovative and timely solutions. Yet most Canadians were still looking backward, clinging to an agrarian past that no longer

reflected the livelihoods of the majority of Canadian citizens, and attempting to apply traditional solutions to new problems. The 1930s can be viewed, in some respects, as a hinge between the past and the present, but it was often unclear which way the pendulum was swinging. Examination of the back-to-the-land process in Saskatchewan provides an opportunity to consider a broader set of social, economic, and political conditions that were emerging during this period, and to assess their impact on government's approach to resolving the economic crisis. Few of the plans formulated were fresh and innovative; others simply reflected Canadians' unwillingness to let go completely of the past.

The back-to-the-land movement as it played out in Saskatchewan during the 1930s is the focus of this dissertation.[19] There is, however, much to be understood about the design and implementation of this activity as government policy. The following two chapters establish a framework within which the back-to-the-land movement can be properly situated. The first focuses on the historic efforts of government to promote and direct the development of the prairie west through immigration, railway, and settlement policies, and suggests that government involvement in the back-to-the-land movement was, at least in part, a continuation of these practices. It examines the role that three different levels of government played in western development, and suggests that the relationship among various governments changed over time and as a result of new circumstances. The next chapter considers the philosophical underpinnings of the back-to-the-land movement, discusses its social and economic roots, and examines some of the ideas about this movement that appeared in print. It is the convergence of these two streams of thought and action that provide support for the policy initiatives created in the early years of the Depression. The impact of the economic collapse in western Canada,

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[19]See Appendix A for a discussion of the sources used in this study.

with particular emphasis on conditions in Saskatchewan, is the focus of the final chapter in the first section. It was the Depression that served as a catalyst to bind together two rather disparate phenomena, government action and idealization of the land, with the result being a government supported back-to-the-land movement.

The second half of the dissertation focuses on the development and implementation of the back-to-the-land movement during the Depression. The development of various settlement initiatives as a response to the economic crisis is examined in Chapter Five. With the nation reeling from the successive blows of economic collapse, drought, and escalating social welfare concerns, Canadian politicians searched for solutions to the crisis and alternatives to the abyss of direct relief. Many thought that land settlement offered a viable option. One of the more important concerns of this research is to examine how ordinary Canadians fared when they participated in relief settlement programs. To achieve this objective, two settlements that were established in northwestern Saskatchewan by relief recipients participating in the back-to-the-land movement are investigated. The first, a fairly successful community known as "Little Saskatoon," is the focus of Chapter Six, while a nearby settlement, called Tamarack, where residents rarely achieved hoped-for self-sufficiency, is discussed in Chapter Seven. Both are analyzed in as much detail as possible, given the constraints imposed by the historical record. Every attempt has been made to permit the voices of those who joined the movement to be heard. Chapter Eight reviews the back-to-the-land movement of the 1930s, evaluates the effectiveness of government policy in light of the experiences of the settlers at "Little Saskatoon" and Tamarack, and concludes that the inadequacies of its design were fundamental flaws that limited the success that any settler might achieve.

Chapter Two

Governments' Role in Developing the Canadian West

> In spite of many changes, agriculture is still fundamental in the Canadian economy and in Canadian life. It is the original activity by means of which the country was settled and given a permanency of population .... It is one of the basic industries, whether measured by its product--particularly foodstuffs, which are the support of life itself--its output in dollar terms, or the population who work and live on farms. ... farming and the rural way of life set a large part of the pattern of Canadian thinking.[1]

This statement, written in 1941, makes it clear that land and rural life were central to Canadian identity and continued to exert a powerful hold on the national psyche. The pervasiveness of this view, the rhetoric employed to reinforce the message, the mythical power associated with rural livelihoods, and the economic value placed on property all make it necessary to understand the social meaning of land. Land plays a central role in this study, and two complementary, but distinctive aspects of this resource are considered. The first is land settlement and its supervision by government and railways; the second relates to discussions about land, its moral and economic value, and its influence upon Canadian society.

It is the instrumental role that government played in the settlement of the West, and the associated consequences of this activity, that are the foci of this chapter. Government recognized the economic and social significance of land and by placing a value on it, turned it into a commodity. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the federal government designed and implemented three

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[1]George V. Haythorne, *Land and Labour* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1941), ix.

different, but largely interrelated policies that were essential for national economic development. Through its railway, immigration, and land policies the federal government determined the course of western expansion. Vernon Fowke observed that "the immigration policies of the Dominion government were obviously inseparably linked with settlement prospects, and these, in turn, with the availability of agricultural lands and with the Dominion's land settlement policies."[2] One could not properly develop without the other, and government played a vital role in ensuring that the three elements complemented one another and permitted the economic growth of the nation.

The Depression of the 1930s made it obvious to Canadians that government, whether local, provincial, or federal, needed to take a more active role in the economic and social life of the nation. It also forced a recognition that some form of systematic planning on the part of government agencies was essential. Yet these statements should not be taken to imply that government had failed to act to promote economic growth and social development prior to the Depression. Three policies that were developed in the second half of the nineteenth century: a systematic survey and land disposal system; recruitment of European immigrants to settle the vast western prairies; and support for a railway to promote national economic integration; are antecedents to policy initiatives undertaken by the Dominion government in the early years of the Depression. The involvement of the federal government in directing the course of western development in the late nineteenth century, and the benefits that the country gained from these initiatives, made the federal government more aware of its role, and made it predisposed to intervene in the twentieth century.

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[2]Vernon C. Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), 58.

Immigration, Land and Railway Policies

Remarking that the federal government's encouragement of the back-to-the-land movement in the 1930s was not a great innovation, one author reminded his readers that "it might almost be said ... that the history of land settlement is the history of Canada itself."[3] Indeed, the history of Canada has been shaped in large measure by more than two centuries of immigration. The federal government played a crucial role in directing the development of the Canadian nation, particularly through the settlement of its western lands. Although the British North America Act granted the provinces and the federal government concurrent jurisdiction over agriculture and immigration, the fact that Ottawa retained control over western lands meant that policies set by the federal government would determine the course of western development.[4] In 1872, Canada introduced a settlement policy, based on the American system, in which parcels of 160 acres were offered to prospective settlers in exchange for a ten dollar filing fee and a three year period of residence.[5] Facing stiff competition from its southern neighbor, the Canadian government believed that the establishment of a land disposal policy equal to that of the United States was essential if Canada was to attract settlers.

In order to inform prospective settlers of agricultural opportunities in Canada, the federal government developed an extensive advertising campaign to promote settlement of its lands. This task was handled by the federal Department of Agriculture which produced millions of pamphlets, maps, and advertisements in a dozen different languages and distributed them to prospective settlers. One author

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[3]Haythorne, 423.

[4]Friesen, 182.

[5]Friesen, 183.

has observed that until responsibility was transferred to the Interior Department in 1892, the chief function of the Department of Agriculture was the promotion of immigration, for Canada needed immigrants in order to develop an agricultural economy, particularly in the West. A second program initiated by federal authorities was the establishment of immigration offices in Britain and continental Europe. The government also paid commissions to agents who successfully recruited immigrants and subsidized steamship fares for agricultural settlers. Between 1867 and 1899, one and a half million immigrants made their way to Canada, and, although this number was small in comparison to the numbers going to the United States or Australia, these first arrivals played a critical role in attracting other newcomers from their home communities. In his history of the Prairie Provinces, Gerald Friesen concludes that by the end of the nineteenth century, immigration to western Canada was "an established fact, if not an overwhelming success." More importantly, he asserts that by this time the groundwork had been laid for the flood of immigrants that would soon follow. During the first decade of the twentieth century, Canada received as many immigrants as arrived in the previous four decades, a trend that would continue until the onset of the Depression.[6]

The development of immigration and land policies was essential to encourage economic integration of the Canadian nation. Another tool that the federal government employed to promote growth was the construct ion of a national railway linking the nation from coast to coast. In order for agricultural settlement to succeed, the government recognized that farmers needed a means of transporting their products to market. To this end, the federal government entered into an agreement in 1881 with a syndicate of railway men whereby they would build a railway to the

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[6]Friesen, 185-186 and 248.

Pacific in exchange for $25 million and a land subsidy of 25 million acres, all of which was located in the west.[7] This action made it clear that the government was committed to using its land resources as an instrument of national development. Within months of the approval of the contract, the newly organized Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) established a Land Department and formulated a policy for the disposal of its newly acquired property.[8] Despite the apparent contradiction between federal land subsidies to the railway syndicate and the free homestead system, James Hedges, author of an exhaustive history of the CPR, declared that the practice was justified by the "generally accepted belief that the building of railways increased the value of the settler's acres sufficiently to compensate for the few extra dollars which he paid for them."[9] Settlement of its lands was essential to the railway's success, and also served the economic interests of the Canadian nation. To attract settlers, the CPR established a number of land offices overseas, and although these were independent of similar offices operated by the federal Department of Agriculture, the two complemented one another and at times cooperated in their recruitment efforts. By the summer of 1901 the CPR had sold more than six million acres of its land, much of it to European immigrants.[10]

Beginning in the mid-1890s, the trickle of immigrants became a flood, which Friesen attributes to a number of factors. The explosive growth of immigration was apparently related to the rise in wheat prices, decreasing transportation costs, a shortage of free land in the United States, and scientific improvements in agricultural

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[7]James B. Hedges, *Building the Canadian West: The Land and Colonization Policies of the Canadian Pacific Railway* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1939), chapter two.

[8]Hedges, 66.

[9]Hedges, 14.

[10]Hedges, 388.

techniques. These reasons, combined with a number of "push factors" such as rising rural poverty, inadequate land holdings, and insufficient employment opportunities, stimulated outmigration from Europe.[11] The Canadian government took advantage of these conditions by establishing a more serious and effective recruiting campaign. This effort was developed under the capable leadership of Clifford Sifton who served as Minister of the Interior from 1897 to 1905. Recognizing the inefficiency of the Department, Sifton streamlined homesteading procedures and made regulations more flexible.[12] The Immigration branch was revitalized with new employees, a larger budget, millions more promotional pamphlets, dozens of displays at regional exhibitions in the United States and Great Britain, as well as more tours of the Prairie West for visiting journalists. These efforts resulted in a tidal wave of immigrants. Whereas less than three hundred fifty thousand immigrants came to Canada in the period from 1891 to 1901, more than 1.7 million people arrived between 1901 and 1911. That phenomenal growth was nearly matched in the following decade when an additional million and a half immigrants moved to Canada, most of them settling in the western provinces.[13] The net result was that this wave of immigration ushered in an unprecedented era of development in the Prairie West.

The federal government and the CPR were not the only institutions interested in promoting the west. Other railways were chartered in the late 1800s, but the next spurt of construction did not begin until early in the twentieth century. The federal government awarded land subsidies to the Canadian Northern and the Grand Trunk railways which in turn established colonization departments in an effort to sell these

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[11]Friesen, 250-251.

[12]Robert England, *The Colonization of Western Canada: A Study in Contemporary Land Settlement (1896-1934)* (London: P.S. King & Sons, Ltd., 1936), 65.

[13]Friesen, 248-249.

lands to immigrants. By 1911, the Canadian Northern had built a line from Port Arthur to Edmonton, and four years later it reached Vancouver. Branch lines were constructed throughout the Prairies, connecting the region's small cities and towns and increasing the economic value of land. Although one observer remarked that the construction of competing railway lines was "in no way justified by the population and resources" of the country, they did serve to increase settlement and to bring more agricultural lands within reach of a transportation link.[14] The rapid expansion was, however, not without negative consequences. At the end of the First World War, the federal government was forced to step in to mediate the damage caused by the financial collapse of both the Canadian Northern and Grand Trunk railways. The two lines were brought under government control and operated as the Canadian National Railway.[15] The federal government's takeover of the bankrupt railways served to reinforce its interest in promoting western development, and ensured that it would continue to play an important role in that process.

Immigration resumed in the years immediately following the cessation of hostilities in Europe, but the federal government imposed tighter restrictions. Doukhobors, Hutterites, Mennonites, and "enemy aliens," including Ukrainians and Germans, all of whom had previously been admitted to Canada in large numbers, were prohibited.[16] These restrictions clearly imposed financial hardship on the railways, which needed settlers on their lands and traffic on their lines if they were to remain economically viable. Railway companies had lobbied the federal government to ease the restrictions since they were imposed as a reaction to wartime sentiment,

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[14]Hedges, 129-131.

[15]Brian S. Osborne and Susan E. Wurtele, "The Other Railway: Canadian National's Department of Colonization and Agriculture," *Prairie Forum* 20:2 (Fall 1995): 231.

[16]Friesen, 247.

and by the mid-1920s, Ottawa had reversed its position. In 1925, the federal government signed an agreement with the two national railways whereby they would be given the principal role in the recruitment of immigrants, including those from eastern Europe, because of their "vested interest in colonization."[17] Both railways then embarked upon expensive recruitment campaigns in continental Europe, attracting large numbers of immigrants who had been excluded since the war. Until the Depression essentially halted the flow, nearly 370,000 people from central and eastern Europe arrived in Canada, one-half of whom were admitted under the Railways Agreement.[18] Like others before them, the overwhelming majority of these people settled in the Canadian west.

Federal Policies in the Post-War Era

In the immediate post-war period, the federal government was burdened with war debts and the demobilization of veterans, as well as by the economic and social consequences of a post-war recession. The provinces, however, were unwilling to allow the federal government to avoid responsibility for the unemployment crisis brought about by the end of the war and exacerbated by the return of tens of thousands of soldiers. Under the terms of the British North America Act, relief was a municipal responsibility, and, if municipalities were financially unable to deal with the problem, it became an issue for provinces to resolve. The war resulted in a reevaluation, albeit temporary, of this approach. For the first time in its history, the federal government accepted some responsibility for relief of the unemployed by acknowledging that war had contributed to the economic problems. In both 1920

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[17]Osborne and Wurtele, 235-236.

[18]Friesen, 247.

and 1921, the federal government agreed to contribute one-third of the cost of municipal relief. Federal authorities also proposed two other programs to deal with the problem, the Employment Service of Canada and Soldier Settlement. The former was an innovative, although short-lived, scheme designed to assist employers to find sufficient labour and workers to find jobs. This national network of labour exchanges was established in 1918 and was jointly funded and administered by the federal and provincial governments. The land program for returned soldiers, operated by the federal Soldier Settlement Board, was a less novel approach. The Dominion offered land and financial assistance to veterans interested in farming, but this initiative was merely an adaptation and extension of existing federal settlement policies. Its implications were, however, more significant. James Struthers, a historian who has examined unemployment in this period, has observed that the soldier settlement plan "represented the first indication that the government viewed the land as its principal solution to unemployment."[19] The implications of this position must not be overlooked for they influenced the development of later policies designed to deal with the economic collapse of the 1930s.

Soldier Settlement

As the war in Europe drew to a close, the Dominion government recognized that it had a responsibility to facilitate the return of its soldiers to civilian life. It also realized that the economy would likely experience a downturn because production of materials to support the war effort was no longer necessary. In short, it was obvious that the years ahead would involve a period of adjustment. Concern for an

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[19]James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 17.

anticipated unemployment problem among veterans prompted the Dominion government to develop plans for the placement of returned men on the land. At the end of 1917, the Dominion passed legislation creating the Soldier Settlement Board, an agency that would encourage settlement of Dominion lands, lands already owned by soldiers, or those purchased on their behalf. The Board would provide loans up to $2500 to permit veterans to purchase livestock and equipment, with repayment to be made over a twenty year period.[20] When demand for farms far exceeded expectations, Parliament enacted a new law in 1919 that broadened the scope of the original plan. The federal government authorized the Board to increase the loans to a maximum of $7500 and to spread repayment over twenty-five years.[21]

The Soldier Settlement Board outlined six conditions that it believed were essential for the success of this endeavor. These were:

> (1) To settle on the land soldiers whose best interests would be served by engaging in farming. (2) To assist settlement only where the land concerned is well located, of reasonable price, and of such fertility as to ensure profitable returns. (3) To develop ... settlement in areas contiguous to existing lines of railway. (4) To secure by ... special ... arrangements the best values possible in livestock, implements, building material, and other necessary equipment. (5) To guide and assist settlers in their farming activities. (6) To help the inexperienced or city-bred wife in the development of her home and its economic and social relations.[22]

A selection committee evaluated soldiers on their fitness for settlement based on their military, physical, and agricultural qualifications. For those without adequate farming experience, the Board recommended that they seek employment with an established farmer to acquire the necessary skills, and reapply at a later date. Men who were approved were instructed to select land and submit an application. The

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[20]McDonald, 37.

[21]Morgan, 41-42.

[22]Ashton, 494.

Board hired approximately 150 men, most of whom were ex-soldiers with agricultural experience, to provide assistance and guidance to the settlers.[23] Additional assistance was given to soldiers' wives and daughters through the Home Service Branch which cooperated with the Red Cross, women's institutes, and university extension programs to provide instruction in dairying, poultry raising, and home economics.[24]

By the end of November, 1920, approximately 20,000 soldiers had settled under the auspices of this program, nearly three-quarters of them on farms in the Prairie Provinces. Four years later, the number reached 24,000. Loans made to these settlers exceeded one hundred million dollars, an average of $4266 per settler.[25] Despite these expenditures, soldiers participating in the program soon experienced financial difficulties. Most of them had taken up land in 1919 and 1920, when prices for land, livestock, and equipment were high. By the time they had brought sufficient land under cultivation or built up a herd of cattle, agricultural prices had plummeted, while soldiers' fixed costs, principally their indebtedness to the Settlement Board, remained constant. Under these conditions few veterans were able to keep up their payments.[26] In 1922, the federal government responded to the demands of solders and their political representatives by permitting the consolidation of indebtedness into one loan payable over twenty-five years, and granting an interest exemption of two to four years, depending on the year of settlement. These concessions, however, failed to solve the problem. In the Prairie Provinces, rates of

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[23]Ashton, 495.

[24]Morgan, 44.

[25]Morgan, 44; Ashton, 496.

[26]Morgan, 44.

abandonment that had been 7 percent in 1921 rose to 24 percent in 1924, and to 31 percent by the middle of the decade.[27]

The federal government granted further concessions to the soldiers in 1925. Liens on livestock purchased prior to October, 1920 were reduced by 40 percent, and by 20 percent on livestock purchased after that date. But resolutions demanding further loan reductions continued to appear before Parliament. In 1927, the original act was amended to permit the reevaluation of land prices, a process which resulted in an average of 24 percent of the original purchase price being deducted from settlers' indebtedness. Although reevaluation was appreciated, the fact that it coincided with the onset of depression in the 1930s did little to ease the financial burden of the veterans. Parliament appeared sympathetic to their plight and responded to the recommendations of a Special Committee on Veterans and Returned Soldiers by granting additional concessions, including a 30 percent reduction of outstanding debts.[28]

It is clear that the Soldier Settlement scheme encountered serious problems, each of which can be attributed to a variety of factors. The two most obvious were the unsuitability of the settler and the inappropriateness of the land for agricultural development. Initial applications to the Board were far higher than anticipated, and in their haste, committees often approved settlers who were ill-prepared for homesteading. Despite the fact that the Board recommended that soldiers with too little experience seek to upgrade their agricultural training by working with established farmers, men without adequate backgrounds were allowed to participate in the scheme. Another equally important factor was the poor quality of the land

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[27]McDonald, 41.

[28]Morgan, 47-49.

selected for settlement. By the time that a settlement scheme for veterans was devised, most of the available land was located in wooded areas and often only marginally suited to agricultural development. To make matters worse, these parcels were isolated and usually some distance from existing transportation routes.[29] Although not all of the land was of poor quality or located in peripheral locations, but this was too often the case. When these conditions were combined with the cost-price squeeze described above, the likelihood of failure increased exponentially. But, how high, in fact, were the failure rates of soldier settlers, and how can they be measured? Chester Martin calculated that the cancellation rates of soldier settlers were 31 percent in Saskatchewan and 28 percent in Alberta. Financial costs associated with these abandonments were also high because the federal government had provided loans to veterans and invested capital in various projects. Yet these figures are significantly lower than the 40 percent failure rate calculated by Martin for the free homestead system as a whole.[30]

Despite both its high costs and rates of abandonment, soldier settlement should not be viewed as a complete failure. Many of the Soldier Settlement Board's original goals were achieved: thousands of acres had been brought under cultivation, there had been a substantial increase in primary production, and the agricultural frontier had been pushed northward in each of the Prairie Provinces.[31] One observer remarked that the transformation of soldiers into farmers was "all but complete" at the end of the 1920s, while a commissioner of the Soldier Settlement Board proclaimed that although these settlers "have had to shoulder a much heavier burden

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[29]Morgan, 44-45.

[30]Chester Martin, *"Dominion Lands" Policy* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, Ltd., 1973), 166 and 241.

[31]Morgan, 55.

than that of the average farmer ... in the main their performance has been a very creditable one."[32] Although the program's shortcomings were often substantial, the federal government's implementation of another soldier settlement scheme following the Second World War demonstrates that it believed support for the program was a worthwhile expenditure.[33] Perhaps more important were the lessons this experiment offered in terms of government assisted agricultural colonization. It was clear that careful selection of settlers needed to be an absolute priority, and their location on suitable tracts of land was a necessary prerequisite to their success. Lack of investment capital also meant that their debt burdens had to be thoroughly managed: too much indebtedness incurred before the land could turn a profit could easily spell disaster for settlers.

Provincial Policies

The 1920s witnessed a change in the federal-provincial relationship: Ottawa began to limit its responsibilities and refused to assume new ones, and encouraged the provinces to play a more active role in administration and decision-making. In short, the federal government sought to make the provinces more responsible for planning, development, and economic growth.[34] The Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations provided several reasons for this retrenchment of federal authority, emphasizing the effect of World War I. That effort had strained

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[32]Ashton, 497.

[33]Morgan, 55; Denis Fitzgerald, "Pioneer Settlement in Northern Saskatchewan" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1966), 466-468; Burke G. Vanderhill, "Settlement in the Forest Lands of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta: A Geographic Analysis" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1956), 154-156.

[34]*Report of the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, Book I, Canada: 1867-1939* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1940), 127-132.

the federal political system with various interest groups raising questions about national policies. In addition, the national debt had increased dramatically, and federal authorities were reluctant to add to that burden.[35] Government remained an influential factor in national development policies, but as federal authorities backed away, provincial governments moved to the forefront.

The parameters of this new relationship might best be illustrated by using the provision of social services as an example. World War I had permitted the federal government to take a few steps in the direction of active social policy, much to the satisfaction of social reformers who believed that state involvement in resolving social and economic problems was essential in the modern era.[36] These steps were, however, tentative at best, for there was considerable uncertainty about how to proceed. Doug Owram observes that in the 1920s two questions regarding the level of state intervention in social and economic matters were being debated. The first involved how it was to be determined which services were necessary, and the second concerned who was to take responsibility for the design and implementation of these programs.[37] At the national level, the absence of a reform party and the continued focus on these questions severely hampered efforts to construct social and economic policies. Municipalities and provinces, which were more immediately confronted with the need to provide these services, assumed a more active role. This situation in part reflects the growth of the social work profession that had been involved in issues of urban poverty and family problems, and had been successful in demonstrating to

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[35]*Dominion-Provincial Relations*, 112.

[36]Doug Owram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State, 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 132.

[37]Owram, 121.

local governments the necessity of intervention. It also indicates growing provincial influence in social and economic matters.[38]

Soldier settlement, the creation of employment offices, and limited financial contributions to municipalities for relief of the unemployed were the extent of new federal responsibilities assumed during the decade following the First World War. One reason for Ottawa's failure to inaugurate new social and economic development programs may have been a lack of direction. Vernon Fowke, an economist who wrote extensively on federal policies and their effect on the Prairie economy, suggested that by 1920 the goal of national economic integration had been achieved, and that there was no longer any great project of national expansion to occupy the federal government.[39] This situation substantially altered the relationship between the federal government and the provinces throughout the 1920s. The federal government sought to limit its responsibilities and reduce its expenditures, while the provinces began to play a more visible role in the daily lives of their citizens. Consequently, the federal government progressively conceded greater social and economic responsibilities to the provinces.[40]

An enlightening source of the changing relationship of municipalities and provinces to the federal government is found in the report issued by the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations. The Commission, created in 1937 to investigate the economic and financial basis of Confederation and to consider the distribution of authority between Ottawa and the provinces, produced an exhaustive account of this relationship. One chapter in the report examines the impact of

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[38]Owram, 125.

[39]Vernon C. Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), 287.

[40]*Dominion-Provincial Relations*, 113.

economic and social changes and the increased costs assumed by the provinces and municipalities. Two conditions account for the increasingly important role played by these governments during this period. One was the increased provincial political power associated with new highway construction and development projects that had replaced national projects such as railway building. A second factor was the changing nature of Canadian society. As the nation industrialized and more people became dependent on wage earnings, the vagaries of such an economy meant that greater numbers of people were in need of some form of temporary financial support. As welfare and relief were municipal and provincial responsibilities, these governments found it necessary to respond to these new and more frequently occurring needs.[41]

One consequence of increased urban and industrial development was a demand by citizens for more public services, the provision of which was a provincial responsibility. Thus the costs of new highway and utility construction, as well as schools, hospitals, and relief, were borne solely by municipal and provincial governments. To pay for these services, provinces relied on revenues which had risen largely as a result of new taxes on liquor, motor vehicles, and gasoline. The public's desire for improved services also coincided with fundamental changes in social and economic life. Increased urbanization and industrialization, the "virtual disappearance of the agricultural frontier," and the continued movement of people from the country to the city each contributed to the decline in self-sufficiency of individuals and families. In the past, people had turned to their families or local charities for help in times of trouble, but these sources were soon exhausted and people looked instead to governments for support. Thus, in addition to providing

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[41] *Dominion-Provincial Relations*, 112.

economic infrastructure, municipalities and provinces also took on greater responsibility for social welfare and relief.[42]

Providing services in urban areas was relatively cost-effective, but services in rural areas, particularly in the sparsely-settled pioneer districts, were expensive to implement and maintain. Throughout the 1920s, the governments of Alberta and Saskatchewan faced the greatest financial burdens, and demanded that the federal government turn over control of natural resources which it had retained when the three Prairie Provinces were admitted into Confederation. They argued that provincial treasuries had to pay for schools, roads, and other services, yet they received almost no revenue from the exploitation of their resources.[43] In response to these demands, and with recognition that its role in the development of the west was coming to an end, the federal government agreed to relinquish control of natural resources. In preparation for this transfer to the provinces, all unoccupied Crown Lands in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta were withdrawn from homestead entry late in 1929. The provincial legislatures quickly set to the task of creating and implementing their own policies regarding the settlement of lands and the development of natural resources.

In Saskatchewan, discussion of the natural resources issue had raised serious concerns about existing government immigration and land settlement policies, and the problems that too little regulation of these matters had created for the province. In January, 1930, the Saskatchewan government appointed a Royal Commission, directed by William W. Swanson, an economics professor at the University of Saskatchewan, to investigate these matters and create guidelines for new policies to

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[42]*Dominion-Provincial Relations*, 128-130.

[43]Vanderhill, 94.

be established by the province. The Commission was appointed at this time in response to two different causes. The first was the belief that immigration and land policies needed to be "readjusted to meet changing conditions which may, in short, be described as the visible approach of the time when the agricultural area of the province will almost completely have passed into the hands of settlers."[44] The second was the impending return of natural resources to the province. After a nine-month investigation in which 476 witnesses were interviewed during forty meetings held throughout the province, the Commission sent its report to Regina. It recommended that both the province and Dominion government exert greater control over immigration and settlement policies, and that a program of land classification be undertaken before any further lands were made available for homesteading. Commissioners expressed concern about the trend of rural depopulation, and that if an "economically sound condition of rural population" was to be maintained, new immigration and settlement policies would have to be imposed.[45]

The report contained several important recommendations regarding future land policies. It urged that experts conduct an investigation of economic conditions throughout the province. Once completed, these surveys would serve as a foundation for future settlement policies.[46] The commissioners recognized that in addition to classifying suitable lands, appropriate selection of settlers was an essential prerequisite to successful settlement. They suggested that farm size,

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[44]*Report of the Saskatchewan Royal Commission on Immigration and Settlement, 1930* (Regina: King's Printer, 1930), 11.

[45]*Saskatchewan Royal Commission*, 17.

[46]T.J.D. Powell, "Northern Settlement, 1929-1935," *Saskatchewan History* 30:3 (Autumn 1977): 82-83.

financing, and types of livestock also be regulated. More importantly, they recommended that public lands be

> opened up in blocks, constituting not more than a municipal area at one time, to assure sufficient population to warrant expenditure for necessary social services.[47]

Finally, they concluded that some basic improvements should be made to homestead units before they were sold to settlers. Most lands required extensive clearing, and to facilitate settlement, "the government should clear and break a minimum of forty acres on each unit, the cost of which should be added to the sale or lease price." In addition to land clearing, "suitable buildings should be erected and a water supply provided."[48] 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.

When the federal government turned over control of natural resources in the spring of 1930, Saskatchewan created a Department of Natural Resources to direct land settlement and resource development. In theory, this department was to heed the advice offered by the Royal Commission, and to incorporate its recommendations into newly-created settlement policies. Because the Depression coincided with the release of the Commission's findings, the province had too few financial resources available to implement more costly procedures. Saskatchewan abandoned the free homestead system and replaced it with a purchase program, under which lands classified as suitable for homesteading were sold for a minimum of one dollar per acre. Settlers were required to make a ten percent down payment at

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[47]*Saskatchewan Royal Commission*, 31.

[48]*Saskatchewan Royal Commission*, 32.

the time of the sale, with the balance to be paid over a twelve year period at six percent interest.[49] The principal reason for the adoption of this policy was financial. Officials estimated that

> every homestead entry and disposition involved an administrative cost of from $100 to $200 per homestead unit. This included cost of survey, inspection, general correspondence and issuing of patent. It was felt that the general public and general revenues of the Province should not be called upon to subsidize entrants on homestead lands by bearing all cost of administration.[50]

Although the province was eager to dispose of lands suitable for agriculture, it was no longer willing to "subsidize" their development.

Saskatchewan's implementation of its own land policy following the return of control over natural resource policy to the Prairie provinces was just one of the actions undertaken by the provinces and municipalities in response to federal retrenchment. Others included the expansion of social programs, and the provision of infrastructure, including schools, highways, and utilities. These efforts brought local governments into much closer contact with citizens, and served to broaden the influence that these agencies exerted over their constituents. In turn, residents came to view the role of local government as a facilitator of development and as directly serving their social and economic interests. Rising expectations, and indeed, demands on the part of the citizenry resulted in local government's assumption of new responsibilities.

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[49]Powell, 87.

[50]*Annual Report of the Department of Natural Resources of the Province of Saskatchewan, 1930-31* (Regina: King's Printer, 1931), 4, quoted in Powell, 87.

Conclusions

Since Confederation, the federal government had taken the initiative in directing western development. It did so principally through immigration policies, land subsidies to railway companies, and control of natural resources. Each of these policies reflected a long-standing belief in the primacy of land; agricultural settlement had become the foundation upon which the economic expansion of the nation rested. Although this condition had not completely changed by the 1920s, processes of urbanization and industrialization were restructuring Canadian life. Whereas the federal government had played a leading role in promoting economic development and integration of the nation through its land settlement policies, it was less willing to implement policies to counteract some of the ill effects of modernization. Charging that social and economic welfare was the responsibility of municipal and provincial governments, federal authorities steadfastly avoided new obligations. With national economic integration achieved and the settlement of the west all but accomplished, the federal government began to yield the initiative for further development to the provinces. Taking advantage of their newly gained political power, provinces began to formulate their own development strategies and to take a more activist approach to governing.

The policies of the federal government, the railways, and the provinces reflect the importance of land and agriculture in Canadian economic development. They also highlight the role of government and its agents in providing the structures within which western settlement could be pursued. Nevertheless, the actions of these institutions were simply one-half of an equation that would be formulated and implemented in the first years of the Depression. That equation was the very foundation of the back-to-the-land movement, the only long range solution that the

federal government offered to the economic crisis of the 1930s. The other half was the influence of prevailing ideologies about the presumed virtues of rural life, a topic that is examined in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Back-to-the-Land Movements in Historical Perspective

The term "back-to-the-land" has both negative and positive connotations. In the first instance, the idea of returning to the land suggests a retreat, a step backward. It also implies that some of those who had migrated to cities could not adjust to urban life and were forced to return to their rural roots. On the other hand, land and rural life also represent such virtues as independence and responsibility that social reformers praised. These reformers also believed that a back-to-the-land movement could alleviate urban problems and unemployment. The idea of returning to the land has had a long and dynamic history, and the back-to-the-land movement, embracing as it does a mixture of romanticism and practicality, has also taken on different meanings depending on the advocate and the audience. These must be disentangled from a complex web of ideas in which the back-to-the-land movement is fully intertwined. Deciphering these meanings facilitates understanding of the reemergence of the back-to-the-land principle in the 1930s.[1]

Back-to-the-land was a relatively small part of a much broader phenomenon in which promoters idealized country living and remembered the rural past with fondness. The country life movement and romantic agrarianism, both widely

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[1]For an appraisal of the role of simple living in American society, see David Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). Peter C. Gould provides a detailed account of the back-to-the-land movement in late nineteenth century England in *Early Green Politics: Back to Nature, Back to the Land, and Socialism in Britain, 1880-1900* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1988).

promoted in the early twentieth century, were also rooted in this same ideology.[2] Those who supported the country life idea believed that rural life was wholesome and virtuous, and that agriculture was the most important underpinning of society. That foundation was, they feared, being undermined by the defection of the best and brightest rural people to urban centers. As rural areas became increasingly marginalized, religious leaders, educators, social scientists, and public officials recognized the implications of this movement, and joined forces in an attempt to reverse it. They believed that without concerted effort cities and society as a whole would ultimately be drawn into a general malaise.[3] Perhaps more important, although more difficult to detail, was the widespread belief that there were "virtues" in rural living that had to be preserved; urbanization clearly threatened those virtues.[4] While concerned citizens sought to improve life in rural areas, they did not issue the call for a return to the land until it became apparent that rapid urbanization and industrialization were threatening the moral fabric of society. Rising unemployment, urban overcrowding, and a corresponding increase in social problems in the last decade of the nineteenth century forced a reexamination of modern society.[5]

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[2]An excellent appraisal of the origins and ideological foundations of the country life movement is found in William L. Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America, 1900-1920* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1974). See also, Merwin R. Swanson, "The American Country Life Movement, 1900-1940" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1972); David B. Danbom, "Romantic Agrarianism in Twentieth-Century America," *Agricultural History* 65:4 (Fall 1991): 1-12.

[3]Bowers, 15-17; David B. Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 167-173.

[4]Swanson, 14-15.

[5]See, for example, Charles R. Henderson, "Are Modern Industry and City Life Unfavorable to the Family?" *American Journal of Sociology* 14:5 (March 1909): 668-680; Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess, and Robert D. McKenzie, *The City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925); Robert E. Park, "The Urban Community as a Spacial Pattern and a Moral Order," in *The Urban Community: Selected Papers from the Proceedings of the American Sociological Society, 1925*, ed. Ernest W. Burgess (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926), 3-18; Peter J. Schmitt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969; reprint, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 177-180.

The back-to-the-land movement that took place in North America during the early twentieth century grew out of this widely-held concern about country life. Back-to-the-land had two distinct, but largely interrelated, motivations. The first was social. Reformers had come to believe that urban life, with its crowded living conditions, inadequate employment opportunities, and lack of healthful amenities, had demoralized a large segment of the working class population. Concerned citizens argued that the working class needed to be reinvigorated and have their standing in society improved. A second reason for interest in a back-to-the-land movement was economic in nature. It was widely believed that growth of urban populations had outpaced industry's ability to provide adequate employment. Poor housing conditions and hunger were often the consequence of uncertain employment and too little pay. Only the land, from which self-sufficiency could be derived, might counter the degenerative impact of urban life. Removing the underprivileged from the city and placing them in a more natural setting, advocates argued, would restore their sense of self-worth and permit them to become productive members of society.

Revitalizing Lives and Livelihoods

Adherents to this ideology fervently believed that the land offered hope to those who had nowhere else to turn. Religious leaders, in particular, often zealously promoted some form of agricultural settlement as a solution to the ills of urban living. One of the earliest and most notable attempts to show that the land could regenerate the lives of the down-and-out in urban centers occurred in Salvation Army colonies established in Colorado and California in 1898.[6] In his analysis of the

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[6]Clark C. Spence, *The Salvation Army Farm Colonies* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985).

colonization efforts undertaken by this group, Clark Spence, a respected historian of the American West, observed that the Army's approach had

> its antecedents in literally hundreds of farm colonies advocated by individuals, by charitable or religious societies and even city and national governments in all parts of the globe, generally with benevolent aims: to aid the needy, improve living conditions, reform criminals, or diminish the breakup of families.[7]

It was not a new scheme, but rather a time-honored approach to helping those unable to help themselves.

The Salvation Army obtained the land for its Colorado colony from an irrigation company that had already constructed canals in the area. The original site contained 640 acres, purchased for twenty dollars an acre. Once land had been secured, the Army began to select settlers from the more than 5,000 unsolicited applications that it had received. Potential settlers were required to provide references and were interviewed in their homes. Honesty and industry were essential characteristics, and the final group was "carefully selected with a view to intelligence, character, and physical capability." A later observer remarked, however, that they were a "motley crowd, all hard up, mustered from all sorts of occupations," and so ignorant of farming that some "hardly knew one end of a plow from the other."[8] The Army refuted this, claiming that all but five of the colonists had at some time worked on farms, even though they had been city dwellers prior to their arrival in Colorado. Just how much agricultural experience these settlers had is difficult to determine, but the underlying assumption of the Army's colonization efforts was that the "country was uplifting." Even those who did not have the benefit

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[7]Spence, 2.

[8]Spence, 43.

of a "rural upbringing or extensive farm experience" could, with proper instruction, become good farmers.[9]

In 1905, Henry Rider Haggard, a British novelist and gentleman farmer who supported the objectives of the Army's colonization efforts, investigated these colonies to determine if "some analogous system might ... be applied in transferring the urban populations of the United Kingdom to different parts of the British Empire."[10] Haggard believed that land settlement would "assist thousands ... to regain a lost foothold ... and prevent countless children from sinking into death, ill-health, vice or idleness."[11] The "true cure" for the poor, he declared, was to be found "not in the workhouses ... but upon the land." After his visit to the Colorado colony, Haggard suggested that this experiment offered an important lesson. Its success demonstrated that "unskilled and untrained persons could be taken from towns, put upon the land and thrive there ...."[12] Unfortunately, Haggard's example was flawed because nearly all of the urban families who settled in Colorado had some previous farming experience; nonetheless, it does indicate the amount of faith that was placed in both the land and the "worthy" poor. Life on the land offered an escape from the ills of city life that, the Salvation Army claimed, often resulted in degradation, misery, and poverty.

Similar beliefs prompted some Jewish leaders to encourage their people to return to the land. Asserting that farm life would "remake the Jew physically and spiritually ...," and that "agriculture offered Jews the path to economic and social

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[9]Spence, 64-65.

[10]Henry Rider Haggard, *The Poor and the Land* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1905), vi.

[11]Haggard, xxvi.

[12]Haggard, 71.

independence," these leaders both encouraged and provided financial support for a number of colonization efforts throughout the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[13] Agriculture and Judaism are not so incongruous as it might first seem. One authority on Jewish farm colonization has declared that the "urban complexion of American Jewry disguises, even from itself, a people rooted in agrarianism."[14] The colonization efforts made by American Jews to re-establish themselves in agriculture was simply an attempt to restore the agrarian life. Its advocates believed that farming was key to a necessary restructuring of Jewish life, and would remove Jews from "artificial and less worthy sectors of urban commerce and industry while providing [them] with a measure of dignity and self-worth."[15] Like the Salvationists, Jews also were convinced that back-to-the-land offered a cure for the unemployment, poverty, slum living, disease, crime and other ills affecting their people.

The last of the colonization attempts undertaken by Jewish aid societies was a settlement called Clarion, established in central Utah. In 1911, two hundred Jewish families from New York City, Philadelphia, and Baltimore subscribed funds to the Jewish Agriculture and Colonial Association from which a new agricultural colony would emerge. Later that year, the first eighty-one families moved west to a site that had been selected by two of their representatives. The land quickly proved to be a poor choice, as the soil was both sandy and full of gravel, and not particularly appropriate for irrigation. The tract's distinct slope also created unforeseen problems for these people who were completely unfamiliar with irrigation. The unsuitability

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[13]Robert Alan Goldberg, *Back to the Soil: The Jewish Farmers of Clarion, Utah, and Their World* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1986), 37.

[14]Goldberg, xxiii.

[15]Goldberg, 38.

of the soil, coupled with the fact that the main canal could not deliver water in sufficient quantities on a regular basis, meant that the colony's crops were doomed. Despite the best efforts and intentions of the colonists, they were unable to produce crops sufficient to support the colony financially. A shortage of funds was a critical and chronic problem for the colonists, and their inexperience with farming, specifically those practices necessary for irrigated agriculture in the arid west, aggravated an already difficult situation. These factors combined to make the transition from the city to the farm far more difficult than most had imagined.[16] Five years after it began, the colony was a clear failure. Although a dozen families remained on the land after the colony disbanded, one after another abandoned the settlement as other opportunities arose. Clarion, like the majority of other Jewish agricultural efforts, eventually failed because of settlers' lack of farming experience, harsh environmental conditions, insufficient funding, and the availability of more attractive alternatives.[17] Nevertheless, for a small minority of Jews, life on the land, however brief, provided them with an escape from the tenements and sweatshops of urban America.

Improving Rural Life in Canada

The colonization efforts undertaken by the Salvation Army and by Jewish agricultural societies were not isolated phenomena. They were, in fact, part of a widespread back-to-the-land movement that took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the first decades of the twentieth century, a group of urban-based social reformers and middle-class intellectuals endeavored to improve

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[16]Goldberg, 81.

[17]Goldberg, 137-139.

the quality of rural life. This reform effort, known as the country life movement, sought to offset the growing cultural dominance of urban America and to counter the widening gap between urban and rural standards of living.[18] Advocates believed that these objectives might best be achieved through the placement of well-educated people in farming and other rural occupations, by making rural people more efficient and sophisticated, and by mechanizing and commercializing their operations. In short, the country should be made more like the city.[19] Development of rural areas would also permit a redistribution of population and result in a more equitable balance between rural areas and urban centers. Central to the ideology of the country life movement was a belief that agriculture and, by extension, rural life, was fundamental to a strong civilization. Liberty Hyde Bailey, the movement's most active and well-known proponent, declared that "City properties may come and go, [and] ... stocks and bonds may rise and fall, but the land still remains; and a man can remain on the land and subsist ...."[20] Farming was neither an easy nor a simple business, and for this reason, "it has produced a virile lot of men and women." By way of contrast, the writer admonished his readers "to exercise every precaution that [industrialization] does not make clock-watchers and irresponsible gang-servers."[21] Country life was suffering, but its decline could still be reversed. Its preservation was essential, in fact, because rural values were superior and could combat the incidence of urban deprivation and moral decay.

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[18]Swanson, 11.

[19]Danbom, "Romantic Agrarianism," 4.

[20]L. H. Bailey, *The Country Life Movement* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913), 16.

[21]Bailey, 59.

Efforts to reform country life in the United States did not go unnoticed north of the border. In 1913, John MacDougall, a Presbyterian minister, echoed the concerns of many Canadians when he suggested that the agricultural roots of society were being eroded. In a series of lectures that were later published as *Rural Life in Canada: Its Trend and Tasks*, MacDougall identified the source of the rural problem and suggested some solutions. The church's Board of Moral and Social Reform and Evangelism had been concerned with urban problems for a number of years, but recognized that rural areas were also distressed. Like so many of their contemporaries, the concerned members of the Board held to a romantic vision that country life was pure and simple. To its horror, the "virus of urbanism" had already infected much of rural Canada, but the Board held out hope that rural life could yet be saved. Its salvation was a worthy objective as farming was one of the "great fundamental occupations, and therefore the interests of the men who follow it are worth conserving."[22] Furthermore, it was not only an "occupation which some individuals follow for profit: it [was] a great national interest determining in a dominant way the fortunes of this nation and the opportunities and the character of the population." Improving rural life in Canada was certain to affect the nation's status, as well as "its outlook and its destiny."[23] These were heady words, but they demonstrate the depth of concern that existed about the dangers of urbanization and industrialization. Perhaps the more important conclusion to be drawn from MacDougall's book was that the church had a moral responsibility to improve rural life. He asked: "Should [the church] teach men ... how to grow better cabbages?" No, he replied, but it "should teach men ... that it is their duty to grow better

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[22]James W. Robertson, Introduction to *Rural Life in Canada*, by John MacDougall (Toronto: Westminster Company, Ltd., 1913), 14.

[23]MacDougall, 20.

cabbages. ... it is for the church to deal with the moral prerequisites of better husbandry, and hold out the better resultant life as an incentive."[24]

The opinions presented by MacDougall reflected the growing concern of Canadians that rural life was in jeopardy. In 1913, Martin Burrell, the federal minister of agriculture remarked that "there can be no health in the cities without corresponding health in the country." In an address to the House of Commons, he said that it should strive to create "a rural civilization which will at once ensure a fuller and happier life to those in its midst," and the reconstituted rural society would no doubt "prove a source and fount of strength to the State itself."[25] Other leaders made similar comments and expressed views shared by large numbers of Canadians. In his introduction to the reprint edition of MacDougall's book, the historian Robert C. Brown concludes that the book expressed "the public concern of Canadians over the impact of industrialization and urbanization upon Canada's farming population." He continues:

> The questions it poses and attempts to answer, and the social assumptions behind them, clearly reveal the nature of the anxiety of thoughtful citizens that the agricultural roots of their society were being eroded by the attractions of the new era.[26]

Brown's words clearly demonstrate that the condition of rural life played an important role in the intellectual climate of the time.

Just a few years after MacDougall's lectures appeared in print, another author explored the problems of rural life. Thomas Adams, an adviser on town planning issues for the Commission of Conservation, a Canadian organization dedicated to the

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[24]MacDougall, 181.

[25]Quoted in Robert Craig Brown, Introduction to *Rural Life in Canada*, by John MacDougall (Toronto: Westminster Company, Ltd., 1913; reprint, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), vii.

[26]Brown, vii.

better utilization of natural resources, observed that the "period of pioneer achievement [was] not over," but had entered a new phase that required greater attention to rural planning and development.[27] In the past, Adams wrote, the sanctity of property was placed above that of human life and civic welfare; Canadians were "prone to exalt individual liberty above social justice" and "to treat liberty as an end in itself instead of as a means to attain the end of equal opportunity for all its citizens."[28] The question of land, and subsequently, rural development, was fundamental because life was fully intertwined with land, and the two could not be separated. Still there was trouble in the countryside, and Adams pointed to three possible solutions to the problem of rural development. These were: 1) the planning and development of land by methods which would secure health, amenity, convenience and efficiency, and the rejection of those methods that led to injurious speculation; 2) the promotion of scientific training, improved educational facilities and means of social intercourse; and 3) the establishment of an efficient government organization and improved facilities for securing cooperation, rural credit, and development of rural industries.[29] The Commission concluded that "broadly speaking, the land question is at the root of all social problems, both in rural and urban territory." Adams advised that defects in the settlement system had recently become apparent. It was essential, therefore, that if rural areas were to be developed properly, a "scientific plan of development had to be prepared in advance of settlement ... to enable a sound economic structure to be built up." The farmer had to

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[27]On the establishment and purposes of this body, see Alan H. Armstrong, "Thomas Adams and the Commission of Conservation," in *Planning the Canadian Environment*, ed. L.O. Gertler (Montreal: Harvest House Press, 1968), 17-35.

[28]Thomas Adams, *Rural Planning and Development* (Ottawa: Commission of Conservation Canada, 1917), 2.

[29]Adams, 3.

have the facilities at his disposal to ensure a good life, and to enjoy better social conditions not only for himself, but for his wife and family.[30]

The rapid growth of urban centers need not be maligned, Adams continued, if conditions in rural areas were improved. It was futile to try to stem the tide of migration as long as industry provided a better return on labour than agriculture, or while cities presented better opportunities for advancement than the country. In short, it was not wrong that people sought better social and economic conditions in the city; the injustice was that similar opportunities were not available in the country. As in other works which examined the relationship between people and the land, this study also emphasized the tensions that existed between town and country. The equilibrium between the two had not been properly maintained, but there was no immediate solution. In fact, Adams warned, if rural settlement were temporarily increased without careful planning, the "injurious results" which followed from the "migratory tendencies" of the people would not be reversed. It was clear to many that in North America the city had developed at the expense of the country, but Adams asked, "would it not be more correct to say that neither the city nor the country had developed properly because of their neglect of each other?"[31]

How the public responded to these particular ideas is uncertain. It is clear, however, that there was a widespread concern about rural depopulation and the perceived lower standard of living that existed in the country. While rural life was touted as more wholesome and virtuous, the problem of how to balance city and country remained unresolved. The efforts made by Adams, MacDougall and others to call attention to the need for rural reform were likely met with sympathy by

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[30]Adams, 11.

[31]Adams, 17.

urbanites, but their concern did little to stop the exodus from the countryside. With the onset of the Depression, interest in the country life movement itself waned, but people still recognized the need to improve rural standards of living. In 1930, Rinaldo Armstrong, a minister in the United Church of Canada, wrote a series of essays on rural life that he presented to the public "with the hope that they will stimulate interest in the rural problem ...."[32] Armstrong may have been too generous in his praise of rural life and the people who lived it, but his ideas are nonetheless important:

> Rural environment ... produces moral and mental qualities that are distinct and unique. ... these qualities have a definite social value which is not always appreciated. Social stability and social progress are both traceable to those values contributed to the social order by the rural group. Thus it may be said that these values are the salt of human society.[33]

Armstrong also made the case that life on the land should not be considered as one of simple drudgery. He stressed that no occupation afforded greater variety than farming: "None of the major phases of ... work occupies ... more than a few weeks at a time, and they are all so different that the farmer's life is filled with variety." He further implied that in contrast to the jobs of urban workers, "practically every operation requires planning and initiative." By way of example, he declared that it was impossible to

> milk a cow as you would handle a machine because the cow has an individuality of her own and is liable to assert it at any time. For that reason, you have to keep your wits about you, and can never fall to the level of dead monotony such as is produced by purely automatic movements.[34]

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[32]Rinaldo William Armstrong, *The Salt of the Earth: A Study in Rural Life and Social Progress* (Ottawa: Graphic Publishers, Ltd., 1930), preface.

[33]Armstrong, 18-19.

[34]Armstrong, 46.

Armstrong also expressed concern over the declining percentage of rural population in Canada. In the twenty year period from 1901 to 1921, the decrease was more than 15 percent, and he believed that the decade of the 1920s would show an even greater decline. It was imperative that "rural and urban populations should be so balanced as to be complementary to one another." The need to maintain that balance was a matter of national importance, he argued, because rural people were indispensable to the life of the nation. A strong countryside was also essential for the continued success of the city. The two depended on one another; indeed, they were so intertwined that one could not exist without the other. Armstrong declared that "rural life should provide just as great opportunities for culture, enjoyment, and human well-being as city life," and that "serious efforts must be made to determine the causes and possible correctives" of the cityward drift of population.[35] One solution that he advocated was a "back-to-the-country movement," where the city could be relieved of its "non-functional elements." Key to the success of such a scheme was the revival of rural industries. This would increase rural populations and contribute financially to the broader community. In addition, the seasonal nature of farm work could be supplemented by opportunities in rural industry. From an economic standpoint, expansion of rural industry was a necessary objective, but it was also imperative from a cultural perspective as well. Increased populations would strengthen rural institutions, and provide greater opportunities for social interaction.[36]

Four years later, in the midst of the Depression, another book echoed these sentiments. In *City and Country: A Study of Fundamental Economics*, P.C.

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[35]Armstrong, 71-72.

[36]Armstrong, 116-117.

Armstrong and F.E.M. Robinson, two Canadian economists who claimed extensive expertise in agriculture and the practical application of economic principles to business, described the growing disparity between urban centers and their rural hinterlands. They suggested that one of the reasons that new areas of settlement were slow to develop was the belief, particularly among the unemployed, that high wages and decent standards of living would soon return, and that urban life would be "more profitable than the hard task of making a home in a new and unsettled country."[37] Armstrong and Robinson viewed the value of landward movement as nothing short of the possibility of saving urban civilization. Nevertheless, the "attempt to make the movement of urban unemployed back to the land a sentimental pilgrimage" would be useless. "Colonies of unfortunate settlers plunged into the wilderness by the well-meant enthusiasm of believers in the virtues of rural life [were] doomed to failure before they [began]." The authors argued that if the capitalist system was on the verge of collapse, the basic cause was not greed, but rather the failure to apply the profit motive intelligently. They continued,

> If the modern urban system finds itself threatened by the growing mass of the unemployed, to leave the cure to the state is folly; to imagine that the condition can continue without cure is madness. If the cure can only be found by the return of the idle to the land, then methods must be found which will extract a profit from the process ....

To achieve this goal, the value of farm lands had to be stabilized, and rural workers had to gain more than bare subsistence.[38]

Like others before them, Armstrong and Robinson believed that the question of whether urban development had gone too far must be addressed. They concluded

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[37]P. C. Armstrong and F. E. M. Robinson, *City and Country: A Study of Fundamental Economics* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1934), 94-95.

[38]Armstrong and Robinson, 103-104.

that while the long term consequences had yet to be determined, conditions in 1934 led them to believe that

> our cities have actually outgrown the economic foundation on which they are based, and that an essential to the restoration of equilibrium will be a reduction of the total mass of urban development ....[39]

In essence, the only way to emerge from the economic crisis of the 1930s was to make rural living more profitable, and by doing so, to create a more equitable distribution of population between rural and urban areas. Urban workers and their rural counterparts had to receive equal remuneration for equal work, and until such time as this objective was met, the nation would continue its economic decline.

The arguments presented above demonstrate that many people believed in the importance of rural life and were eager to reshape life in the country. To accomplish their objectives, reformers would have to make a concerted effort to counteract the problems associated with the ascendancy of the city and the cityward drift of population. Advocates believed that country life and citizens engaged in agriculture were the foundation of society. A balance between the urban and the rural had to be achieved in order to preserve that foundation; still, it was unclear how this balance might best be secured. One of the principal problems was that the message about the perceived problems of urban living and the need to redress the inadequacies of rural areas had failed to reach the masses. With each passing year, the imbalance became more obvious to rural folk, who migrated to the city for better economic and social opportunity. Reformers knew that populations had to be redistributed, but they also recognized that any effort to send urban people to the land without adequate preparation of both the settlers and the land was shortsighted. The twin objectives of

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[39]Armstrong and Robinson, 105.

restoring rural life and redistributing population could only be achieved through careful planning and effective organization.

Rural Life and the Popular Press

While reformers and others were making their views known within the academic community and through scholarly publications, the farm press was expressing similar sentiments. In an analysis of country life ideology as it appeared in Canadian farm journals, David Jones identifies this ideology as one in which country life was equated with farming, and agriculture was "the mainspring of natural greatness and the moulder of national and personal character." This vision reflected the optimism of the West, and confirmed that the land could support a family. It also supported the idea that farmers with the "aid of science could subdue nature and pave the way for an era of agrarian splendor."[40] Two themes appear consistently in the farm journals published in the early twentieth century. The first reflected belief in the land itself; the second was a condemnation of urban living.

"There is some power about the land that elevates, morally and emotionally, if not intellectually." This statement, written by a contributor to the *Farmer's Advocate and Home Journal*, certainly illustrates some of the mysticism attached to the land. He continued: the land was "a permanent, ever-renewing source of sustenance," and provided "the endowment of the race." That endowment was more than simply the production of food, for as this man observed, the land also served to "nurture ... men and women who are destined to carry forward the best ideals of the race in religion, conduct, industry, recreation, education and cooperation."[41] That

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[40]David C. Jones, "'There is Some Power About the Land': The Western Agrarian Press and Country Life Ideology," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 17:3 (Fall 1982): 96-97.

[41]Quoted in Jones, 99.

country life adherents believed in the land's ability to shape and nurture a proper society is evident from statements such as those cited above, but its strength was most often advocated as a contrast to the evils found in the city.

Jones argues that negative depictions of the city in the farm press reflected its concern about the "genuine menace cities posed to the country, both economically and socially."[42] Articles repeatedly attacked the virus of urbanism that "dissipates energy, weakens the moral fibre, [and] distracts with too many frivolous side interests."[43] This statement spoke to the consequences of city life for farm youth, but it had equal applicability for adults. Out on the land, the farmer was "not depending on some storekeeper friend or ward politician to float him into a job where he can 'sojer' for eight hours, like the 'laborers' who roost about the unemployment bureaus waiting for a job with the least work in it."[44] Finally, as the editor of the *Nor'West Farmer* noted, "it is one of the seldom appreciated advantages of country life that a rural environment conduces to better morals than are so frequently the rule in our cities and towns."[45]

The farm press had a vested interest in promoting agriculture and rural life, but it was not the only institution concerned with such issues. Although less a celebration of rural life than of the contributions of agriculture to Canadian development, articles in the popular press depicted the western farmer as a rugged individualist whose economic condition was hampered by national policies designed to serve the eastern establishment. In 1922, *MacLean's Magazine* published two

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[42]Jones, 104.

[43]Quoted in Jones, 99.

[44]Quoted in Jones, 99.

[45]Quoted in Jones, 98.

articles entitled "The West is Still There!" and "The West Won't Stay Down!" that, although laced with a heavy dose of boosterism, provided an assessment of the possibilities of western agriculture if given the right economic advantages, such as loans, lower freight rates, lower tariffs, and wider markets.[46] These matters were controlled by the government, and thus it was necessary for politicians to take decisive action. The author of this pair of articles warned that if full advantage was to be taken of Canada's agricultural potential, the mistakes of the past had to be turned into "stepping stones to a wiser future."[47] The following year, a series of articles appeared in *Saturday Night* that expanded upon this theme, saying that it was essential for government to recognize and improve the situation of western farmers and that prices for agricultural commodities should be increased.[48] In 1924, *MacLean's* published a similar series on economic problems in the provinces. Three articles were devoted to the Prairie Provinces, where the Canadian farmer was seen as being adversely affected by national economic policies designed to protect eastern industries. The author reiterated the concerns expressed by previous writers, and suggested that a coordinated provincial-federal government policy be formulated to reduce farm debt.[49]

MacLean's continued to publish articles on agricultural issues throughout the decade. In 1928, C.W. Peterson, the founder and long-time editor of the *Farm and*

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[46]Charles Christopher Jenkins, "The West Is Still There!" *MacLean's Magazine*, 15 January 1922, 16-18, 33, and "The West Won't Stay Down!" *MacLean's Magazine*, 1 February 1922, 28-29, 41-42.

[47]Jenkins, "The West Won't Stay Down!" 42.

[48]M.D. Geddes, "Putting New Heart into Agriculture," *Saturday Night*, 21 July 1923, 13, and 28 July 1923, 13.

[49]John Nelson, "The Problems of Our Provinces," *MacLean's Magazine*, 15 May 1923, 13-14, 57-60, "The Problems of Our Provinces," *MacLean's Magazine*, 1 June 1923, 18-19, 64-65, and "The Problems of Our Provinces," *MacLean's Magazine*, 15 June 1923, 18-19, 47-48.

Ranch Review, wrote that the "genesis of all national development, the world over, has been agricultural and pastoral." He continued:

> Without attempting even a guess at the solution of our national conundrum, very little imagination is needed to conclude positively that the present balance between urban and rural population is decidedly out of focus.[50]

This statement simply repeats an oft-heard lament about the structure of Canadian society. Peterson decried the fact that the agricultural population was decreasing at an "astonishing rate," and that government and business leaders exhibited far less concern for the wise utilization of agricultural resources than for the promotion of industrial development. To illustrate the widening gap between industry and agriculture, Peterson compared wheat prices with industrial wages. In the seventeenth century, the average price for a bushel of wheat was $1.17, while industrial labor earned twenty-five cents a day. In 1927, a bushel of wheat earned $1.65, whereas wages had risen to one dollar per hour. To be sure, increases in the cost of living in the city had outpaced that of the countryside, but farmers had also achieved access to the amenities of urban life through magazines and mail order catalogues. While their costs may not have increased on a par with city dwellers, their desire for consumer products probably matched those of urban residents. Peterson thus concluded that the "greatest social crime ... [was] the spectacular increase in the reward to urban labor without a somewhat approximate increase in the reward to agriculture."[51]

Peterson regarded the lack of adequate rewards in agriculture as one of the principal reasons for the exodus from the farm. The stream toward the city was

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[50]C.W. Peterson, "'How're You Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm?'" *MacLean's Magazine*, 15 January 1928, 17.

[51]Peterson, 18.

further increased by the fact that work in the city was "less laborious, ... more interesting and amusing, [allowed] more leisure hours, [and provided] greater personal comfort and social contacts."[52] It was a tragedy, he said, that no one was "burning the midnight oil to devise ways and means to stem the tide of rural depopulation. We are too busy trying to figure out how to add one more smoke stack to our top-heavy industrial plant."[53] In order to achieve an economic balance with urban industries, Peterson argued that Canada must augment its agricultural population, and make life on the land more rewarding from both social and economic standpoints. Fulfillment of this objective, he believed, was essential to the development of a great Canadian nation.

Later that year, *MacLean's* published three articles on Canadian farm life by E.C. Drury, the former Premier of Ontario. Like Peterson, Drury asserted that the "farmer and the farm home are in very truth the foundations on which our present prosperity is built ...."[54] Drury also supported the need to improve rural life. Farm people were not content with their situation, and were displeased that their industriousness did not receive the same reward as their urban cousins. They were, however, "determined to make rural life worth while," and were not "satisfied to accept a permanently inferior position, either economically or socially, and they see no reason why this should be necessary." Drury concluded that this determination deserved sympathy and that it was "not only just, but the best sort of nation-building."[55]

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[52]Peterson, 17.

[53]Peterson, 37.

[54]E.C. Drury, "The Canadian Farmer: What He Is," *MacLean's Magazine*, 1 May 1928, 3.

[55]Drury, 50.

In his final article, Drury returned to the theme of rural life. He observed that farmers wanted country living to "compare favorably with conditions in town and city." While this meant "more leisure, more recreation, better educational facilities, more active country churches, [and] a fuller and more satisfying social life," there was a clear sense that to "compare favorably" did not mean a simple imitation of city life.[56] The conditions of industry and life in town and country were "intrinsically different," and farmers realized that development would follow divergent courses. What farmers demanded, however, was a "fair chance for country life to develop the best of which it is capable." This objective seemed clear and reasonable to Drury, who hoped that calling attention to the problem would permit the formulation of a new national policy. This policy should not be dominated by urban thought and urban needs, but should recognize that Canadian farmers were "national assets."[57]

The views disseminated in the popular press shed light on the problems of the farmer and rural life in Canada, and brought these issues to the attention of the nation. These articles expressed concerns similar to those held by proponents of the country life movement, but were read by a much wider audience. The appearance of these articles and others in the popular press suggests, at the very least, that the magazines' editors believed that their readers would be interested in these ideas. It may also lead one to conclude that the improvement of rural conditions had broad-based support, and did not simply reflect romantic or idealistic objectives. However this may be interpreted, the fact remains that through one or another of these sources significant numbers of Canadians were being made aware of issues such as rural depopulation, declining agricultural prices, and the importance of raising rural

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[56]E.C. Drury, "The Canadian Farmer: What He Wants," *MacLean's Magazine*, 15 June 1928, 17.

[57]Drury, "The Canadian Farmer: What He Wants," 48.

standards of living. Although Canadians may not have had solutions to the rural problem, they recognized the potential consequences of inaction.

Back-to-the-Land during the Depression

With the onset of the Depression, interest in the advancement of rural life became subsumed by the more practical need to restore order to Canada's economy and society. The back-to-the-land movement, however, was promoted with renewed vigor in the 1930s as a solution to the country's economic and social woes. Interest in land settlement had waned after the First World War as prosperity returned, but in the midst of a world-wide economic crisis, rural living once again seemed to offer an immediate solution. The economic collapse appeared to support criticism made by back-to-the-land proponents that urban and industrial development had proceeded too rapidly and with too high a social cost. With a more attentive audience, reformers were now able to push forward with their agendas. In many government agencies, a land settlement program for the urban unemployed became a prominent issue, particularly as the costs of providing relief mounted.

Government had to respond to the social and economic turmoil that enveloped the nation. It was compelled to work for the good of the country, but also faced demands from its citizens who called for some appropriate action. As it had so frequently in the past, government - local, provincial, and federal - pursued a course that it believed was in the best interest of the people, would promote national development, and was fiscally responsible. Government leaders listened more attentively to the calls for an improvement of rural living standards. It was easy for them to see the merit of such arguments because Canada was, after all, a nation whose people were rooted in agriculture. Despite sweeping urbanization, Canada

was still a rural nation. If cities could not provide adequate opportunities for people, it made sense to heed the words of those who had carefully examined this situation and argued for a return to rural living.

Government's attention to the need for action and its consideration of the plans of reformers represent the intellectual context within which the decision to promote land settlement as an alternative to direct relief was made. A second part of that context was the more pragmatic response of the nation's citizens. People were well aware of their rural roots and believed that if industry could not provide, agriculture would. It simply made sense to ordinary citizens that encouraging and facilitating a return to the countryside was a reasonable course of action for the government to follow. If people were hungry, and could provide for themselves on the land, why not give them the opportunity to return to their roots and be self-sufficient rather than simply be a drain on the public purse.

Historically, the cry of "back-to-the-land" had been heard in times of economic distress. The Depression of the 1930s was no exception. One scholar who has examined the back-to-the-land movement remarked that it was quite "natural" for urban people to look to the land as a solution. Whether it was "natural" or not is a moot point; the fact is that during the 1930s cities throughout North America were discussing various plans for re-establishment of the unemployed on farms.[58] Discussion quickly turned to action, and in 1931, the province of Saskatchewan led the way in using land settlement as an alternative to direct relief. This initial program was followed by the implementation of a federal plan in 1932. Both plans were influenced by prevailing attitudes about the virtues of rural living and reflect

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[58]R.W. Murchie, *Land Settlement as a Relief Measure* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1933), 5.

the widely-held belief that a proper balance between rural and urban populations needed to be restored.

Two scholarly works that examine the back-to-the-land movement in Canada serve to reinforce the ideas about rural life that were circulating through Canadian society. In 1941 George Haythorne, an economist working with the Social Sciences Research Committee at McGill University, wrote a book that provides considerable insight into the land settlement process as it developed during the Depression. Haythorne noted the need for attention to the return flow of migrants from the cities, described the social consequences of the back-to-the-land movement, and suggested ways to judge the relative merits of the newly established settlements. One important theme that reverberated throughout his work was that farming and rural life were interwoven with the Canadian psyche, and he argued that "agriculture is still fundamental in the Canadian economy and in Canadian life." More importantly, Haythorne suggested that because it supplied large reserves of labor in prosperous times, agriculture "is looked to hopefully as the medium through which the unemployed may be re-established in depression."[59]

Throughout this period, back-to-the-land initiatives were popular solutions to unemployment, and Haythorne reported that the "'colonizing' of urban relief families ... seemed to many advocates the most obvious and desirable [method] of relieving unemployment." Haythorne suggested, however, that few scholars had addressed the apparent conflict between a return of urban populations to the land and the more prominent cityward flow of rural populations. "Certainly [no attention]," he continued, had been given "to measuring the exact volume of 'repatriated' population which would have been needed to liquidate the national total of unemployment."

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[59]George V. Haythorne, *Land and Labour* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1941), ix.

Despite apparent evidence of a large flow of people back to the land, the national trend was in fact one of people leaving the farm rather than returning. An exception was found in the Prairie Provinces. There, between 1931 and 1936, rural population increased, largely, according to Haythorne, through the return of "young and unskilled workers from towns."[60]

In measuring the human and financial costs of the 1930s settlement experience, Haythorne clearly believed that for those who "made the grade," the benefits in "physical, psychological, and social gains" could not be calculated in financial terms. Echoing the words of many of his contemporaries, Haythorne offered this support for the movement: "Against the alternative of life in a city slum area perpetuated by a cash dole affording only meagre subsistence, settlement offers the boon of self-respect, the chance of a self-supporting occupation, hard but varied and satisfying work, in a healthy environment."[61] Yet it was not enough simply to encourage and assist back-to-the-land movements. Haythorne correctly asserted that two ingredients were essential for successful land settlement: "the capacity and determination of the individuals concerned, and the extent to which the plan is broadly conceived and thoroughly organized." These same points had been made by Thomas Adams in 1917, but the Depression made their application more urgent. The intensity of the economic crisis, however, gave planners little room to maneuver and contributed to the development of hastily-prepared and ill-conceived plans. Many back-to-the-land projects were encouraged as "emergency measures -- as a means of reducing the relief burdens" of urban municipalities. It is not likely that under such conditions settlers had much chance for permanent re-establishment.[62]

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[60]Haythorne, 51-53.

[61]Haythorne, 437.

[62]Haythorne, 446.

In conclusion, Haythorne recommended that the circumstances of the time made it necessary to "judge the validity of subsistence schemes extremely carefully." One of the most important questions to ask was how many of the new settlements were in fact successful, and how far they went in addressing the problems for which they were prescribed. Haythorne claimed that the relatively small number of settlements supported his belief that there were definite limits to agricultural expansion. Furthermore, he questioned whether pioneer settlement was, in fact, as "inexpensive a method of dealing with unemployment and depression as has often been argued." The 1930s experience demonstrated that "the subsistence farmer who relieves the pressure of unemployment without entering into competition or participation" in the agricultural economy is a myth. "At best," Haythorne concluded, the subsistence farmer "is a transitional phenomenon."[63]

In his study of prairie settlement, Robert England, an agent in the Canadian National Railway's Colonization Department, addressed the role of the government in encouraging settlement, the economic benefits of Depression-era settlement schemes, and the fundamental need to investigate the problems of urban life. England also wrote a chapter on the back-to-the-land phenomenon then taking place in western Canada. It was a unique migration, he said, because it represented internal colonization.[64] Much of this movement was unassisted and went unrecorded, but that did not diminish its importance. As tracking all migrants was next to impossible, England focused attention on the assisted settlement schemes of the western provinces. Demand for farms in the northern parts of those provinces, he suggested, reflected settlers' interest in land where "building logs, fuel and even

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[63]Haythorne, 446-447.

[64]England, 116.

game" was available, and indicated a lack of capital and a "desire to engage in a more self-sufficing type of agriculture."[65]

An unusual characteristic of the assisted settlement schemes was that the various governments had no intention of recovering the money advanced to settlers. Examining the return migration taking place in Manitoba, England noted that taxpayers were the principal beneficiaries of the program because of the considerable saving in relief payments. Relief support for a family of five in Winnipeg cost about $40 per month; maintaining a similar family on a farm for two years with a $600 subsidy averaged $25 per month.[66] Economic benefits were no doubt influential in government decisions to support the back-to-the-land plan, but equally important were the increasing social costs to families living on relief in the city. Poor health, poor sanitation, and general moral decline were some of the potential risks faced by children of relief recipients and by the recipients themselves.

Finally, England asserted that while the back-to-the-land idea had its critics, the movement did "emphasize the fundamentals of life." The educational system had failed to prepare individuals for the rigors of pioneer life, and thus it became "easy to accept and expect the amenities produced by our machine civilization." No longer were men taught to "grow and live by the fruits of the earth and their own labour." Cities, England argued, were responsible for this demise because they tore men away from their "biological and natural environment." Life in the country was a tonic which could cure those urban dwellers who had some previous relationship with the land. Although the movement was simply a relief project, and there was little expectation that the settlers would become commercial farmers, officials truly hoped

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[65]England, 122.

[66]England, 129.

that those who participated in the plan would be able to improve the quality of their lives. England reported that the "de-urbanized settler has acquired a distrust of urban life, ... has as his primary objective the provision of food and shelter, [and] is located where the securing of these needs is possible ...." The belief in farming as a way of life, in England's words "a family affair with an atmosphere of frugality, industry and thrift," was still very much alive and ought to be encouraged.[67]

These two studies emphasize both the social and economic motivations that provided the foundation for the back-to-the-land movement. The authors describe the agricultural origins of Canada and argue that these were a fundamental underpinning of the nation's society. That foundation would also affect the future development of the country. Haythorne and England also stress that the land offered an opportunity for re-establishment and social regeneration, and that the nation as a whole would benefit. This belief, combined with its promotion as an unemployment relief strategy, made the back-to-the-land movement a powerful tool of reformers and politicians alike. Although plans developed by government often failed to meet the expectations of back-to-the-land proponents, this situation arose primarily because its philosophical objectives could not compete with economic realities.

Back-to-the-Land: Meaning and Implication

The back-to-the-land movement was born of a long tradition of idealization of the land. There were, according to its supporters, few ills that life on the land could not cure. Social reformers repeatedly offered the land as a refuge for city dwellers. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries various groups dedicated to the moral uplifting of society repeatedly tested the hypothesis that a

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[67]England, 134-135.

return to the land could regenerate the lives of the down-trodden. Although few colonies created during this period became viable agricultural undertakings, their success was more often measured in social rather than economic terms. These were less easy to quantify, but adherents had little doubt that living on the land resulted in an improved quality of life and a morally responsible citizenry.

Back-to-the-land suggests a dissatisfaction with urban life, and represents a search for a better alternative for all segments of the population, although particular attention was given to the working class. Reformers believed that society's detachment from its rural roots had led to moral decline, and that rural life was more virtuous and more rewarding than life in a congested city slum. The rhetoric of anti-urbanism is found throughout the literature. Supporters of the landward movement argued that the urban environment was an unnatural one, where crime, disease, poverty, and overcrowding confronted people on a daily basis. These same people described industrial work as drudgery, and claimed that there were few opportunities for economic advancement and still fewer chances for social improvement. Yet the motives behind back-to-the-land went beyond a dislike of the city and its troubles. To many, urban development appeared to have proceeded at too rapid a pace, and had outgrown the ability of economic infrastructure to support its continued growth. Reformers argued that to avert disaster, the balance of population between urban and rural areas had to be restored.

The back-to-the-land movement, in contrast to the country life movement, was not particularly concerned with the improvement of rural life. The more relevant issue was what the country could do for people rather than what people could do for the country. This is not to suggest that back-to-the-land advocates were eager to dump surplus urban populations in the country as some in the country life movement claimed; instead, these individuals urged the careful planning of

settlements and proper selection of participants. Planning, in fact, was crucial to the success of any effort to restore people to the land, as well as for the improvement of rural areas, and on that score supporters of both the back-to-the-land and the country life movements were in agreement. Not all who favored the revitalization of rural life were opposed to an influx of urban people. They believed that balance needed to exist between the city and the country. The city had grown at the expense of the country and industry was incapable of absorbing the increasing number of migrants. The economic collapse in the 1930s simply confirmed for reformers that their views were correct. It was obvious to them that abandonment of the countryside must cease and that the underprivileged be given a chance to recover.

During the Depression, the back-to-the-land movement acquired an economic urgency that seemingly differentiated it from past efforts. Previously, advocates had stressed the social benefits of rural living, yet the back-to-the-land programs developed during the Depression were designed primarily as a remedy for economic problems. This suggests a fundamental dichotomy between rhetoric and reality. It is a divergence that had serious implications for the outcome of the programs launched during this period, and requires that the economic and social crisis affecting Canada and the Prairie West, in particular, be examined.

Chapter Four
Government Response to the Depression

The back-to-the-land idea outlined in the previous chapter had its origins in the social reform and country life movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Economic hardships and social decay, both real and imagined, had usually provided the impetus for back-to-the-land movements, and those of the 1930s were no exception. The depths of despair and extent of suffering during this period were, however, unprecedented, prompting reformers and ordinary citizens alike to encourage land settlement as a means of achieving self-sufficiency once again. The crisis of the 1930s simply confirmed for many that life on the land was the best approach to solving the problems. To understand why a back-to-the-land initiative emerged during the Depression, and how land settlement was used as an alternative to direct relief, the social and economic environment that inspired this latest movement must be considered. This chapter explores the general impact of the drought and depression on Prairie society, then focuses specifically on conditions in the province of Saskatchewan, and the problems that the city of Saskatoon confronted. With the economic and social situation established, attention is then turned to the systems of relief administration. Examining how the province and the city dealt with the Depression, what strategies they devised for dealing with the crisis, and the relief programs that were developed and coordinated with other agencies is a necessary prerequisite for examining the measures implemented to combat the unemployment problem in later years. Laying this foundation permits an

appreciation of the severity of the Depression, the search for solutions, and the significance attached to land settlement as a relief strategy.

Canada in the Depression

Many of the old-timers who survived the Depression described the decade of the 1930s as ten lost years.[1] It is a powerful phrase that conveys a sense of deep and profound hardship. Prairie residents often remember the period as the "Dirty Thirties," when winds blew away the topsoil and the skies blackened.[2] By whatever terms the decade is described, it is clear that few Canadians, particularly in the Prairie West, escaped unscathed. The Depression that wreaked havoc with Canadian economy and society was certainly not a new phenomenon; only its extent and severity distinguished it from previous economic slumps.[3] Still the experience varied from region to region, with some parts of the country suffering more than others. In the Prairies, residents dealt not only with economic calamity, but also faced searing and unrelenting drought that further reinforced the crisis. "Black Tuesday," the October 29 crash of the Montreal and Toronto stock exchanges, is viewed by most historians as a turning point: it marked the end of the prosperous "Roaring Twenties" and the beginning of the Great Depression.[4] Despite this

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[1]Barry Broadfoot, *Ten Lost Years, 1929-1939: Memories of Canadians Who Survived the Depression* (Don Mills, ON: General Publishing Company, Ltd., 1975).

[2]Douglas Francis and Herman Ganzevoort, *The Dirty Thirties in Prairie Canada* (Vancouver: Tantalus Research Ltd., 1980) and Michiel Horn, ed., *The Dirty Thirties: Canadians in the Great Depression* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1972).

[3]A number of books have been written on the Depression, several of which provide much of the foundation for this section. These include: John Herd Thompson with Allen Seager, *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1985) and Michiel Horn, ed., *The Depression in Canada: Responses to Economic Crisis* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, Ltd., 1988). For more popular, less academic accounts, see James H. Gray, *The Winter Years* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1966) and *Men Against the Desert* (Saskatoon: Western Prairie Producer Books, 1978).

[4]Thompson, 194.

devastating turn of events, few Canadians believed at the time that the downturn was more than a temporary aberration. The Depression was, however, anything but temporary.

In the summer of 1930, Canadians went to the polls to elect a new government. With the economy deteriorating at a rapid pace, unemployment and protective tariffs naturally became the central issues of the campaign. R.B. Bennett, the Conservative leader, promised the jobless that they had a right to work and, because unemployment had become a national problem, it was the responsibility of his party to "see that employment is provided for those of our people who are able to work."[5] During the campaign, Bennett made it clear that his intention was to provide jobs, not the dole, as relief was disparagingly termed. It was a promise he would later break, but in the meantime it enabled him to win the election. The first order of business for the new Prime Minister was to have Parliament pass the Unemployment Relief Act of 1930. Eighty percent of the twenty million dollars designated for relief would be spent on public works, to which the municipalities and provinces were required to contribute a share of the funds.[6] The preamble to the Relief Act made it clear that unemployment and the subsequent provision of relief was still viewed as a local responsibility. The Dominion was not assuming any obligation by passage of this legislation, but was simply providing financial assistance to beleaguered local governments.[7] Despite efforts made by municipalities and provinces to use these limited funds in the most constructive manner, the Relief Act of 1930 did little to counteract escalating unemployment.

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[5]Thompson, 202-203.

[6]Thompson, 207-208.

[7]James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 47.

None of the activities taken by governments appeared to alleviate the distress, and faced with soaring costs, Bennett, in the spring of 1932, announced that all public work projects would end. Provincial and municipal governments could barely provide food and shelter, let alone pay for equipment and material needed to complete construction, and because direct relief was far less expensive, it became the federal government's primary tool to combat the unemployment problem.[8] The historian James Struthers has observed that Bennett could justifiably claim that neither the opposition nor any other group had proposed "constructive alternative policies," and thus turned to direct relief as a last resort. Bennett's placement of the blame on the provinces, however, was simply unfair. He chastised provincial leaders for their inability to control relief costs, reminding them that unemployment relief was a provincial responsibility, not that of the Dominion government. Struthers charges that this was "utter nonsense," because in the very first Relief Act, and all subsequent acts, the federal government "determined the relief policies of the provinces by stipulating the circumstances under which dominion aid would be available."[9] Although Ottawa paid the bills, the provinces could be more easily faulted for the deficiencies of administration.

Under the British North America Act, responsibilities for social and economic welfare were divided among the various levels of governments. Poverty and relief were issues with which local governments were to deal. Only in dire circumstances were the provinces expected to provide assistance. The current crisis was, however, so unusual and the economic downturn so widespread that the federal government grudgingly acquiesced to the demands made by both provinces and

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[8]Thompson, 217-218.

[9]Struthers, 67.

municipalities, as well as the unemployed, and agreed to provide funds for relief. The 1930 Unemployment Relief Act stipulated that the Dominion government would provide funding for public works projects to be developed by the provinces and municipalities. In this and subsequent legislative acts, the Dominion agreed to share the costs of relief with provinces and municipalities on a temporary basis only. Once the crisis had passed, local governments would once again have to assume responsibility for the unemployed and the poor. The rules set by federal authorities under the various Unemployment Relief Acts changed constantly, and provinces and municipalities had to contend with a continually fluctuating "temporary" framework of relief funding. Harry Cassidy, director of the University of Toronto's School of Social Work, investigated relief administration in Ontario and asserted that the federal government's *ad hoc* policies contributed to problems within the relief system. Cassidy argued that because Ottawa had assumed that the economic crisis was likely to be temporary in duration, it had ensured that national or provincial relief organizations failed to develop and that there was no coordination of public and private relief agencies. Some organizing body was necessary to coordinate relief projects, to ensure that funds were being used as efficiently as possible, and to determine precisely the needs of the poor and how best to provide for those needs. Lack of effective organization and the uncertain and inadequate funding for relief administration meant that rules were variable, assistance uneven, and suffering greater than it needed to be.[10]

One significant problem with the 1930 Relief Act and those drafted in later years was that money rarely found its way to those who needed it most. Instead, funds were divided on the basis of population rather than need, and within each

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[10]Struthers, 64-65.

province allocations to municipalities were based on how much of the municipal treasury each city was willing to spend on public works.[11] Wealthier cities could obviously afford to spend more money than those with a small tax base or those that already had a high municipal debt. Little consideration was given to the fact that the Depression varied in intensity from region to region, with the western economies suffering the sharpest declines. Regions where the economy had been most unstable appeared to bear a heavier burden.

Economic Collapse in the Prairies and Governments' Response

The Prairie Provinces faced an uncertain future during the Depression. An agricultural economy that was susceptible to wide variations in world markets and a seemingly endless drought conspired to destroy the livelihoods of tens of thousands of farm families. Grain prices collapsed in 1930. A bushel of wheat that had sold for $1.03 in 1928 brought only 47 cents two years later. Prices continued to plummet, and by 1932 the price per bushel was 29 cents, less than one-third of what it had been in the late 1920s.[12] The wheat economy was also affected by pervasive drought which caused per acre yields to fall, on average, by almost fifty percent during the early 1930s. Still, the worst was yet to come. The price slump and drought seriously eroded farm income. In 1932-33, prairie farmers earned only six percent of the income they had made in 1928-29. To make matters worse, the price

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[11]Thompson, 210, states that funding decisions were based on population. In a study of Dominion-Provincial relations in the 1930s, however, Max Rubin claims that out of the 1931 appropriation, the Prairie Provinces received only 6% of the funds despite having 24% of the population. Max W. Rubin, "The Response of the Bennett Government to the Depression in Saskatchewan, 1930-1935: A Study in Dominion-Provincial relations" (M.A. thesis, University of Regina, 1975), 67.

[12]G.E. Britnell, "The Depression in Rural Saskatchewan," in *The Canadian Economy and its Problems*, ed. H.A. Innis and A.F.W. Plumptre (Toronto: Canadian Institute for International Affairs, 1934), 99.

of wheat had fallen more than twice as far as the price of other products farmers needed to buy. As a result, most farmers could not earn enough to cover operating expenses and were unable to pay mortgage interest payments.[13]

In *The Depression in Canada*, Michiel Horn demonstrates how the economic collapse in the West affected the rest of the nation. The decline in purchasing power of such a significant portion of the prairie population quickly impacted the region and economies beyond its borders.[14] Manufacturers of farm implements and automobiles experienced some of the most rapid declines in their markets. In 1928, farmers had purchased 17,000 tractors; four years later, they bought fewer than 900.[15] Other suppliers also felt the pinch. Throughout the 1920s, large mail-order companies had expanded significantly in western communities, but with the onset of Depression and drought, these firms lost a large percentage of their customers. As wheat yields declined, railways that hauled grain made less money; consequently, they laid off workers and purchased fewer rails and boxcars, triggering increased unemployment in the steel industries of Ontario and Cape Breton. Longshoremen in Vancouver, Thunder Bay, and Montreal also lost their jobs because of reduced freight volumes. Horn concludes: "... the impact of low wheat prices reverberated through ... the Canadian economy, [and affected] people who would not have been able to tell wheat from rye if their lives depended on it."[16]

The effect that the collapse of western grain markets had on the national economy is instructive. Recognizing the preeminent position of agriculture in the

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[13]Don G. Matheson, "The Saskatchewan Relief Commission, 1931-34" (M.A. thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1974), 30.

[14]Horn, 4.

[15]Thompson, 196.

[16]Horn, 4.

prairie provinces facilitates understanding of the catastrophic consequences that the Depression had for all prairie inhabitants. That western agriculture could experience such a precipitous decline also makes clear that it rested upon a very tenuous foundation. The specialized nature of this economy and its dependence on external markets, combined with falling grain prices and the widespread drought, only exacerbated economic and social problems experienced by prairie cities. Although cities contained only a small percentage of the overall prairie population, their fundamental role as service centers depended on a healthy and prosperous agricultural hinterland. A succession of failures, some preventable, others unanticipated, drove the countryside, and the cities it supported, into an ever deepening abyss. Recovery proved to be elusive.

Reliance on the single commodity of wheat, from which farmers received 60 percent of their crop income, and the dependence on world markets, to which 70 percent of Canadian wheat was exported, guaranteed that any downward movement in prices or demand would have a devastating effect on the entire prairie economy. Agriculture had always been subject to fluctuating market conditions and the uncertainties of the weather. A post-war agricultural depression had struck the Prairies between 1920 and 1923, but by the late 1920s, recovery was underway. Several years of good yields, culminating in a record crop in 1928, and satisfactory prices encouraged farmers to expand production and borrow to pay for that expansion. In the summer of 1929, however, the first warning bells sounded. World wheat prices had been dropping as a result of overproduction, and for Canadian farmers, the 1929 crop was disappointingly small because of drought. Despite the continued decline of wheat prices, most farmers remained optimistic that prosperity would soon return.[17]

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[17]Friesen, 383-385.

But prosperity failed to return. Prices did not increase, and rain did not fall. With each passing year, farmers and the towns that served them sank deeper into debt and saw little to inspire optimism. In the summer of 1931, Gideon Robertson, the federal Minister of Labour, traveled to the West to view conditions firsthand. The collapse of wheat prices in 1930 had crippled most farmers, and drought in the spring of 1931 meant that some areas would have no crop at all that year. In a letter to the Prime Minister, Robertson wrote, "One could never believe the desolation existing in southern Saskatchewan did he not see it himself."[18] Thousands of agricultural workers were without jobs and their transient status made them ineligible for most municipal relief programs. A real crisis was forming, and several politicians feared a potential revolution if something was not done at once.[19] A new Relief Act was drafted, and more money loaned to provinces on the verge of bankruptcy, but no real changes were made in the way governments approached the crisis.

The Unemployment Relief Act of 1930 was, in large measure, a failure. While work relief was given to the unemployed, far too many of the appropriated dollars went to pay for construction materials rather than to provide food and housing for the destitute. It was no surprise to Charlotte Whitton, executive director of the Canadian Council on Child and Family Welfare, that this program collapsed in the spring of 1932. She believed that the problem had not been the amount of money being spent, but rather the ways that funds were being used. More importantly, Whitton saw in the problems and inadequacies of relief distribution an opportunity to strengthen the social service profession, for she desired to put properly trained social

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[18]Gideon Robertson to R.B. Bennett, 1 July 1931, quoted in Thompson, 213.

[19]Thompson, 213.

workers in positions of authority to replace the untrained, political appointees who staffed municipal and provincial relief offices throughout the nation. In early April, Whitton wrote to the Prime Minister expressing her concerns and suggested that a "more rigid schedule of conditions" needed to be imposed upon the way federal funds could be spent. Her timing could not have been better. Bennett was convinced that funds were being wasted, and by pointing to the wide variation in relief expenditures among Canadian cities, she provided all the evidence he needed to curtail federal contributions. Although it is not likely that she fully understood his motives, Whitton was hired within the month to investigate the unemployment problem and relief administration in the West.[20]

Over the course of the summer, Whitton traveled extensively throughout the prairies and investigated conditions of relief and unemployment. She submitted a thorough report on her findings, and despite her own agenda to professionalize social service agencies, the conclusions say a good deal about conditions in the Prairies. Some of them were quite disturbing. For example, more than one third of the citizens in Swift Current, located in the heart of the drought area, were receiving relief when the town was forced to suspend relief payments in August for lack of funds. Although few municipalities had sunk as low as Swift Current, many were forced to default on loan payments and to ask the provincial government for assistance.[21] In June, 1932, twelve percent of the total population of the western provinces was on relief, but even more striking was the fact that in a ten-month period that ended on April 30, 1932, one in four residents had received some form of

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[20]James Struthers, "A Profession in Crisis: Charlotte Whitton and Canadian Social Work in the 1930s," *Canadian Historical Review* 62:2 (June 1981): 169-185.

[21]Horn, 276-277.

assistance.[22] Public works had been discontinued, but because economic conditions showed no sign of improvement, it was clear that funds allocated to direct relief would have to increase substantially. Whitton learned that direct relief expenditures in the summer of 1932 were higher in every instance than average rates for the winter of 1931-32. In addition, she maintained that food rations would have to be increased because maintaining families at such minimal levels could not be continued "without the gravest impairment of health."[23] Food was not the only item supplied to relief recipients. Clothing and footwear also had to be provided in substantial quantities, and in urban areas, fuel and rent payments were an essential component of relief budgets.

By focusing on the inadequacies of the system and suggesting that direct relief was wasteful, Whitton confirmed Bennett's suspicions and unwittingly contributed to his new approach to relief. She sought to make experienced social workers responsible for welfare decisions, but because bureaucrats rather than highly trained professionals were in charge, she believed that the existing system encouraged abuse. Bennett inferred from her statements that relief was a "racket" and needed to be curtailed, not professionally restructured.[24] Having already ended public works because of their high cost, the Prime Minister was unwilling to practice deficit spending, particularly to support people who, in his opinion, were undeserving citizens. Instead, Bennett chose the quickest remedy for the problem. If local and provincial governments were wasting federal money, the logical solution was to give them less money to waste. At the Dominion-Provincial Conference held

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[22]Charlotte M. Whitton, "Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada," in R.B. Bennett Papers [MG 26], Vol. 1450, p. 489887, NAC.

[23]Whitton, p. 489915, NAC.

[24]Struthers, "A Profession in Crisis," 180.

in January, 1933, Bennett's Labour Minister explained that the Dominion government would provide no additional funds and told provincial leaders that relief rolls were growing simply because "sufficient emphasis was not being placed upon the responsibility of the individual to maintain himself."[25] Bennett held steadfast to the notion that relief was a problem to be handled by municipal and provincial governments. No matter how bad conditions were for working-class Canadians, relief would have to be limited to that which could be provided within the constraints of fiscal responsibility.[26] In the meantime, unemployment continued to rise, and provinces and municipalities repeated their calls for the federal government to take charge. Instead of responding, Ottawa simply turned a deaf ear.

Saskatchewan, 1929-1937

The Saskatchewan government handled the growing relief crisis in ways similar to those of other provincial governments. In the first two years, it pursued a traditional course by making special financial grants to municipalities.[27] This approach quickly proved to be inadequate; the problem was too extensive and the funding insufficient. Given Saskatchewan's dependence on federal grants and loans, provincial relief policies were in effect predetermined by Ottawa. In order to secure funding, the province had to abide by the conditions set by federal authorities. Relief

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[25]Struthers, "A Profession in Crisis," 178.

[26]H. Blair Neatby, *Politics of Chaos: Canada in the Thirties* (Toronto: Macmillan Company, 1972).

[27]P.A. Russell, "The Co-operative Government's Response to the Depression, 1930-1934," *Saskatchewan History* 24:3 (Autumn 1971): 82.

administration at the provincial level, therefore, reflected the annual agreements made with the federal government.[28]

On July 23, 1931, Dr. J.T.M. Anderson, the Premier of Saskatchewan, promised that no one in the province would starve. In an investigation of the province's relief programs, Alma Lawton observed

> That the Premier thought it was necessary to make such a pledge is at once an indication of the depth of depression and the limitations of the Provincial Government's response. This was both the least and the most that the Saskatchewan Government could promise to do.[29]

People in Saskatchewan did not starve, but there were often times when families went hungry between the day that the food ran out and when the next relief order arrived. No central planning of relief policy occurred within the Saskatchewan government largely because the federal government had failed to take an aggressive stance in easing the impact of economic collapse. Following the lead of the federal government, provincial authorities dealt with each situation as it developed with whatever means were at its disposal.[30] These piece-meal, stop-gap methods meant that suffering was greater than it had to be, but faced with an intransigent federal government that held relief to be a municipal responsibility, the Saskatchewan government had no alternative.

Writing about conditions in Saskatchewan, the sociologist S.M. Lipset declared that "No other province in Canada -- and, for that matter, few other places in the entire world -- suffered so sharp a decline in income and required so much

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[28]Alma Lawton, "Urban Relief in Saskatchewan During the Years of Depression, 1930-39" (M.A. thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1969), 41.

[29]Lawton, 37.

[30]Lawton, 41-42.

government assistance in order to survive."[31] Incomes in the province dropped by 72 percent between 1928 and 1933, at the same time that the national average decreased by less than fifty percent (Table I). Agricultural incomes in the prairies declined by 92 percent between 1928 and 1932, while in the rest of Canada, this decrease was 68 percent. Before the Depression, Saskatchewan had been one of the most prosperous farming areas in North America; from 1930 onward, its farmers were destitute. According to official reports issued by the University of Saskatchewan, the economic crisis had become an impossible burden for the province's farmers:

> ... in the year 1932 there was not sufficient net income to pay the mortgage interest and nothing for living expenses which had to be met out of borrowing, past savings, consumption of capital and government relief.[32]

With so much of its economy inextricably linked to the export of wheat, Saskatchewan was buffeted by the vagaries of weather and international markets, and bore the brunt of the nation's economic depression more fully than other provinces.

The extent of the tragedy was in no small way related to the specialized nature of production in Saskatchewan. Wheat had been king. In 1936, the Bank of Canada issued a report on financial conditions in the province. Its statement is revealing:

> To an unique extent, the economic history of Saskatchewan is that of wheat. No other governmental unit in the world attempting to maintain a modern civilization is so completely dependent on the production and marketing of one commodity -- a commodity which under even normal conditions is subject to wide variations in production and price. On the average, about 85 percent of the value of all net production in Saskatchewan is supplied by the agricultural industry, and about 80

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[31] S.M. Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), 93.

[32] William Allen and E.C. Hope, *The Farm Outlook for Saskatchewan* (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 1934 and 1938), quoted in Lipset, 90-91.

Table I

Variation in Provincial Incomes,
1928-29 to 1933

Province	1928-29 average per capita (dollars)	1933 average per capita (dollars)	Percentage decrease
Saskatchewan	478	135	72
Alberta	548	212	61
Manitoba	466	240	49
National Average	**471**	**247**	**48**
British Columbia	594	314	47
Prince Edward Island	278	154	45
Ontario	549	310	44
Québec	391	220	44
New Brunswick	292	180	39
Nova Scotia	322	207	36

Source: *Report of the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations: Canada, 1867-1959*, Book I, 150.

> percent of the cash income of the agricultural industry is derived from wheat.[33]

Saskatchewan's occupational structure also reflected its dependence on wheat. In 1931, 60 percent of its population was engaged in agricultural pursuits, while slightly more than three percent worked in the manufacturing sector. Five years later, the patterns were not noticeably different (Table II).

The first widespread impact of drought occurred in 1929, and local governments assumed the burden of relief provision. A year later, with no improvement in sight and their resources stretched beyond all reasonable limits, municipalities turned to the province for assistance. For two years, the province shared with local governments the cost of distributing food, fuel, and clothing, as well as seed, feed and fodder, tractor fuel, and binder twine to destitute farmers in the southern part of the province. In addition to these forms of direct relief, the provincial department of highways provided opportunities to those farmers who had seen their crops fail to work on road construction.[34] By the summer of 1931, it was clear that almost all of southern Saskatchewan had experienced crop failure, and that the province would require federal assistance to cope with the problem. Since the area needing relief was so extensive, and as all three levels of government would provide assistance, some new centralized agency had to be created. In August, 1931, the province established the Saskatchewan Relief Commission, which became responsible for supervising all rural relief and administering provincial relief programs.[35] One of its first acts was to organize drought stricken areas into zones

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[33]Bank of Canada, *Report on the Financial Position of the Province of Saskatchewan* (Ottawa: 1937), quoted in Lipset, 26.

[34]G.E. Britnell, "Saskatchewan, 1930-1935," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 2:2 (May 1936): 152.

[35]Blair Neatby, "The Saskatchewan Relief Commission, 1931-1934," *Saskatchewan History* 3:2 (Spring 1950): 42.

Table II

Occupations of Saskatchewan Residents

	1931		1936	
Occupation	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Agriculture	204,472	60.3	217,315	62.7
Service	42,864	12.6	46,960	13.5
Trade	20,571	6.0	21,084	6.1
Transportation	15,497	4.5	15,469	4.5
Manufacturing	10,668	3.1	11,116	3.2
Clerical	10,819	3.1	10,625	3.1
Labourers	18,251	5.3	9,310	3.7
Construction	7,810	2.3	5,966	1.7
Finance	2,300	0.6	1749	0.5
Other	5,659	1.6	7,010	2.0
Total	338,911	100.0	346,604	100.0

Source: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Seventh Census of Canada 1931*, Vol. 7, 518-530; *Census of Prairie Provinces 1936*, Vol. 2, 518-526.

based on the number of crop failures experienced. In the hardest hit areas, the federal government contributed 100 percent of direct relief, feed and fodder costs, and half of those costs in other areas. In the first year of its operation, with nearly one-half of the total rural population receiving some form of assistance, the Saskatchewan Relief Commission spent more than eighteen million dollars, nearly ten million of which was provided by the federal government.[36]

Economic collapse was so complete that it became impossible for the majority of farm families to support themselves without government assistance. In this respect, Saskatchewan faced financial burdens that did not exist in most other parts of the country. Relief was not simply a matter of providing food and shelter for unemployed workers, but also meant supporting the province's farmers. Providing relief in the form of seed, feed, and supplies to its farmers added to Saskatchewan's relief load, a burden that did not exist in the more industrialized provinces.[37] The proportionate amount of government relief was higher in Saskatchewan than in any other province, and the per capita costs for agricultural aid alone were greater than the total per capita disbursements for all relief purposes in the other provinces.[38] Under various "emergency" agreements, the federal government assumed responsibility for one-half of rural relief expenditures, but the provincial government was forced to pay the rest because most Saskatchewan municipalities were unable to contribute their share. Between 1930 and 1937, the provincial debt more than doubled, with 75 percent of this increase the result of relief expenditures.[39] Perhaps

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[36]Britnell, "Saskatchewan, 1930-1935," 154.

[37]Matheson, 32.

[38]Matheson, 32.

[39]In contrast, the national debt increased by just 27% during this same period. Matheson, 32-34.

more significant is the fact that during this time the total cost of relief accounted for two-thirds of all local and provincial revenues.[40] The impact of soaring relief costs would have profound repercussions well into the future. In 1929, Saskatchewan's per capita debt was the second lowest in Canada; by 1937, it had become the highest.[41]

These statistics illuminate the severity of the crisis within the province's agricultural sector, but for Saskatchewan, agriculture was the economy. Trouble for the farmers translated quickly into grave problems for the cities. Saskatchewan has only a few cities, and no one urban center is dominant. Regina, the capital, is located in the southeastern part of the province, and in 1931 was home to 53,209 residents. Forty miles to the west lies the city of Moose Jaw, a railroad center that had a population of 21,299. To the north, the city of Saskatoon had a population of 43,291 in 1931. Only 31.5 percent of the province's people lived in urban places in 1931, and this figure actually declined slightly to 30 percent in 1936.[42] In Saskatchewan, as perhaps in no other province, cities were products of the countryside. They had developed as service centers for vast agricultural hinterlands, and their primary manufacturing functions were limited to the processing of agricultural commodities. Lipset described them as "larger versions of the country towns" and "trading centers serving rural areas."[43] George Britnell, author of a study of Saskatchewan in the 1930s, suggested that the province's dependence on agriculture and its need for outside capital to develop natural resources had "conspired to prevent the emergence

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[40]Lipset, 94.

[41]Lawton, 50.

[42]Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Census of the Prairie Provinces, 1936*, Volume 1, 359-360.

[43]Lipset, 31; Lawton, 5.

of a metropolitan centre in Saskatchewan." Although Saskatoon exerted some dominance over northern Saskatchewan, and Regina claimed a similar position in the south, neither had "developed other important attributes of metropolitan centres, such as mature financial organizations, so that the province ... has provided a large part of the hinterland necessary to the growth of Winnipeg to metropolitan stature."[44] Lipset's identification of Saskatchewan's cities as trading centers dependent on rural hinterlands lends credence to the claim made by businessmen in Saskatoon that when the farmers did well, the city prospered, and when the farmers suffered, the city could only wait for better times.[45]

The "Hub City of the West": Saskatoon, 1929-1937

Relief administration at the municipal level was extremely variable, for no centralized organization for this purpose existed. Cities created their own policies and relied on local unemployment or relief offices to take care of the growing burden of relief cases. The fact that local governments were held responsible for relief, and the hope that the crisis would be short-lived, meant that all Dominion and provincial assistance was designed to be of a temporary nature. Lawton has termed the relief policies of this period "a veritable patchwork quilt" of annual legislative acts, followed by Dominion-provincial and provincial-municipal agreements that were made at yearly or monthly intervals.[46] The nature of Saskatoon's economy, as well as its occupational structure, contributed to its relief problem. Exploring how this

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[44]George E. Britnell, *The Wheat Economy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1939), 23.

[45]Don Kerr and Stan Hanson, *Saskatoon: The First Half-Century* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982), 248.

[46]Lawton, 7.

particular city coped with an ever increasing number of relief cases in light of these fluctuations provides insight to the process of relief administration at the local level.

Saskatoon was established as a temperance colony in 1882, and by the turn of the century had aspirations of becoming a service center for the region's farmers. With completion of a railroad bridge across the Saskatchewan River in 1908, the city could finally pursue this ambition. Like so many other western cities, Saskatoon's growth was phenomenal, and was spurred by agricultural settlement and continued expansion of the wheat economy. The city's nickname, the "Hub City," symbolized the role it envisioned for itself as a central place in the Canadian West. Although the city felt the effects of the post-war agricultural depression during the first half of the 1920s, by 1926 a boom was under way. Between 1926 and 1931, Saskatoon's population grew by 39 percent. Business and industry flourished at the end of the 1920s, and construction, both in housing and commercial buildings, ballooned. In the year 1929 alone, Saskatoon residents witnessed the construction of the city's fourth high school, a church, legion hall and theater, three department stores and the city's first Safeway stores, twelve gas stations, a dozen apartment buildings, a bakery, and expansions at the city's two major flour mills. Residents were very optimistic about their future, and anticipated that growth would continue. A few dark clouds appeared in the fall of 1929, but news of the collapse of eastern stock markets was offset by the fact that October bank clearings were the highest in the city's history.[47]

Despite this positive financial news, it was clear that bleaker times were on the horizon. The once plentiful supply of jobs had all but evaporated, and many workers soon found themselves without employment. In October, 1929, city council

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[47]Kerr and Hanson, 292.

resolved to put notices in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta newspapers warning the unemployed not to come to Saskatoon as no work was available and relief would be given to bona-fide residents only.[48] Although this was a stern warning, council members appeared willing to alleviate distress among their own citizens. In December, 1929, council appointed a committee to address the problems of the single unemployed. Believing that it was "inhuman to allow men to starve and sleep out of doors" in the depths of winter, the committee hoped to provide temporary shelter and meals, and to "sift out those who will work for their sustenance." Money was required to achieve this goal. The council was unwilling to raise the necessary funds through taxes as "this might form a precedent as the yearly solution," and consequently, it turned to the city's churches.[49] In a letter to local clergy, Alderman John W. Hair appealed for ten volunteers from each congregation to canvass the city for funds on Christmas Eve. The committee recognized that this effort would require a "good deal of self-sacrifice ... but we feel we can count on the people of the churches to manifest the Christmas spirit in this very practical way."[50]

Saskatoon had a relief department with a supervisor as well as a number of assistants and investigators, but it still took several months to devise an efficient system of relief administration. Initially, city council was responsible for all relief decisions, outlining procedures, registering the unemployed, and determining who qualified. With cost always a consideration, the city provided only the most basic necessities to the needy. Recognizing the limitations of city finances, it also sought

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[48]Lawton, 103.

[49]Letter from Alderman John W. Hair to [Local Clergy], 21 December 1929, D500. III. 893, Relief to the Unemployed, 1929-1930, CCF (hereafter CCF), City of Saskatoon Archives (hereafter CSA).

[50]*Ibid.*

the assistance of service groups and the Salvation Army, as well as local churches, in an effort to alleviate distress among the unemployed. In December, 1929, these organizations established a soup kitchen for single men that continued to provide meals throughout the winter months. With additional funding obtained from the province, the city implemented a program of water and sewer line construction to occupy unemployed married men for the winter, but due to the numbers seeking relief and the limited scale of the project, work had to be given on a rotating basis. This meant that married men, for example, worked only one week out of four.[51] In the summer of 1930, the city engaged in an "extraordinarily heavy programme of municipal work." It continued the water and sewer line projects, and developed a plan for sidewalk construction as well as road paving. In addition, council met with heads of city departments to arrange for the extension of primary water mains and road construction in an effort to provide work for as many men as possible. City council hoped that these projects, in addition to the construction of the Canadian National Railway's Bessborough Hotel and the Saskatoon Technical Institute, would provide a sufficient number of employment opportunities.[52]

Saskatoon's city council was proud of the fact that it "fully realized ... the necessity of planning ahead public works and relief measures to cope with the situation." Meeting with a delegation from the Saskatoon Unemployed Association, the Mayor assured those present that council was sparing no efforts and that "some definite form of useful work" was being arranged.[53] In the spring, John W. Hair

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[51]Report of the Committee re: unemployment, 20 December 1929, D500. III. 893, Relief to the Unemployed, 1929-1930, CCF, CSA; Clarence Lyle Barber, "Unemployment Relief in Saskatoon" (Honor's thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1940), 29.

[52]Excerpt from Minutes of Council Meeting held July 7, 1930, D500. III. 894, Unemployment Relief - Employment of Men, 1930, CCF, CSA; Lawton, 116; Barber, 42.

[53]Excerpt from Minutes of Council Meeting held July 7, 1930, D500. III. 894, Unemployment Relief - Employment of Men, 1930, CCF, CSA.

who was now mayor, asked the City Commissioner to determine the scale of unemployment that the city was likely to face in the winter months. The city council also desired to know what schemes the province was considering, and hoped that during the federal election campaign, some evidence of how the federal government would handle the unemployment crisis might be forthcoming.[54] Based on the numbers of unemployed who had been given work over the past winter, and the continued economic slump, it was believed that an even larger number of its citizens would require assistance in the coming months. As the first line of defense, the city needed to formulate plans for the relief of the destitute; as the last line of defense, the federal government had a similar objective.

In August, 1930, the recently appointed federal Minister of Labour, Gideon Robertson, sent a telegram to Mayor Hair, asking for an estimate of the unemployment problem in the city, and the extent to which it might be accentuated during the coming winter. Hair replied that five hundred men had submitted employment applications, and that one-half had been placed on farms for the harvest, but this was only a temporary solution.[55] Despite these placements, the Mayor worried that there did not "seem to be any diminution in the number applying." Over the previous winter, the city had embarked upon an extensive program of public works; however, many workers on these projects had been unable to accumulate sufficient resources with which to carry themselves through the coming winter. To compound the situation further, unemployment continued well into the summer

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[54]Letter from Hair to City Commissioner, 19 May 1930, D500. III. 894, Unemployment Relief - Employment of Men, 1930, CCF, CSA.

[55]Letter from Hair to Hon. G.D. Robertson, Minister of Labour, 15 August 1930, D500. III. 895, Unemployment Relief, 1929-1931, CCF, CSA. For a discussion of the placement of the unemployed on farms, see Cecilia Danysk, "No Help for the Farm Help: The Farm Employment Plans of the 1930s in Prairie Canada," *Prairie Forum* 19:2 (Fall 1994): 231-251.

months, when all those wanting to find jobs had ordinarily been able to do so. Over one thousand men were still registered for work in July, but few jobs were available. To provide Robertson with an estimate of the number of unemployed that the city expected to support during the winter of 1930-31, Hair relied on figures from the previous year. At that time, the city had fed 455 single men in soup kitchens, provided employment for 432 men on a storm sewer project, and maintained 208 families on direct relief. Hair concluded: "On a conservative estimate I would say that we have to devise some means of employing about 1,500 men."[56]

In a second letter to the Labour Minister eleven days later, Mayor Hair reiterated that his estimate of the unemployment problem was conservative, and that if he had erred, "it has been on the side of too small a number." He had just learned, however, that one of the city's largest industries, a road machinery manufacturer, was on the verge of closing due to lack of business. Hair knew that if the company did indeed cease operations, an additional one hundred people would be thrown out of work. He concluded that the city would then have a real problem on its hands, but optimistically closed his letter by declaring that he had "absolute faith in the new Government devising ways and means to alleviate the situation somewhat."[57]

The federal government's initial response to the unemployment problem was as usual to provide funding for public works as a form of relief. In Saskatoon, two projects were approved under the Unemployment Relief Act of 1930. One was a street subway project and the other an expansion of the storm sewer work begun the previous winter. Contracts for both projects stipulated that most of the work should

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[56]Letter from Hair to Robertson, 15 August 1930, D500. III. 895, Unemployment Relief, 1929-1931, CCF, CSA.

[57]Letter from Hair to Robertson, 26 August 1930, D500. III. 895, Unemployment Relief, 1929-1931, CCF, CSA.

be done by hand rather than by machinery, thus creating more jobs. The public works program employed about five hundred men, but as nearly fifteen hundred sought positions, the city once again found it necessary to rotate work. According to the plan adopted for this purpose, positions were allocated according to family size. Men with more than four children were employed for three weeks in four, fathers with two to four children worked for two weeks, and those with one child (or none) worked only one week in four. Wages earned from this schedule were expected to last the entire month, and additional assistance was granted only in cases of dire necessity. Work created by these two projects proved to be woefully inadequate, forcing the city to implement a program of direct relief, which came in the form of grocery orders. In return for this assistance, men were required to perform a variety of odd jobs, usually for two days a week. By March 19, 1931, 360 men were employed under this system.[58] But in spite of these efforts, the problem of unemployment was not diminishing.

As the number of Saskatoon residents needing assistance increased, the problem of how to finance both direct relief and public work relief projects became more acute. The city could generate only small sums of money from local taxes, and increasingly turned to the province and federal governments for funds. In 1930, the city spent about forty-two hundred dollars on relief, a figure that jumped to $76,425 the following year, and more than doubled in 1932 to $163,000 (Table III). By January, 1932, there were more than 2000 families on relief, and the Mayor declared that ten thousand rate payers were supporting eight thousand unemployed people.[59] The city's major source of revenue was derived from property taxes. In 1929, the

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[58]Barber, 42-45.

[59]Kerr and Hanson, 295.

Table III

City of Saskatoon
Unemployment Relief Expenditures
1930 - 1939

Year	Direct Relief	Land Settlement	Clothing Bureau	Medical	Administration	Capitalization[a]	Total
1930	1,203	-	-	-	542	-	4,232[b]
1931	68,238	-	-	-	4,195	-	76,425[b]
1932	135,837	-	2,163	-	-	-	163,000[c]
1933	176,017	14,795	12,317	-	21,348	23,000	224,477
1934	230,878	12,830	28,128	5,617	18,203	50,937	346,593
1935	205,273	11,921	28,227	11,389	22,090	12,093	290,993
1936	118,388	1,141	17,988	14,198	18,985	82,818	253,517
1937	137,465	2,624	19,008	15,801	17,778	74,953	267,995
1938	137,662	2,801	20,404	16,406	19,799	88,499	285,572
1939	110,431	-	16,368	13,391	22,918	99,670	262,779

Source: Alma Lawton, "Urban Relief in Saskatchewan During the Years of Depression, 1930-39," (M.A.thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1969), 136.

[a] Cost of borrowing funds, interest charges, etc.

[b] Does not include costs associated with the relief camp for single men.

[c] Estimated

city assessed $1.5 million in property taxes, but the increased costs associated with relief forced the city to raise taxes. By 1934, tax assessments had risen to $1.9 million. As the Depression deepened, collecting taxes became more of a problem, and tax arrears increased sharply. In 1929, delinquent taxpayers owed the city just over a million dollars; a figure that reached three and a half million dollars by 1938. In 1934, the worst year for tax collections, less than 55 percent of taxes due to the city were actually paid. The severity of the situation is further illustrated by the number of property forfeitures. Between 1929 and 1938, the city acquired more than 8500 lots from owners who were no longer able to pay the property taxes.[60]

Saskatoon's financial woes were further compounded by its dependence on transfer payments from the provincial and federal governments. One observer has written that during the Depression municipalities had to "follow the dictates of the upper levels of government which insisted on maintaining the principle of local responsibility for unemployment relief as much as possible." The losers in this equation were ultimately the municipalities and the unemployed.[61] Like cities elsewhere, Saskatoon was unable to pay its relief bills, but the provincial and federal governments refused to supply funds until the proper paperwork had been filed. This generally meant a lag time of several months before the city was reimbursed for its expenditures. Municipal tax levies were simply not designed to cope with the unprecedented relief costs borne by local governments, so funds had to be raised in other ways. One involved securing short term loans until provincial and federal shares of relief costs were paid. Another means for urban municipalities to finance

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[60]Barber, 59.

[61]Roger E. Riendeau, "A Clash of Interests: Dependency and the Municipal Problem in the Great Depression," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 14:1 (Spring 1979): 50. Another article that explores this issue is John Taylor, "'Relief from Relief:' The Cities' Answer to Depression Dependency," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 14:1 (Spring 1979): 16-23.

their own share of relief costs was to apply for permission to issue debentures. From 1932 onwards, these debentures financed a substantial portion of municipalities' share of relief costs. Debts, however, accrued interest, and these additional charges simply added to the burdens of local governments. In Saskatoon, the cost to the city of borrowing these funds added nearly twenty percent to their relief expenditures throughout the decade (see Table III, page 91).[62]

The collapse of the agricultural economy added further to the financial problems experienced by the city. Because fewer agricultural products were shipped to Saskatoon, its processing facilities, particularly the large flour mills, required a smaller number of workers. The city's retail outlets sold less merchandise, resulting in a reduction of jobs for clerks and warehousemen. During the 1920s, agricultural depression and the consolidation of farm holdings had encouraged the migration of rural people to the city, and with the onset of general economic depression and widespread drought in the 1930s, this trend continued. Among the first depression-induced migrants to Saskatoon were agricultural laborers. In December, 1932, they represented 14 percent of all relief recipients in the city; four years later their numbers had grown to 17 percent of Saskatoon's relief population.[63] These figures, however, did not include independent farmers who, officials believed, had also arrived in the city in sizable numbers. A few of these newcomers found employment, but most did not, and they simply added to the burgeoning number of unemployed people with which the city was forced to cope. No one knows how many displaced rural people moved into Saskatoon during these years, but the number was certainly several hundred, and may well have exceeded one thousand.[64]

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[62]Lawton, 47-48.

[63]*Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 16 January 1933, 4.

[64]Barber, 14.

The census actually recorded a decline in the percentage of the province's population living in urban places between 1931 and 1936, but this was probably caused by the large numbers of people who left the province during that period.[65] Saskatoon's population also decreased, but this should not suggest that the city failed to attract the rural poor. As early as 1930, its relief department complained about an influx of outsiders who met minimum residence requirements and then promptly applied for relief. As there were no residential rules in place in the early 1930s, it was not difficult for a family or single person to enter the city, rent a room, and head for the relief office. Saskatoon officials initially attempted to discourage this procedure by refusing the newcomers work on relief projects. City council later implemented a rule requiring six months' residence in the city before relief would be given; this was increased to twelve months in 1936.[66]

The city of Saskatoon had been a growth industry in itself for most of its existence. Laborers, construction workers and tradesmen represented a significant percentage of the city's work force (Table IV). A construction boom that continued into the summer of 1929 kept most of these individuals gainfully employed, but with the first signs of economic uncertainty, those in the building trades were adversely affected. Lack of funds idled most construction projects, except those generated as relief measures. By June, 1931, nearly one-quarter of Saskatoon's workers were without jobs (Table V), and conditions did not improve during the following year. The construction sector was hardest hit. Although not all unemployed workers were eligible for assistance, examination of former occupations of relief recipients confirms that the building trades had suffered greatly. More than a third of the men

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[65]One author has estimated that Saskatchewan lost nearly 8% of its population between 1931 and 1936. Barber, 11.

[66]Barber, 12-13.

Table IV

Occupations of Saskatoon Residents

	1931		1936	
Occupation	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Service	5984	33.4	4704	29.0
Trade	3537	19.7	2509	15.5
Transportation	2172	12.1	1699	10.5
Construction	1752	9.7	994	6.1
Manufacturing	1742	9.7	1619	10.0
Clerical	-	-	2088	12.9
Labourers	-	-	970	5.9
Finance	864	4.8	338	2.0
Agriculture	465	2.5	721	4.4
Other	1385	7.7	538	3.3
Total	17,901	100.0	16,180	100.0

Source: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Seventh Census of Canada*, 1931, Vol. 7, 750-756; *Census of Prairie Provinces*, 1936, Vol. 2, 490-496.

Table V

City of Saskatoon
Percentage of Workers by Occupation
Not at Work on June 1, 1931 and June 1, 1936

Occupation	1931 Percentage Not at Work	1936 Percentage Not at Work
Construction	-	44.3
Agriculture	-	66.3
Manufacturing	-	18.0
Transportation	-	17.0
Trade	-	14.5
Service	-	12.0
Finance	-	10.8
Total	23.9	19.2

Source: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Seventh Census of Canada*, 1931, Vol. 6, 1268; *Census of Prairie Provinces*, 1936, Vol. 2, 618-624.

receiving assistance in December, 1932, listed their occupations as construction workers or general laborers.[67] By 1936, virtually all construction had ground to a halt, and relief works had been discontinued several years before. Under these conditions, nearly half of Saskatoon's construction workers found themselves with no means of support.

With each passing year, the city found itself devoting greater resources to support its unemployed citizens. To most city officials, it seemed that they were throwing good money after bad, and that few tangible benefits were being derived from the vast amounts expended. The federal government had failed to take decisive action to combat the Depression, and the provincial government was so overwhelmed by the intensity of the rural crisis that it could give only passing attention to the problems faced by city governments. Thus, it appeared that when it came to creating alternatives to costly public works programs and inadequate direct relief, Saskatoon was on its own. This did not mean that the city was without ideas for how to deal with its problems. Its most innovative suggestion - a land settlement program for the unemployed - was embraced by both destitute citizens anxious to find some solution to their dilemma and a city council concerned with curtailing the mounting costs of providing relief. The land initiative first developed by the city of Saskatoon, and proposed to the provincial government as a relief alternative, the settlement plan inaugurated by the province in 1931, and the programs later implemented by the federal government in conjunction with provinces and municipalities are each discussed in the following chapter.

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[67]*Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 16 January 1933, 4.

Chapter Five

Back-to-the-Land as a Response to the Depression

Throughout the Depression, the federal government maintained that relief was a local responsibility and that funds from the national treasury should not be used to support people in idleness. The provinces, however, believed that the conditions which contributed to the relief problem were national in scope, and that they alone should not have to bear the costs of providing for the destitute. Although its stance never wavered, the federal government was ultimately forced to spend federal dollars to support both public works projects and direct relief in each of the provinces. Politicians and the general public devoted a great deal of discussion to possible causes of the Depression and an even greater amount of time was spent in the search for solutions to the crisis. One problem was that the Depression's impact differed from one region to the next and thus the weight given to possible causes also varied. Few doubted, however, that rampant urbanization and too rapid industrial expansion were at least partly responsible. To redress this problem, some suggested that the nation needed to return to its agricultural roots. It was one solution with which most people agreed. How this goal might be achieved created considerable disagreement, however, but this did little to diminish the number of proposals put forward.

During the first three years of the Depression, private citizens, railway colonization agents, city councils, provincial legislatures, and eventually the federal government all promoted various plans to encourage a return to the land. It was

thought that through such measures, people could provide for their own sustenance and would no longer have to depend on an overburdened relief system. Two principles influenced this conviction. First, those promoting land settlement were convinced by the arguments about the value of rural life made by reformers and others. These statements, outlined in detail in Chapter Three, obviously made an impact, and influenced the direction in which responses to the economic crisis would develop. Second, it was clear that the principal problem faced by cities was simply too many people and too few jobs. If people could be encouraged to return to the country, unemployment in the cities might be somewhat alleviated.

The initial impetus for creating land settlement initiatives as relief measures came from cities that were the first line of defense against a growing tide of relief cases. For city councils, funding a family's attempt to become self-sufficient was a more worthwhile use of public moneys than simply providing for food and shelter. In the Prairie West, the city of Saskatoon led the way in promoting the idea of land settlement as a relief measure. Regina followed this lead, but had no specific plan of its own.[1] Winnipeg also promoted a land settlement plan that would permit the unemployed to occupy abandoned farms owned by the Manitoba government.[2] Plans developed at the local level caught the attention of provincial legislatures and were discussed as a possible alternative to the provision of direct relief. The Manitoba legislature failed to support Winnipeg's plan, but the Saskatchewan legislature took some interest in Saskatoon's proposal.[3] Although it altered the proposal considerably, the Saskatchewan government did eventually pass legislation

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[1]"Council Votes Finances for Land Scheme," *Regina Leader Post*, 29 May 1931, 1.

[2]"Would Establish Jobless on Farms," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 14 May 1931, 5; "Pleads for Support of Settlement Plan," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 15 December 1931, 11.

[3]Murchie, 17.

to facilitate land settlement by the unemployed. The province, however, was unable to underwrite fully the cost of this venture and turned to the federal government for help. This chapter discusses the initial settlement plan developed and promoted by the city of Saskatoon, and then examines the Saskatchewan Land Settlement Act of 1931, a provincial plan designed to encourage land settlement and facilitate the movement of urban relief recipients with agricultural experience back to the land. The final section considers a similar land settlement program implemented by the federal government in 1932, in which the provinces and municipalities participated.

Saskatoon's Village Settlement Scheme

Saskatoon had endeavored to ease its unemployment problem by creating public works projects, but recognized late in the winter of 1930-31 that the number of those without jobs was growing larger, and that the current system of rotating work for the married unemployed was not satisfactory. By March, 1931, 1700 family heads had registered at the unemployment office, and more were applying each day.[4] Saskatoon's mayor, John Hair, declared: "We can't hope to provide work for all our unemployed [this] summer, let alone next week."[5] It was obvious that some other method of assisting those without work would have to be found. Saskatoon was a city whose success hinged on a productive and prosperous countryside. Its leaders also knew that many of its citizens who were on relief had agricultural experience or had spent their formative years on the farm. It must have seemed logical to council members that their efforts might be best directed toward some accommodation of this fact. City officials were also aware of widely-held

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[4]"Asks Heads of Families to Register," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 10 March 1931, 3.

[5]"Hair Would Put Jobless on Farm Land," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 7 March 1931, 3.

sentiments about the restorative qualities of the land. It was true that drought and depression had created hardship on farms, but dependence on single crop production was partly to blame for those desperate conditions. If small-scale, intensive agriculture could be restored, both city and farmer would benefit.

On March 16, 1931, F.J. Rowland, Saskatoon's relief officer, presented city council with a plan to establish unemployed families on small farms near the city, where they could grow sufficient produce to meet their own needs. The farms would be forty acres in size and grouped in small clusters so that buildings and equipment might be shared by several families. A cow, a couple of pigs, and twenty-five chickens, as well as groceries sufficient for five months would be provided for each family. Families would be responsible for constructing their own dwellings, but a community hall, which would also serve as a church and school, and barns in the four community pastures would be provided by the city. The objective of the plan was not to expend vast amounts of money to establish families on the land, but rather to provide enough assistance so that they could become self-supporting. The city recommended that loans of up to $600 be made to each settler. The Mayor admitted that although this amount might seem rather high, keeping a family on relief cost the city approximately five hundred dollars each year. A loan would be repaid, he argued, whereas relief would not. Hair concluded that "by raising poultry, dairying in a small way, and growing potatoes and garden crops, families should have no difficulty in making a living."[6]

City officials believed that the plan had several advantages. First, it would ensure that families were not isolated, and their proximity to one another would

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[6]F.J. Rowland, Relief Officer, to City Council, 16 March 1931, File 1069-2055 (7) 370 Unemployment [1931], CSA; "Suggests Establishing 500 Jobless on Stocked Farms," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 4 March 1931, 4; "Hair Would Put Jobless on Farm Land," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 7 March 1931, 3.

permit a pooling of resources. Second, the city could assist the settlement by purchasing surplus produce and using it in the hospital and for relief purposes. Finally, the issue of cost weighed heavily on their minds. Depending on whose estimates were used, the plan would either save the city a small amount of money over simply providing relief to families, or would be slightly more expensive, but such expenditures could be made in the form of loans and repaid over a period of time. It is clear that regardless of which figures were used, the city would benefit.[7]

To gauge the extent of public interest in such a plan, Hair asked unemployed family heads who might be interested in moving onto these small farms to register with the relief officer. The response was overwhelming; within a few days, 156 families had registered with R.F. Briscoe, the city unemployment officer, who reported being "besieged" by prospective settlers. Briscoe declared that families recognized that the plan was "one way out of their present situation which is no more pleasant to them than to the city."[8] One man who had heard of the proposed plan wrote to city officials expressing his interest:

> I have seen in the newspapers that you are going to give 40 acres of land to married men out of work under the easy payment plan; we should like to have a place like that very much .... I seen what you are going to do with men out of work, in the newspaper, I know it is the finest thing I have heard for a long time .... you know the last three years were not so good, and now we are on the end of the rope and our money is soon gone... I have a team of horses and a wagon and if we could get a chance on 40 acres I know we make a go of it; my wife and myself are born on the farm in Holland, and know what to do, we know the care of dairy cows, sheep, and everything connected with a small farm ....[9]

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[7]Village Settlement Scheme, March 16, 1931, File 1069-2055 (7) 370 Unemployment [1931], CCF, CSA.

[8]"Asks Heads of Families to Register," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 10 March 1931, 3; "Interest Keen in Settlement Plan," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 14 March 1931, 3; "Will Confer Friday with Sask. Premier," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 11 March 1931, 3.

[9]Letter from W. Van Bruggen, 25 March 1931, File 1069-2055 (7) 370 Unemployment [1931], CCF, CSA.

The city clerk replied to this inquiry by saying that the plan was still in its formative stages, and that approval had not yet been secured from the province. If the scheme were approved, there would no doubt be a great deal of publicity, at which time the writer could make application for one of the plots.[10] Inquiries such as this one were fairly typical and demonstrate that families were eager to provide for their own support. All they needed was a little assistance from the government.

As the idea gained momentum, the Mayor called a meeting of local representatives from the university, agriculture, labor, and business to solicit their views of the proposed plan. City council also wanted to determine if these people, who had familiarity with agricultural settlement and colonization, thought that the proposal should be pursued. Each expressed interest, but no consensus on its practicality was reached. Some pointed out that past colonization efforts had not always worked out well and had proven to be costly undertakings. Others believed that the scheme had much to commend it, but warned that careful planning and supervision were essential for its success. A final opinion came from the city engineer. He stated simply that "it was absolutely necessary to work out some solution to the present [relief] problem as the system of rotating men [was] most unsatisfactory," and perhaps this plan offered some hope. The group was not unanimous in its support of the proposal, but recommended that the Mayor approach the provincial government about supporting some type of settlement plan.[11]

Details of the actual circumstances that led to the proposal of this particular plan have been obscured by the passage of time. Obviously the plan did not emerge from thin air, but neither the city clerk's files, minutes of city council meetings, nor

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[10]Letter from City Clerk to W. Van Bruggen, 7 April 1931, File 1069-2055 (7) 370 Unemployment [1931], CCF, CSA.

[11]Minutes of the Meeting of Citizens called by the Mayor re: unemployment, 11 March 1931, File 1069-2055 (8) 370 Unemployment [1931], CCF, CSA.

the local newspaper shed any light on the origins of the Village Settlement Scheme. One fact, however, is clear. Consideration of this plan demonstrates that Saskatoon was actively pursuing alternatives to direct relief and public works that had already shown inherent limitations, and was eager to find some solution to the unemployment problem. Civic leaders knew that establishing people on the land under this plan would prove costly, but they viewed the proposal as more than a matter of economics alone, for it was also an opportunity for the destitute to reorient their lives and once again become productive members of society. The land could sustain and nurture these individuals, and provide a far better life than merely existing in the city on direct relief.

The Saskatchewan Land Settlement Act

A few days after this meeting, Saskatoon's Mayor met with Premier Anderson and requested the province's assistance in financing the scheme. The Premier was noncommittal, but promised that the Government would give the proposal due consideration.[12] At the same time that Saskatoon's city council was meeting to discuss the forty acre farm proposal, the Saskatchewan Legislature was considering action of its own. Like the municipalities that increasingly looked to the province for aid, the Saskatchewan government was also frustrated by the extent of the unemployment problem and its inability to find constructive ways of dealing with it. With its economy tied to agricultural production, it was perhaps logical that the province should consider plans to combat unemployment in the cities by promoting land settlement. On March 11, 1931, the legislature passed an Act designed to

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[12]"Small Farms Plan Studied," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 12 March 1931, 6; Saskatoon City Council Minutes, 16 March 1931, CCF, CSA.

encourage settlement in the northern part of the province. The Act declared that settlement of Saskatchewan lands by provincial residents was a worthy objective, but recognized that "present economic conditions make such settlement difficult and unattractive." Thus, the Province considered it necessary to provide some financial assistance to those desiring to establish a homestead, and established a loan program for qualified persons. Applicants were required to be British subjects, to have resided in the Province for at least five years and to possess livestock or equipment valued at $250.[13] Loans not to exceed $500 were granted for the sole purpose of providing "housing material and fuel, and for land clearing, ploughing and fencing, in order to relieve the immediate necessities" of settlers and to permit them to provide for themselves.[14]

Two circumstances prompted passage of the province's Land Settlement Act at this time. The first was the transfer of natural resources, including lands, in 1931 to the province from the Dominion government. Prior to 1931, the federal government controlled these resources and the province had no policy for the settlement of its lands. This Act was drafted to establish how and under what conditions provincial lands would be disposed. The second, and no doubt more pressing, impetus for the Act was the Depression itself. Recognizing both the catastrophic impact that drought and depression had on most farmers and the need for capital in establishing homesteads in the bush, where the drought was known to be less severe, the legislature appropriated funds for a loan program to encourage settlement in the north. The province's Land Settlement Act was not designed to

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[13]Murchie, 16.

[14]*Statutes of the Province of Saskatchewan*, 1931, c. 22 (Regina: King's Printer, 1931). Unfortunately, the debates of the Provincial legislature were not archived until the 1940s, so no record exists of how this Act was received or what concerns may have been raised by any of its opponents.

promote land settlement by the urban unemployed, although a significant number of relief recipients in Saskatchewan's cities did apply for and receive loans to reestablish themselves on homesteads.[15]

A month after Saskatoon had asked the province for assistance with its proposal, the Premier informed Mayor Hair that he did not believe that sufficient areas of land were available close enough to Saskatoon to permit the city's plan to proceed. With its Land Settlement Act already in place, provincial officials were unwilling to pass new legislation that would divert scarce resources to duplicate in essence the Province's plan, and to create what many believed was a scheme that could not succeed.[16] Saskatoon officials were undoubtedly disappointed that their scheme had been turned down, but they were willing to cooperate with the province under the terms of its new Land Settlement Act. This legislation was not intended to be a relief measure; rather the provincial government viewed it as a means of helping those people who had the proper agricultural experience and equipment to make a fresh start. The distinction is a subtle one, and suggests that politicians wanted to differentiate between the dole and a program to encourage a return to self-sufficiency. Cities like Saskatoon, however, viewed it as one way to deal with the unemployment crisis. Mayor Hair observed that "We cannot see any daylight for the jobless men in Saskatoon," and declared that large numbers of city residents "realize that they would be better off on a farm of their own than trying to make their way in the city under present conditions."[17]

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[15]Powell, 81-98.

[16]"25 Families Seek Farms," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 14 April 1931, 5.

[17]"Scores Now Planning to Obtain Land," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 20 April 1931, 3.

Government officials and the public both favored settlement schemes as a means of providing relief. Unemployed workers' associations were also interested in the idea and lobbied local authorities to adopt a back-to-the-land program for the urban poor.[18] City officials in Saskatoon agreed that land settlement had some genuine advantages. Not only would a number of families be removed from the city and its relief rolls, but those same families would be working toward a goal of self-sufficiency. The Mayor repeatedly stated that any effort to place families on the land was simply a way "to assist the families to assist themselves," and added that this plan offered "a means whereby a man with sufficient equipment could get a start."[19] The city employment officer observed that of those people from whom he had received applications, "the majority seem[ed] very anxious to take part in the scheme."[20] In short, although the movement would be limited to a small number of the unemployed, relief settlement held out the possibility of "independence, health and happiness," whereas direct relief could only lead to "discontent, bitterness and despair."[21]

The only dissenting voices to be heard belonged to those of farm organizations and colonization agencies. The United Farmers of Canada expressed concern over the plan from the start. A.J. Macauley, the UFC president, pointed out that much of the north was unsuited to agricultural development, and that great care had to be taken in the selection of land. Macauley was also critical of the

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[18]"Men Ask Cash to Settle on Farms," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 16 May 1931, 7; "Dr. Anderson Answers Macauley's Criticisms," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 29 March 1932, 12; "Unemployed Ask $400 for Each Family," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 3 May 1932, 3.

[19]"Ask Heads of Families to Register," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 31 March 1931, 3; "25 Families Seek Farms," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 14 April 1931, 5.

[20]"Will Confer Friday with Sask Premier," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 11 March 1931, 3.

[21]"Going to the Land," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 18 May 1932, 11.

government's continued adherence to a homestead policy, one that he claimed had both directly and indirectly contributed to the current farm crisis. In its place, he believed, the province should institute a "use lease" policy, where the government would retain ownership of the land.[22] Criticism of the settlement plan was also expressed by the Canadian National Railway. The CNR had an interest in promoting settlement along its rail lines in the northern part of the province, but its colonization department saw serious flaws in the provincial arrangements. The railway's agents believed that the funds to be allocated to each family were simply insufficient to produce any permanent re-establishment. Although the CNR would benefit from the location of homesteaders along its rail lines, it had no direct interest in the plan. This may explain why its colonization agents were not afraid to express skepticism about the plan and the objectives of the city leaders:

> ... the ultimate objective of the scheme is not clear to us. ... Even the families we have observed already settled have no very clear intention of remaining on their farms indefinitely, and ... many selected families ... undoubtedly have the idea of "digging in" for a few years in the country, expecting to return to industrial occupation when the depression is over.

Despite the general concern, there was still optimism that in the long run, some good would come of this policy:

> ... a percentage of selected families ... have as their intention permanent settlement on the land.... From the standpoint of the city and the two Governments, if these families are to remain a public charge until the depression lifts (3 to 5 years?), ... it will not cost more to place them on land and sustain them than it would if they remained in the city, and there, of course, is the possibility that many permanent settlements can be effected with consequent lessening of relief appropriations.[23]

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[22]"U.F.C. Chief in Warning to Farmers," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 4 July 1931, 3.

[23]Letter from F.B. Kirkwood, Superintendent, Colonization Department, CNR, to E.M. Johnston, District Superintendent, Land Settlement Branch, CNR, 13 August 1931, RG 30, Vol. 8394, File 3860-4, Sec. 2, NAC.

In short, it seemed to CNR officials that the principal benefit of this policy had less to do with the re-establishment of people on the land and more with the potential savings in relief expenditures. If families remained on the land, so much the better. But even if they ultimately returned to the cities, the taxpayer, it was thought, would still come out ahead. This may appear to be a rather callous attitude, but the demands of the day called for cost-saving measures. The western provinces were on the verge of bankruptcy, many municipalities had already run out of funds and were dependent on the province to pay their bills, and the numbers of people requiring assistance were mounting on a daily basis. Sending people out onto the land to try to make their own way permitted less capable but equally needy people to collect direct relief in the city.

The province went ahead with its plan in spite of these concerns. The legislature appropriated $250,000 for assisted settlement, and limited the number of loans to five hundred. A selection committee was established to review applications and determine if applicants had the necessary experience and equipment to receive assistance. By the middle of July, 1931, one-half of the allotted number of loans had been approved, but four hundred more applications were still pending.[24] The vast majority of applicants came from southwestern Saskatchewan where drought had been most severe, but urban dwellers were also counted among those hopeful of receiving loans. Residents of the province's cities who met the criteria were approved and joined the exodus to the north, with a large number from Saskatoon and Moose Jaw settling in the vicinity of Loon Lake, a village 175 miles northwest of Saskatoon. All too quickly, however, the appropriated funds ran out, and large numbers of people who wanted to participate in the homestead plan were turned

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[24]"Many Trekking North to Homesteads," *Regina Leader Post*, 17 July 1931, 12.

away. Nevertheless, the province and its cities recognized the value of the scheme and looked to the federal government for additional funds.

Positive reports about activities in the north that made their way to the city during the spring of 1932 confirmed for city officials that settling relief recipients on provincial lands was a good idea. Two former Saskatoon residents wrote letters in support of the back-to-the-land plan. One wrote:

> Sure, it is great! When working for oneself it is a pleasure. We have got things comfortable. The cabin, or mansion, is a kitchen, dining-room, sitting-room, combined, with a nice big pantry, also good sized bedroom and clothes closet.
>
> Last week I built an addition to it, 8x15, joining the kitchen which I have piled up with wood so the wife don't have to keep running outside every time she needs some. Have also built a chicken house ... and cleared about 12 acres of land ready for breaking.... I am starting to get logs out for a pig pen and a barn. ... As far as the wife and I are concerned, we say the government will never have this homestead again, as I have no fear it will all turn out all right.[25]

The other settler, in a letter to Saskatoon's relief officer, encouraged the city to send more unemployed families north.

> Thought I would drop you a few lines, just to let you know that we are still alive. I have not been able to call at your office this winter for a work card or relief, thank God. ... With us the future looks good. We have something to work for.
>
> We have a very nice log cabin.... There's one real good feature about it, there's no one coming along every month demanding rent or telling us to get out. ... I am the landlord. ...
>
> Last year at this time we owned nothing, now we feel as if we have the world on a downhill pull. It may be slow, but it is success none the less .... My advice is if you have more men down there that ... can get away from mother's apron strings, also their wives have real backbone and if you can find your way clear for them to homestead let them go. It's hard grinding, but when it's time for one's self, who cares.[26]

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[25]Quoted in *House of Commons Debates*, 4 April 1932, 1664.

[26]"Saskatoon People Making Good on Loon Lake Farms," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 28 March 1932, 3.

Encouraged by these and other reports, and facing near-daily requests from the unemployed to participate in a land settlement scheme, the province continued to discuss various plans to place unemployed workers on the land.

In March, 1932, A.G. Sinclair, the CNR colonization agent in Saskatoon, reported that the "annual 'Back to the Land' agitation" had been renewed. The city relief officer still believed that the forty-acre farm scheme offered the best real solution, but he was unable to spark either municipal or provincial interest and the plan was discarded. Sinclair concluded: "if the Provincial government [could] again be prevailed upon to render some financial assistance similar to what they did last year ... such a scheme will be vigorously pushed by the city of Saskatoon."[27] City council was interested in pursuing any proposal that would provide some relief from its unemployment burdens. Several members expressed support for a proposal to establish unemployed married men with farm experience on the land. The 1931 land settlement plan did facilitate the settlement of provincial lands, but the province had underestimated the desire of people to return to the land. Furthermore, as a number of councilors suggested, the Act had not been fully suited to the needs of the province, for no provision had been made to assist those without the means to purchase the necessary equipment.[28]

Provincial officials apparently agreed, and held a conference in Regina with representatives from Saskatchewan's three largest cities to discuss the possibility of a more comprehensive back-to-the-land movement. The plan that they developed at this meeting called for the establishment of committees in each of the three cities to

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[27]Letter from A.G. Sinclair, District Superintendent, Department of Colonization, CNR, to Kirkwood, 9 March 1932, RG 30, Vol. 5637, File 5540-2, NAC; "Settlement of Jobless is Proposed," *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, 27 February 1932, 3 and "Settlement Proposal to be Discussed," *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, 5 March 1932, 3.

[28]"Settlement Plan Liked," *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, 8 March 1932, 7.

supervise the purchase of livestock and equipment to be used by people participating in the scheme. These committees would also bear the responsibility of selecting families to be assisted in moving back to the land. Delegates emphasized that not every family would be approved, and that only those with farm experience or those who had "shown themselves to be industrious and anxious to establish a home of their own could be considered." The province stressed that the proposed plan was designed to be a relief measure and not a settlement scheme, and was intended in the first instance for unemployed married men in the cities.[29] The purpose of this program diverged sharply from that of the Land Settlement Act passed the year before. That legislation was simply designed to promote agricultural development; this new plan would actually facilitate the settlement of unemployed families on the land. The province may well have been more willing to fund settlement of the unemployed in light of the fact that the economic crisis was growing worse, and that no tangible solutions had been offered to the ongoing relief burden. Each family would receive three hundred dollars to purchase livestock, machinery and building materials. One third of this amount would be paid by the municipality from which the family originated, the province would cover one-third, and the province hoped that the federal government would contribute the remaining amount. In order to expedite federal approval of the plan, Saskatoon's new mayor, John Underwood, wrote to the mayors of Regina and Moose Jaw asking that they have their local members of Parliament press the federal government for an early decision.[30]

Like the forty-acre plan of 1931, response to this new proposal was very positive. Within two days of the announcement of the proposal in the newspaper,

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[29]"Council to Debate on Farm Plan," *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, 21 March 1932, 3.

[30]"Would Rush Settlement," *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, 30 March 1932, 3.

more than sixty families from Saskatoon had signed up with the relief officer; one week later, approximately three hundred families had expressed an interest in taking up a homestead.[31] The editor of the *Saskatoon Star Phoenix* believed that the plan would meet with "general approval providing the cost [was] kept to a reasonable figure." All families that might be selected to participate were on relief, and the editor observed, "it is not difficult to calculate that the back-to-the-land movement will be less expensive to the authorities than it will be to continue that relief for another year or more." In addition to the savings in relief payments, it was also possible that

> given reasonable assistance and a determination on the part of the settlers not to be beaten they should be able to establish themselves on a self-supporting basis quite rapidly and in the course of time bring their farms to a state where profitable production is possible.[32]

Premier Anderson reiterated his support for a land settlement plan at a meeting of the unemployed in Saskatoon in April. He voiced the opinion that there was "no immediate solution for the unemployment problem in Saskatchewan as there were so few industries." The land offered the only hope. The real problem, however, lay in securing the cooperation of, and funding from, federal authorities. Two weeks after the province sent its proposal to Ottawa, officials were told that the settlement plan would be placed on the agenda of the upcoming federal-provincial conference on unemployment.[33] More than ten days after the close of the conference, a decision still had not been reached.[34] With valuable time slipping

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[31]"Scores Keen on Farming," *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, 23 March 1932, 3; "May Act on Settlement This Evening," *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, 1 April 1932, 3.

[32]"Back To The Land," *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, 22 March 1932, 15.

[33]"Hopeful of Settlement Plan Passing," *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, 5 April 1932, 3.

[34]"Settlement Plans Wait," *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, 19 April 1932, 7.

away, the unemployed of the province who wanted to try their luck on a pioneer farm could only wait for politicians in Ottawa to determine their future.

Federal Back-to-the-Land Initiatives

While the Saskatchewan provincial government and the city of Saskatoon were developing settlement plans, the federal government was also discussing similar initiatives as one possible response to the economic crisis. In the summer of 1931, the federal Minister of Immigration and Colonization, Wesley A. Gordon, requested that the two national railways, the Land Settlement Branch of the Department of Immigration and Colonization, and the provincial Colonization Departments undertake a coordinated effort to place Canadians on available farmland. The Minister reasoned that

> it is entirely logical that a substantial number of families ... now in our cities should, under existing conditions, be seriously turning their thoughts to the security to be found on the farm.... Assured shelter and food are strong incentives to families and individuals who are either out of employment or whose probable tenure of employment is precarious.[35]

Assistance would be provided in the form of information about settlement opportunities and help in selecting property, but no funds were to be given for settlement purposes. This plan simply represented an attempt to help those who were already in a position to help themselves.

Writing to Minister Gordon to share his opinion of the policy, J.B. MacLean, President of the MacLean Publishing Company, agreed that it was "the first constructive step in the solution of our present problems," and considered it "a most

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[35]Letter from W.A. Gordon, Minister of Immigration and Colonization, to Colonel J.B. MacLean, President, the MacLean Publishing Company, 22 June 1931, RG 30, Vol. 8394, File 3860-4, Sec. 1, NAC.

important bit of far-seeing constructive work."[36] Others, including a committee charged with overseeing the coordination of the settlement activities, echoed this opinion. In a report to Gordon in August, 1931, committee members argued that

> The agricultural industry ... constitutes a stabilizing influence in our national structure. It offers at once a productive field for the absorption of a large number of our Canadian unemployed ....[37]

Observations such as these provided a good indication that a policy of agricultural settlement for the jobless might be an acceptable response to the unemployment crisis, and could alleviate some of the burden that was being placed on governments to care for ever increasing numbers of indigent citizens. They also suggest that widely-held assumptions about land and rural life would influence the course of this particular aspect of federal relief policy. Canadian development had been intimately linked to immigration and agricultural settlement, and efforts to place Canadians on available farmland simply refined this historic process.

The cooperative effort of the railways and colonization departments sought to encourage settlement by those Canadians who had the necessary capital and agricultural experience. Whereas previous efforts of these agencies had been directed toward immigrants, Minister Gordon now declared that it was "unfair to our own people to encourage immigration ... that will in any way aggravate our own internal difficulties." Attention should instead be "devoted to the placing in productive work of people within our own borders."[38] Despite a growing rural to urban migration and a marked increase in industrialization, public officials still saw agriculture and rural life as the proper foundation of society. Large numbers of

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[36]Letter from MacLean to Gordon, 15 June 1931, RG 30, Vol. 8394, File 3860-4, Sec. 1, NAC.

[37]Memorandum from the Central Committee to Gordon, 28 August 1931, RG 30, Vol. 8394, File 3860-4, Sec. 2, NAC.

[38]Letter from Gordon to MacLean, 22 June 1931, RG 30, Vol. 8394, File 3860-4, Sec. 1, NAC.

people with agricultural backgrounds were no longer on the farm, but federal immigration and colonization officials believed "a little encouragement and a good deal of information -- something to excite their own initiative" might lead such people to return to rural life. Thousands of families had left the farm in search of more prosperous livelihoods in urban settings only to see their jobs and savings evaporate, and many "were beginning to look back to the once-despised farm as the possible means of escape from actual distress." Promoters of settlement as a relief measure recognized that agriculture was experiencing its own difficulties, but they firmly believed that the farm offered food and shelter, and perhaps more importantly, the "independence and morale which come with a sense of self-support."[39]

No specific expectations were outlined for this particular settlement initiative, but the results suggest that it aroused a great deal of interest. In a two-year period ending in September, 1932, the railways and federal government had assisted more than nine thousand Canadian families to settle on farms and had placed another twenty thousand single men in farm work throughout the nation (Table VI). More than half of these families selected farms in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and the majority of the single unemployed who were placed on farms were located in the three prairie provinces. The success of the farm placement policy could also be measured in dollars and cents. Government employees who had previously been engaged in attracting immigrants into the country were now charged with placing Canadians on the land, and no funds had been expended from the public purse to assist this migration.[40]

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[39]Robert J.C. Stead, *The Great Landward Trek*, Radio Address broadcast April 4, 1933, RG 30, Vol. 3860-4, Sec. 6, NAC.

[40]*House of Commons Debates*, 20 July 1931, 3973.

Table VI

Family Settlement and Farm Labour Placement
by the Department of Immigration and Colonization,
the Canadian National Railway and the Canadian Pacific Railway
from October 1, 1930 to September 30, 1932

Province	Families	Single Men
BC	652	245
Alberta	3109	6124
Saskatchewan	2300	2498
Manitoba	878	3232
Ontario	1097	6514
Québec	1271	1247
Maritimes	186	829
Totals	9,493	20,689

Source: "Back to the Land Movement," RG 30, Vol. 8394, File 3860-4, Sec. 5, NAC.

Officials in charge of the program soon realized, however, that simply assisting families to locate land was not enough. Families with the financial resources to return to the land on their own accord were in short supply and those who desired to take up land had already done so. Yet there were other families who wanted to leave the city and start anew on a farm:

> In the course of settlement work ..., [we] have encountered a number of families presently unemployed who, from the stand point of human equation covering practical experience, physique and the will to work, are regarded as first class prospects for farm settlements. These people have no financial resources.[41]

Families without adequate means would also benefit from returning to the land and deserved a chance to become self-supporting on a farm of their own. Officials remarked that the urban experience had been very disappointing for many of these families, who would welcome the opportunity to return to rural life.[42]

Belief that assistance should be extended to help families on relief take advantage of settlement opportunities were shared by others concerned with the relief problem. In the last months of 1931, the Saskatoon newspaper printed two editorials supporting land settlement as a relief measure. In the first, appearing in mid-October, the editor wrote:

> a back to the land movement is a natural result of depression. Man can at least make a living there although he may not become wealthy and it is the desire for that security which is the inspiration for a return to agriculture.[43]

Just after Christmas, another editorial pointed out that the Winnipeg city council had declared that

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[41]Memorandum from the Central Committee to Gordon, 28 August 1931, RG 30, Vol. 8394, File 3860-4, Sec. 2, NAC.

[42]Memorandum to Gordon, n.d. [Fall 1931], RG 30, Vol. 8394, File 3860-4, Sec. 2, NAC.

[43]"Back To The Land," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 15 October 1931, 11.

> it would be impossible to continue the present relief work indefinitely and that placing men and their families on the land and helping them to get established on a self-sustaining basis would be much less expensive than granting direct relief to them while resident in cities.

It seemed to this writer that such a plan would be an appropriate form of relief expenditure, and would be welcomed by the unemployed.

> Certainly farming is not a profitable occupation at the present time but even under the most adverse conditions, it has certain advantages not to be overlooked. ... Western agriculturalists tend to scorn sustenance farming but to the unemployed city dweller even that measure of self-support is a great advance over his present condition.[44]

Life on the farm was not easy, particularly during the current economic crisis, but it did offer some security. More importantly, to those who advocated such an approach, rural life appeared fulfilling and satisfying in ways that urban life could never match. For city dwellers who were living a hand-to-mouth existence, supported only by relief payments, the land offered the promise of independence and self-respect.

Many Members of Parliament appeared to agree that deserving families with agricultural backgrounds could be assisted to return to the land. In March, 1932, F.W. Gershaw, the M.P. from Medicine Hat, Alberta, suggested that the federal government finance a plan similar to the joint venture of the federal and railway colonization departments. The people he had in mind were those who were out of work, but "who might if suitably placed on the land be able to produce food and supplies for themselves." It was a scheme, he believed, which would provide genuine assistance to those with farming experience. He also argued that these people could be "supported on the farms at a smaller cost to the state than [it] must meet [at present]." Gershaw pointed out that some people might charge that the government could not afford to undertake such a scheme. The people he would

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[44]"Back To The Land," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 30 December 1931, 9.

encourage to settle were, however, already being supported by some government, and that "three, four or five hundred dollars a year must be advanced to keep them from starvation." If some small share of these funds were advanced as a credit, the people carefully chosen, and the lands properly selected, then "many of the unemployed who now have no hope for the future would be given fresh courage, and their conditions vastly improved." Gershaw also claimed that if, in the end, such a scheme added to the overproduction of farm products as some critics had charged, then the scheme would have "succeeded far beyond our hopes." In short, he did not see the plan as being more than a way to promote self-sufficiency.[45]

A month later, the M.P. from Saskatoon, F.R. Macmillan, also expressed his support for a back-to-the-land policy. He reported that, with the support of the provincial government, his city had sent "some forty-two families who were on the unemployed list [to lands in northern Saskatchewan in 1931]. We financed them to some extent, and I am glad to say that forty of the forty-two families will remain in the area, and that they are doing exceptionally well." In the spring of 1932, the cities of Saskatoon, Regina and Moose Jaw, in conjunction with the provincial government, came up with a plan to relocate two thousand unemployed families to farms in the north with the assistance of the federal government. The cities had already agreed to contribute $100, as had the province, and provincial officials had asked the Dominion to make the same contribution. With a total of $300, Macmillan believed, these families could be put into "productive work whereby they can earn their living."[46] With the 1931 land settlement scheme having already produced tangible results, Macmillan recommended that the federal government support a

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[45]*House of Commons Debates*, 11 March 1932, 1055-56.

[46]*House of Commons Debates*, 4 April 1932, 1663.

similar plan, and offer financial assistance to the provinces that had citizens willing and able to earn their living from the land.

Not all members were so enthusiastic about the back-to-the-land movement, nor about the federal government's statements regarding the success of its current policy. Angus MacInnis, a western Labour M.P., declared that the back-to-the-land movement "tends towards the creation of a peasantry in Canada, a peasantry which will eke out a precarious living from the land when there is nothing to be done in the city. That peasantry will form a labour reserve to be called upon at a time when working conditions in the cities improve." These words clearly convey his vehement opposition to any back-to-the-land plan, and his convictions that the unemployed were simply being used as pawns. During the parliamentary question and answer period, Minister Gordon declared that the powerful Trades and Labour Congress had expressed its support for the settlement initiative, suggesting that its leaders did not see the back-to-the-land movement as an exploitive measure. MacInnis countered that he did not believe that "everything of which the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada approves must be right," and that he himself was not unwilling to challenge its positions.[47]

Other M.P.s shared MacInnis' views, but the fact that the TLC was "heartily in accord" with the settlement policy cannot be ignored. Tom Moore, the organization's President, was satisfied with the efforts to place unemployed workers on the land, and expressed hope that the policy be "continued and developed [so] ... all those capable and willing to provide for themselves and their dependents by farming may be placed in a position to do so."[48] Smaller labour groups also

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[47]*House of Commons Debates*, 2 March 1933, 2657.

[48]J.A.P. Haydon, "Filling up Canada's Vacant Spaces," *Canadian Congress Journal* 12:9 (September 1933): 15-16.

promoted various back-to-the-land schemes as a way to relieve unemployment. In Regina, the British Workers' Association forwarded a plan to the city council in which a dozen of its families would be placed on homesteads in the northern part of the province, and machinery and equipment would be held on a community basis.[49] In Moose Jaw, a delegation from the Federal Workers' Union asked city council to advance a loan of $672 to permit forty-two unemployed married men to file on land under the provincial land settlement scheme.[50] Both proposals were eventually turned down by the councils, but they do suggest that these labour groups recognized that land settlement offered immediate benefits and hope for the future. Not all labour groups were of one mind on this issue as the statement of Angus MacInnis aptly demonstrates, and perhaps it is significant that this was so. Nonetheless, the evidence suggests that most of these organizations, particularly at the local level, were supportive of the settlement idea, even if only as a temporary palliative.

Statements similar to those cited above were made by other newspaper editors, appeared in national magazines, and were voiced in council chambers and provincial legislatures.[51] These did not go unnoticed by the federal government. In the spring of 1932, Ottawa began to give serious consideration to a policy of state-aided land settlement as a measure to relieve unemployment. At Gordon's request, W.M. Jones, the federal Commissioner of Colonization, formed a committee to

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[49]"Unemployment Plan City Council Object for Friday Meeting," *Regina Leader-Post*, 13 May 1931, 11; "Unemployment Scheme Liked," *Regina Leader-Post*, 14 May 1931, 2.

[50]"City May Finance Unemployed to Get on Northern Land," *Moose Jaw Evening Times*, 16 May 1931, 7; "Details of Land Settlement Plan Will be Sought," *Moose Jaw Evening Times*, 19 May 1931, 5.

[51]See, for example, "Land Settlement Most Beneficial Policy in Canada," *Moose Jaw Evening Times*, 1 January 1932, 3; "Back To The Land," *Moose Jaw Evening Times*, 16 February 1932, 4; "Unemployed and Land," *Regina Leader Post*, 25 November 1931, 4; "Land Settlement as a Relief Project," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 3 August 1931, 11; "Colonization at Home," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 19 September 1931, 9; Richard Churchill, "Back to the Land," *MacLean's Magazine* 15 March 1931, 26.

weigh the relative merits and potential problems associated with such a program. The two other committee members were W.J. Black, the director of Colonization for the Canadian National Railway, and J.N.K. Macalister, chief commissioner of Colonization for the Canadian Pacific Railway, both of whom were experienced in settlement matters and had supervised colonization initiatives developed by their companies. Prior to its first meeting, Jones circulated a memo to each man outlining some of his concerns, and raising three critical questions:

> 1) Should assisted land settlement as a relief measure be undertaken as one practical means of relieving the national problem of unemployment?
>
> 2) Is it feasible for the Federal Government to participate financially in such an undertaking?
>
> 3) If it were to be proposed, what general form should such a project take?[52]

With its agenda set, the committee discussed whether this sort of plan was worthwhile, and how an experimental project might be implemented later in the year.

Jones, Black, and Macalister considered that, in the first instance, it was necessary to differentiate between a colonization scheme, that would bring new lands under cultivation and where funds would be spent to promote agricultural development, to build roads, and to develop infrastructure, and a relief measure, in which only minimal amounts of money would be spent to support the unemployed and their families until economic conditions improved. One question that received a great deal of consideration was whether assisted settlement offered a "practical means of contributing in a tangible way to the relief of our national unemployment problem." They concluded:

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[52]"State Aided Land Settlement as a Measure to Relieve Unemployment," 21 March 1932, RG 30, Vol. 8394, File 3860-4, Sec. 3, NAC.

> Unemployment relief applied in the placement of families on the land - embodying as it does the essential element of helping people to help themselves - would be in the public interest, both from the stand-point of the families assisted and the Canadian tax payers who are called upon to shoulder the burden of relief costs.[53]

The real issue concerned the cost of maintaining families in idleness on direct relief, as opposed to the "cost of placing these same families, whose practical experience and present condition indicate the possibility of reasonable success, on farms where they will contribute to their own maintenance and in due course become self-sustaining."[54] When considered from this perspective, there was no doubt that money spent on direct relief could be better channeled into a program of land settlement, where families would provide for their own support and place less of a burden on the relief system.

The committee recommended that the federal government incorporate a policy of land settlement into its relief policy because it was a "constructive method of actually reducing unemployment," and would permit families to help themselves. The plan advocated by these men was not a hastily-conceived measure. Each had considerable experience in colonization work and this enabled them to formulate a practical program of relief settlement. Selection of suitable families was crucial to its success, for, as the committee pointed out, "it would be a waste of money to endeavor to settle any family that was totally unsuitable for rural life." It also recommended that only families with actual farming experience be allowed to participate in the scheme, and advised that families selected "be keenly anxious to return to rural life." Limiting expenditures was also an important prerequisite for the

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[53]"Unemployment Relief Land Settlement," 29 March 1932, RG 30, Vol. 8394, File 3860-4, Sec. 3, NAC.

[54]*Ibid.*

plan, and the committee reported that "many of these families could live much more cheaply in the country than in the city provided that they had suitable housing accommodation, a supply of milk and vegetables and their own fuel." In conclusion, committee members declared that

> a policy of settlement ... might not absorb any large number of unemployed families for the present winter; nevertheless the plan is a constructive one and decidedly in the interests of our national development. It will relieve the problem at points where there is considerable congestion, and above all it will enable a number of good families to be self-sustaining and to re-establish themselves in rural life where they desire to be.[55]

With this report in hand, the federal government decided in late April, 1932, to incorporate land settlement into its relief policy. The Dominion would contribute one-third of the cost of assisting a family on relief to take up a homestead, while the provincial government would share the remaining two-thirds with the municipality from which the family originated. Settlement was stressed as an unemployment relief measure, and its purpose was to promote subsistence farming only. "This is in no sense a Government-aided land settlement scheme," Gordon declared, "but an application of relief expenditure to enable families receiving relief to contribute to their own maintenance by labour on the land, where they may eventually establish themselves on a self-supporting basis."[56] All provinces except Prince Edward Island elected to participate in the scheme, and accepted responsibility for settlement arrangements and the selection of families. Each province would be assisted in this endeavor by an advisory committee consisting of representatives from the municipalities, the federal Department of Colonization, and the Canadian Pacific and the Canadian National Railways. The agreements made with the provinces stated

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[55]Memorandum to Gordon, n.d. [Fall 1931], RG 30, Vol. 8394, File 3860-4, Sec. 2, NAC.

[56]*The Labour Gazette* 32:5 (May 1932): 478.

that all families selected must be residents of Canada who were receiving relief.[57] It was further provided that selections be made without regard for race, religious views, or political affiliation (Appendix C).[58]

The existence of these advisory committees suggests that promotion of the back-to-the-land movement could be achieved only through cooperation. The federal government had control of the necessary funds, and an interest in resolving the crisis. Provincial and municipal governments did not have adequate financial reources, but were confronted on a daily basis with demands from their citizens that some action be taken to combat the unemployment and relief problem. The federal Department of Colonization had directed immigration prior to the Depression, but with immigration effectively halted in the 1930s, it turned its attention to promoting settlement by Canadians. The Department had been assisted in this role by the two national railway companies, both of which had an interest in placing people on the land. The railways themselves had land available for purchase, and would benefit from the settlement of new settlers along their lines. They also had an infrastructure of agents and inspectors in place with experience in land settlement. All of these agencies came together to support a program of land settlement that each hoped would ease at least a small part of the urban unemployment problem. Governments and other groups may have joined forces to promote particular policies in the past, but now the situation had reached such crisis proportions that it was imperative that they work together to provide a feasible alternative to the dole.

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[57]Some leniency was shown in this regard. In Saskatchewan, provincial officials agreed that the general principle would be adopted, but that "some discretion might be exercised in accepting a first class type of settler, when it could be shown that [the] applicant would be on relief shortly." Department of Railways, Labour and Industries, "Synopsis of Relief Settlement Plans of 1932-33-34," 3, File 1069-1508 (5) 307 Relief - Land Settlement [1935], CCF, CSA.

[58]*The Labour Gazette* 32:7 (July 1932): 789.

Saskatchewan's Participation in the Federal Land Settlement Program

The relief settlement plan implemented by the federal government in the spring of 1932 was embraced most fully by Saskatchewan.[59] The province believed that its own settlement plan of 1931 was working well, and recognized that with federal support, even more relief recipients could be assisted in taking up homesteads.[60] It was a valid assumption, and probably reflects the importance of rural life in provincial society as a whole, and in the thinking of officials charged with finding a solution to the crisis. Nearly one in four of the approvals made nationwide were granted to Saskatchewan residents (Table VII), and within the province, the city of Saskatoon took the lead in promoting this back-to-the-land movement, with its citizens making up nearly one-half of those that the province sent to homesteads in both 1932 and 1933 (Table VIII).

Saskatoon residents who participated in the relief settlement plan did not represent the full spectrum of the city's population on relief. Comparison of residents who participated in the 1932 settlement plan with the city's relief list of November, 1931, identifies some revealing patterns. Nearly one-half of those receiving relief that month were classified as laborers with limited skills (48%). A slightly smaller percentage were skilled tradesmen (43%), while fewer than one in ten could be categorized as clerks and professionals.[61] Those in the highest

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[59]Québec actually had slightly more applications approved, but its much larger population meant that a greater proportion of Saskatchewan residents participated in the plan.

[60]Letter from Premier J.T.M. Anderson to Mayor J.E. Underwood, 12 March 1932, and Letter from Anderson to Gordon, 21 March 1932, File 1069-1523 (13) Relief - Misc. Reports [1932], CCF, CSA.

[61]I looked up each of the names on the November relief list in the 1931 city directory to determine occupations. Of the 1093 names on the relief list, only 454 were found in the directory. Occupations were provided for 359 people, or 33% of the total. "City of Saskatoon, Unemployment Relief Disbursements, November 1931," File 1069-1521(8) - Relief, Miscellaneous [1931], CCF, CSA; *Henderson's Saskatoon Directory 1931* (Winnipeg: Henderson's Directories, 1931).

Table VII

Relief Land Settlement
1932 and 1934 Plans
Approvals and Abandonments by Province
as of March 31, 1936

Province	Approvals	Abandonments & Cancellations	On the land
British Columbia	52	9	43
Alberta	651	170	481
Saskatchewan	939	179	760
Manitoba	793	109	684
Ontario	606	142	464
Québec	976	179	797
Nova Scotia	341	61	280
*Totals:	4,358	849	3,509

*Figures for New Brunswick were not included in any annual report.

Source: *Report of the Department of Immigration and Colonization for the Year Ended March 31, 1936* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1936), 87.

Table VIII

1932 Land Settlement Plan
Number of Families Contributed from Saskatchewan Cities

	1932	1933
Saskatoon	193	48
Regina	77	30
Moose Jaw	59	0
Prince Albert	12	6
Weyburn	4	3
Swift Current	2	1
Yorkton	1	1
Towns & Villages	46	25
Total:	394	114

Source: "Saskatchewan Relief Settlement Plan," RG 30, Vol. 8395, File 3840-4, NAC.

occupational category were less likely to take advantage of the settlement scheme. Only six percent of those who went back to the land had been employed as a clerk or in a professional position. In contrast, laborers represented a greater proportion of the settlers than of the city's relief recipients, accounting for 54 percent of the total who moved to homesteads. There was little difference in the number of skilled tradesmen on either list; however, it might be concluded that tradesmen were somewhat more inclined to stay in the city and hope for some improvement rather than try homesteading, for only 40 percent of the relief settlers were drawn from this employment category.[62]

The above comparisons do not suggest that the city residents who chose to pursue settlement opportunities were substantially different from their counterparts receiving direct relief, but an examination of family size does demonstrate some difference. One in five people on the relief list were single men and women, and another one-quarter were couples without children, but the majority of relief recipients were families. The average household contained just over two children, although five percent had more than five children. Settler families, in contrast, tended to somewhat larger. On average, settler families had three children, with ten percent of them having more than five children. Only 12 percent of the couples who moved to farms under the 1932 plan had no children.

Two conclusions can be drawn from these comparisons. First, clear-cut occupational distinctions cannot be made between those on relief and those who chose to pursue settlement opportunities, although workers without skills were apparently less hopeful that they would find a job in Saskatoon and were a bit more

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[62]I followed the same procedure using the list of settlers from Saskatoon who participated in the 1932 relief settlement plan. S-MA 3, Department of Municipal Affairs, Local Improvement Districts Branch, File 27, Relief Settlement, Schedule of Names under the Relief Act 1932, 1934, SAB.

willing to take a chance on a homestead. Second, family size was apparently a factor in determining who elected to participate in settlement and who did not. It is probable that families with an extra mouth to feed were more likely to recognize the potential benefits of homesteading, and may have looked upon the venture as a chance, at the very least, to put more food on the family table.

In Saskatchewan, approximately five hundred families took advantage of the 1932 relief settlement plan. About two-thirds selected provincial homestead lands, while the remainder found their way onto properties made available by the Canadian Pacific Railway.[63] In large measure, destinations of settlers reflected the availability of land. Loan settlers were supposed to select only first class lands, but as most available homesteads were located in the boreal forest, little good land could be found. Of the seven thousand homestead entries made between 1930 and 1934, fully 96 percent were on "ordinary settlement land" which was defined as "fair to poor and mostly third grade land, but deemed to be sufficiently good enough to allow a man of industry and energy ... a reasonable chance of making it." Although this may be construed as a more or less positive assessment, it was not an altogether pleasing prospect for families participating in this northward movement.[64]

Destinations of these families varied considerably, but most relocated in the southern margins of the boreal forest, and others in completely unoccupied country farther north (Figure 1).[65] One important target was a tract of bush land northeast of North Battleford, which absorbed more than a hundred relief families. Others

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[63]Annual Report for 1933, Department of Colonization (Saskatchewan section), CNR, RG 30, Vol. 5575, NAC.

[64]Britnell, *The Wheat Economy*, 204-205.

[65]See Appendix B for a discussion of the sources used in the compilation of this and subsequent maps.

acquired homesteads in undeveloped lands beyond the pioneer fringe, particularly north of Prince Albert and near the Manitoba border. Still others fanned out to a scattering of additional northern localities. One of these was the Loon Lake area, where men and women who had moved north from Saskatoon and Moose Jaw with provincial help in 1931 were joined by new families assisted under the 1932 plan.[66]

In the chapters that follow, two back-to-the-land settlements established near Loon Lake are examined from the settlers' perspective (Figure 2). The first, known as "Little Saskatoon" because of the origin of most of its settlers, represents the positive side of relief land settlement initiatives, while "Tamarack" illustrates many of its negative aspects. The "Little Saskatoon" experience demonstrates how the back-to-the-land scheme was implemented at the provincial level, documents its establishment and early years of development, and, where appropriate, gives voice to the settlers who abandoned the urban world and became pioneers on the province's northern frontier.

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[66]Some of this activity is described in "Rush to Land Expected by C.P.R. Office," *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, 14 March 1932, 3; "CP Bush Lands are Thrown Open for Settlement," *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, 13 May 1932, 3; "New Settlers Make Homes Near Kamsack," *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, 12 October 1932, 13; "Arran Gateway to Forest Settlement," *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, 14 October 1932, 21; R.A. Stutt and H. Van Vliet, *An Economic Study of Land Settlement in Representative Pioneer Areas of Northern Saskatchewan* (Ottawa: Department of Agriculture, 1945), 9 and 13.

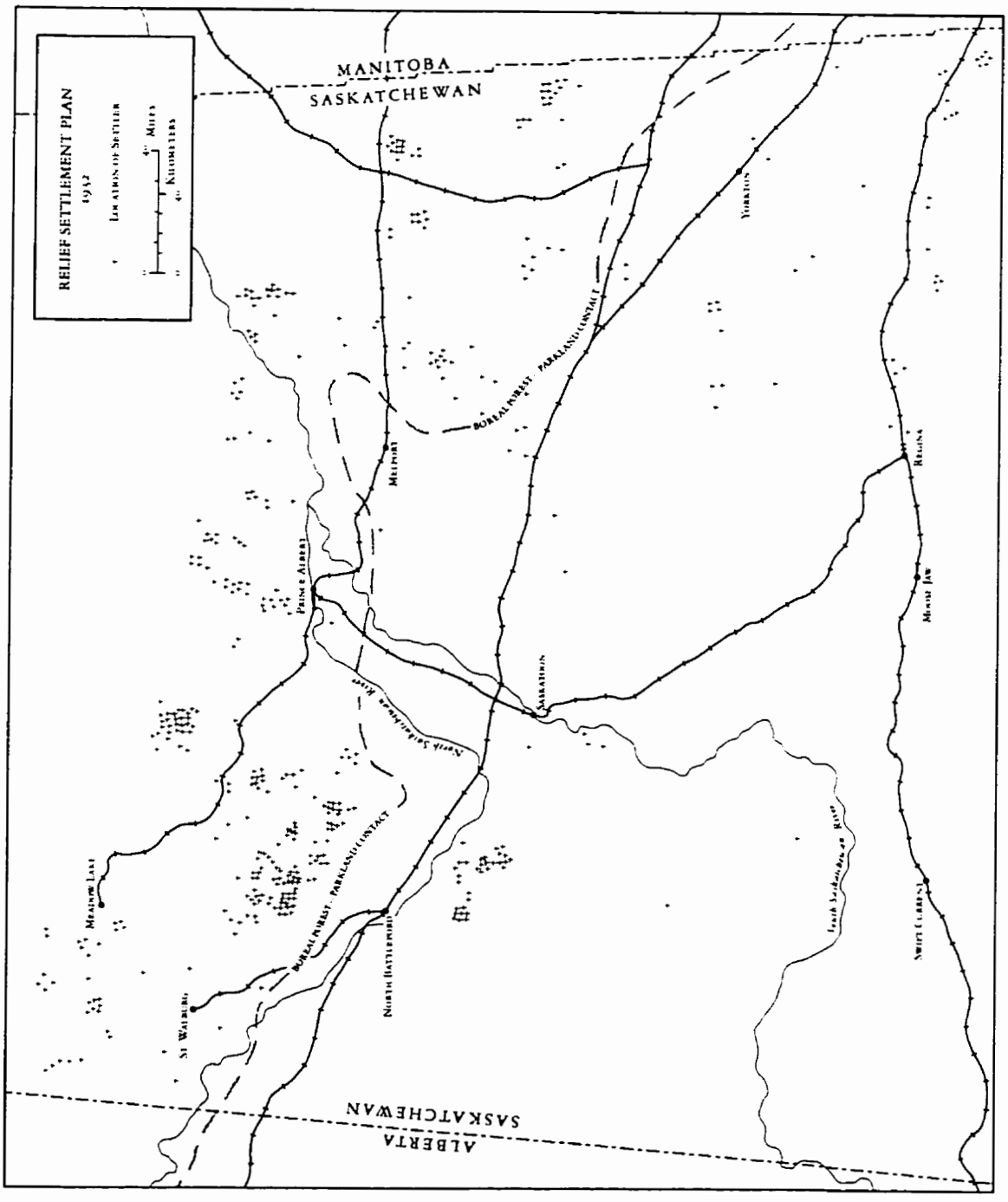

Figure1. Location of settlers under the 1932 Relief Settlement Plan.

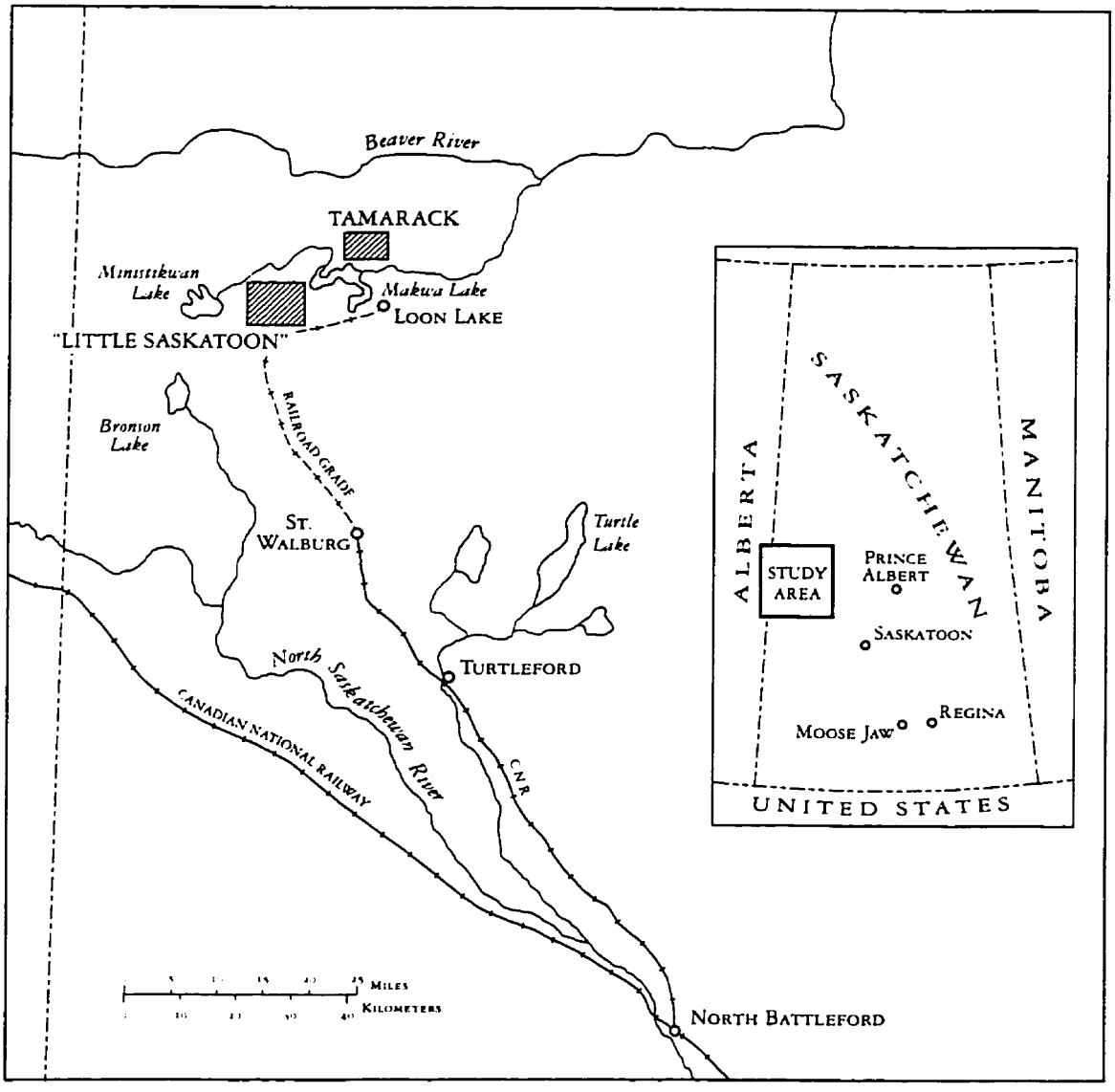

Figure 2. Location of "Little Saskatoon" and Tamarack.

Chapter Six

"Little Saskatoon"

In the late spring of 1931, three dozen families from the city of Saskatoon packed up their belongings, bade farewell to family and friends, and made their way to new homes on Saskatchewan's northern frontier. They loaded their possessions onto a train bound for St. Walburg, a small community at the end of steel some forty miles short of their final destination. There, they transferred their belongings to wagons and followed a newly completed railroad grade north toward Loon Lake (Figure 3). After a slow and often harrowing journey, the families reached their homesteads, and began the arduous task of constructing shelters, clearing land and building a community. They were neither the first nor the last in a long line of families who trekked north during the Depression years in search of a better life. Their story, however, is one that is worth telling.

These settlers represent only a trickle of the vast stream of people from urban areas who made their way back to the land during the Depression. The community that these families created, commonly known as "Little Saskatoon," is not necessarily representative of all settlements established by former city residents, nor are the particular experiences of its homesteaders likely to have been shared by everyone who went back to the land. The development of this community does, however, shed light on the relief settlement program that was carried out by the Saskatchewan government in the early years of the Depression, and how it was implemented. The fact that the settlers here were reasonably successful suggests that

Figure 3. Railroad grade from St. Walburg to Loon Lake.
Photo taken near "Little Saskatoon."
Photo by author, 1993.

there may be valuable lessons to be learned from careful analysis of this community. This chapter explores the early years at "Little Saskatoon," examines settlers' attempts to develop homesteads and documents their agricultural progress, and identifies problems encountered by these pioneers as they worked to forge new lives for themselves on the northern frontier. It also analyzes settlers' efforts to create a social infrastructure and to develop a community. These dimensions are particularly important, for success was to be measured not only by agricultural achievements, but also by a degree of social integration and cooperation. Consideration of these factors, and their impact on the settlers, also provides a baseline against which other settlements created by relief recipients at this time can be evaluated.

The Saskatoon Initiative

As economic conditions deteriorated in Saskatoon, people responded eagerly to proposals that might enable them to improve their circumstances. Families and friends gathered to discuss the continuing economic crisis, the inadequacies of existing relief measures, and plans such as the Mayor's Village Settlement Scheme, which had received considerable newspaper coverage in the first two weeks of March, 1931. With hope that the city might proceed with this plan, several families agreed to join forces in an effort to obtain land. The leaders of this group were Ray Gearhart and Stanley Sly, who had resided on neighboring farms near Donavon, a hamlet twenty miles southwest of Saskatoon, before moving to the city a few years earlier. The group's nucleus also included Gearhart's sister and brother-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Norman Watts, and Norman "Chub" Walper, another friend from the Donavon district. Other Saskatoon residents, recognizing the benefits of banding together in this venture, allied themselves with Gearhart and Sly. A small number of these people had no connection with other members of the group, but most were

friends or relatives of one another. The Charles Fowler and Richard Sipes families, for example, were related by marriage, as were the George Skuce and Albert Neilly families. Alex McLean and Charlie Trask were both carpenters who had known each other and worked together for many years before making the decision to move north. John Parker and Harold Lightfoot had both been employed by the Massey-Harris implement company as mechanics and claimed adjoining quarter sections. Still others were connected with one another through their lives in rural areas before moving to Saskatoon. Tom Arnold, a railway fireman, formerly lived in Kelfield, where he knew the Heimbeckers, who moved directly to "Little Saskatoon." Cecile and Sam Lunt, Arnold's sister and brother-in-law, also left Kelfield and took a homestead in the settlement in 1932. Arnold also knew Charlie Trask, who had lived in Springwater, Saskatchewan, a short distance from Kelfield, before he moved to Saskatoon in the late 1920s.[1] The ties of family and friendship shared by these people provided a foundation for cooperation that would prove necessary for the success of this endeavor and made "Little Saskatoon" somewhat different from most relief settlements on the northern frontier.

The process of land acquisition began in April when Gearhart and some of the others visited the Canadian National Railway Colonization office in Saskatoon to learn more about the Mayor's plan. It is unclear why the group approached the railway company, but the CNR did advertise lands and settlement opportunities, and perhaps the men thought that men at the railroad knew about the proposal, and could provide advice. During this meeting, CNR agents encouraged them to apply for

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[1]Letter from J.H. Currie, Relief Supervisor, SRC, to Deputy Minister of Natural Resources, 14 May 1931, Department of Agriculture, Lands Branch, S-Ag.11 File II. 25, SAB; *Through the Years ... Delisle, Donavon, Glendhow and O'Malley, Laura, Swanson* (Delisle, SK: Women's Institute, n.d.), 188-89; *Portrait of a Community: Kelfield, Saskatchewan, Canada* (Kelfield, SK: Kelfield History Book Committee, 1982), 111-112 and 120; *Trails North: A History of the School Districts of Letchworth, Lonsdale, Worthington* (Paradise Hill, SK: Whelan History Club, 1988), 63-64, 81, 128 and 139.

homestead land rather than waiting to see if the 40-acre scheme would be approved. With this new idea in mind, several members of the group met with Mayor Hair to determine if the city would provide assistance if they moved onto homestead lands. Hair had not yet learned of the province's decision regarding his proposed scheme, and sent them to Major John Barnett, the Deputy Minister of Natural Resources, for advice. Barnett informed the men that if they secured equipment and filed on homestead lands, they would be eligible for provincial land settlement loans that would become available on May 1. Clearly, pursuing this option seemed a better alternative than waiting for the province to make a decision about the 40-acre homestead scheme. The group decided to follow Barnett's suggestion, and selected four representatives to accompany a pair of CNR agents on a trip to the north to select a suitable block of land that was available for homestead entry. Within days, the party found a promising tract west of Loon Lake, with level to gently rolling land and apparently good soil. Although it was located some 175 miles northwest of Saskatoon, the land was not considered exceptionally isolated, for no prospective homestead site was more than ten miles from a branch line that the CNR was planning to build from St. Walburg to Loon Lake and points still further north. The men could see that the grade had already been completed to the outskirts of Loon Lake, and believed that it would be only a matter of time before tracks were laid, bringing the proposed settlement within easy reach of Saskatoon and other settled parts of the province.[2]

Upon their return, the delegation conferred with the other family heads who had expressed an interest in moving to the north. Most agreed that living near Loon Lake promised more that spending another year on relief in Saskatoon, and filed

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[2]Letter from J.P. Martin, "Special Representative," CNR, to Sinclair, 31 April 1931, RG 30, Vol. 5614, File 2231-D, NAC.

claims on the land recommended by their representatives.[3] Once they had applied for homesteads, most families submitted requests to the province for settlement loans. The application inquired extensively into the men's personal backgrounds, their occupations and training, and, most importantly, their farming experience (Appendix D). Questions included where this experience had been obtained (i.e., prairies or bush country), and what type of farming had been practiced (i.e., grain, livestock, or mixed farming). Although it believed that farming skills were the most essential ingredients for success, the Province also wanted to know what other skills a man might have which could help him secure additional funds when necessary.[4]

Relief officials believed that selection of men with the potential to succeed was necessary, but the willingness of their wives to offer their cooperation was also essential. "Fully 50 percent of the success of such a venture," a reporter remarked, "depended upon the women."[5] Women were active participants in the application process, and were questioned about their farming experience and whether they were "fully conversant with the conditions of life on a pioneer farm." Officials also asked whether they approved of their husbands' applications, and if they "willingly joined" them in taking up land. A report of the interview with the William Taylor family illustrates the perceived importance of women to the success of the effort: Mrs. Taylor was, in the words of the investigator, "a real Scotch homemaker, [who was] fully experienced, able and willing to do her bit to make a success of farming with her husband."[6]

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[3]"Choose Land in Loon Lake Area," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 21 April 1931, 3.

[4]The 1931 application was very similar to the 1932 application included as Appendix B.

[5]"25 Families Seek Farms," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 14 April 1931, 5.

[6]"Application for an Eligibility Certification, Department of Natural Resources, Province of Saskatchewan," in homestead file of William T. Taylor, Section SW 33 Township 58 Range 23, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

Who were the Saskatoon citizens who participated in this venture? Personal information has been collected for twenty-four of the families who settled at "Little Saskatoon" (Table IX). The median age of the men was forty-three, and all but two were married. Three children were the average in each family, although one family had eight children, and three others had five or more (Figure 4). These family heads had been engaged in a variety of occupations, mostly involving blue collar work, prior to their migration. More than one-third were carpenters, while the remainder included a railway fireman, a mechanic, a cook, and a salesman. All of the women were home-makers, although a few had taught school and one had practiced as a midwife. Nearly all of these men and women had grown up on farms, and several men had been engaged in farming prior to their move to Saskatoon. Half of the eighteen settlers for whom this information is available had lived in the city for periods ranging from two to four years, but a few had resided there for a decade or more.[7] The mean length of residence in Saskatoon was five years. Fully 80 percent of the men who settled at "Little Saskatoon" were known to be on relief, although it is probable that others of them had received some form of assistance prior to their departure from the city.[8] It is clear that whether these families were receiving relief or not, each viewed settlement as an opportunity that should not be passed up.[9]

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[7]Data compiled from the homestead files of selected Saskatoon settlers on file at the Saskatchewan Archives Board, the 1930 and 1931 City of Saskatoon Relief Lists, File D500.III.880, CCF, CSA, letter from F.J. Rowland to Andrew Leslie, City Commissioner, 11 September 1931, File 1069-2055 (7) 370 Unemployment [1931], CCF, CSA, and from family histories recorded in *Trails North*.

[8]The 1930 and 1931 City of Saskatoon Relief Lists, File D500.III.880, CCF, CSA.

[9]Although this scheme was designed as a relief measure, not all settlers were receiving relief. A report on relief settlement issued in 1935 by the Department of Railways, Labour and Industries states: "On the question of whether the applicants for settlement must be actually on relief, it was agreed that while this general principle would be adopted, some discretion might be exercised in accepting a first class type of settler, when it could be shown that [the] applicant would be on relief very shortly." Department of Railways, Labour and Industries, "Synopsis of Relief Settlement Plans of 1932-33-34," File 1069-1508(5) 307 Relief - Land Settlement [1935], CCF, CSA.

Table IX

Demographic Profile of Settlers Located at "Little Saskatoon," 1931

Name of Settler	Age	Martial Status	Dependent children	Years in city	Occupation
T.E. Arnold	41	M	8	5	Steam Engineer
T.F. Astley	53	M	1	?	Superintendent, CNR
A. Black	60	M	1	5	Carpenter
A. Boa	42	M	1	?	Farmer
J.N. Coulter	56	M	0	?	Coal Deliverer
A.C. Crocker	43	M	1	4	Carpenter
C.R. Fowler	45	M	1	7	Carpenter
W.H. Gibbons	36	S	-	?	Fireman, CNR
C.G. Hoffman	27	M	0	3	Laborer
R. Hogg	?	M	0	?	Carpenter
O.A. Johnson	50	M	5	2	Laborer
G.H. Knight	49	M	6	11	Caretaker
H.W. Lightfoot	35	S	-	9	Mechanic
A. McLean	37	M	2	3	Carpenter
F. Moellman	52	M	1	3	Carpenter
E.L. Murphy	47	M	4	12	Carpenter
A. Neilly	51	M	2	9	Teamster
J.H. Parker	42	M	4	2	Machinist
R.E. Sipes	50	M	2	9	Salesman
S.W. Sly	31	M	1	2	Cook
J.W. Smith	44	M	0	?	Carpenter
C.N. Trask	38	M	5	4	Carpenter
N. Walper	35	M	3	2	Laborer
N.B. Watts	36	M	3	3	Laborer

Source: See footnote 9.

Figure 4. The Murphy family. Saskatoon, 1930.
Source: Whelan History Club.

When the Saskatoon city council offered to provide financial assistance to those who desired to take up a homestead, these families eagerly expressed their interest.

The first group of Saskatoon residents left the city with high hopes as they prepared to begin new lives in the north. Here was a chance to become self-supporting once again. They knew that they would still be dependent on the government for assistance, but at least they could avoid the stigma of direct relief. The men would be working again, not on a make-work relief project, but on developing their own homesteads. Although funds were in short supply, the city was able to assist a total of thirty-eight families. City council agreed to pay the $16 filing fee for a homestead claim and $17 in freight charges needed to ship each family's possessions to St. Walburg, the railway point closest to the settlement area. In addition, about half of the families received funds to cover railway passenger fares, and a handful were given small grocery vouchers.[10] Noting that some of the settlers were "not overly blessed with worldly goods," the Mayor appealed to local citizens to donate any equipment they could spare. "An old wagon, plow, harrow, garden tools, an old horse, and even clothing would be greatly appreciated." Materials were provided by a large number of citizens and businesses, including the Hudson's Bay Company, which supplied an ax to each family.[11]

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[10]Letter from Rowland to Leslie, 11 September 1931, File 1069-2055 (7) 370 Unemployment [1931], CCF, CSA; "Thirty Families Prepare for Trek to Farm Location," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 6 May 1931, 3.

[11]"Thirty Families Prepare for Trek to Farm Location," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 6 May 1931, 3.

The Summer of 1931

The area that became known as "Little Saskatoon" also attracted farmers from other parts of the province. A dozen families from the drought-stricken region of southwestern Saskatchewan, particularly the area around Maple Creek, had already relocated to homesteads here between 1929 and 1931. Others, including friends and relatives of the Saskatoon people, came from farms near Kelfield and Outlook, driven north by dust and prolonged drought. These new homesteads provided an escape from the difficult conditions in the south and another chance for these farmers to reestablish themselves. When settlers from Saskatoon arrived in the spring of 1931, followed by a few more former city residents the next spring, the settlement grew to include an area of twelve square miles, with sixty quarter-sections claimed (Figure 5).

The settlers at "Little Saskatoon" appeared eager to make the best of their situation. The first few months in the new settlement were difficult for the former city residents, but their desire to succeed, their existing relationships with one another, and their willingness to cooperate eased the transition. When they first arrived on their homesteads, they built shacks and cleared a small amount of land for a garden. Stanley Sly, one of the group's organizers, described the area as a "regular little heaven," and reported to the Saskatoon newspaper that "it would be impossible to induce any of [the settlers] to return to the city." Sly rather optimistically concluded, "While we have been there only a few weeks we are now practically self-supporting." The newspaper's editor responded that although the claims of self-sufficiency may have been a "little exaggerated," it nonetheless appeared that the settlers were content and that the scheme was off to a good start.[12]

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[12]"New Settlers Are Sold on 'Little Saskatoon'," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 20 June 1931, 3; "Little Saskatoon," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 23 June 1931, 9.

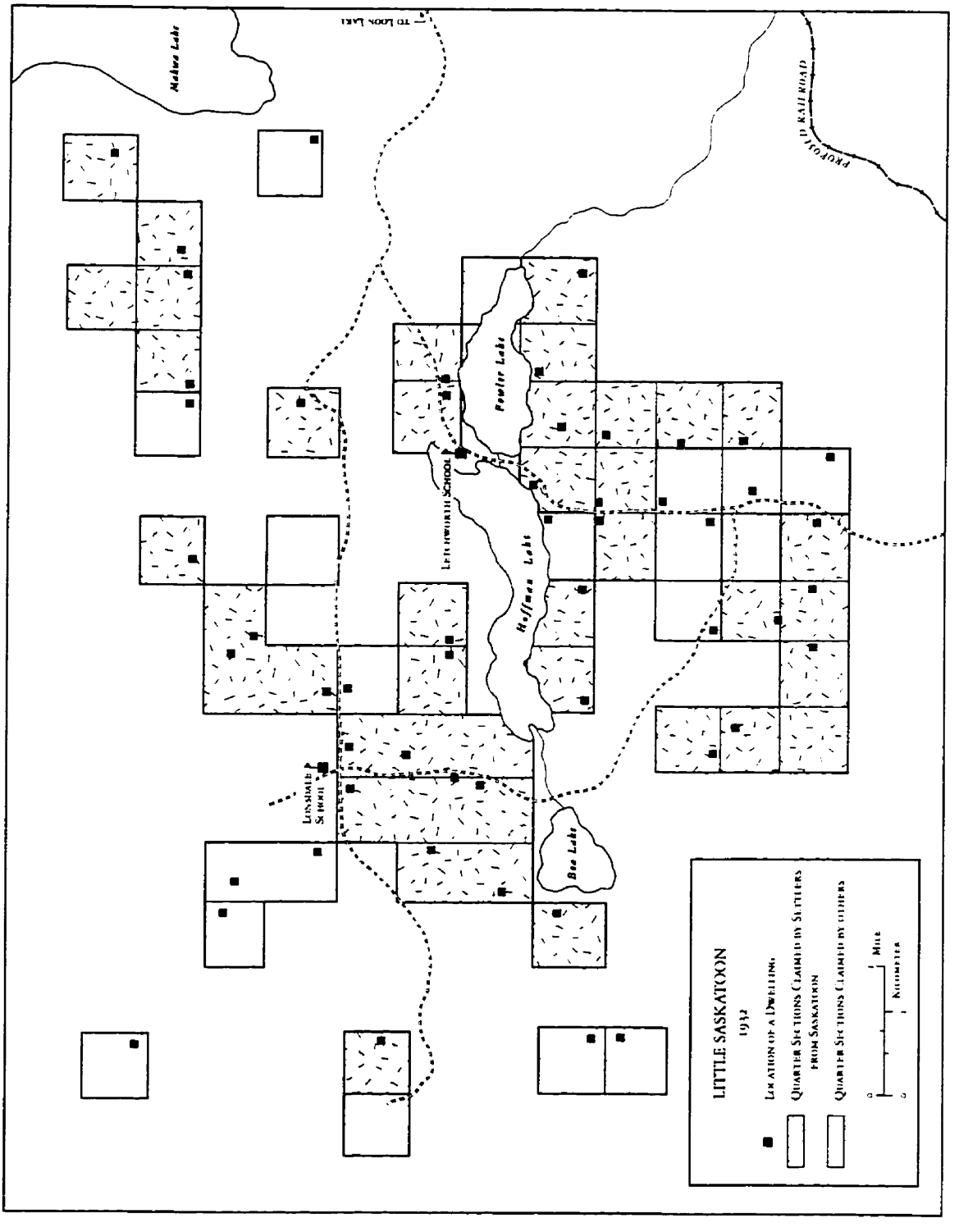

Figure 5. Homestead claims made at "Little Saskatoon," 1932

By nearly all accounts, it did appear that the community was doing well. Sly, who was to prove tireless in his efforts to promote the settlement, reported in June that the settlers had constructed homes and planted gardens. Within a week of planting, Sly declared, "green shoots" had appeared in his garden.[13] In September, Ray Gearhart told a *Star-Phoenix* reporter that the group was doing as well as could be expected. Contradicting Sly's earlier statement that they were "practically self-supporting," Gearhart conceded that they had yet to reach this point, but that they were "all making splendid progress in that direction." Every settler had between two and ten acres cleared in preparation for breaking in the spring of 1932, had fair garden crops, and expected a very good potato crop. In an expression of gratitude for the assistance that the city had given to him and his fellow settlers, he offered to ship two tons of fish to Saskatoon's relief office. Gearhart, who as events would prove was a better organizer than a settler, also declared that he planned to establish a wood-working plant, and was visiting the city to secure a market for the wagons, sleighs, and other agricultural implements that he expected to produce.[14] In October, J.H. Currie, the Saskatchewan Relief Commission supervisor based in Saskatoon, reported that the settlers were warmly housed and well prepared for the coming winter. Currie also stated that a feed shortage that existed among some of the settlers had occurred because many had arrived after the haying season and, to complicate matters, heavy rains in August had flooded many hay meadows. There were, however, plenty of oats in the district to feed all the stock, and the relief department had secured an adequate supply.[15]

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[13]"New Settlers Are Sold on 'Little Saskatoon'," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 20 June 1931, 3.

[14]"Offers Fish to Repay this City," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 14 September 1931, 3.

[15]"Face Winter Confidently," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 31 October 1931, 3.

Relief Work

By the end of the summer of the 1931, settlers had built homes and constructed shelters for their livestock, planted, and in some cases harvested, gardens, and cleared small amounts of land (Figures 6 and 7). As they prepared for winter, the men continued to make improvements on their homesteads, but they also hoped to secure employment in the road work camps that could provide them with some sorely needed cash. In August, W.W. Whelan, Chief Inspector for the Department of Natural Resources, visited the settlement and reported that the settlers were doing very well. Just before his trip, a large number of the district's settlers had attended a meeting in Loon Lake, at which the Minister of Highways promised that road work would begin shortly, and that jobs would be available for the settlers.[16] Progress in establishing these camps was slow, however, and by the end of October, their exact location had still not been determined. The issue of location was of concern to local residents because if the camps were established close enough to their homes, settlers could remain at home and report to work on a daily basis.[17] Before this matter was settled, a more significant problem arose. In late December, one homesteader complained that he had been informed that only those who had received settlement loans from the province qualified for the relief work. Having been denied a loan because the quota had already been reached, this man had made his way north on his own resources, and was now in need of funds more than ever before. He demanded to know why the highway department was bringing in men

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[16]Letter from W.W. Whelan, Chief Inspector, DNR, to John Barnett, Deputy Minister of Natural Resources, 4 August 1931, Department of Natural Resources Files, S-NR 1/1, D-124-FR, SAB.

[17]Letter from G.R. Sexsmith, Foreman, Government Relief Camp, to G.E. Tomsett, Department of Labour and Industries, 25 October 1931, Unemployment Relief - Loon Lake Project, 1931-32, Saskatchewan Relief Commission Files [R-SRC], Micro 40, File 21, SAB.

Figure 6. Log structure on the George Knight homestead.
Photo by author, 1993.

Figure 7. Small patch of cleared land.
Photo by author, 1997.

from other parts of the province to build roads when poor settlers such as himself were being "turned down flat, [and] not allowed to earn a few cents."[18]

In December, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) sent a telegram to Currie, the relief supervisor, that sheds more light on this particular problem. In his reply, Currie reported that he had interviewed many of the settlers in the north, and "found every man ... anxious to take advantage of an opportunity to go into camp." The settlers, however, had not yet been informed of any opportunities for them to secure employment from this source. Local DNR officials, with whom Currie had spoken, informed him that there would be no road work for any settlers. This news frustrated Currie, who had been told earlier by the Deputy Minister of Natural Resources that a hundred positions in the camps would be reserved for loan settlers. Infuriated at this turn of events, Currie suggested that "someone ... appears to be doing his utmost to throw a monkey wrench into the machinery ...."[19]

How this issue was resolved is uncertain, but less than two weeks later, Currie informed settlers that twenty-eight spaces had been made available in three camps, and that they were to report immediately to the closest camp where work would be given, provided space still existed. Currie reminded settlers that under the terms of their loan agreements, they were required to accept this work and that unless they could show sufficient cause, refusal to work would result in termination of relief.[20] Although the number of positions was far fewer than Currie had been promised, in the end it made no difference. Each camp was established near Meadow Lake, some fifty miles east of "Little Saskatoon," so Currie excused all of

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[18]Letter from J.A. Leitinger to Department of Highways, 22 December 1931, Unemployment Relief - Loon Lake Project, 1931-32, R-SRC Files, Micro 40, File 21, SAB.

[19]Letter from Currie to John Barnett, Deputy Minister of Natural Resources, 27 December 1931, S-Ag.11 FileII.25, SAB.

[20]Letter from Currie to settlers, 7 January 1932, S-Ag.11 FileII.25, SAB.

the settlers of their obligation because of the distance they would have to travel to obtain work.[21]

The lack of relief road employment was a sore point for many settlers who had hoped to work off their relief and to bring home a bit of desperately needed cash. In the summer of 1932, Mrs. Charles Gould wrote to the Provincial land department explaining her family's inability to pay taxes:

> We are in receipt of various notices for taxes, interest and what not. I wonder if you realize how hard the Provincial Gov. [sic] laws are making it for settlers. It used to be a hero's work to prove up a homestead for ten dollars. Now we have endless expense and nothing with which to meet it.

She continued her letter by outlining conditions in the settlement, noting the difficulty of clearing land, and the problems associated with developing a northern homestead. Mrs. Gould suggested that work be given to settlers to complete the road from "Little Saskatoon" to Loon Lake:

> Could not the settlers here about be given the chance to work out some of their taxes and interest on the road which the Relief Gang left unfinished. ... It would give us a chance to make good and at present we are all up against it. We can sell nothing for cash, neither can the men get work for cash.[22]

Six months later, her appeal for relief road work had apparently been answered, as her husband was now employed by a road building crew. The interest on the settlement loan still had not been paid, however, and the Department of Natural Resources wanted to know why. Mrs. Gould again replied that the family was unable to raise sufficient cash to make the payment because work was not available nor could they sell anything:

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[21]List of settlers declared unable to go to relief camp, 7 January 1932, Unemployment Relief - Loon Lake Project, 1931-32, R-SRC Files, Micro 40, File 21, SAB.

[22]Letter from Mrs. C.S. Gould to Provincial Lands Office, 14 June 1932, in homestead file of Charles S. Gould, Section SE 28 Township 58 Range 23, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

> Wouldn't it be possible to make arrangement so we could pay that interest [through relief road work]. The same way we are paying back relief $1.00 a day.

She concluded: "We are just as anxious as you are to get this straightened up but cannot see any way other than the road work."[23]

The problem surrounding the provision of relief road work ultimately worked itself out, with settlers permitted to work off their taxes at camps within the district (Figures 8 and 9). The lack of cooperation, or at least, communication, between various government departments suggest, however, that problems would continue. The need to make payments on their loans, to pay taxes, and to purchase certain necessities that relief vouchers did not cover presented a serious dilemma for some settlers. The fact, too, that so few jobs were available meant that cash was a scarce commodity.

Developing a Homestead

Settlers were occupied during their first months on the land by constructing shelter for the families and livestock, and clearing small areas for gardens, and were confident that they would make significant strides in the development of their homesteads in the coming months. In late March, 1932, the city relief officer received a letter from a settler who was happy to share his story. This man reported that he had twelve acres cleared and ready for breaking, three horses, a cow, six chickens and a rooster. He was enthusiastic about his plans for the coming summer, and was certain that he would make a success of this venture.[24] Shortly after this

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[23]Letter from Gould to Provincial Lands Office, 4 December 1932, in homestead file of Charles S. Gould, Section SE 28, Township 58 Range 23, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

[24]"Saskatoon People Making Good on Loon Lake Farms," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 28 March 1932, 3.

Figure 8. Road constructed as relief project from
"Little Saskatoon" to Loon Lake.
Source: Saskatchewan Archives, R-A 8539.

Figure 9. Sam and Cecile Lunt with oxen team on the road to Loon Lake.
Source: Saskatchewan Archives, R-A 22277.

story was published, a United Church missionary who had visited "Little Saskatoon" provided a very different portrait of the new settlement. In a report to *The Western Producer*, the weekly newspaper of the United Farmers of Canada, Reverend A.R. Taylor described the conditions he had encountered. Few of the city men, Taylor advised, had accomplished much in the way of farm work, and he believed that the placement of these men on the land had not been particularly successful. Commenting on this report, the Saskatchewan section of the United Farmers expressed sympathy with the desire of authorities to solve the unemployment problem, but demanded that before any further settlement of the unemployed be made, the province undertake a thorough and disinterested investigation to discover the truth about the settlement scheme.[25]

These two reports provide contradictory accounts of the new settlement, and the latter raises serious questions about the advisability of placing urban residents on homesteads in the north. It is true that the men had in fact made little progress in their agricultural endeavors, but they had been on the land less than a year when the minister traveled to the area. The time of his visit, at the end of winter when conditions were the harshest, might also have affected his perception of the situation. All settlers were aware that they would be pioneers on a new frontier, and because of their late departure in the 1931 season, no one expected that they would accomplish more than the planting of a small garden and the clearing of a few acres.[26] Little more than this had actually been achieved, but none of the settlers blamed anyone for this circumstance nor did they want to return to their former lives in the city. It is also true that isolation far from Saskatoon meant that their concerns could be easily

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[25]"Conditions Bad in Loon Lake District," *The Western Producer*, 31 March 1932, 5.

[26]"Thirty Families Prepare for Trek to Farm Location," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 6 May 1931, 3.

ignored, but for the first year or two, the city tried to keep in touch with its former residents and to assist them whenever possible.[27]

After a full year of work on their homesteads, settlers had made considerable progress, particularly in light of their limited equipment and meager financial resources. In September 1932, the province's Minister of Municipal Affairs, Howard McConnell, toured the community in the company of W.J. Mather, the agricultural editor of the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*. Mather and McConnell visited the homes of sixteen former Saskatoon residents to "discover what progress had been made and to investigate some difficulties that had arisen." The newspaperman praised the progress made by the settlers and declared that although it had been "a tough struggle for many of them," they were "nearer their goal than they were a year ago."[28] Their reports suggest that these families had taken remarkable strides toward self-sufficiency.

Charlie Fowler, who had formerly been employed as a carpenter in Saskatoon, was the first settler whom the two men visited. Fowler had a team of horses, a cow, three pigs, and sixty-five chickens. Sufficient hay was stacked in his yard to get the animals through the winter, and the six acres of oats he had planted were doing well. Although he reported that chipmunks and rabbits had "played havoc with the part of his garden above ground," he expected to dig enough potatoes, turnips and carrots to get through the winter (Figure 10). Fred Moellman, another former carpenter, was also doing well. He had eight and a half acres broken, but unfortunately the crop he had planted had failed. He had thirty-five loads of hay

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[27]"Harness Needed by Loon Lake Man," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 27 April 1932, 9; "New Settlers in Need of Clothes," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 23 September 1932, 10; "Loon Lake People in Call for Toys," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 16 November 1932, 3.

[28]"Loon Lake People Happy in New Life on Frontier," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 21 September 1932, 3.

Figure 10. Men with potatoes from garden.
Source: Saskatchewan Archives, R-A 8571.

with which to feed his stock, but no grain. Moellman had two horses, two cows and two calves, some pigs, and fifty chickens. The writer did not mention a garden, but he did report that Mrs. Moellman had preserved sixty-three quarts of wild blueberries. When Mather and McConnell stopped at the home of George Knight, a former garage employee, they found Knight, his wife, and four of his children busy clearing land on a neighbor's farm (Figure 11). Knight had agreed to do the work in exchange for a horse, which brought his total to three. He also had two cows milking, and had kept as many as a dozen pigs, but had since given some away. Knight had six and a half acres of land broken, and three additional acres cleared and ready for breaking.[29] The progress made by these individuals was representative of that made by many others in the community.

Most reports from the settlers reflected their commitment to settlement and the progress they had made since their arrival, but several people discussed problems they had encountered, and made suggestions for improving their situation. In the spring of 1932, provincial authorities had sent a tractor into the settlement to break land that settlers had cleared. A total of seventy acres were broken, with the average amount per settler being five acres. Fred Whitehouse, a former machinist, urged the Province to provide heavier tractors to continue the breaking operations, and he suggested that the highway department send one of its road building tractors. The need for more powerful tractors became apparent again in the spring when the outfit that was supplied was frequently caught up in heavy roots.[30]

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[29]"Loon Lake People Happy in New Life on Frontier," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 21 September 1932, 3; "Loon Lake Folks Anxious to Have Schools Opened," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 22 September 1932, 3 and 5.

[30]"Loon Lake People Happy in New Life on Frontier," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 21 September 1932, 3.

Figure 11. Mr. and Mrs. George Knight, with sons
Jack, George and Fred, 1934.
Source: Whelan History Club.

A second matter of concern to the settlers was the condition of the settlers' livestock. Although cattle and horses could survive on hay, grain was essential for the horses if they were to do heavy work. The failure of the province to provide feed grain often meant that horses were too weak to work in clearing operations or with the mowing of hay. Homesteaders also wanted feed grain for their pigs. Mather, the agricultural editor, reported that although every family he visited had swine, "'Pigs or no pigs' [was] a burning question in the settlement." Pigs needed grain, and because no wheat or barley was grown within thirty miles of the settlement, settlers faced a serious dilemma. Mather discussed this issue with a half-dozen homesteaders who were working on a nearby road project. The settlers had nearly two dozen pigs among them, but were unable to provide grain for the animals. One man said that the pigs he had fenced in two months before were now so much thinner that they could fit through the cracks. Where pigs had been given skim milk and permitted to scavenge, they were making "fair gains," but if they were to be kept through the winter, grain would have to be provided as a relief measure. Provincial officials believed that keeping swine through the winter was not economical, and argued that the pigs should be killed. Few settlers wanted to do this, however, because as Mather reported, they remembered the "rashers of bacon that they [had] on the breakfast table in Saskatoon and the manna of wild meat seem[ed] tasteless" to them.[31]

A month after these reports were published, an anonymous "humanitarian" wrote a long letter to the editor in which he declared that although the *Star-Phoenix* reporter had made "a good case for the provincial settlement scheme," one who "reads between the lines" would have a very different interpretation. This writer had

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[31]"Loon Lake People Anxious to Have Schools Opened," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 21 September 1932, 3.

nothing positive to say about the community, despite that fact that most residents were themselves pleased with what they had achieved. In short, he considered that the settlement was an utter failure, that Mather had failed to provide a true report on conditions, and that the homesteaders had yet to realize the extent of the hardships they faced. In his concluding paragraph, he declared:

> Anyway, it was good to read that 'not a single homesteader expressed himself as dissatisfied with the land on which he had located.' ... It is said that 'Hope told a flattering tale.' Let us hope, however, that in this instance there is more than mere flattery. It is at least good to know that the settlement is in Western Canada, where we are accustomed to have faith in the future. This thought may save a lot of heart burning.[32]

It is difficult to know how to judge these comments. If conditions in the settlement were, in fact, so desperate, why were settlers not lodging complaints with government officials or telling the newspaper of their plight? There was no official response in the press to this condemnation of the settlement scheme, but a homesteader in northwestern Saskatchewan wrote a long and insightful letter to the editor addressing the issues raised. He regarded the letter from the "humanitarian" as pure speculation. In his opinion, the north country had a great future, but homesteading was "no picnic and if a man [wanted] to make a success of it, he must be willing to work hard and dispense with luxuries for years to come." This writer made it clear that creating a farm in the bush required sacrifice and dedication, but he agreed that there was room for great improvement in the policies of the government. Wild game, he suggested, was not the blessing everyone supposed it to be, and human nature would simply not stand for a diet of rabbit meat: "A man soon gets so that he cannot look an honest rabbit in the face." He also believed that there was a significant need for milk cows, particularly among those settlers with children:

> A cow costs fifty dollars, but in the course of a year it furnishes milk that saves more than fifty dollars in groceries and other provisions that

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[32]"The Loon Lake Settlers," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 15 October 1932, 5.

> would have to be supplied on relief and at the end of the year the cow is still worth fifty dollars and has produced a calf that will [increase] in value. A cow is the cheapest means of providing relief.[33]

This was a lesson that both the Department of Natural Resources, which supervised the settlers, and the Saskatchewan Relief Commission were slow to learn. In December, 1931, the DNR agreed to supply a cow for Stanley Sly, but the field officer would authorize only $35 for this purchase, a figure that was simply too low. Fortunately, Currie, the relief supervisor, was in the area visiting and intervened. He sent a telegram to the Deputy Minister of Natural Resources stating that forty-five to fifty dollars was a reasonable price for a cow "worth feeding."[34] The Deputy Minister replied that the price was "far in excess of general prices," but that he was prepared, under special circumstances, to authorize payment up to $45. Any amount above that would have to be covered by the settler "without lien" on the animal. He believed that higher prices should only be paid when "urgent family circumstances" made the purchase of a cow a necessity.[35] Sly eventually received his cow, but other settlers were, initially at least, not so fortunate.

In early March, 1932, the DNR wrote to Currie that they had received letters from two Saskatoon settlers, A.C. Crocker and Elijah Murphy, complaining that their milk rations had been eliminated and that consequently their families were suffering from a lack of adequate nourishment.[36] Whether the rations were restored or not cannot be determined, but two months later, Murphy wrote to the DNR wanting to know why his application for a cow had been turned down.

> Many of the settlers in this district applied for a cow, and their applications were passed without questions and mine was turned down.

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[33]"Homesteading," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 12 November 1932, 5.

[34]Telegram from Currie to Barnett, 11 December 1931, S-Ag.11 File II.25, SAB.

[35]Telegram from Barnett to Currie, 11 December 1931, S-Ag.11 File II.25, SAB.

[36]Letter from DNR to Currie, 4 March 1932, S-Ag.11 File II.25, SAB.

> Some of the settlers have no children, and I have four, the youngest a little girl 3 years old. We must have milk for these children....

His exasperation with the Department was apparent when he concluded:

> There is about $300 against this 1/4 now and if your department thinks it is good business to lose that amount rather than to spend $45 or $50 for a cow for me why that is up to you. I came here to try to make a home for my family but if I am not going to be given the same chance as the others my loan can be cancelled [sic] and I will get out.[37]

By the end of the summer, Murphy had obtained a cow, as had most of his neighbors. Problems such as these arose because no guidelines had been established for provision of either livestock or feed. DNR officials had to respond to settler needs on a case-by-case basis, ensuring that some settlers would be dissatisfied by the amount and kind of assistance that was given.

The cow issue was not raised again, but in its place loomed a larger, more serious problem for the settlers. In the summer of 1932, the DNR sent an ominous letter to the Saskatchewan Relief Commission, apparently in response to a letter written by a settler to Premier J.T.M. Anderson complaining that he and his neighbors were starving. The Premier asked the DNR to investigate the allegations that "women and children were crying because of the lack of food." The department had its local field man investigate the complaint, and as a result of his findings, provided additional food orders for the district's homesteaders. The DNR concluded that "according to information received from [our District Superintendent], which has been backed by the R.C.M.P. patrol in that district, the provisions supplied by the Department were certainly needed." Sixteen settlers received grocery orders averaging $5.50, and all but one were provided with a sack of flour.[38] There is no

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[37]Letter from E.L. Murphy to Barnett, 23 May 1932, in homestead file of Elijah L. Murphy, Section SW 13, Township 58, Range 24, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

[38]Letter from W.R. Holmes, DNR, to A. Kendall, SRC, 27 July 1932, R-SRC files, Micro M, File 14, SAB; letter from J.H. Currie to DNR, 29 July 1932, S-Ag.11 File II.25, SAB.

doubt that this situation was a serious one, and its gravity cannot be ignored. To suggest, however, as the author of the original complaint did, that starvation was widespread, is simply unfounded. Families received a ten dollar grocery voucher each month, although most complained that this barely provided adequate food for the entire month. The fact that after an investigation, families were given half again that amount on this one occasion does indicate that food was sometimes in short supply, but that the problem was ordinarily not so severe as to warrant any increase in the monthly relief vouchers.

Living on the Land

These various problems indicate that the first year, and indeed the many months thereafter, were not easy ones for settlers from the city. No one had expected that they would be, but if perhaps they had naively assumed otherwise, those notions were quickly dispelled. Nevertheless, most settlers believed that the settlement plan was an opportunity not to let slip by. Although about one-third of the Saskatoon people cancelled their claims after no more than two years, this figure is inflated by the fact that some of these people never actually established residence. For example, Edgar Hollinger, a fifty-one year old carpenter, received a letter in May, 1932, from the Department of Natural Resources inquiring about his intentions to settle on the homestead he had claimed in 1931. The city had paid his filing fee, but the DNR had heard nothing else from the man. In his reply, Hollinger stated that he had never seen the land and was "certainly not going to bother with it."[39] Most of the other settlers from Saskatoon persevered and for these hardy souls, each change of season brought progress in the development of their homesteads. Of those families who

[39]Edgar Hollinger, Declaration of Abandonment, 5 June 1933, Section NE 23, Township 58, Range 24, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

remained on the land for more than three years, all eventually received title to their homesteads.

By 1934, three years after their arrival, the bleak conditions that had initially confronted settlers had dramatically improved. In the fall of that year, the DNR's field inspector, Fred Mitchell, conducted a survey of settlers at "Little Saskatoon" to determine their agricultural progress. This information, combined with supplementary data from homestead patent applications, suggests that the settlement as a whole was progressing reasonably well. Houses that had been constructed in the first year had since been improved and expanded. The average dwelling was an eighteen by twenty-four foot structure built of logs and lumber, but more than a half dozen settlers had already constructed more substantial frame houses (Figure 12). Shelter for livestock was equally well-built. Stables averaged sixteen by twenty-two feet and were constructed of logs, although two settlers had larger structures made of lumber. In addition, most settlers had erected granaries, sheds or garages, and hen houses.[40] Archie Boa, a former resident of the city and veteran of the first World War, had constructed an twenty-two by twenty-eight foot frame house for his family, as well as a twenty-two by twenty-eight foot frame stable, a garage, a hen house, and a granary. Alex McLean, a carpenter, was even more industrious, and had built a twenty by twenty-four foot frame house, in addition to a twenty-two by twenty-eight foot log stable, and hen, ice and smoke houses (Figure 13).[41]

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[40]The information in this and the following paragraph is compiled from the progress reports and patent applications in the homestead files of settlers in Township 58, Ranges 23 and 24, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

[41]Progress Report of Field Officer (hereafter PR), n.d. [October 1934], in the homestead file of Archie Boa, Section SE 16, Township 58, Range 24, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB; Homestead Patent Application (hereafter HPA), 17 December 1935, in the homestead file of Alex McLean, Section SW 24, Township 58, Range 24, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

Figure 12. Pioneer home in northern Saskatchewan.
Source: Saskatchewan Archives, R-A 8559.

Figure 13. The Alex McLean home, ca. 1935.
Source: Whelan History Club.

Six of the homesteaders had at least twenty acres in crops, and most of the others were cultivating more than ten (Figure 14). Settlers also had an average of six additional acres cleared and ready for breaking. Although a handful of men had prepared less than an acre for cultivation, most community residents were making respectable progress toward the development of their homesteads. Nearly all families had good gardens that were producing well. The amount of equipment varied from one settler to the next, with some having harrows, discs, and mowers, but every settler possessed a wagon and a plow. Numbers of livestock within the settlement were respectable, despite losses to disease and the difficulty of acquiring adequate feed. Most families had a team of horses, and by now every settler had a least one milk cow. Cattle were quite numerous, with an average of three per settler. Three homesteaders had eight, ten, and twelve head of cattle respectively, a suggestion that some men regarded livestock as a better income producer than crops. Poultry was rarely enumerated, but nearly all settlers had large hen houses, indicating that chickens were an important part of the homestead economy. Charlie Fowler, the former carpenter, kept four horses, two cows and a calf, two pigs, and fifty hens. Elijah Murphy, another former carpenter, had two horses, three cows, three pigs, and twenty-five hens.[42]

Mitchell was pleased with the initiative that most settlers demonstrated. Angus Black, for example, was farming his son's land as well as his own. Fred Moellman was away working as a foreman on the relief road work project when Mitchell visited. Although the J.H. Parkers had only "fair" home conditions, these were "improving." Both the settler and his wife were working faithfully, and

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[42]PR, n.d. [October 1934], in the homestead file of Charles R. Fowler, Section SE 19, Township 58, Range 23, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB; PR, n.d. [October 1934], in the homestead file of Elijah L. Murphy, Section SW 13, Township 58, Range 24, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

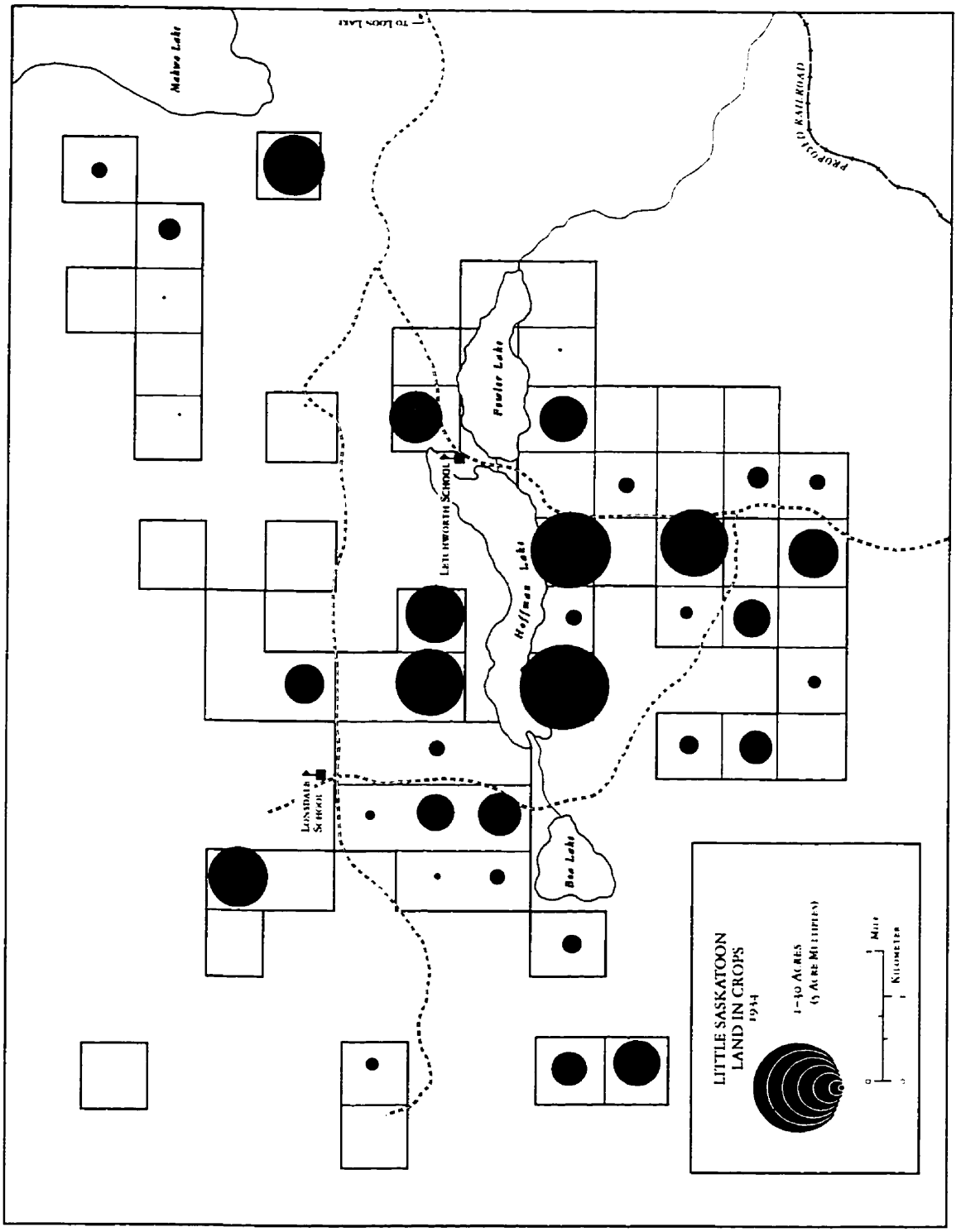

Figure 14. "Little Saskatoon": Land in Crops, 1934.

Parker had recently made an agreement to log during the winter for a local mill. There were, however, exceptions, and the lack of industry demonstrated by certain individuals was apparent. A handful of the settlers had fewer than five acres broken. In the case of Thomas Arnold, the former railway fireman, Mitchell recorded that while this man and his wife had "done better this year," there was still "room for lots of improvement."[43] Norman Watts had broken thirteen acres, but had not seeded all of it, claiming that he did not have adequate horse power. He had a new house, but Mitchell reported that his farm was only in fair condition. The reason for his lack of progress was likely the fact that his wife had left him with three children, and according to the field officer, it was "doubtful" that she would return.[44]

In the summer of 1934, J.H. Currie, the relief supervisor based in Saskatoon, traveled to "Little Saskatoon" and submitted a report of his own about the community to his superiors at the Relief Commission. He suggested that some of the settlers had "sufficient animals or poultry to provide their own meat supplies," and had a plentiful supply of vegetables from their gardens, although some would still require flour, sugar, tea and oil from the relief department.[45] Currie believed that

> a large portion of the settlers in the Saskatoon settlement can be placed on a revised list .... They are growing an abundance of feed this year, are better equipped to harvest it, and they will, undoubtedly, have grown [in most cases], enough wheat to meet their flour needs. This of course would be ground at the local ... mill on a custom basis.[46]

It is clear that the purpose of this visit was to determine the progress of the settlers

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[43]PR, n.d. [October 1934], in the homestead file of Thomas E. Arnold, Section NE 20, Township 58, Range 24, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

[44]PR, 6 October 1934, in the homestead file of Norman B. Watts, Section NW 1, Township 58, Range 24, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

[45]Letter from Currie to Kendall, 9 July 1934, Correspondence with Relief Supervisors, J.H. Currie - Saskatoon, 1931-1934, R-SRC Files, Micro H, Reel 7, SAB.

[46]Letter from Currie to Kendall, 30 July 1934, Correspondence with Relief Supervisors, J.H. Currie - Saskatoon, 1931-1934, R-SRC Files, Micro H, Reel 7, SAB.

and their status as relief recipients, but it is also obvious that the relief supervisor believed that the settlement, as a whole, was making significant headway and the settlers were well on their way to self-sufficiency.

Measures of Agricultural Progress

The data presented in the previous section provides a clear picture of the level of agricultural development in "Little Saskatoon" in 1934. Compiling statistics after this time is more difficult, for once a homesteader had satisfied the residence and cultivation requirements and applied for a patent, no further documentation was provided in the homestead files. As nearly 60 percent of the settlers had applied for patents within five years of initial settlement, little data exists for a later period. The lack of tax records for the district also makes uncovering agricultural development in later years problematic, as does the absence of reports such as those of Mitchell and Currie. To acquire title, a homesteader had to cultivate a minimum of twenty acres, and by the time most patent applications were made, the average settler had twenty-five acres under cultivation. In 1934, settlers had owned three cattle on average, a number that increased to slightly more than four near the end of the decade.[47]

The homesteads of two men, one a carpenter and the other a former teamster, are perhaps typical of the district's homesteads in the late 1930s. Fred Moellman, the carpenter, had fifteen acres under cultivation in 1938, with an additional seven acres broken. He also owned eight cattle and a team of horses. The Moellmans lived in a sixteen by thirty-eight foot home constructed of log and lumber. Improvements on his property included a log stable, hen house and granary, sixty acres of fencing, and

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[47]This information is compiled from the patent applications in the homestead files of settlers in Township 58, Ranges 23 and 24, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

a thirty-six foot well.[48] The other man, Albert Neilly, had fifteen acres in crop and another eleven acres broken, and owned four cattle and two horses (Figure 15). Neilly's homestead consisted of a sixteen by twenty-two foot frame house, valued at $250, as well as a large log stable, a frame hen house and granary. His homestead was completely surrounded by a wire and rail fence.[49] Most other settlers, including those who had already proved up on their land, were doing at least as well.[50]

The figures cited above reflect only the progress made by former city dwellers who made their home in "Little Saskatoon." Comparison of their farming records with those kept by families who had relocated directly from farms in the south reveals that the people from Saskatoon were making very respectable progress (Table X). Existing records for 1936 show that, on average, both groups had about the same amount of land under cultivation, that the city men ordinarily kept more cattle, and that most settlers, regardless of their place of origin, owned a team of horses. These figures do not reflect conditions on homesteads for which final patent applications had been made, but they do suggest that by this time there were few distinctions between farms operated by former Saskatoon residents or those of their rural counterparts. Similarly, city people also compare favorably with their neighbors in terms of the amount of time taken to earn title to their land. Eighty-eight percent of the Saskatoon settlers earned title before the end of 1940, compared

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[48]HPA, 27 April 1938, in the homestead file of Fred Moellman, Section SE 26, Township 58, Range 24, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

[49]HPA, 20 April 1940, in the homestead file of Albert H. Neilly, Section SW 23, Township 58, Range 24, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

[50]This observation is based on information collected from the progress reports and patent applications found in the homestead files of settlers in Township 58, Ranges 23 and 24, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

Figure 15. Land Clearing with oxen.
Source: Saskatchewan Archives, R-A 8558.

Table X

Comparison of agricultural progress made by city men and relocated farmers at "Little Saskatoon," 1936[a]

	City Men	Farmers[b]
Number of Individuals	14	7
Number of acres cultivated[c]	13.1	13.4
Number of cattle	4.3	2.8
Number of horses	1.8	2.0

Source: Patent applications in the homestead files of settlers in Township 58, Range 23 and 24, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

[a]All numbers represent means.

[b]Includes the three individuals listed in Table X and two men who arrived after 1932.

[c]Includes acres in crops and acres broken but not yet planted.

to eighty-five percent of the relocated farmers who received their patents within the same time period.[51] It is difficult to determine how much weight should be given to statistics such as these, but one fact does stand out: the former city dwellers were making good faith efforts to succeed, and were doing at least as well as those people who had moved to the area from another farm.

Despite the acreages cleared and crops planted, few settlers could expect to survive on the money they might earn from the sale of their crops. Settlers generally harvested enough to feed their livestock, and in some cases, to provide seed for the next year's crop. Much of their own food was still supplied by the relief department, although all settlers had large gardens which supplemented their food allotments. Vegetables grew well, and potatoes, turnips, onions, and carrots could easily be stored in root cellars for consumption during the winter months. Seeds for vegetables and flowers were often donated by businesses in Saskatoon. Some of the new settlers were, however, not completely familiar with plants and flowers. In a package of mixed flower seeds, Alice Murphy found some Indian hemp seeds and planted them as a backdrop for her flower garden. She thought they were a lovely addition and even had her daughter pose in front of them for a photograph. It was not until an R.C.M.P. officer visited her home that Mrs. Murphy learned that her beautiful plants were marijuana. The plants were promptly destroyed.[52]

Canning of wild fruits in the summer months also provided a more varied diet in the lean months of winter. Picking wild berries often became a day-long affair with a picnic lunch; few complained of the hard work because they realized that these berries would be the main ingredient of winter desserts.[53] Raspberries,

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[51]Progress reports and patent applications found in the homestead files of settlers in Township 58, Ranges 23 and 24, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

[52]*Trails North*, 96.

[53]*Trails North*, 43, 53 and 74.

blueberries, cranberries, and saskatoon berries were plentiful, and, in some cases, the bushes were transplanted to settlers' gardens. The only problem appeared to be a shortage of cans and jars, and, perhaps more importantly, a lack of sugar. In an effort to assist the new settlers, Currie issued an appeal in the summer of 1932 to women's organizations in Saskatoon for containers and wax, and also for recipes in which fruit could be preserved without the use of sugar.[54]

Wild game, particularly rabbits, partridges, and deer, proved to be a valuable source of meat, particularly before chickens, pigs, and cattle became common in the settlement. Although shot gun shells cost money, a successful hunt could produce meat to supply a family for several days. Allan Murphy recalled his father rationing out five rounds of ammunition each Saturday. He had to account for each round before he could have any more. If a bullet was wasted, he had to find another way of bringing home some meat. Another settler's son, Bert Parker, remembered hunting with his father, who quietly cursed if he missed. At the time, the boy was too young to realize that "a wasted bullet represented a lost supper somewhere down the road."[55] Young boys also snared rabbits, and contributed a steady supply of meat for the stew pot. While it is unknown if the Saskatoon settlers ever reached the stage where they were unable to look an "honest rabbit in the face," their families were able to go to bed with a meal in their stomachs.

Fish, both fresh and canned, were also an important part of the settlers' diet. Young boys, in particular, spent many an hour at the area's lakes and caught pike, perch and pickerel to augment their family's food supply. Stanley Sly was apparently uninterested in the traditional rod and line method, and told a *Star-*

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[54]*Trails North*, 48; "Saskatoon Leads Settlement Work," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 27 June 1932, p. 3.

[55]*Trails North*, 73, 98 and 108.

Phoenix reporter in 1935 that by using a pitchfork, he was able to acquire all the fish he needed.[56] Catching fish was a task largely undertaken by the settlement's men and boys, while turning the fresh catch into an edible meal fell to the women. Alice Murphy, whose homestead adjoined a small lake, recalled that by adding some vinegar to soften the bones and ketchup for color, perch jelled and looked just like salmon. This practice was followed by another settler, Eunice Gibbons, who claimed that it tasted like salmon as well![57] Whether the fish truly tasted like salmon will never be known, but most families were grateful for the meals that came from the nearby lakes.

The progress made by settlers at "Little Saskatoon," as described in the preceding paragraphs, can be measured against the standards of what could reasonably be expected of homesteaders venturing into the forested areas of western Canada. Stutt and Van Vliet, two agricultural economists who investigated conditions in pioneer areas of northern Saskatchewan in the early 1940s, concluded that farmers in the Loon Lake region could be expected to clear and break approximately five acres annually.[58] This was, however, a rough estimate, as actual rates of clearing and breaking varied considerably, and were closely related to the type and density of tree cover on each quarter-section. In another study, Stutt reported that in areas of medium to heavy bush similar to that at "Little Saskatoon," it was unreasonable to expect that a pioneer could clear and break more than ten or eleven acres of land in his first three years on the land.[59] Using this figure as a crude

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[56]"Progressing at Loon Lake," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 4 October 1935, 3.

[57]*Trails North*, 95 and 48.

[58]Stutt and Van Vliet, 36-38.

[59]R.A. Stutt, "Average Progress of Settlers in the Albertville-Garrick Northern Pioneer Areas, Saskatchewan, 1941," *Economic Annalist* 13:3 (August 1943): 45-47.

yardstick, it is clear that a substantial number of settlers at "Little Saskatoon" were making excellent progress. Of the thirty-six pioneer farmers identified in Figure 14, sixteen had ten or more acres in crops in 1934, which in most cases was their third year on the land. Six of these men had planted crops on twenty or more acres, with Oscar Johnson, an energetic carpenter from Saskatoon, leading the way with twenty-eight. Many settlers who had planted fewer than ten acres in crops in 1934 were also making good progress. When acreage cleared and broken but not yet planted is added to acreage already in crops, eight more men exceeded the standard established by Stutt for reasonable progress during the settlers' first three years on the land.[60] Altogether, two-thirds of the homesteaders at "Little Saskatoon" for whom records exist had cleared and broken ten or more acres by 1934, a clear indication that settlers here were moving ahead at a faster than average rate.

These figures do not mean that the families at "Little Saskatoon" quickly became self-sufficient. Indeed, an economic report summarizing the experiences of nearly 2200 settlers on the pioneer fringes of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia, most of whom established homesteads in the 1930s, suggests that the people of "Little Saskatoon" still had a long way to go. This report, published in 1946, concluded that farmers in these newly settled areas needed to place at least one hundred acres under cultivation before they could produce enough to begin paying off debts or putting money in savings. In many places, farmers would have to spend nearly two decades clearing and breaking bush land before they reached this stage.[61] No one in "Little Saskatoon" succeeded in putting a hundred acres under cultivation

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[60]This statement is calculated from data available in the progress reports and patent applications found in the homestead files of settlers in Township 58, Ranges 23 and 24, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

[61]C.C. Spence, "Land Settlement in Western Canada," *Economic Annalist* 16:2 (May 1946): 36-38.

during the entire period under study, forcing settlers to find off-homestead employment or accept relief for many years. This view is substantiated by a woman who lived in "Little Saskatoon" from 1931 to 1939, and recalled years later that throughout this period most families in the community were obliged to accept some sort of government relief. Her husband, generally regarded as one of the area's most successful farmers, received relief payments in every month that the family was on the land, a sobering reminder that there was a considerable gap between making progress and making a living by farming in this frontier locality.[62]

Although agricultural progress was important, it was only one indicator of the potential success or failure of settlements like "Little Saskatoon." Agricultural economists believed that provision of services such as schools and roads was also necessary, and that development of a sense of community was essential.[63] The people living at "Little Saskatoon" could not have agreed more. Everyone knew that years of hard work and sacrifice were required before their farms could become economically viable, but they moved quickly to build a community that would make living on homesteads in the bush much more than merely survival.

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[62]Interview with Olga McLean, Langham, Saskatchewan, 16 June 1993; *Trails North*, passim; Letter from Currie to Kendall, 30 July 1934, R-SRC, Reel H, File 7, SAB; Letter from Currie to Kendall, 4 Augu st 1934, R-SRC, Reel H, File 7, SAB.

[63]Spence, 39; B.H. Kristjanson and F.M. Edwards, "Conditions of Life Associated with Land Settlement in the Bonnyville Area of Northeastern Alberta," *Economic Annalist* 15:1 (February 1945): 16.

Social Life

Once the immediate need to build houses and plant gardens had been met in the summer of 1931, residents turned their attention to creating a social infrastructure that would truly make "Little Saskatoon" home. The homesteaders were anxious to provide educational facilities for their children, and held meetings to organize school districts in the fall. Two schools were needed to serve the settlement, one in the north, and another in the south. Despite the initial impetus, it was still nearly a year before the first school, Lonsdale, serving the northern part of the community, actually opened (Figure 16).[64] The effort to construct the school was shared by the settlers, who gathered logs and hauled lumber for the roof and flooring, and retrieved windows and doors from St. Walburg, where they had been sent via railroad by the provincial Department of Education. Although he had no children of his own, Ray Gearhart, who had experience as a blacksmith, constructed a heater for the new school out of an old oil barrel. Each man was responsible for making desks for his children according to patterns sent from Regina, although in fact several desks were built by Charlie Fowler.[65] In November, 1932, the first inspector to visit the new school was favorably impressed with the building, the teacher, and the students who were present.[66] The second school, named Letchworth, opened in January, 1933, with Alice Murphy, one of the settlers who had formal teacher training, providing instruction for twenty-five students (Figure 17). The school buildings quickly became important centers of community activity with church services, dances, and

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[64]"Plan Concert in New School House," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 16 September 1932, 3.

[65]"Loon Lake Hospital to be Opened at Week-End," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 18 March 1932, 3; *Trails North*, 9 and 125.

[66]*Trails North*, 12.

Figure 16. Lonsdale school.
Photo by author, 1993.

Figure 17. Children at Letchworth school, 1934.
Source: Whelan History Club.

meetings held in each structure.

Religious services were initially held in people's homes, and were later moved to the school houses. Sunday worship drew large gatherings, but the event did not always proceed without incident. The first Sunday school was held at the home of Alex and Olga McLean, whose house was large enough to accommodate most of their neighbors, and contained a piano to provide musical accompaniment for the service. On one occasion, when a visiting Anglican minister was officiating, a dog fight broke out in the farmyard, scattering the animals and sending a rooster inside the house. The bird jumped from bench to bench, but before he could be caught, he landed on the preacher's bald head. Undisturbed, the minister brushed the creature off, never pausing in his sermon.[67] On another occasion, settlers gathered for a service in the Spencer home. No minister was available, so Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Partridge officiated, and the Spencers and Crockers sang a number of hymns. During the winter, the Anglican minister from Loon Lake made bi-weekly visits to the settlement, and a United Church missionary also called frequently on the residents. In the summer months, student missionaries were sent to attend to the spiritual needs of the community.[68] Outsiders also contributed to the settlers' religious development. A chest full of children's books for the Sunday school library was donated by an Anglican church in Listowel, Ontario, and the same group also sent a portable organ.[69] This religious diversity was perhaps best illustrated by the observations of a newspaper reporter visiting the settlement. While he was having

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[67]*Trails North*, 84-85.

[68]*Trails North*, 133; "Loon Lake Hospital to be Opened at Week-End," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 18 March 1932, 3; "Plan Concert in New School House" *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 16 September 1932, 3.

[69]"Loon Lake," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 5 March 1932, 13.

lunch at the Murphy residence (where the organ was stored), the student missionary dropped in and a "sing-song" was held. The writer later observed that although the hostess was a Baptist, the parson from the United Church, and the organ Anglican, harmony was achieved.[70] This observation makes it clear that settlers were happy to have the benefit of any religious activity, regardless of their denominational affiliation.

Schools and religious services were the more formal events for which settlers gathered, but dances, amateur nights, and suppers were also common occurrences, as families sought to create a vibrant community. The Knight home, which was centrally located and, like the McLean home, also contained a piano, became a hub of activity.[71] During the winter, families used almost any excuse to get together. Dances were held every Friday night, and other evenings were marked by smaller groups gathering for card games. Four residents happened to share a birthday on December 28, and held a birthday party each year, rotating the event from one to another of the celebrants' homes.[72] Christmas parties for the children also provided an important occasion for the settlers to gather. In December, 1931, the first of these parties was held at the Knight home. A huge tree had been decorated in the front yard, and Santa Claus made an appearance and presented each child with candy, nuts, and an apple. Gifts, courtesy of Loon Lake and St. Walburg residents, were also provided for each child. Later, after Santa Claus had departed, families gathered indoors for a pot-luck supper.[73]

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[70]"Loon Lake Folks Anxious to Have Schools Opened," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 22 September 1932, 3.

[71]*Trails North*, 74.

[72]*Trails North*, 96.

[73]"Loon Lake," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 4 January 1932, 6; *Trails North*, 140.

After Christmas, the next big social event was the New Year's Eve dance, which always had a large attendance. A song composed by three young women suggests the importance of these occasions for the community:

> The dances here in winter
> Are surely lots of fun.
> We don't go home till morning,
> Till the last dog's hung.
> The old and young together
> Circle, two-step, left, then right,
> Then all too soon comes
> Home Sweet Home,
> For we've had a real hot time all night.[74]

Dances and other community gatherings helped pass the long winter nights, and provided many an opportunity for social interaction. The fact that the Depression was in full swing and that everyone had their troubles also served to rally the settlers. In the late winter of 1932, the Knights hosted a "hard times" party. Awards were handed out for the best costumes, with three women and three men taking home prizes.[75]

Summer brought a new round of activities, nearly all of which focused on the out of doors. Adults enjoyed men's baseball and women's softball games, and children participated in track and field events. Picnics were also highlights of the summer months, when families often gathered on the shores of one of the area's lakes. These same lakes also provided hours of swimming enjoyment for the children of the community. Within a year of his arrival, Angus Black built a twelve-foot boat which his son used frequently on a nearby lake. Another settler, Alex McLean, also built a boat for his son and daughter to use. Charlie Fowler, on the other hand, came to the settlement prepared. He had selected a homestead near the lake, and when he brought his family from Saskatoon, their possessions included a

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[74]*Trails North*, 121.

[75]"Loon Lake," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 5 March 1932, 13.

row boat. In the summer of 1933, Fowler built a dock and a diving board on the lake just below his family's home, and this spot remained a focal point for community-wide recreational activities for years to come (Figures 18 through 21).[76]

These social events should not imply that life was idyllic for the settlers of "Little Saskatoon." Hard times had driven them to the north, and they continued to experience difficulties as they began to carve farms and homes from the bush. Their common circumstances, as well as their ties of family relationships and friendships, were important bonds that helped to unite them as a community. Assisting one another erect homes and barns, as well as with clearing land and planting crops, and sharing the responsibility for building a school, demonstrated their common cause. Joining one another for parties, dances, and picnics after the work was done further cemented those relationships.

The Impact of World War II on the Community

"Little Saskatoon" remained a cohesive community throughout the 1930s. By 1939, more than three-quarters of the homes that had been built by settlers at the beginning of the decade were still occupied (Figure 22). The relatively few empty dwellings had been the homes of people who came to the settlement but quickly decided that life on a homestead would be too difficult and returned to the city. George and Lorena Skuce spent one winter on their homestead and then moved to Paradise Hill, thirty-five miles south of the settlement, where George found work as a blacksmith. For some, poor health prevented them from staying in the north. Less than two years after his arrival, Ray Gearhart suffered a serious medical set back and returned to his family home in the Donovan district. John W.F. Smith, an English-

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[76]*Trails North*, 35, 86, and 53.

Figure 18. Fowler Lake.
Photo by author, 1993.

Figure 19. Hoffman Lake.
Photo by author, 1993.

Figure 20. Women in rowboat, no date.
Source: Whelan History Club.

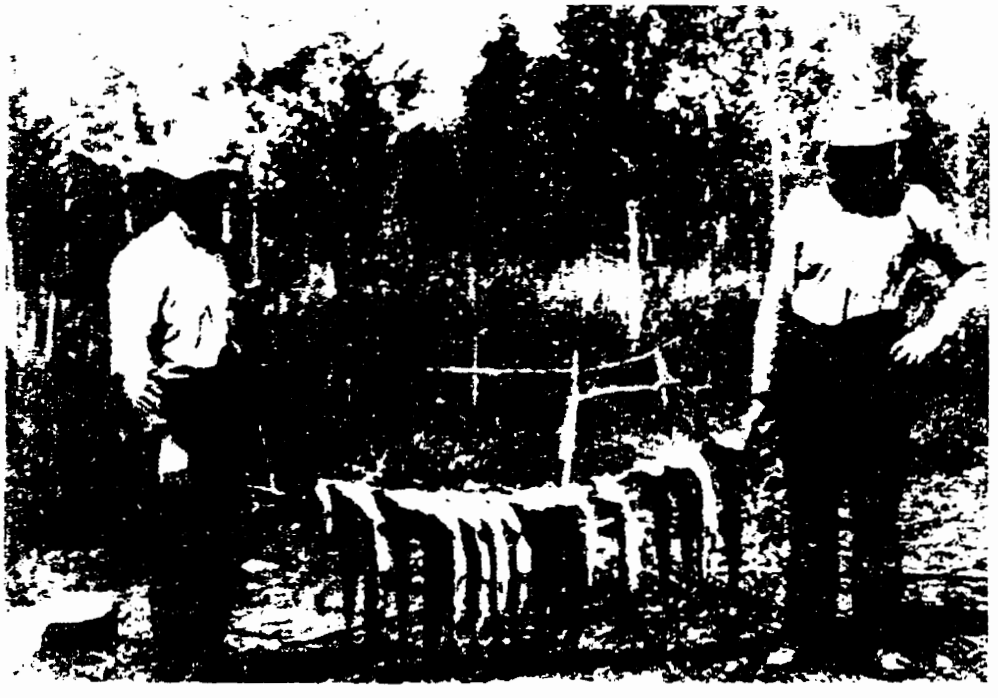

Figure 21. Alex McLean and Charlie Trask with fish, 1932.
Source: Whelan History Club.

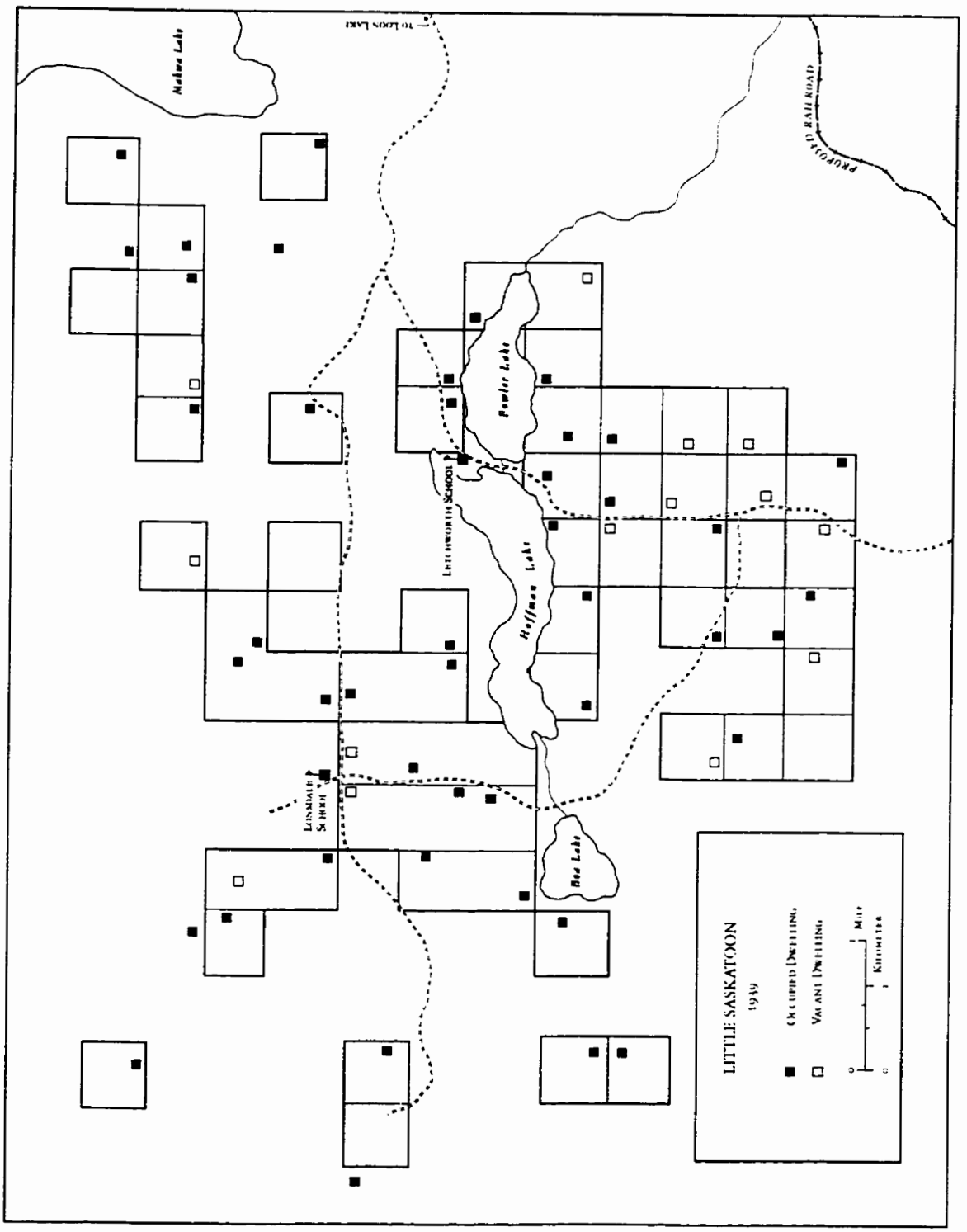

Figure 22. Occupied and vacant dwellings at "Little Saskatoon," 1939.

born carpenter, made tremendous strides toward creating a farm before dying of colon cancer at a Saskatoon hospital in December, 1934. Other settlers worked for several years to develop their homesteads, applied for their patents, and then moved elsewhere. Norman Walper returned to Donovan after leasing his land to another settler in 1936. Robert Hogg also left in the summer of 1936, and spent a few months in Milden, Saskatchewan, before moving to British Columbia. Alex and Olga McLean felt there was not a future for their children in the settlement and in the spring of 1939 they moved to Carrot River, where Alex found employment as a carpenter.[77]

Canada began to emerge from the Depression in 1935, but it was not until the outbreak of war in Europe that the nation's economy really showed marked improvement. Only then did large numbers of families leave the settlement. Several families moved to British Columbia, where they found jobs in war industries, while others left for farms in other parts of the province. Still others returned to Saskatoon, resuming former occupations or finding new positions. A large number of the community's young men and women joined the armed services. Two of Elijah Murphy's sons signed up soon after the war started, and his youngest son, Stewart, joined the RCAF in 1943. Albert Neilly's son, Allan, joined the army in 1940, as did Frank Fowler, the only son of Charlie and Alice Fowler, and Tom Coulter, the son of another settler who had taken a homestead in the area. In 1942, the Butterworth family returned to Saskatoon, where Mr. Butterworth joined the Veteran Guards and his daughter enlisted in the Air Force. Charlie Trask left his homestead in 1941 and served three years in the Air Force before returning to Saskatoon.

By 1946, a large number of the original city settlers had left "Little Saskatoon." Less than one in three houses were still occupied (Figure 23). Many of

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[77]Information about these settlers and their families has been gathered from homestead files and family histories in *Trails North*.

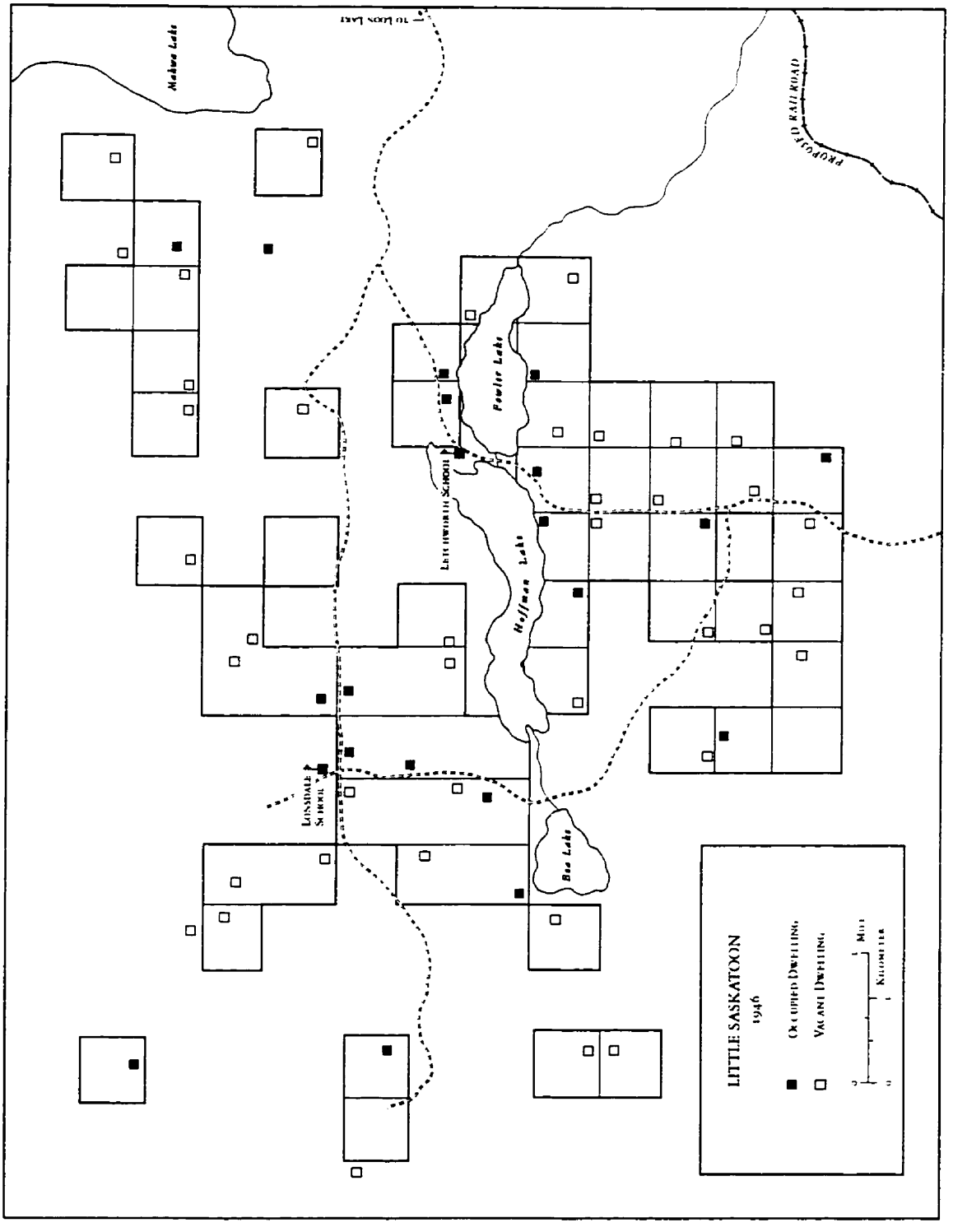

Figure 23. Occupied and vacant dwellings at "Little Saskatoon," 1946.

the former residents had left during the previous six years to find employment in war industries or to join the military. Others, who had become too old to farm, had sold their land and established small businesses in Loon Lake. Still others had retired and moved closer to their children, who by now were living elsewhere. Although most of the movement was made by those leaving "Little Saskatoon," a few people were coming back to the community. By 1945, Tom Coulter had been discharged from the military and soon resumed farming. Ted Moellman, the son of another settler, also returned to the settlement after the war. These men were, however, exceptions. Conditions that had led to the creation of the community had long since passed, and there was little incentive for most people to stay any longer when better opportunities became available in other parts of the province. The departure of these settlers should not suggest, however, that residents' sense of community disappeared. Social activities continued at "Little Saskatoon" with dances, picnics, ball games, church services, and meetings of community organizations taking place of a regular basis. Frequent visits from relatives and former residents added another dimension to the social life of this small but still vibrant community.[78]

The Settlers Remember

Life in "Little Saskatoon" was a tremendous change from that experienced by these settlers in the city, but a homestead offered families a fresh start. One man referred to the city's resettlement plan as "new hope."[79] Another recalled that

> The homesteaders were from all walks of life. All had experienced misfortune and loss, but were willing and eager to get started again no matter how much hard work and humble living it cost.[80]

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[78]Lonsdale and Whelan news reports in the *Loon Lake Star*, 1947 -1948.

[79]*Trails North*, 35.

[80]*Trails North*, 70.

A homestead in the north certainly did require hard work and meant many years of humble living, but the recognition that everyone faced similar difficulties helped to reinforce a sense of community among the settlers: "People worked together and didn't mind lending to their neighbours. Everyone made the most of what they had."[81] This sentiment was echoed by many other former residents.

The settlers who pioneered at "Little Saskatoon" remember their experiences with a great deal of fondness. This is not to suggest that they did not encounter serious hardships, but, for most, a positive pioneer spirit prevailed. There is little doubt that some of these good memories have been embellished with the passage of time, but few settlers were critical of the government, or placed blame on others for their difficulties.[82] In every case, families who came north chose to do so in hope of making a better life for themselves and their families. Although not all of them succeeded, those who persevered believed that they had benefited from the opportunity. Fifty years after their settlement was established, families who remained in the area, as well as many former residents, produced a community history. In the introduction, the authors wrote:

> This book not only tells another tale of hardships suffered through the Depression but creates an awareness of how a government's best intentions to help solve problems often lead to even greater problems. As you read these stories you will see that any measure of success attained was not so much due to outside help but largely because of individual initiative. This is equally true of those who quickly decided to move on and those who adapted and stayed.[83]

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[81] *Trails North*, 70.

[82] In a recent book that makes extensive use of local histories, Bennett and Kohl point to the fact that remembrances are generally of those who made it, not of those who gave up in frustration. They declare that "a majority of the documents tend to feature benign remembrance of the past," and that "hardships are described in ways that suggest they were less painful than they might have been." However, as long as a writer is aware of these limitations, local histories can provide valuable insights to the settlement experience. John W. Bennett and Seena B. Kohl, *Settling the Canadian-American West, 1890-1915: Pioneer Adaptation and Community Building* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 245.

[83] *Trails North*, vi.

It is a story of hope and of courage, and one that provides an intimate portrait of everyday life in this frontier community.

Creating a farm in the north was a difficult undertaking, and not always a successful one, but the land provided adequate supplies of food for the newcomers. Fresh vegetables from newly-planted gardens, an abundance of wild fruit, and fish caught in nearby lakes were a varied source of foods for settler families. In a poem about the riches of this new country, a settler's daughter wrote:

> The streams ran free, the lakes so blue.
> The fresh, green meadows were wet with dew.
> The gardens were full of vegetables galore.
> Wild blueberries grew all 'round the cabin door.
> There was all the wild game that you could wish.
> The streams and lakes were full of fish.[84]

It is true that gardens had to be planted and tended, fruit gathered, and fish caught, all of which were time-consuming tasks, but for many these efforts resulted in a full pantry, and helped make life in "Little Saskatoon" better that what they had left behind.

These statements are the key to understanding the meaning of the "Little Saskatoon" experience for the families who lived there. There were clearly incidents of deprivation, as indicated by the lack of adequate relief work, the suggestion of widespread hunger by the R.C.M.P., and the difficulty that some settlers experienced in their effort to obtain cows. Despite these problems, and they should not be easily dismissed, most reports shed a more positive light on the settlement. Times were tough and they were tough everywhere. It could be argued that, in fact, conditions were more difficult on a bush farm in the north than in a urban neighborhood, but considering the level to which life for these people in Saskatoon had fallen, it was a choice that most families made willingly. They viewed this experience as an opportunity to get off the dole and regain their self respect, and with hard work their

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[84]*Trails North*, 69.

homestead might indeed become home. Considered from this point of view, relocation to "Little Saskatoon" should be interpreted, on balance, as a step in the right direction.

Chapter Seven

Tamarack

In April, 1935, Mrs. Otto Wutke, a former resident of Saskatoon now living in a pioneer district near Medstead, a hundred miles northwest of Saskatoon, wrote to Prime Minister Bennett asking him to look into the condition of relief settlers in northern Saskatchewan. Her letter is a poignant reminder of the difficulties of pioneer life.

> I just can not stand for our treatment any longer without getting it off our chest. We came here in Aug. 1932 from Saskatoon on the Government Relief Plan. So you will understand that we have practically nothing as we had very little to start on, and we have had terrible bad luck. We have lost three horses since coming out here so now are stranded with one horse which is on last legs. So how is it possible to go ahead and farm without help from somewhere. ... We are going back fast. Still we are working like slaves. Never have enough to eat and very little to wear. We have 5 children and our 2 selves. ... We had no garden at all everything froze to the ground as soon as it started growing. We have about 20 chickens, 1 cow. No meat or potatoes only what we buy many a meal around here is dry bread and milk when our cows milking otherwise its water, butter is an extra luxury which we cannot afford. ... We loan settlers from the city's do not seem to be treated [as] well as those that moved in from the dried-out areas as they are fully equipped with livestock and also machinery where we have nothing. I sure would like to know why that is. ... My family don't live anymore we only exist. ... I am looking forward that you may be able to help us in some way. We most certainly would like to be on the upward road. ... Today is only the 15th of the month and our flour is all gone already and the stores will not give any credit out. So we'll be quite hungry until the first of the month.[1]

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[1]Letter from Mrs. Otto Wutke to R.B. Bennett, 15 April 1935, MG 26, Vol. M1450, pp. 489833-489836, NAC.

It is difficult to evaluate this letter. It is certainly not unique; other people wrote similar letters complaining of the inadequacies and injustices of the relief system both in cities and on farms. What is clear is that the concerns raised in Mrs. Wutke's letter were shared by other former city residents who participated in the government-sponsored back-to-the-land movement. This chapter explores the experiences of another group of city people who, like their counterparts at "Little Saskatoon," embraced the opportunities of the relief settlement plan, but, like the Wutke family, were generally less successful in developing viable homesteads. It focuses on the settlement of Tamarack, established north of Loon Lake, illustrates the difficulties that confronted some relief settlers from the cities, and suggests that their inability to create viable farming settlements was often the result of too little agricultural experience, unwise land selection, and a lack of cooperation among settlers who were strangers to one another.

The portrait of "Little Saskatoon" painted in the previous chapter shows that its residents experienced hardships, but their situation never deteriorated to the level described in the letter cited above. It is also apparent that pre-existing friendships and a genuine desire to succeed bound the residents of "Little Saskatoon" together in a real community. These bonds had been forged in the city, and, in some cases, long before these people had moved to Saskatoon. Although the settlers from Saskatoon may not have fully understood the difficulties that they would face, they had a network of friends, relatives, and former neighbors on which to rely. Other city people were not so fortunate. Under the 1932 and 1934 relief settlement plans, provincial authorities made no effort to create organized settlements and no large group of people joined together to homestead as the settlers at "Little Saskatoon" had done. Decisions on where to locate were left to individual settlers who simply chose land that happened to be available. This meant that people from one city were

thrown together with people from other cities, as well as with settlers who had established residence before 1932 and a scattering of newcomers who moved directly from the drought regions. Although this situation may have benefited some city people who learned about farming practices from their more experienced neighbors, it also meant that the bonds of community were initially absent. Still another factor that adversely affected social cohesion was relief. Because virtually everyone in Saskatchewan's north was dependent on government assistance in some form or another, relief became a divisive issue, with settlers frequently comparing their allotments to those of their neighbors, as the letter from Mrs. Wutke aptly demonstrates.

The Settlement Process

In both 1931 and 1932, former residents of Moose Jaw, Saskatoon, Regina, and Swift Current, together with a small number of droughted-out farmers from southern Saskatchewan, claimed homesteads twelve miles northeast of "Little Saskatoon" and seven miles north of the village of Loon Lake, in what became known as Tamarack. This place has sometimes been referred to as the "Moose Jaw Settlement," perhaps to distinguish it from the Saskatoon settlement to the southwest, but in truth fewer than half of its residents actually came from Moose Jaw.[2] At its peak, in 1932, Tamarack was home to thirty families, over three-quarters of whom had moved from the four urban places listed above. Tamarack's proximity to "Little Saskatoon," as well as the predominance of city people in the settlement, makes it an obvious choice for investigation. It serves as a counterpoint to the community

[2]It is significant that no mention is made in the Moose Jaw newspaper about the movement of former city residents to this particular location.

examined in the previous chapter, and consideration of these settlers' experiences provides insight into some common problems associated with the relief settlement program.[3]

The families who chose land in Tamarack traveled by train to St. Walburg and followed the same railroad grade used by the "Little Saskatoon" homesteaders to get to their new homes. The first settlers arrived in 1931, and more followed in 1932 (Figure 24). The settlement experienced an inauspicious start when a half-dozen men from Moose Jaw who had initially chosen land in this area relinquished their claims, declaring that the land was absolutely unsuited to agricultural development. Some of them transferred their claims to homestead sites in the Arran district of northeastern Saskatchewan, while others went right back home.[4] Another settler, George Knight, a night watchman who arrived from Saskatoon with his children and a load of furniture, found "a sea of water on the land" he had selected in the northwestern part of the area designated for settlement. He returned to Loon Lake, discussed his problem with the local DNR officer, and re-filed on an unclaimed quarter-section in "Little Saskatoon."[5] Other reports suggest that the land was, with few exceptions, either too wet, too rocky, or too thickly covered with trees to make good farmland.[6] Those who did settle on land in Tamarack faced a daunting task.

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[3]Few compact settlements were created under the relief plans, for most people obtained properties that were spread over wide areas, often interspersed among existing farms. There were larger collections of relief settlers scattered about in other places, but an absence of available resources, such as homestead files, newspaper reports, and local histories, makes thorough analysis of these other settlements nearly impossible. Tamarack is one of the very few collections of relief settlers for which it is possible to piece together a meaningful portrait of pioneer life.

[4]Information contained in various homestead files for Township 59, Range 22, West of the 3rd meridian, SAB.

[5]*Trails North*, 74.

[6]This observation is based on reports in various homestead files for Township 59, Range 22, West of the 3rd meridian, SAB.

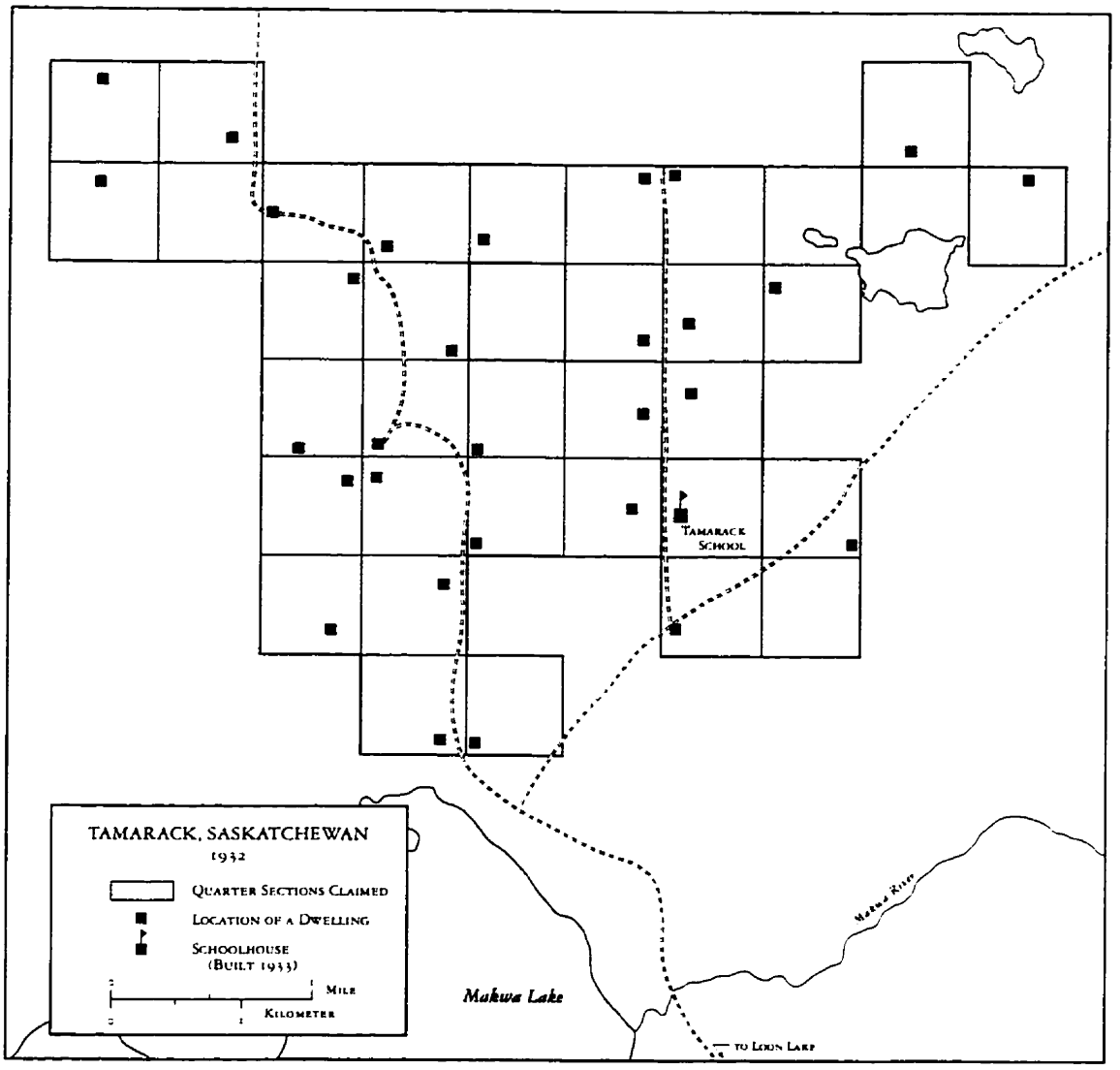

Figure 24. Homestead claims made at Tamarack, 1932.

Of those who made bona fide attempts to occupy their claims, nearly thirty percent gave up within three years. Touring the area for the Department of Natural Resources, Chief Inspector Whelan observed that the land in Tamarack was not nearly as good as the land in the Saskatoon settlement, and that the local inspector had been unable to recommend loans on several of the quarters that these men had selected. Whelan added, in what may have been a harbinger of things to come, that the settlers at Tamarack were "not by any means the type of men that came from Saskatoon" and settled west of Loon Lake. [7]

Selection of poor homestead sites undoubtedly reflected a lack of good choices, but it may also indicate inadequate farming experience on the part of these settlers. The vast majority of the thirty-four men who claimed homesteads in this settlement were former city residents who brought few skills, including that of land selection, to the homesteading process. Relatively complete information can be compiled for nineteen of these homesteaders (Table XI). Of these, only three had been farmers immediately prior to their move north. The vast majority of men were blue collar workers from Saskatchewan cities, and generally occupied lower rungs on the socio-economic ladder than their counterparts at "Little Saskatoon." Eight (42%) of these individuals were unskilled laborers, three were mechanics, and three others had been employed by the Canadian Pacific Railway. It is not possible to determine exactly how long these men had made their homes in various urban centers, but few had lived in the city from which they departed for more than two years. Whether they had recently left the countryside, had moved from other urban areas, or had

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[7]Letter from Whelan to Barnett, 4 August 1931, Department of Natural Resources, S-NR 1/1, Field Reports, File D-124-FR, SAB.

Table XI

Demographic Profile of Settlers Located at Tamarack, 1932

Name of Settler	Age	Martial Status	Dependent children	Occupation
H.H. Allen	58	M	1	Laborer
W.T. Beemish	43	M	3	Laborer
L.C. Bloomingdale	39	M	3	Laborer
E.F. Cook	34	M	0	Conductor, CPR
C.P. Crobar	32	M	0	Mechanic
T.H. Duncan	?	M	?	Carpenter
G. Edelman	?	M	?	Store Clerk
I.M. Edmison	33	M	4	Laborer
W. Guthrie	63	M	0	Laborer
G.A. Hall	29	?	?	Engineer, CPR
F.J. Harman	53	M	1	Farmer
E.D. Hay	44	M	4	Mechanic
F.R. James	?	M	1	Railway Lineman
M.A. McRae	44	M	6	Laborer
A.E. Riley	44	M	2	Laborer
C.C. Robinson	39	M	1	Farmer
F.M. Thomas	26	M	1	Laborer
J.C. Ward	39	M	?	Farmer
G.A. Watson	43	M	5	Mechanic

Source: See footnote 7.

simply been missed by city directory enumerators cannot be determined.[8] Even less information is available about the women who settled at Tamarack. Most were mothers whose households contained an average of three children. Whether they had training in mid-wifery or teaching, two skills that could have been put to good use in the new settlement, is unknown. It is likely, however, that the operation of the home, care of the children, and attention to the garden and barnyard animals kept these women fully occupied.

A Struggle for Survival

In 1934, Fred Mitchell, the local DNR field inspector, recorded the progress made by settlers who had received provincial loans. These reports, supplemented by information found in homestead files, provide a glimpse of agricultural conditions in Tamarack at this time. Two men had at least fifteen acres of land broken, while the other fourteen had five acres broken and an additional five to ten acres cleared and ready for breaking. Clearing and breaking were necessary before land could be cultivated, but only crops produced an income or provided nourishment for their families and their animals. Yet altogether these men had fewer than forty acres in crops (Figure 25). Ten of the settlers had managed to prepare only small areas for gardens, and had made little effort to clear larger acreages for grain crops. This was not particularly good progress for men who had been working the land for three years, particularly in light of the fact that experts believed that five acres could be cleared and broken in this area each year. This record compares poorly to the efforts made by settlers at "Little Saskatoon," where most settlers averaged more than

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[8]Information compiled from homestead files, the 1931 Moose Jaw, Regina, and Saskatoon city directories, and "Much Activity Seen in Loon Lake Village," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 23 September 1932, 3 and 6.

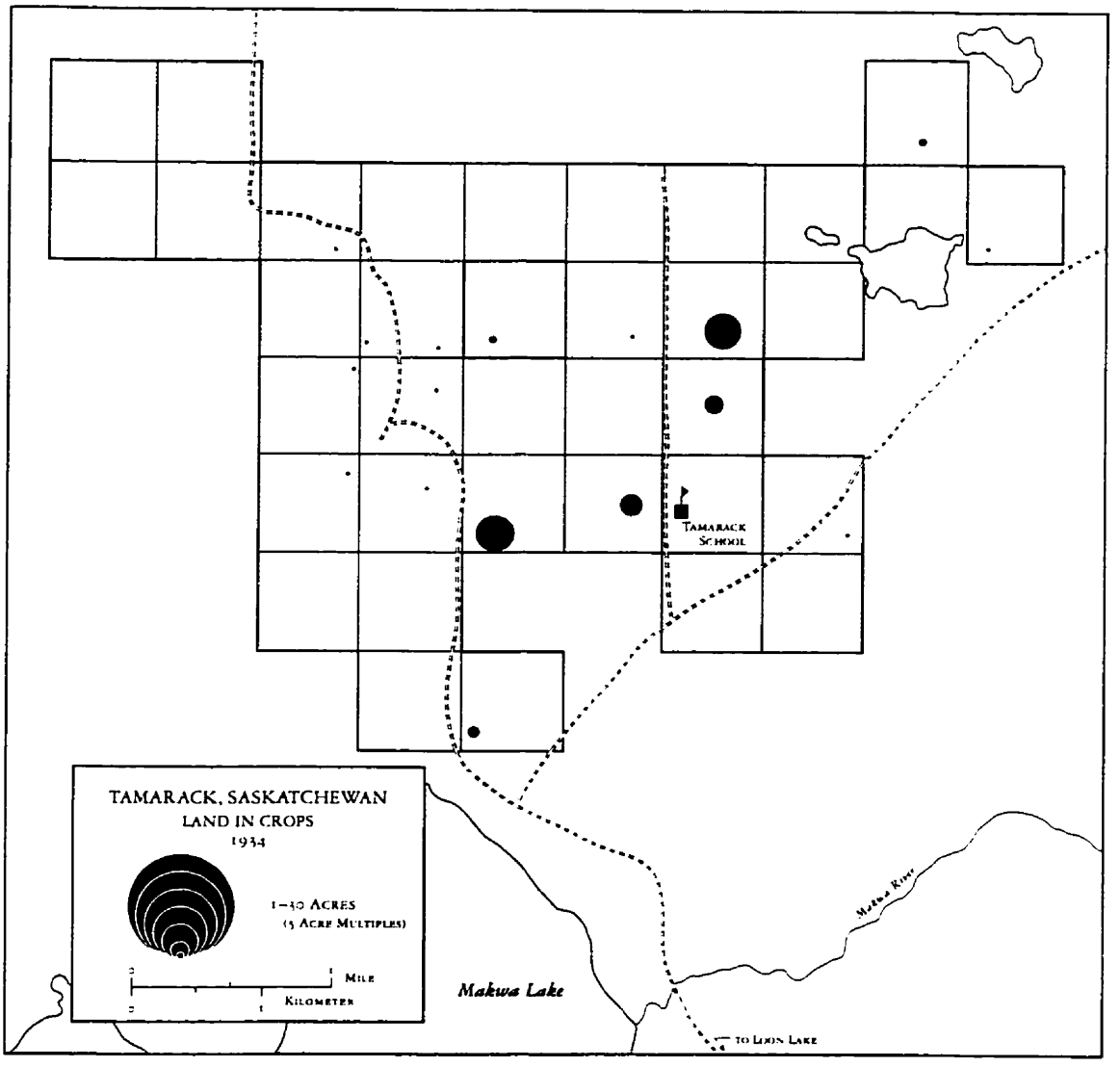

Figure 25. Tamarack: Land in Crops, 1934.

twelve acres of cultivated land after three years of residence, and several had more than twenty acres in crop. All of the settlers had built houses, but only one was more than a simple log structure (Figure 26). Each had also erected log barns and hen houses. Only one man owned any cattle (a cow and a calf), a telling indication of the difficulty of getting started on a homestead in this place.[9]

Two years later, the situation had changed only slightly. Records of twelve homesteaders from cities who eventually secured title to their land show that in 1936 the average settler had eight acres in crops, with some homesteaders having planted fewer than three acres. Only a quarter of these homesteaders had placed more than ten acres in crops. By now, more men had obtained cattle, but only half of them had more than two of these animals. Significantly, every former city resident who owned more than two cattle lived in the more poorly-drained northern half of Tamarack, which suggests that these men now understood that producing good crops on such inferior land would be next to impossible, but that they could effectively use large parts of their claims as pasture (Figure 27). Nearly two-thirds of the homesteaders had at least one team of horses, but the remainder had no horsepower at all.[10]

Comparison of the records for 1936 kept by the former city dwellers with those compiled by relocated farmers now living in Tamarack makes it clear that the city people were measurably behind their neighbors (Table XII). By this time, men who had moved directly to Tamarack from farms had, on average, more than sixteen acres under cultivation, half again as many as the city people, and owned nearly

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[9]This information is compiled from the progress reports and patent applications in the homestead files of settlers in Township 59, Range 22, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB. A letter written by the settlers in February, 1934, does suggest that there may have been a few other cows in the settlement.

[10]This information is compiled from the patent applications in the homestead files of settlers in Township 59, Range 22, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB. Among the settlers living in the northern half of Tamarack, a man from Swift Current and one from Moose Jaw each owned eight head of cattle, and one of their neighbors, a laborer from Saskatoon, had six.

Figure 26. Abandoned log house on the Thomas Duncan homestead.
Photo by author, 1993.

Figure 27. Poorly drained land in the northern part of Tamarack.
Photo by author, 1997.

Table XII

Comparison of agricultural progress made by city men and relocated farmers at Tamarack, 1936[a]

	City Men	Farmers[b]
Number of Individuals	12	5
Number of acres cultivated[c]	10.5	16.6
Number of cattle	3.4	6.2
Number of horses	1.5	2.8

Source: Patent applications in the homestead files of settlers in Township 59, Range 22, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

[a]All numbers represent means.

[b]Includes the three individuals listed in Table X and two men who arrived after 1932.

[c]Includes acres in crops and acres broken but not yet planted.

twice the number of cattle and horses. Every one of the farmers owned at least one team of horses, but only a shade more than half of the city men had a team.[11] These figures reinforce the notion that settlers from the cities, who arrived in Tamarack with little equipment, few animals, and very little agricultural experience, still faced an uphill struggle.

Because a majority of the settlers came from the province's cities, had only limited farming experience, and achieved little in their first years on the land, it was unlikely that Tamarack would become a viable agricultural settlement. Inspector Whelan's remarks about the class of settler and the quality of land clearly identified problems that might influence the outcome of this venture. Nevertheless, when viewed from the settlers' perspective, it was not poor land or their lack of initiative, but rather too little government assistance, that affected their success or failure. These settlers believed that if they were to succeed, they needed more help from the government. To achieve this objective, families formed an association to encourage "closer co-operation among the settlers and also as a means of co-operating with the government for helping settlers to become established and self-supporting." In February, 1934, they wrote a letter that described conditions in the settlement, outlined their needs, and asked for more assistance. Many settlers had already spent two years on some admittedly difficult land, but they had accomplished little. Few had done more than make the most tentative steps toward self-sufficiency.[12]

None of the settlers had been able to grow grain for feed, and they complained that the allowance of seven and a half bushels per team per month

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[11]This information is compiled from the same patent applications that are noted above.

[12]The letter was signed by two of the settlers, one as president and the second as secretary-treasurer. Unfortunately, because of the poor quality of microfilming, it is impossible to decipher either of the signatures. Moose Jaw Settlement Settlers' Association to Honorable Dr. R.H. Smith, 19 February 1934, R-SRC Files, Reel H, File 7, SAB.

provided by the government was "hardly enough to keep a team alive if they have work to do." Twenty horses had already died, leaving their owners in a precarious position. With no team, it was nearly impossible for a settler to put land under cultivation. Although the government did supply some livestock feed, it was not enough to feed both their teams and their cows. Settlers reported that cows were going dry after "three or four months milking which leaves us without milk or the means of securing butter other than buying it and using up our relief allowance." The government also refused to supply feed for swine, and thus only two of the settlers had been able to keep pigs. "Pigs or no pigs" was clearly not an issue here. Although some chicken feed had been issued in the spring, none was given in the winter, resulting in the loss of between seventy-five and ninety-five percent of their poultry flocks.

The letter also reported that very little land had been brought under cultivation because assistance in breaking land was given only to the settlers who had come north under the provisions of province's 1931 Land Settlement Act. The others were unable to do their breaking because the government failed to provide feed for their teams. In addition to the problems of bringing land under cultivation, the settlers also complained that buildings on their homesteads were in very poor shape. There were not "two houses ... which have waterproof roofs." The settlers claimed that material was available but that they could not afford timber permits and that, again, lack of horse feed prevented them from hauling logs. They remarked that as "good houses [were] a security to the health of the people and are a permanent improvement of government land," assistance should be given to all settlers to build decent dwellings.[13]

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[13]*Ibid.*

The general tone of the letter can be gleaned from the passages cited above, but the association's obvious despair was conveyed most effectively in the final sentence:

> We left the cities in the hopes of getting away from relief and of becoming self-supporting, but we feel that unless changes are made this is hopeless.[14]

There is no reaction to this letter in the files of the Saskatchewan Relief Commission. It is likely that the settlers received a reply stating that their concerns would be investigated, but their letter apparently drew no measurable response from government officials charged with overseeing the relief settlement plan. Perhaps they believed that the letter simply expressed the complaints of a disgruntled and insufficiently hard-working group of people, or perhaps, given the financial constraints of the relief program, officials knew that there was nothing more that could be done for these unfortunate settlers.

In March, 1936, two years after the settlers had formed their association and complained of conditions, Henry Allen, a former laborer from Moose Jaw, voiced his frustrations in a letter to the DNR.

> I am writing these few lines to you ... to look into this with your best attention as regards conditions in the Moose Jaw settlement in which I live as the relief that I [receive] I can not live on it and do my amount of work. Since I have been up here I have not been able to earn a dollar in work and the bed clothes are about done. Also the cooking utensils are worn out and I cannot get them replaced. I went into this Relief office to see if they can do anything and they said that I have to write to Regina. I have put this off until I cannot put it off any longer as regards my Relief. I am already out of flour and sugar and I wonder what it would feel to you if you had got to live on potatoes and bread the same as I am doing right now hear (sic). Come spring with water all about us and no foot wear to put on my feet to go out and get some work .... I would like to ask you if you would come up hear (sic) and hold a

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[14] *Ibid.*

> meeting in the Tamarack school as soon as possible and if you would set a date and let me know when you are coming ....[15]

The DNR sent a copy of the letter to its inspector at Loon Lake and asked him to "please investigate this case at your earliest convenience and send a report."[16] As with the earlier letter written by the settlers' association, no response exists in the files, but Allen's letter does indicate that for some people conditions had not improved in any measurable way.

Disillusionment with the amount of support supplied by government officials did not discourage settlers from continuing to express their grievances. In late March, 1937, a former Saskatoon resident who had taken a homestead at Tamarack complained to the DNR about the settlement plan.[17]

> I write you in regards the new settlement plan. I have about thirteen acres brushed and between three and four broke. I have lost four horses up here one horse fell dead in the harness and one got in an old shack which was empty and hurt herself. I had to shoot her the next day. The other team took sick and they lasted about one month.
>
> I asked the Field Man here and he said they could not put out any horses. ... People might just as well move back to the city for there is nothing a man can do to help himself out here. It just looks like some people can get some things to work with. I asked for a little glass for my windows and could not get any help. I asked for a hay permit. Could not get some but my near nabour [sic] got both and also a man and his wife for the winter on the five dollar a month plan. And I understand he is receiving ten thirty five per month for relief himself. His wife and boy is not up here. This winter my wife has been sick since the 10th of January and I wanted to get help on the five dollar plan but they said I could not get some. So if they don't intend to treat people all the same I think I will be in Saskatoon ....

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[15]Letter from H.H. Allen, 19 March 1936, S-MA 3, Department of Municipal Affairs, Local Improvement Districts Branch, File 7, Correspondence with Inspectors, SAB.

[16]Letter to J.M. Kirkpatrick, Assistant Inspector, April 1936, S-MA 3, File 7, SAB.

[17]The information on individual settlers that have been maintained in file 31 of the Local Improvements Branch of the Department of Municipal Affairs has been designated as confidential and sensitive by the Saskatchewan Archives Board. Access to these files is restricted and researchers must provide a written explanation of their need to view these files. As a condition of my access to these files, I had to agree not to identify any of the individuals whose files I examined.

> ... And if this is all the plan amounts to I think it is the Bunk.[18]

Despite this man's protestations, there was more to the story. In April, the Northern Settlers Re-establishment Branch (NSRB) sent a note to the district inspector at Loon Lake saying that under no circumstances was this settler to be given new horses. He had been on the land

> six years and [had] done a very negligible amount of improvement work on his farm, this in spite of the fact that at one time he had four horses. ... In our opinion, therefore, he should only be provided with oxen, and that assistance be given only when you feel he is worthy ....[19]

During the summer, the man broke five additional acres and was trying to break still more. The inspector concluded that the settler had "shown more personal effort this season than [in the] past six or seven years."[20]

The settler's effort was initially rewarded with glass for his windows, but more importantly, the Branch provided him with two mules the following summer. By the end of July, 1939, he had broken twelve more acres of land with the help of these animals.[21] This new breaking, combined with the thirteen acres he already had under cultivation, was enough to enable him to secure title to the land in the spring of 1941. The provincial government, however, placed a lien on the property because of the amount of relief and equipment it had provided to this settler. In March, 1941, the NSRB granted a $40 credit order for a milk cow, and in May, 1941, two horses

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[18]Letter to Mr. Patterson from "Settler," 29 March 1937, S-MA 3, File 31, Settler Files, SAB.

[19]Letter to A.T. Craig, District Inspector, from G.J. Matte, Northern Settlers Re-establishment Branch, 20 April 1937, S-MA 3, File 31, SAB. The NSRB was created in 1935 by the Saskatchewan Government to deal with the many problems of settlers located on poor land in the northern part of the province. For an examination of the objectives and activities of the NSRB, see John Charnetski, "A Study of Settlers' Progress in Northern Saskatchewan for the Period 1935 to 1939" (M.A. thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1940).

[20]Memo from Kirkpatrick, 8 September 1937, S-MA 3, File 31, SAB.

[21]Credit Supply Order, 5 October 1937, 27 June 1938, 18 July 1939, S-MA 3, File 31, SAB.

and a set of second hand harnesses, with a total value of $197.50, were purchased for this man. Another mule, valued at $40, was given to him in 1942.[22] The expenditures were for naught, however, for by 1944 the settler had given up. The two horses, harnesses, mule and cow were "salvaged," and sold for $140. Five years later, the settler inquired about the possibility of clearing the lien on his land. The government agreed to cancel the $1524.40 in direct relief that it had granted him up to August, 1941, but a debt of over $750 remained. The clerk replied that this man "has received a great deal of assistance and it would appear that the Government is most generous in reducing the claim ...."[23] Whether or not he ever paid the debt is uncertain. It is likely, however, that since he had not been in residence for a period of several years, he simply abandoned his interest in the property.

The experience of Loren C. Bloomingdale, a former mechanic from Moose Jaw, parallels that of the settler from Saskatoon. In the late spring of 1935, Mrs. Bloomingdale wrote to the Minister of Natural Resources. Her letter has not survived, but the report that it generated has been maintained in her husband's homestead file, and provides a detailed glimpse into the lives of another relief settlement family.[24] Bloomingdale applied for a provincial settlement loan in May, 1931. He stated that he was a motor mechanic and blacksmith, had resided in the province for twenty-six years, was a married man with three daughters, and had one year's farming experience, in addition to being raised on a farm. His assets at the time of his application were a house and a lot, valued at $500, and household effects

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[22]Credit Supply Order, 14 March 19340, 17 May 1941, 22 July 1942, S-MA 3, File 31, SAB.

[23]Cancellation Report, 9 February 1949, S-MA 3, File 31, SAB.

[24]Memorandum from L.C. Patterson, Director of Lands, to Deputy Minister, DNR, 11 June 1935, in homestead file of L.C. Bloomingdale, Section NE 27, Township 59, Range 22, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

totaling another $500. Loan applicants also were required to show that they had sufficient equipment with which to develop a homestead. Bloomingdale himself did not have the necessary machinery or livestock, but said that his brother-in-law was willing to assist him by providing a wagon, two horses, and a harness. Although officials recognized that these were insufficient for Bloomingdale to make a good start, his loan was nonetheless approved.

In November, 1931, Fred Mitchell, the local DNR officer, inspected the Bloomingdale homestead. There was no equipment on the land, and the settler's short time in residence made it impossible for Mitchell to judge whether he would succeed or not. As Bloomingdale now had four children to support, Mitchell did recommend the purchase of a cow, even though the DNR would have to provide feed for the animal. The department rejected this suggestion. In May, 1932, Mitchell again visited the family. By this time, Bloomingdale had constructed a small but solid dwelling, and had dug a twelve foot well, but there was still no equipment and no livestock. Because the settler had no means of breaking land for himself, Mitchell believed that the only way for the Department to "get any returns from the funds already invested would be to break the land for him."[25] If he had five acres ready for breaking by mid-summer, the Department agreed to break it for him. By September, Bloomingdale had two acres broken, but how this was accomplished is uncertain.

On March 21, 1933, Inspector Mitchell again visited the homestead. One and a half acres had been cleared, but no other improvements had been made since his last visit. The Saskatchewan Relief Commission was supplying food, and Bloomingdale was making little effort to clear this debt. Mitchell declared that the

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[25]*Ibid.*

man would simply not work and that he just sat around the house all day. The inspector acknowledged that the clearing was heavy, but, in his opinion, the settler could "surely clear some." Mitchell described Bloomingdale's wife as a "very good worker" and "very willing" to help develop the homestead, and because of her efforts, he recommended that garden seed be supplied for "the sake of the family." At the end of the summer, the DNR's Chief Inspector, W.W. Whelan, visited Bloomingdale and confirmed the opinions of the local field officer. Whelan remarked that the settler was a poor man on a poor quarter, and that "things [were] going along fine as long as relief continues."[26] The inspector did not believe that any more money should be advanced to this settler except under the strictest supervision.

The situation did not improve in 1934. In his report of October, Mitchell condemned Bloomingdale and his lack of initiative. Conditions on the farm were poor, and food was still supplied by the Relief Commission. No agricultural implements could be found on the homestead, but two old automobiles were on the property. In summation, Mitchell wrote:

> Settler is always talking about building a new house instead of trying to get some work done on the land. Simply will not do anything unless it is close to home. [I] expect he does a lot of useless hunting in the woods, but not for work. Continually asking for more assistance and advances, both from the relief authorities and this department. Is trying to trade off old cars for bulls and I hope he manages to get them ....

Mitchell had kind words for Mrs. Bloomingdale, who now had five children under her care (Figure 28). It is likely that this praise encouraged the Director of Lands to approve finally that a cow be supplied to facilitate her child-rearing efforts.[27]

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[26]*Ibid.*

[27]*Ibid.*

Figure 28. Abandoned tricycle on the Loren Bloomingdale homestead. Photo by author, 1993.

Still another settler, William Beemish, appeared to be a problem from the start. This man, a forty-two year old laborer from Moose Jaw, had brought his wife and three children to a homestead in the spring of 1932. Two years later, he requested a transfer from his original quarter-section to another a half-mile away. The DNR was reluctant to permit this request because it viewed the settler as a "wash-out," and its chief inspector recommended that no further advances be given to him. The department concluded that if it agreed to the transfer, "it would only mean starting over again making advances for building, breaking land, etc., and it is doubtful, due to the fact that he has already had advances to the amount of $200.00, if his improvements would off-set advances already made." The Director of Lands denied the request.[28]

Three months later, the matter was again brought to the attention of the DNR. Fred Mitchell reported that Beemish was "completely discouraged at the possibilities of making a farm unit" out of his original claim. He had, in fact, already abandoned that quarter and was squatting on the preferred land. Mitchell believed that the house and barn that Beemish had built could easily be moved to the other site, and reported that it was probably the "only means of the department salvaging" anything from its advances. Reversing its initial decision, the DNR believed that "if the land [was] as inferior and difficult to bring under cultivation" as Mitchell claimed, "there [was] very little likelihood of the settlement of it being encouraged."[29] Beemish did indeed legally homestead the second site, and eventually developed enough of his homestead to secure title to the property.

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[28]Letter from the Land Settlement Branch to Holmes, 30 June 1934, in the homestead file of William Beemish, Section NE 21, Township 59, Range 22, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

[29]Letter from J.A. Arnot, Department of Lands, to Holmes, 29 September 1934, in the homestead file of William Beemish, Section NE 21, Township 59, Range 22, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

These three cases illustrate the problems that some settlers experienced in Tamarack, but it is true that others were more capable of adapting to life on a northern bush farm. In the summer of 1931, a husband and wife who had "considerable farming experience" were selected to receive a loan to re-establish themselves. The inspector reported that the man was "first class" and that his wife was "very anxious to again be settled on a farm."[30] Unlike most other settlers who were assisted to go back to the land, this couple had a complete line of livestock and equipment to take with them (Figure 29). The land that this man selected was not the best, and the inspector remarked that clearing it would be difficult, but only six months after his arrival, the settler had five acres partly cleared, a sure testament to his determination. His land clearing efforts, however, took so much time that he was unable to build a decent house. The family's home, a fourteen by eighteen foot shack with a dirt floor, was valued at only $30, a figure not substantially higher than that given for their log stable or the hen house.[31] Two years later, few improvements had been made to the house, but there was evidence of substantial progress on the land. The five partly-cleared acres were now broken, and an additional six acres had been cleared.[32] By the time that he applied for patent in the fall of 1938, this man had thirty acres under cultivation, kept nearly a dozen head of cattle, and had constructed a twenty-two by twenty-eight foot frame dwelling valued at $300, in addition to a substantial stable.[33]

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[30]The identification of this couple is prohibited by the Saskatchewan Archives Board. Report of Interview, 4 June 1931, S-MA 3, File 31, SAB.

[31]Progress Report of Field Officer [hereafter PR], 7 September 1932, S-MA 3, File 31, SAB.

[32]PR, 20 October 1934, S-MA 3, File 31, SAB.

[33]Application for Transfer, 14 October 1938, S-MA 3, File 31, SAB.

Figure 29. Abandoned agricultural implement.
Photo by author, 1993.

The progress made by this settler demonstrates that land quality alone was not the principal factor in determining success or failure; individual initiative and hard work were important parts of the equation. It is also obvious that in Tamarack genuine farming experience was likely to ease the task of turning a quarter-section of bush land into a farm, and that access to a range of agricultural implements lightened the burden. A number of settlers were simply not prepared for the task and chose to return to the city. Those who stuck it out generally needed nearly a full decade to make the necessary improvements that enabled them to secure title to their land.[34]

When the rates of agricultural development made by the city people who settled at Tamarack are compared with that of their counterparts at "Little Saskatoon," it is clear that these homesteaders were not making much headway. Few were able to feed their stock or had substantial gardens, and all of the settlers were receiving groceries from the relief department. Five years after their claims had been made, only two of the settlers had cultivated enough land to apply for title. In contrast, sixty percent of the homesteaders at "Little Saskatoon" had applied for their patents by 1936. Nearly all of the settlers there had adequate feed for their stock, had sufficient produce from their gardens, and, in some cases, harvested enough grain from their fields that could be milled locally to supply their own flour. At Tamarack, poor land, a weak work ethic, and a lack of cooperation each contributed to the failure of settlers to make substantial progress in developing their homesteads.

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[34]Sixty percent of the patents earned by settlers at Tamarack were not issued until 1940 or later.

An Absence of Community

Settlers' efforts to build a community were apparently even less successful than most of their agricultural endeavors. The two dozen families who still lived in Tamarack in 1934 apparently had little in common, and although all settlers were trying to make farms from the bush, few if any of them worked together to accomplish this goal. Unlike "Little Saskatoon," where settlers frequently reported their social activities to the Saskatoon newspaper and, later, reminisced about such gatherings in their local history book, there is little evidence to suggest that settlers at Tamarack made any efforts to create a social infrastructure. Only two examples of cooperative action can be gleaned from existing documents. These were the formation of a school district and the organization of a settlers' association. Other than these activities, there is no record of community dances, Christmas parties, or religious services, and just one brief report about life in the community was filed in the newspapers of cities where Tamarack's residents originated.[35]

One of the first concerns of most settlers in pioneer districts was the establishment of a school for their children. In February, 1932, settlers met at the home of Elijah Hay to discuss the formation of a school district and to seek the Department of Education's assistance in constructing a school house. Three trustees and a secretary were elected at this meeting. These men had a personal interest in organizing a school as their families contained half of the twenty-six school-age children who resided in the area. At the end of June, 1932, the Department of Education officially recognized the Tamarack school district. The Department's

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[35]In September, 1932, when the agricultural editor of the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* traveled to the Loon Lake area to report on conditions among the relief settlers, he spent most of his time talking with men and women in "Little Saskatoon," but he did visit five people from Saskatoon and three from Moose Jaw who were homesteading at Tamarack. However, his brief notes on the activities of these people were the only news items from Tamarack to appear in city newspapers during the entire decade of the 1930s.

records do not indicate when the school was actually constructed, but since settlers were required to erect the building and make desks for their children, it is not likely that classes were actually held until the spring of 1933, perhaps even later.[36] The school was an essential component for these new settlers, and it is likely that it served as a focal point for the settlement. Establishment of a school required some cooperation on the part of the settlers, and as long as the objective was to provide education for their children, there is little doubt that people worked together for this particular purpose.

Self-interest, and perhaps desperation, also brought the settlers together in one other cooperative venture. This was the Moose Jaw Settlement Settlers' Association, whose 1934 letter was discussed earlier. Homesteaders hoped that by joining together and making their predicament known to the authorities, they would all benefit. Although the results appear to have been negligible, settlers seem to have recognized that an association was the best way to transmit their concerns to provincial officials. Only this one letter remains in the files of the Saskatchewan Relief Commission, and it is impossible to determine if the association sent additional letters or took part in any other cooperative activities. Nevertheless, the initial impetus to join together came as a result of the deprivation that these families experienced and their hope that group action would bring them nearer to their goals.

Two other bits of information, largely anecdotal in nature, further illustrate this apparent lack of social unity. In May, 1932, the DNR inspector reported on the progress made by a family in his district. The man, he wrote, was a good worker, but the wife appeared "to be the manager of the family." She was "quite hard natured," and was "not liked by the balance of the settlers" because she was unwilling to

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[36]Department of Education, school organization branch, S-Ed.5 File B971, Loon Lake, 1932, SAB.

"repay any favors done by the other settlers for her family." The family's neighbors had no horses, and were willing to work for them in exchange for the use of their team, but the woman had refused to lend the horses, which meant that the neighbors were no longer willing to assist this family in any way. The inspector remarked that refusal to share resources seemed "poor business in a new settlement," and adversely affected the man who had a team but had frequently borrowed equipment from other settlers.[37]

The unwillingness of this particular family to assist their neighbors was apparently not unique. The settlers in Tamarack exhibited a more pervasive inability to work together. Commenting on a proposal made by a relief officer to assist settlers in breaking land, W.R. Holmes, an inspector with the Department of Natural Resources, stated that petty jealousy among individual settlers was rampant.

> On account of the fear existing among the settlers that their neighbour may receive something which they do not get themselves, I doubt if anyone could get six to work together with any degree of success ....[38]

Exactly what may have prompted the inspector to hold such an opinion is unclear, but it does demonstrate that a strong spirit of cooperation and a sense of a common cause, so evident among the "Little Saskatoon" residents, did not exist among these settlers.

Further evidence to support the supposition that social cohesion was lacking is found in the letter from the Moose Jaw Settlers Association, a document written by the settlers themselves. The words, "a need for cooperation," were repeated in the introduction and provided as a reason for their joining together.[39] If they were trying

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[37]The identification of this family is prohibited by the Saskatchewan Archives Board. PR, 6 May 1932, S-MA 3, File 31, SAB.

[38]Memo from Holmes to Barnett, 27 April 1932, S-Ag.11, File II.25, SAB.

[39]Moose Jaw Settlement Settlers' Association to Honorable Dr. R.H. Smith, 19 February 1934, R-SRC Files, Reel H, File 7, SAB.

at this point to foster greater cooperation among themselves, one might conclude that they had not yet been particularly successful at working together. Differences in the plans under which the settlers came to the district meant that some received assistance with the clearing and breaking of land, as well as the construction of homes and outbuildings, while others did not. These differences may have formed the basis for some of the tension and squabbles that seem to have characterized life at Tamarack, which in turn would have inhibited social interaction and the development of a real community.

Two factors that were important in fostering social cohesion and community development at "Little Saskatoon" were not at work in Tamarack. The first is the absence of an existing network of family relationships and friendships among the Tamarack settlers. The settlers from Moose Jaw all had very different occupations, rarely knew one another, and with one exception made no effort to join together in moving north, as their counterparts at "Little Saskatoon" had done.[40] A second problem may have been the small number of settlers who actually made bona fide attempts to establish farms. No more than thirty-three homestead claims were made at Tamarack throughout all of 1931 and 1932, and at least a half-dozen of these were abandoned almost immediately. In contrast, relief settlers and farmers from drought-stricken areas claimed sixty quarter sections at "Little Saskatoon" between 1929 and 1932, and, with many more people on the land than the total number who ever lived at Tamarack, they were in a much better position to create effective social networks.

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[40]Frank James and George Hutchinson, who lived at the same address in Moose Jaw, shipped their effects together in a boxcar to St. Walburg, but neither stayed on the land for little more a year. Settler's Account - Relief Settlement, Frank Richard James - Loon Lake, Saskatchewan, Certificate Number 121, 30 April 1934, Department of Labour Records, RG 27, Vol. 2240, NAC. George Hall and Harry Hall were brothers who spent their childhood on farms in Zehner, SK before moving to Moose Jaw.

Perhaps Tamarack simply lacked the critical mass necessary for the formation of a functional community.

The End of Tamarack

Given what is known about the impact of World War II on the depopulation of "Little Saskatoon," it is reasonable to assume that the war had no less impact on Tamarack. Canada's participation in the war effort stimulated production and created employment opportunities in the cities, while some settlers or their children may have joined the armed forces.[41] The seeds of disintegration, however, were sown much earlier. In 1936, Archie Riley left Tamarack and rented his land to Charles P. Crobar, a mechanic from Swift Current. Where Riley went is uncertain, for he told Inspector Mitchell that he had no forwarding address, but he never returned to his homestead.[42] Another settler, Thomas Hillier of Saskatoon, abandoned his claim in May, 1934, after two years on the land, while George Hutchinson and Frank James, a former warehouseman and a railway lineman, respectively, left after a year.[43] Frank M. Thomas, a Saskatoon laborer, spent three years on his homestead before giving up in 1935 and moving to British Columbia.[44] Only fifteen families were still on the land by the end of the decade, fifty percent fewer than had lived in Tamarack in

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[41]The absence of family histories, tax records, and other documents that might clarify this matter make it impossible to identify the timing and nature of Tamarack's decline with the same degree of precision that can be done for "Little Saskatoon."

[42]Letter from Fred Mitchell, Field Officer, DNR, to H.A. Burrows, DNR, 18 April 1936, in homestead file of Archie Riley, Section NW 22, Township 59, Range 22, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

[43]Homestead files for Section SW 32, Township 59, Range 22, West of the 3rd Meridian, and Section SE 21, Township 59, Range 22, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

[44]Homestead file for Section NE 28, Township 59, Range 22, West of the 3rd Meridian, SAB.

1932, and only a third of the number who continued to make their home in "Little Saskatoon" at the same time (Figure 30).

During the war years, another seven families left the settlement. Most headed west, but Walter Guthrie and family moved to Sudbury, Ontario, where Mr. Guthrie found work as a miner. After the war, the rate of decline accelerated. Two of the remaining families moved to Alberta in 1947, with a third following in the spring of 1948. Before the end of 1949, Thomas Duncan and Elijah Hay both suffered heart attacks, and after lengthy hospital stays, each man and his family moved to new homes in Loon Lake.[45] Perhaps nothing symbolized the disintegration of Tamarack during these years better than two disheartening events that occurred in 1948. The first was the settlement's annual school district meeting, which was "very poorly attended." The handful of people took care of most of their business easily enough, but when they re-elected the Chairman for another term, the man refused to accept the position, forcing them to turn to another settler who reluctantly agreed to serve for just one year. Later in the year, the annual rate payers' meeting had to be canceled when only five residents attended, and as the Loon Lake newspaper reported, "these did not include the president or the speaker who was expected."[46]

The lack of success in holding these meetings and the absence of organized social activities probably reflected the small number of residents, but these incidents also reinforce the belief that social cohesion among the settlement's residents was poorly developed. These circumstances remained unchanged during the next few years, when still more settlers moved away, but dates of departure and

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[45]Tamarack news reports in the *Loon Lake Star*, 1947-1949.

[46]*Loon Lake Star*, 4 March 1948 and 11 November 1948.

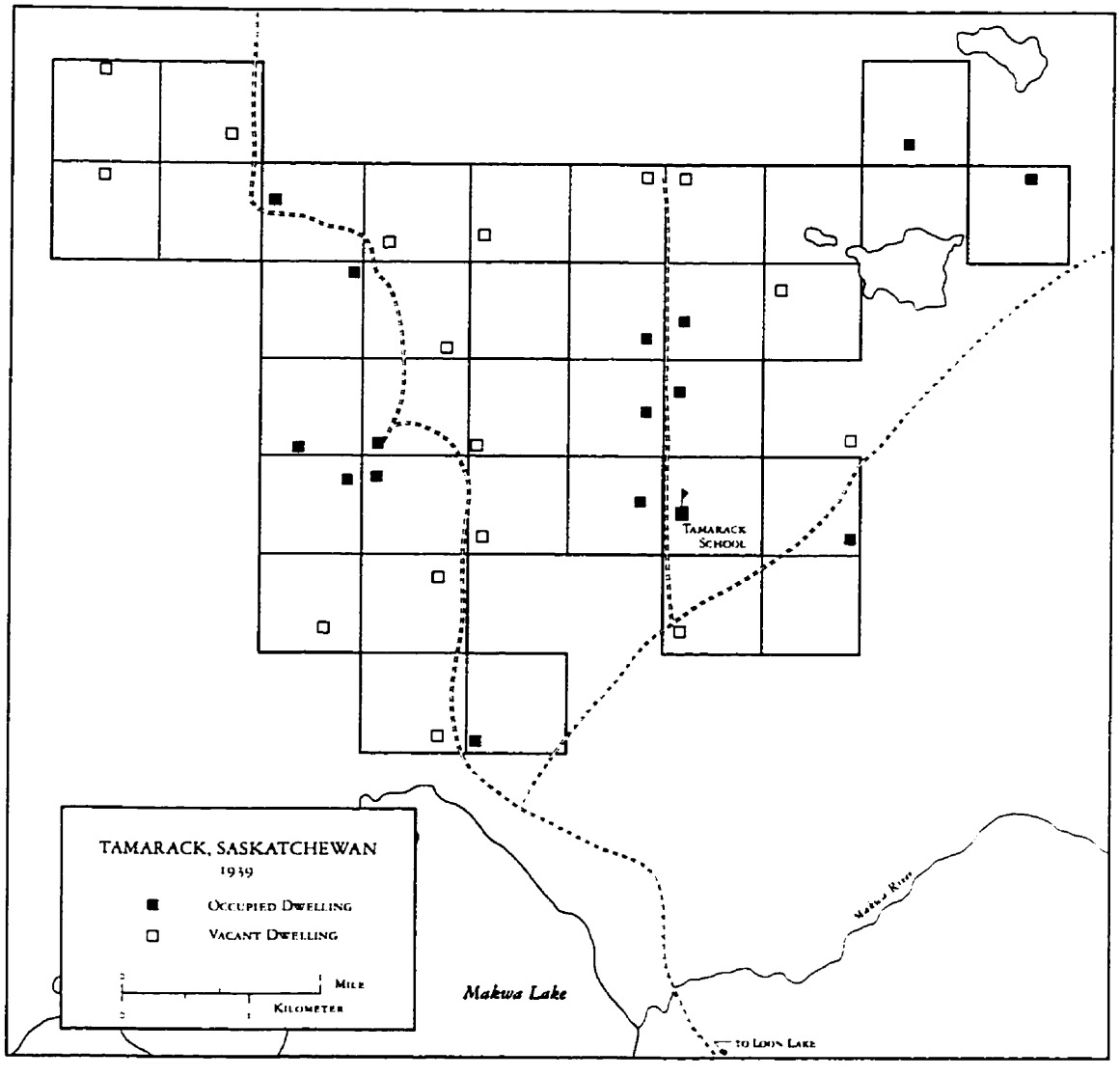

Figure 30. Occupied and vacant dwellings at Tamarack, 1939.

destinations cannot be determined with any degree of precision. What is certain, however, is that Tamarack had a short life, suffered an early death, and never achieved the stability (nor indeed the identity) that became so much a part of "Little Saskatoon."

Two conclusions can be drawn from what is known about the Tamarack settlement. First, the fact that so little information remains suggests that social ties among the settlers were poorly developed. There is hardly anything to indicate that the city settlers knew one another before their arrival, nor is it likely, based on the reports of the field inspectors, that strong social bonds were forged among the settlers after their arrival. Second, from an agricultural standpoint, poor land quality and settlers' inadequate experience severely hampered their farming efforts. Although some of the city men persevered and eventually earned a land patent, their homesteads could not be considered prosperous. They simply made do.

Was their time on the land a dismal experience for the settlers at Tamarack? If letters of complaint and reports by relief officials are a reliable measure, settlement on homesteads in the northern bush did not meet their expectations, nor solve the problems that had sent them to Tamarack in the first place. If this was true, it is logical to ask whether their expectations were simply too high. Without hearing more from the settlers themselves, this is impossible to judge, but it is clear that, for whatever reasons, many people at Tamarack were unhappy with their lot. Perhaps the problem here lay not only with the settlers, but also with the nature of the settlement scheme and the type of land available. Complaints about the inadequacies of the various relief plans were voiced by settlers not only in Tamarack, but also in "Little Saskatoon" and in other parts of the province. Rates of initial abandonment elsewhere because the land was unsuitable for agriculture were also high, and those who stayed to make an effort at developing farms often gave up in frustration within

a few years.[47] By comparing this situation with that of "Little Saskatoon," it appears that settlers' inadequate experience, which led to unwise land selections, combined with their lack of initiative, were insurmountable obstacles that, considering the limitations imposed by the relief settlement plans, condemned Tamarack to obscurity while it existed and left very little in the way of a collective memory.

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[47]For example, see *Timber Trails: History of Big River and District* (North Battleford: Turner-Warwick Printers, 1979), 132-137, 182-183, and 218-224.

Chapter Eight

Reflections on the Back-to-the-Land Scheme

Tamarack and "Little Saskatoon" offer two very different perspectives on the back-to-the-land movement as it developed in Saskatchewan during the 1930s. Sadly, Tamarack probably more closely corresponds to the conditions that most relief settlers experienced in northern Saskatchewan. Still, both of these settlements provide lessons for scholars who are concerned with understanding the possibilities and problems of government-assisted back-to-the-land plans. How should these plans, formulated by various levels of governments, be judged? It is important to recognize the limitations and constraints under which they emerged, and to remember the social, economic, and political milieu of the times. We must also pay attention to the purposes for which such settlement plans were devised. What were the goals of their creators and what sorts of problems did they anticipate? With this information in mind, and with an understanding of the settlement process as it played out at "Little Saskatoon" and Tamarack, the plans can be more effectively evaluated.

In 1939, the Institute of Public Affairs at Dalhousie University published the results of a symposium held to examine the unemployment problem in Canada. Most papers had nothing to do with the country's back-to-the-land initiatives, but one, written by William Jones, the federal Commissioner of Colonization who had investigated the possibilities of using land settlement as a relief strategy in the spring of 1932, dealt directly with this issue. His opening paragraph provides a fundamental framework by which the settlement plans should be assessed:

> Consideration of Relief Land Settlement must be based upon an accurate understanding of its essential elements. The project had its origin in the simple truth that families with agricultural experience and a genuine desire for self-dependence on the land were being maintained in idleness on direct relief in towns and cities. The problem was clearly one which called for constructive action. Was there a way in which these families might be given a chance of self-support -- in surroundings to which their qualifications and experience indicated they were fitted -- at a cost approximating that for direct relief? Relief Land Settlement was and is an honest effort to answer "Yes" to that question.[1]

This characterization of the plan reflects the underlying goal of the back-to-the-land initiative developed by government. The intention of relief settlement was clearly to provide an alternative to direct relief while at the same time promoting a return to self-sufficiency.

Jones asserted that determining the outcome of these plans was essential before any final judgment on their effectiveness could be made. He used examples from the experience of the provinces of Québec and Manitoba to demonstrate that

> Relief Land Settlement has not only proved of benefit to a large number of families throughout the Dominion but has imbued them with new hope, and that the cost of the undertaking compares favourably with what would have been expended had the same families stayed in the cities living in idleness on direct relief.[2]

Contemporary observers repeatedly stressed that these two ideas, saving taxpayers' dollars and giving families hope, were essential considerations, and they subsequently became the underlying principles that guided the formulation of this policy.

Financial constraints are central to understanding the development of land settlement schemes. Time and again, politicians and civil servants asserted that families could be supported on the land more cheaply than in the city. Returning

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[1]W.M. Jones, "Relief Land Settlement," in *Canada's Unemployment Problem*, ed. Lothar Richter (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1939), 261-295.

[2]Jones, 271.

people to the land would reduce local relief burdens, and offered, potentially at least, the chance to reestablish permanently people who could become self-supporting. It no doubt seemed reasonable to politicians that if men could not find work in the cities, they could still support their families on farms. In his assessment, Jones concluded that the relief settlement plan had proven to be a cost-effective measure, with no more funds expended than would have been used to keep families on direct relief. "If every family that was ever settled under the relief settlement plan went back from the farm to the city and was re-absorbed into industry with no settler left on the land, Relief Land Settlement could still show a credit balance on the books."[3]

This opinion was also confirmed by the CNR. In 1936, the company produced a report on relief settlement in the province of Saskatchewan that, while critical of the administration of the program, concluded that "from the point of view of national economics, the scheme has served the purpose for which it was intended." The report offered concrete evidence of the savings that were realized under this plan.

> Based on an average of five persons per family, the Department of Labor advise that the cost of providing food, fuel, clothing, and shelter, to a family in the City of Regina works out at the rate of $44.70 per month. The present average cost of maintaining a relief family in the northern areas works out at [$10.78 per month for food and clothing]. It is therefore evident that families moved from urban centres to the country effect a saving of about 75% in relief costs.[4]

There can be no denying that these were the savings the government had hoped to obtain. To policy makers and to people making contemporary evaluations of relief land settlement, helping urban families return to the land made good financial sense, regardless of how these settlements turned out in the long run. After more than sixty

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[3]Jones, 294.

[4]"Report on Relief Settlement - Saskatchewan," RG 30, Vol. 8396, File 3860-4, Sec. 12, NAC.

years, there is nothing to contradict the view that this approach, admittedly a bit callous by today's standards, represented a good faith attempt to resolve a terrible problem within the constraints of the resources that were available.

Land settlement saved money, but its more useful purpose, a point reiterated frequently by its supporters, was the impetus it gave to social well-being. Jones provided this assessment:

> Most valuable from the social standpoint has been the effect upon the children. The complete change of environment, the healthful surroundings, have borne visible fruits. Sturdy, ruddy youngsters who but a few months ago had their playground on the city streets bear eloquent testimony to the fact that Relief Land Settlement must not be judged by the yardstick of dollars and cents alone.[5]

The land settlement program had to make good economic sense, but it is clear that its benefits extended far beyond simple fiscal equations.

> There can be no question that the physical standards of those living under the scheme have in the vast majority of cases been improved by the time spent on the land. It is true that the scheme must not be judged by the criteria of the book-keeper; but it is important to remember that it has cost no more to keep men and women and children physically fit and contributing to their own support than it would have done to allow them to remain in idleness in a city environment.[6]

George Haythorne echoed this view in 1941 when he declared that the benefits to settlers in terms of "physical, psychological, and social gains" could not be quantified. Haythorne concluded that when compared to living in a city on direct relief, "settlement offers the boon of self-respect, the chance of a self-supporting occupation, [and] hard but varied and satisfying work, in a healthy environment."[7] In another assessment of the land settlement plan, F.B. Kirkwood, the Superintendent of Land Settlement for the CNR, argued that, in the final analysis, it was "not in

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[5]Jones, 271.

[6]Jones, 294.

[7]Haythorne, 437.

dollars and cents that the most valuable dividends are declared."[8] Like many of his contemporaries, Kirkwood believed that the true value of relief settlement could only be measured in terms of the improvement it gave to social life. He concluded that "Relief Land Settlement has a place in extended periods of depression as a measure of alleviation of urban relief costs and as a measure for maintaining the physical and mental health of men, women, and children."[9]

These assessments recall characterizations about the value of land and rural living that were discussed earlier in this study. It is important to remember the words that had appeared in scholarly publications, in the farm press, and in popular magazines such as *MacLean's* and *Saturday Night*. Rural areas were thought to be healthier environments for raising families, and life on the farm offered more variety and independence than work in the city. These widely-held perceptions clearly influenced the development of this particular relief strategy. Supporters of the settlement plans may not have expected rural life to improve, but there was no doubt in their minds that relief settlers would benefit from working in what was seen as a more wholesome environment.

Northern Saskatchewan

As the experiences of the settlers at Tamarack and, to a lesser degree, those at "Little Saskatoon," demonstrate, the back-to-the-land settlers were quickly confronted with the harsh realities of creating farms on the northern frontier. Initially, it may have seemed adventurous to try one's hand at farming, but this illusion soon gave way to stark reality. In September, 1934, F.B. Kirkwood of the

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[8]F.B. Kirkwood, "The Place of Land Settlement in Relief Policies: A Review of the Rural Rehabilitation Plan - Manitoba [1944]," TMs, Legislative Library of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

[9]*Ibid.*

CNR made an inspection of the new farms in the Loon Lake region. Citing the "indifference of the administration" and "lack of funds," Kirkwood wrote that he did not expect the province to continue with the plan in 1935. There was clearly a need, he believed, for the province to give more assistance to these settlers, particularly in the form of development work on the farms. Yet, given the high cost of relief and the numerous other demands being placed on the system, he did not believe that it was likely that anyone could convince provincial officials to spend even more money on the settlers.[10]

Kirkwood's words call attention to the most glaring problem of the back-to-the-land movement: a lack of funds. It was the one single reason why so many different individuals and groups questioned the viability of the various schemes. The United Farmers of Canada supported the back-to-the-land movement in principle, but recognized that basic infrastructure had to be provided if the plan were to succeed. In a newspaper article outlining its conditional support for the government's plan in 1932, the United Farmers had declared that "satisfactory arrangements" must be made prior to the resettlement of unemployed families. These included the construction of local roads by the relief settlers; the provision of supply depots where machinery and building materials could be obtained at cost; government supervision of the construction of suitable houses; the establishment of medical services; and the formation of community hall associations.[11]

Other supporters of the land settlement plan also believed that the

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[10]Letter from Kirkwood to Sinclair, 25 September 1934, RG 30, Vol. 5639, File 5540-5, NAC. Kirkwood's prediction was not, in fact, correct. The province did end its participation in the relief settlement schemes after 1934, but it did so because it wanted to improve the lives of those settlers who were already living in the north, rather than to permit more settlers to relocate. In 1935, the province established the Northern Settlers Re-establishment Branch to supervise settlement and to distribute relief. Its chief goal was to coordinate relief efforts and to assist the establishment of self-supporting agricultural communities among settlers already living in the north.

[11]"U. F. C. Plan of Settlement," *Western Producer*, 7 April 1932, 5.

government should supply a more effective infrastructure. Robert England, the Western Manager of the CNR's Colonization Department, urged provincial officials to set aside some of the public works funds for the construction of buildings on farms in northern Saskatchewan. "Quite a few farmers," he reported, "have saw-mills." A building program in the north would not only stimulate the lumber industry, "but could absorb quite a few single men and at the same time prepare the way for the settlement" of families.[12] Although each of the suggestions made by the UFC and England would have greatly benefited the new settlers, not one was incorporated into the settlement schemes. This was their fundamental flaw. The problem was primarily one of funding: there were simply too many needy people and not enough money to help everyone to the extent that was required. For these settlements to become lasting, successful entities, governments would have to provide more infrastructure and supervision, but neither federal, provincial, nor local agencies were willing to make financial commitments that would permit these settlers to become permanently reestablished on the land. This was the primary reason why the land programs of the 1930s could never meet the expectations of their proponents.

The representatives of both the UFC and CNR made very important points. The arrangements that they believed were necessary prior to settlement were reminiscent of the plans suggested by the Saskatchewan Royal Commission on Immigration and Settlement in 1930, which called for a systematic survey of lands, the construction of suitable buildings, and the clearing of land prior to settlement. The provincial government failed to implement the proposals of the Commission because of cost, but its recommendations also reflected the beliefs of knowledgeable people about how settlement should be supported. Perhaps the most glaring and

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[12]Letter from Robert England to W.J. Black, 16 February 1934, RG 30, Vol. 8395, File 3860-4, Sec. 9, NAC.

inexplicable oversight of the federal relief settlement plans was their failure to heed the lessons learned from the soldier settlement projects. The six conditions outlined by E.J. Ashton for the success of the soldier settlement scheme, including the selection of good land and good settlers, were also overlooked by the creators of the relief land settlement schemes. If these prerequisites were regarded as essential for the agricultural success of veterans, why were they not equally applicable to the settlement initiatives proposed in the 1930s?

Relief Settlement or Agricultural Colonization?

Perhaps one answer to the question raised above lies in the repeated declaration of government officials that the settlement initiative was simply a relief measure, not a colonization scheme. When the plan was announced in Parliament, Minister Gordon made it clear that the purpose was to promote subsistence farming only. It was not a Government assisted settlement scheme, but "an application of relief expenditure to enable families receiving relief to contribute to their own maintenance by labour on the land, where they may eventually establish themselves on a self-supporting basis."[13] This is a point that Jones reiterated in his assessment of the scheme. The plan called for "subsistence settlement" only, and he remarked that the "merits or otherwise of State-aided land settlement were never at issue." The purpose was simply to use funds that would otherwise be used for direct relief in a manner that was likely to be more "beneficial to the recipient and his family."[14]

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[13]*The Labour Gazette* 32:5 (May 1932): 478.

[14]Jones, 265.

The distinction made between a colonization scheme and an alternative expenditure of relief monies may have been a subtle one, but it does provide another means of evaluation. A report issued by Saskatchewan's Department of Railways, Labour, and Industries concluded in 1935 that "had the project been considered as a Colonization project from the start instead of as merely an alternate form of relief, the approach and direction could have been much more constructive and economical."[15] In short, it appears that initial costs would have been higher, but the long-term success of individual settlers and the agricultural development of suitable lands would have also increased. The report's author also raised the question of whether the "percentage of success would have been higher if the land had been chosen, the land improved in advance of placing settlers upon it, and the settlers placed in clearly defined colonies under direction and close supervision."[16] That question can be answered only with the benefit of hindsight, but it is apparent that hard work and individual initiative could carry settlers only so far. Coaxing a livelihood, even one based on subsistence agriculture, from many of these homesteads required greater funds than were actually expended, and more assistance than what government agencies felt they could supply.

Settlers' expectations about the plan also influenced the outcome. What did they believe were the objectives and how did they see their role as participants? It is not likely that many settlers hoped to become commercial farmers, but most expected that at least they would be able to support their families. The report issued by the Department of Railways, Labour, and Industries noted that the 1932 relief settlers demonstrated

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[15]Department of Railways, Labour and Industries, "Synopsis of Relief Settlement Plans of 1932-33-34," File 1069-1508(5) 307 Relief - Land Settlement [1935], CCF, CSA.

[16]*Ibid.*

> a very wide variation in ... success. Some [of the settlers] practically having marked time with just sufficient land broken to clear a garden, and others have cleared and broken considerable land, and are well on the way to self support. This is also noticeable in stock and equipment, some having practically worn out the slight stock and equipment originally supplied them, and others have increased their work stock, their cattle, and have gathered around them considerable additional equipment.[17]

This difference was a reflection, the author observed, of the "attitude in which the relief settlers have viewed the loan, whether it was intended to completely reestablish them, or in assisting them to establish themselves." He had visited a large number of settlers in the north, and described the majority as "contented" and eager to develop their homesteads "as soon as means afford." The settlers from the cities seemed to do as well as those who came directly from farms, but those city settlers who found "initial settlement and establishment tough" had quickly abandoned, "leaving those of a tougher fibre behind."[18]

The expectations of settlers obviously cannot be overlooked when trying to judge the schemes, for they often determined how hard they worked and how well they adapted to new conditions. The situation of one settler at "Little Saskatoon" is illustrative. Elijah Murphy, a forty-seven year old father of four, went north with several fellow veterans in the spring of 1931. He built a shack on his claim and returned to Saskatoon in time to work as an enumerator for the Dominion Census in June. When his children had finished school, the family packed up and moved to the homestead, intending to stay only through the summer. Mrs. Murphy had applied to teach at Saskatoon's new school for the deaf, and anticipating that she would be hired, the family returned to the city at the end of August. Upon their arrival, Mrs. Murphy found a letter from the school offering her a position, but the deadline for

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[17]*Ibid.*

[18]*Ibid.*

her acceptance had already passed. She hurriedly went to the school, only to be told that the vacancy had already been filled. Mrs. Murphy remembers that she "sat down and had a good cry" before going home to tell her husband that she had no job. Mr. Murphy looked for work in Saskatoon, but could find nothing, so the family decided to return to the homestead and truly make it their home, rather than remaining in the city and living on direct relief.[19]

The actions taken by this family in response to their particular situation suggest that for them homestead life was preferable to living on relief in Saskatoon. That belief was shared by the hundreds of other families who turned their attention back to their rural roots. It is not likely that the Murphys expected to become prosperous farmers, for despite their agricultural backgrounds, they were now city people. Nevertheless, when neither one had a job and their prospects were bleak, the Murphys chose to leave Saskatoon with the expectation that life on the homestead would provide more opportunities than simply collecting relief in the city. It was a decision that hundreds of other families made when the cities offered no work, inadequate relief, and little hope for the future.

An Agricultural Nation

After a brief period of public works, back-to-the-land became Canada's only immediate response to the unemployment crisis. It was, in James Struthers' words, Bennett's personal "confession of despair," and should be viewed as another stop-gap measure because no one believed that it "offered even a partial solution to unemployment."[20] Struthers, whose research has focused on labor problems, the

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[19]*Trails North*, 95.

[20]Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 69.

transformation of work and the development of unemployment insurance, has also charged that Canada's preoccupation with the land kept it from squarely confronting urban unemployment problems and finding innovative solutions to the crisis that was enveloping the country.[21] This assessment may reflect his failure to acknowledge that land was fundamental to Canadian identity. Canada was a nation of farmers, and while many of those farmers were no longer on the farm, the sentiment remained. In prosperous times, people left the land for the city; in times of economic distress, people were willing to take another chance on the land. This ebb and flow of humanity reflected the fortunes of an uncertain and sometimes unsound economy. While the land could provide sustenance, cities and their industries, reformers charged, would not be able to support large numbers of people in times of economic distress. In urban environments, people had nothing to fall back on. On the farm, at least, they would not starve.

The ideological roots of this belief in the land lent both credence and support to the back-to-the-land schemes adopted by the government. Canada's long agrarian tradition, and the fact that agriculture had provided the underlying support for much of the Canadian economy, also helped to convince people and their government that a return to a simpler rural life would benefit society. The federal government's encouragement of the dispossessed to return to the land as a means of self-help also demonstrates its reluctance to rely on industry to provide the country's unemployed with a promising future. If recovery were to be achieved, it would result largely from the actions taken by those without work to help themselves. Although the government gave assistance to the jobless who wanted to go to the land, politicians viewed the distribution of funds for this purpose as no more than a logical alternative

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[21]Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 8.

to the provision of direct relief. Underwriting settlement only made economic sense to them if people could subsequently help themselves and emerge from the morass of relief.

Proponents also expected that the back-to-the-land movement would help restore the proper balance between rural and urban populations. This unequal distribution was cited as one reason for the severity of the economic situation in which Canada found itself. When evaluating the settlement plans formulated by governments, it is essential to remember the discussions about the wholesomeness of rural life and the place of agriculture in the Canadian economy. Like many of his contemporaries, Minister Gordon argued that a fundamental cause of the Depression was this perceived imbalance of population. A necessary component of economic recovery, therefore, was the return of surplus urban populations to the land. Gordon had long supported the idea of land settlement, in part because he adhered to age-old beliefs that the land could sustain and nurture a morally responsible and law-abiding populace. When he announced the federal settlement plan in Parliament, Gordon explained that, in his opinion, the phrase "back to the farm" was a misnomer. A more correct expression, he suggested, would be "go forward to a farm" because in the final analysis, if "Canada is to survive ... it will be by reason ... of the products of the first six inches of her soil."[22]

The federal government's relief settlement plan was not a panacea for the myriad problems associated with the Depression. It did, however, offer an alternative to bare subsistence in the city, where prospects for gainful employment were virtually non-existent. A back-to-the-land movement would also not solve the unemployment problem, nor would it actually help more than a few thousand

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[22]*House of Commons Debates*, 28 April 1932, 2453.

families to become self-supporting, but relief land settlement did provide a means for the government to demonstrate that it was attempting to redress some of the problems associated with urbanization and industrialization. It was a familiar theme, and one to which many turned in search of a cause of the unemployment problem. Some proponents asserted that a back-to-the-land movement was a "remedy suited to [the] national economy," which would permit the "re-establishment of an equilibrium destroyed by too rapid industrial expansion."[23] No one knew what the end result might be, but assisting people to return to the land represented a step toward countering the problems of urban growth.

Back-to-the-land was not born of the Depression, yet it was very much affected by the disastrous economic conditions of the 1930s. Repeating the claims made by a few Labour M.P.'s in the 1930s, John Herd Thompson has characterized the movement as an attempt by government and industry to create a rural peasantry that could be recalled to the city whenever manpower was needed. Struthers supports this view, and concludes that such a "reserve army of the unemployed would be willing to work under conditions and for rates of pay that were unattractive by any standards."[24] These are unfair assessments, for these authors have not given due consideration to the social and economic conditions of the time, to the ideological roots of the back-to-the-land movement, or to the motives of individuals who actually participated in the process. Careful examination of each of these factors, in addition to the records of various government agencies, shows that the notion of creating a rural peasantry is simply without foundation. There is no indication that any of the settlers who participated in the back-to-the-land movement were coerced; rather, after carefully weighing the alternatives, they elected to return

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[23]Anonymous, "Some Remedies for Unemployment," MG 26, Reel 1279, pp. 346995-996, NAC.

[24]Thompson, 218-219; Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 8-9.

to the land in the best interest of their families. Furthermore, funds were restricted under the terms of the federal-provincial relief land settlement agreements, limiting the number of families who could actually participate. If the objective had in fact been to force people from the city, why were these restrictions put in place?

It is true that funding was inadequate to ensure permanent re-establishment, and that this situation did often produce a new class of rural indigents. It is also true that families were not always selected with sufficient care, and that for those without adequate expertise or determination, life on the land could become a dismal experience. Nevertheless, families always had the option of returning to the city if they found that they could not manage as pioneers. Even if the assumptions of Thompson and Struthers contain some elements of truth, their assertions that government and industry conspired to place a reserve labor force on the land until it was needed lacks relevance. Whether relief settlers were still on their homesteads when industry sought more workers, or whether they had returned to the cities to live off the dole, these individuals remained part of the labor force. Sending these people to the northern frontier would not make them any more or less likely to become urban laborers when industry expanded, nor did it in reality differentiate them from unemployed relief recipients who elected to remain in cities and wait for jobs to become available.

The Final Analysis

Government sponsorship of the back-to-the-land movement in Canada did not result in large numbers of migrants returning to the soil. During the period under investigation, assisted settlers, of whom there were approximately seven thousand, comprised only a fraction of all the families who went back to the land. Still the

small number of participants should not suggest that relief settlement was an inconsequential episode in the history of unemployment relief. On the contrary, the movement demonstrated that beliefs about the value of rural life and the place of agriculture in Canadian society still influenced the actions of the nation's leaders. The economic crisis of the 1930s was unprecedented; politicians had little experience dealing with a society in chaos and could offer few solutions to the unemployment problem. Relief settlement, the one concrete program created by governments, reflected not a preoccupation with the land, but rather an understanding of the fundamental role that land played in the Canadian economy. Land had helped to build a great nation, and it seemed logical that it could again provide a livelihood for the thousands of urban residents who had left the farm for the city, but who now had no means of support.

Whether this perception was, in fact, correct can only be judged from the experience of the settlers themselves, but, as observers have noted, their success varied considerably. In Saskatchewan, the back-to-the-land movement demonstrated this unevenness. At "Little Saskatoon," families filed forty-two land claims west of Loon Lake, and of these, two-thirds eventually gained title to their homesteads, while in the Tamarack settlement, fewer than half of the thirty claims made by city people resulted in a transfer of title. For the province as a whole, however, the relief settlement scheme appeared to satisfy the objectives of government planners. The first two years were critical in determining whether relief settlers would be able to overcome the obstacles they faced as northern pioneers. Of the settlers approved under the 1932 Relief Settlement Plan, 23 percent abandoned their properties within the first two years. After four years, that figure had reached only 27 percent.[25]

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[25]"Province of Saskatchewan, Relief Land Settlement (1932), Settlers Who Have Abandoned the Land," RG 27, Department of Labour Records, Vol. 2260, NAC.

These numbers compare favorably with those for Manitoba, where 24 percent left within two years and 38 percent within four. More than nine out of ten Manitoba relief settlers eventually abandoned their holdings, although half remained on the land for at least five years and 20 percent lasted for over a decade.[26]

Upon initial inspection, these figures are appalling, and may suggest to some that the policy was a miserable failure. In reality, however, settlement in the Prairie Provinces was never an easy undertaking. A harsh climate, variable land quality, pests, and uncertain market conditions each raised the odds against eventual success. In *The Canadian Prairies*, Gerald Friesen discusses the work done by Chester Martin to calculate failure rates among homesteaders who took land between 1905 and 1930, and describes the rate of attrition as "extraordinary." In Alberta, 45 percent of entries were abandoned during this period, while in Saskatchewan, the figure was 57 percent.[27] It must be remembered, too, that these settlers were usually experienced farmers and that many of them were continental Europeans, who Martin claimed made better homesteaders than settlers of British origin.[28] The back-to-the-land settlers of the 1930s had some farming experience, but they had also become urbanized. That their rates of failure were no worse than those of settlers in an earlier era is testimony to their diligence and perseverance.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the back-to-the-land plan was that it provided an opportunity for men on relief to regain their self respect. On the land,

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[26]"Province of Manitoba, Relief Land Settlement (1932), Settlers Who Have Abandoned the Land," RG 27, Department of Labour Records, Vol. 2260, NAC. Comparable data for the settlers in Saskatchewan after 1935 has not been located either in the National Archives in Ottawa or the Provincial Archives office in Saskatoon. The complete records for Quebec and Alberta have been preserved, but the only data available for Saskatchewan is a listing of abandonments through January 1936.

[27]Friesen, 309.

[28]In Saskatchewan, two-thirds of the settlers selected under the 1932 settlement plan were of British origin. "Approved Settlers under Relief Settlement Plan, Province of Saskatchewan, 31 December 1933." RG 27, Vol. 2266, File C, NAC.

men and their families could work to feed themselves and did not have to experience the near-daily humiliation of city doles. Effort put into homesteads would provide satisfaction because settlers realized that it was their home. These were the potential benefits and the tangible results that might, with good luck, be attained. The reality was often very different. Land settlement schemes were, in fact, emergency responses to adverse conditions rather than carefully planned colonization initiatives. The federal government repeatedly declared that its plan was simply designed to provide relief, not to create lasting communities. Land settlement did provide an alternative to direct relief, but without sufficient financial resources, adequate guidance in agricultural matters, or much infrastructure, the various schemes could not begin to address fully the problems of the urban unemployed. In the final analysis, neither the cities, the provinces, nor the federal government was prepared to expend the funds or give the assistance needed to guarantee permanent resettlement. Relief land settlement was simply a stop-gap measure for governments bankrupted by relief payments and, with no end to the Depression in sight, it was the only tangible program that they could afford that might give some assistance to the unemployed.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

A Note on Sources

I have used a wide variety of sources to unravel the story of the back-to-the-land movement and of the settlers who participated in this process. When I began this research, my primary objective was to uncover all sources that would provide insight to the relief settlement plans, particularly with respect to goals that were established and methods of implementation. Once this was accomplished, I turned my attention to identifying the relief settlements that came into existence, and to gathering information that would enable me to develop profiles of some of these communities. What follows is a description and brief evaluation of the primary sources that I have used.

Canadian National Railway Files

Located in the National Archives in Ottawa, the files of the CNR provide an excellent portrait of both immigration and western settlement, and the particular role that the company has played in these developments. Numerous files in this collection document the implementation of the relief settlement plan, and the attitude of the CNR toward that plan. There are numerous reports from its agents in western Canada who were asked by their superiors for their views on the plans that were being discussed at all levels of government, and to provide some assessment of the impact that such plans might have on the railway. Many of the reports and most of the correspondence found in the files were intended only for railway officials, but some files contain correspondence between CNR and government officials, and letters to and from private citizens. These include letters to and from the federal Minister of Immigration and Colonization, as well as reports from a federally

appointed advisory committee appointed to investigate the feasibility of land settlement as a relief measure.

In general, the files contain few specific references to the settlers who participated in the plan, but fortunately, because a group from Saskatoon met with local CNR agents to discuss settlement possibilities, there are some reports on the activities of these particular people. There is also a considerable amount of correspondence devoted to plans proposed by the city of Saskatoon, and later developed by the province. Most of the remaining information dealing with the location and numbers of relief settlers is found in the annual reports issued by the railway.

R.B. Bennett Papers

The papers of the former Prime Minister include correspondence between Bennett and different government departments, reports on the relief problem, and letters written to Bennett from ordinary Canadians about relief and their views on how the crisis might be resolved. One of the most useful reports was an exhaustive study of relief in western Canada undertaken by Charlotte Whitton in the summer of 1932. In addition, there is extensive correspondence on the relief settlement plans and their implementation, as well as some correspondence from committees formed to investigate the feasibility of the plan.

City Records

In the summer of 1993, D'Arcy Hande, one of the archivists at the Saskatchewan Archives Board, told me about the newly-created City of Saskatoon Archives. He also gave me the name of a person to contact to determine if the City

of Moose Jaw had a similar collection. In the fall of 1993, I sent letters to people in both cities inquiring about the availability of documents. Elizabeth Diamond of the City of Saskatoon Archives wrote a detailed letter of the types of resources that were housed in her facility, and added that, unfortunately, the records were simply sitting in the original boxes arranged by the City Clerk in the 1930s. She and an assistant were to begin cataloguing the files in the summer of 1994, but, if I were willing to begin digging through the boxes, I was welcome to do so. I received no reply to the letter addressed to the Moose Jaw person, and sent a follow-up letter in early 1994. This letter was answered several months later by a librarian to whom my query had been forwarded informing me that, unfortunately, the city had not preserved its records for the 1930s.

During the summer of 1994, I spent several weeks at the City of Saskatoon Archives going through boxes of uncatalogued material. These records are an invaluable source of information on virtually every aspect of city governance. The files of the relief office, in particular, open a fascinating window on the provision and distribution of relief throughout this period. These include correspondence from city residents complaining about their allotments, efforts made by city council to secure more funds from the province, problems associated with the public works relief projects, and the need to control costs and to provide assistance only to the most destitute. The files also shed light on the plans developed by the city to send relief recipients back to the land, and their efforts to have the provincial government support this proposal. Information on the settlement established by former residents at "Little Saskatoon" is limited, and none of the letters written by these people to the relief office have survived, but there are brief notations about some individuals and how they fared in their first few months on the land.

Saskatchewan Relief Commission Files

The SRC files also contain a wealth of information on conditions in Saskatchewan in the 1930s. There are records documenting agricultural relief, public works projects, and direct relief in the form of food vouchers and clothing assistance, as well files that contain information on provincial relief policies and correspondence with municipalities and the federal government. Unfortunately, these records were microfilmed in the 1960s when such technology was still not particularly advanced, and the task was undertaken by a set of extremely careless technicians. The documents were photographed in the order in which they appeared in the file, whether that was upside down or, in some cases, backward, and many are completely illegible. There is a general index to the collection, but it provides no means of access to specific files. Much of the information that I found was uncovered simply by luck. I believe that there are probably other useful records in the collection, but after reaching a number of dead ends and bypassing too many indecipherable letters and reports, I chose to devote my efforts to other, more promising sources. This is not to suggest that I did not give these records due consideration, but that in their current condition, the SRC files have limited value.

Homestead Files

Homestead records available in their original form at the Saskatchewan Archives are an invaluable source of information. The data that can be extracted vary from file to file. In cases where the process of land acquisition took longer than the expected four years, the information is often richer in detail and more complete. Of course, the longer it took for a settler to earn apatent, the more data on agricultural progress can be gleaned from the file. Similarly, if an issue such as the building of a church or the dedication of a cemetery on a particular piece of land was

raised, correspondence about that matter usually became part of the homestead file. Letters written by the settler and various government departments are also usually part of each file. In many cases, however, letters that one expects to find in the file are not there and have probably been lost or misfiled. In addition, reports on settlers' agricultural progress, livestock, housing, and family conditions, made by Department of Natural Resources inspectors, are often part of the original file.

Files of those settlers who received assistance from the Northern Settlers' Re-establishment Branch, beginning in 1935, ordinarily contain even more information about the settler and their quarter-section. Of particular interest are reports written by NSRB inspectors on an annual basis, which described settler progress (or lack thereof) and household conditions, and recommended actions which they believed would help settlers and their families achieve a better quality of life. Access to these records, however, is restricted, and a researcher must demonstrate that these files are vital to one's research. Records of five settlers from "Little Saskatoon" and Tamarack are located in this collection of 98 settler files. The rationale for preservation of these particular files from a total of more than five thousand is a mystery both to this author and the archivists at the Saskatoon office of the Saskatchewan Archives Board. It is also unclear why these files have been designated as containing sensitive material by the Provincial Archivist. Some information is, in fact, unflattering to particular individuals, but so too are pieces of information found in the homestead files to which access is neither restricted nor privacy guaranteed.

Homestead records contain data on the place of birth of the claimant, the age of the claimant, and of the spouse and children at the time that an application for homestead entry was made, and the location of previous land entries. Also available

in the files are information related to the development of the homestead, including building type, size, and construction materials, as well as estimated value; type of fencing; the amount of land cleared and broken; quantity of cattle and horses (although not other livestock such as swine or poultry). Two features detract somewhat from the usefulness of the homestead files. First, unlike similar records kept for homesteads in the United States, these files do not contain information about the acreage of specific crops planted by the settlers, nor do they reveal anything about yields. Second, like those in the U.S., files that exist today are limited to those homesteaders who succeeded in earning title to their land, and were presumably more successful as pioneer farmers than those who did not. The absence of records for the men and women who were unable to obtain patents means that information pieced together from the contents of these files probably depicts conditions in a more favorable light that they were in reality. Despite these deficiencies, homestead files remain the most valuable source for reconstructing life in these pioneer communities.

Newspapers

Coverage in newspapers of the back-to-the-land movement and the relief settlement initiatives undertaken by various governments was at best uneven. The *Regina Leader-Post* provided reasonably good accounts of the actions taken by the provincial government, but because residents of Regina did not settle in any particular location, stories of their activities were not printed in the paper. The *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* did give good coverage to the settlers located at "Little Saskatoon," and since the city actively sought alternatives to direct relief and saw large numbers of its residents participate in the relief settlement plan, the newspaper did its best to inform readers of the plans and their development. In contrast, the *Moose Jaw Evening Times* provided little information about the land settlement

plans, and reported nothing about the activities of those Moose Jaw settlers who participated. Unfortunately, the *Loon Lake Star* did not begin publication until 1947, long after the settlers had arrived and the new settlements were created. Nevertheless, the coverage of local news at both "Little Saskatoon" and Tamarack enabled me to determine in large measure who still lived in the area, and in some cases, where other settlers had moved, and provided glimpses of life in these settlements in the post-war years.

Two other papers, the *Western Producer* and the *Winnipeg Free Press*, also included articles on the relief settlement schemes. The *Western Producer*, the voice of organized agriculture, was published on a weekly basis, and was examined for the years in which the settlement initiatives were debated to determine farmers' reaction to the settlement plans. Because it was beyond the scope of this project, I did not make a systematic search of the *Winnipeg Free Press*, but I did uncover several specific references to the land plans and Manitobans' reaction to them. I also read this newspaper for the weeks when I knew of specific dates of city council meetings in which relief settlement was discussed.

Field Research

One of the most rewarding parts of this research project was exploring the settlements that were created by the relief settlers. This process began in July of 1993, after I had completed the initial stages of archival research in Saskatoon and Regina, and was repeated in the summers of 1994 and 1997. On each occasions, I was accompanied by my husband, who drove a four-wheel drive truck that took us down every passable road that still exists in "Little Saskatoon" and Tamarack. Armed with topographic maps and a legal description of each settler's quarter-

section, we succeeded in finding fully 75 percent of the homestead sites in "Little Saskatoon," and more than half of those in Tamarack. Some sites yielded little more than rotting boards and broken pieces of farming equipment, but others contained readily identifiable remnants of houses and outbuildings, and visible evidence of field locations. A very few sites are still occupied, and these contain new or renovated houses, functional barns and sheds, and fields of hay, grain, and canola. With great effort, we also managed to find the grade of the railroad that was planned, but never built, from St. Walburg to Loon Lake, and followed it as far as safety considerations and common sense would permit. During these trips, I took dozens of photographs of the remnant landscape, some of which appear in this dissertation. Together, these ventures helped me obtain a better understanding of what pioneer life must have been like more than a half-century ago in these remote places, and gave fuller meaning to the written records that I have used.

Appendix B

A Note on the Maps

Figures 1 and 2

These maps were constructed by the author using the regional base map of the Prairie Provinces produced by the National Atlas Information Service, Geographical Services Division, Canada Centre for Mapping, of Energy, Mines and Resources Canada in 1990. The data shown on Figure 1 was plotted by the author using the land descriptions of each of the 513 settlers who applied for assistance under the 1932 Relief Settlement Plan. A list of the settlers is located in S-MA 3, Department of Municipal Affairs, Local Improvements District Branch, File 27: Relief Settlement, Schedule of Names under the Relief Act, 1932, Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB).

Each of the remaining maps was constructed by the author using the Makwa Lake 1:50,000 base map produced by the Surveys and Mapping Branch of the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources in 1975, as well as the "Plan of Township" maps for Townships 58, Ranges 23 and 24, West of the Third Meridian, and Township 59, Range 21, West of the Third Meridian produced by the Department of the Interior and compiled from official surveys conducted in 1910, 1911, 1912, and 1921. The data shown on each of the maps was gathered from a wide variety of sources that is explained below.

Figure 5

This map includes information taken from selected homestead files, Township 58, Ranges 23 and 24, West of the Third Meridian, S-Ag.11, Department of Agriculture,

Lands Branch, SAB; Correspondence between J.H. Currie, Supervisor of Relief, Saskatchewan Relief Commission and the Department of Natural Resources, 1932, located in S-Ag.11, Department of Agriculture, Lands Branch, File II.25, SAB; the applications for the creation of the Lonsdale and Letchworth school districts, S-Ed 5, Department of Education, School Organization Files, I B964, Loon Lake, 1932, SAB; a map published in *Trails North: A History of the School Districts of Letchworth, Lonsdale, Worthington* (Paradise Hill, SK: Whelan History Club, 1988); and field reconnaissance in July, 1993.

Figure 9

This map includes information taken from selected homestead files, Township 58, Ranges 23 and 24, West of the Third Meridian, S-Ag.11, Department of Agriculture, SAB.

Figures 17 and 18

These maps include information taken from selected homestead files, Township 58, Ranges 23 and 24, West of the Third Meridian, S-Ag.11, Department of Agriculture, SAB, and the local news column of the *Loon Lake Star*, 1949-1950.

Figure 19

This map includes information taken from selected homestead files, Township 59, Range 22, West of the Third Meridian, S-Ag.11, Department of Agriculture, Lands Branch, SAB; Correspondence between J.H. Currie, Supervisor of Relief, Saskatchewan Relief Commission and the Department of Natural Resources, 1932, located in S-Ag.11, Department of Agriculture, Lands Branch, File II.25, SAB; the application for the creation of the Tamarack school district, S-Ed 5, Department of

Education, School Organization Files, I B971, Loon Lake, 1932, SAB; and field reconnaissance in July, 1993.

Figure 20

This map includes information taken from selected homestead files, Township 59, Range 22, West of the Third Meridian, S-Ag.11, Department of Agriculture, SAB.

Figure 24

This map includes information taken from selected homestead files, Township 59, Ranges 22; West of the Third Meridian, S-Ag.11, Department of Agriculture, SAB, and the local news column of the *Loon Lake Star*, 1949-1950.

Appendix C

Dominion-Provincial Relief Settlement Agreement, 1932[1]

INDENTURE OF AGREEMENT entered into this _____ day of _____ A.D. 1932.

BETWEEN:

The Government of the Dominion of Canada (hereinafter called the "Dominion"), represented herein by the Honourable Wesley A. Gordon, Minister of Labour

OF THE FIRST PART,

AND

The Government of the Province of _____ (hereinafter called the "Province"), represented herein by_____

OF THE SECOND PART

WHEREAS The Relief Act, 1932, provides, inter alia, that the Governor in Council may pay out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund such moneys as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of the said Act.

AND WHEREAS the Province desires to enter into an agreement under the provisions of the said Act.

AND WHEREAS it is proposed that the Dominion Government, the Provincial Government, and the Municipality concerned, shall participate in the expenditure of relief moneys which would otherwise be expended in the form of direct relief for the purpose of assisting selected families to settle upon the land and thus contribute to their own maintenance and eventually become self-supporting.

NOW THEREFORE it is mutually agreed by and between the parties hereto as follows:

1. The Dominion Government shall contribute one-third of an amount not to exceed $600.00 per family for the purpose of providing a measure of self-sustaining relief to families who would otherwise be in receipt of direct relief by placing such families

[1]RG 30, Volume 8394, File 3860-4, Sec. 3.

on the land, the remaining two-thirds of the expenditure to be contributed by the Province and the Municipality concerned as may be decided between the Province and the Municipality. The Dominion contribution to be a non-recoverable expenditure.

2. The Dominion contribution shall be payable to the Province progressively as expenditures are made by the Province and Municipality. The total expenditure on behalf of any one family during the first year shall not exceed $500.00 for all purposes inclusive of subsistence and establishment, a minimum amount of $100.00 to be withheld to provide sustenance if necessary during the second year.

3. No part of the total expenditure referred to in the preceding sections of this agreement shall be for the purpose of acquiring or renting land.

4. All families who may be assisted under the terms of this agreement shall be residents of Canada and shall be selected from those who would otherwise be in receipt of direct relief. The selection of families shall be made without discrimination by reason of political affiliation, race, or religious views.

5. The Province shall be responsible for administration of relief settlement including the location and inspection of suitable farms, the selection of suitable families who shall be physically fit and qualified in other respects. The Province shall be responsible for the disbursement of funds to the families assisted, and the expenses of such administration shall be paid by the Province, and no part of the cost of administration shall be deducted from the maximum amount of $600.00 set aside for subsistence and settlement of each family.

6. The Province shall set up an Advisory Committee upon which shall be included representatives of the Dominion Land Settlement Branch, the Colonization Branch of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, and the Colonization Branch of the Canadian National Railways.

7. The Province agrees to furnish to the Dominion from time to time a schedule, or schedules approved by the Advisory Committee, setting forth a list of the families to be assisted with particulars as to the location in which they are to be settled.

8. Statements of accounts for expenditures made by the Province in respect to families assisted pursuant to the provisions of this agreement shall be submitted by the Province to the Commissioner of Unemployment Relief accompanied by certificate of the appropriate Provincial authorities that expenditures have been duly made in accordance with such statements and such statements and certificates shall be in the form prescribed by the Commissioner of Unemployment Relief.

9. The Commissioner of Unemployment Relief may at any time call upon the Province to furnish such information as he may require in relation to statement of accounts rendered by the Province.

10. The amount to be paid out of the moneys to be appropriated under the Relief Act, 1932, by the Dominion in respect of the provisions of this agreement shall not exceed $2,000,000.00.

11. This agreement shall become effective after being approved by the Governor in Council and shall continue in force until March 31st, Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-Four.

Appendix D

Application for Settlement,
Relief Settlement Plan, 1932
Province of Saskatchewan[1]

Name: _____ Address: _____

Age: _____ Birthplace: _____

Are you a British Subject by birth or naturalization? _____

How long have you resided in Saskatchewan? _____ years

Married, Widower or single? _____ Divorced? _____

Number of children (who will accompany you to farm) _____

Age of sons _____ Age of daughters _____

What members of your family, if any, have any special training which would enable them to assist you through their earnings to become established?

_____

Have you a trade? _____ What? _____

Are you especially experienced in any line which would assist on occasions to provide extra funds such as gas or steam engineering, threshing, carpentering, blacksmithing, etc.? If so, in what line? _____

State occupation during immediate past 5 years _____

_____

What farming experience? _____

_____

Where obtained (on prairies or in bush country)? _____

Whether in grain, livestock or mixed farming? _____

Give two references (not relatives) concerning your farming experience:

1_____ Address _____

2_____ Address _____

What physical disabilities, if any, are you now suffering from? _____

_____

What illness, if any, have you had during past three years? _____

[1] RG 30. Vol. 8394, File 3860-4, Sec. 3.

Are you now in good health? _____ If not state nature of your present trouble _____

_____

Have you ever been convicted of any criminal offence? _____

If so, when, where and what was it? _____

Are you on City Relief? _____ Name of City _____

Monthly allowance $ _____ Reg. No. _____

Have you any relatives or friends in rural Saskatchewan? _____

Would you want to settle near them? _____ Give reasons _____

_____

Is the statement of assets, hereto attached, correct? _____

Are you, or any member of your family, in receipt of any pension? _____

Amount $ _____ From what source? _____

Do you at present own any land? _____ Where? _____

Have you made your selection of land for which you propose to apply? _____

If so, describe _____ 1/4 Sec. _____ Tp _____ Rge _____ W _____ Mer.

Present Owners? _____

Terms of sale? _____

If not, have you any particular locality in view? _____ Where? _____

_____

State briefly your plan for financing yourself during the first two years of settlement:

_____

_____

STATEMENT OF ASSETS

As at _____ 19 _____

REAL ESTATE

Description:	Value	Encumbrances

CHATTELS

Description:	Value	Encumbrances

Cash in your own right $ _____

Cash I can borrow or secure in other ways $ _____

In consideration of the acceptance of my application for assistance under the said Plan, I hereby agree:

1) That all monies expended on my behalf for livestock, farm equipment and other goods and chattels of a like nature shall be repaid by me without interest upon such terms as may be prescribed by the Government of the Province of Saskatchewan, as Trustee for the Relief Settlement Plan.

2) That the title or ownership to the livestock and their natural increase, farm equipment and chattels of a like nature furnished me shall be vested and remain vested in Provincial Government as Trustee until such time as the monies expended therefor have been by me fully paid and satisfied.

3) To carry out to the best of my ability the farm programme prescribed under the Relief Settlement Plan.

4) To maintain on the farm as security to the Provincial Government stock and equipment equivalent to that supplied to me under the Relief Settlement Plan.

5) That if I fail to carry out the programme prescribed and the intent and purposes hereof, I will on demand peaceably surrender possession of the said livestock or their natural increase, farm equipment and other chattels of a like nature.

Dated at _____, this _____ day of _____, A.D. 1932.

_____
(Signature of Applicant)

QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED
BY WIFE OF APPLICANT

Age: _____ Birth Place: _____

Christian Name: _____

Address of Parents, if living: _____

What physical disability, if any, have you? _____

What illness have you had during past three years? _____

What is present condition of your health? (good, fair or poor) _____

Have you any farming experience? _____

Are you fully conversant with the conditions of life on a pioneer farm? _____

Do you approve of your husband's application and do you willingly join with him in taking up land under Relief Settlement Plan, 1932? _____

Dated at _____, this _____ day of _____, A.D. 1932.

_____ (Witness)

_____ (Signature of Wife)

The within named applicant is recommended for settlement.

_____
City Relief Officer

On behalf of the administration of the City of _____ I recommend the within named applicant for settlement.

_____
For Local City Committee

On behalf of the Provincial and Federal Governments I recommend the within named applicant for settlement.

_____
For Governments

Dawn S. Bowen

813 College Avenue
Fredericksburg, Virginia 22401

EDUCATION

M.A. (Canadian History), University of Maine, December 1990.
Thesis Title: "The Transformation of a Northern Alberta Frontier Community."

B.A. (Geography and International Affairs), Mary Washington College, May 1986.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Senior Lecturer. Department of Geography, Mary Washington College, August 1997 - present.
Currently teaching Introduction to Cultural Geography and Field Methods in Geography.

Lecturer. Department of Geography, Mary Washington College, August 1996 - May 1997.
Taught History of Geographic Thought and Introduction to Cultural Geography.

Teaching Assistant. Department of Geography, Queen's University, September 1992 - May 1995.
Assisted with the following courses: Regional Geography of Middle America, Regional Geography of South America, Cultural Geography, and Honors Seminar in Geography.

Lecturer. Department of Geography, Mary Washington College, January 1991 - May 1992.
Taught courses in the History of Geographic Thought and Field Methods in Geography.

FELLOWSHIPS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

Queen's Graduate Fellowship, Queen's University, 1995-96.

Canadian Studies Graduate Student Fellowship, 1994-95.

Queen's Graduate Fellowship, Queen's University, 1994-95.

R. Samuel McLaughlin Fellowship, Queen's University, 1993-94.

Amoco Production Company Fulbright Scholarship, 1992-93.

Graduate Trustee Scholarship, University of Maine, 1988-89.

GRANTS

Queen's University, Office of Research Services. Travel grant to present a paper at the Association of American Geographers, Chicago, Illinois, March 15-19, 1995.

Embassy of Canada, Academic Relations Office. Research grant to conduct research in western Canada, spring/summer 1995.

Foundation for Educational Exchange between Canada and the United States. Travel grant to present a paper at the Eastern Historical Geography Association Conference, Halifax, Nova Scotia, September 29-October 2, 1994.

GRANTS continued

Graduate Dean's Grant for Doctoral Field Travel, Queen's University. Travel grant to conduct research in western Canada, summer 1994.

Foundation for Educational Exchange between Canada and the United States and the Eastern Historical Geography Association. Travel grant to present a paper at the Eastern Historical Geography Association Conference, St. John, Barbados, February 3-8, 1994 .

Foundation for Educational Exchange between Canada and the United States. Travel grant to present a paper at the Association for Canadian Studies in the United States Biennial Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 17-21, 1993.

Queen's University, Office of Research Services. Travel grant to present a paper at the Association for Canadian Studies in the United States Biennial Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 17-21, 1993.

PUBLICATIONS

"Carl Sauer, Field Exploration, and the Development of American Geographic Thought." *Southeastern Geographer* 26:2 (November 1996): 176-191.

"'Forward to a Farm': Land Settlement as Unemployment Relief in the 1930s." *Prairie Forum* 20:2 (Fall 1995): 207-229.

"Preserving Tradition, Confronting Progress: The Dynamics of Change in a Mennonite Community, 1950-1965." *American Review of Canadian Studies* 25:1 (Spring 1995): 53-77.

PAPERS PRESENTED

"Lookin' for Margaritaville: Place and Imagination in Jimmy Buffett's Songs." Association of American Geographers, Annual Meeting, Fort Worth, Texas, April 4, 1997.

"Residential and Occupational Mobility in Depression Era Saskatoon." Association of American Geographers, Annual Meeting, Charlotte, North Carolina, April 11, 1996.

"Land Settlement and the Unemployed: A 1930s Relief Strategy." Association of American Geographers, Annual Meeting, Chicago, Illinois, March 16, 1995.

"Forward To A Farm: Land Settlement as Unemployment Relief." Eastern Historical Geography Association, Annual Meeting, Halifax, Nova Scotia, September 30, 1994.

"Depression-Era Back-to-the-Land Movements: A Saskatchewan Portrait." Association of American Geographers, Annual Meeting, San Francisco, California, March 31, 1994.

"The Unemployed and the Land: Saskatchewan's Back-to-the-Land Initiatives During the Depression." Eastern Historical Geography Association, Annual Meeting, St. John, Barbados, February 7, 1994.

"Migration as a Response to Crisis: The 1930s Depression and Saskatchewan's Northern Frontier." Association for Canadian Studies in the United States, Biennial Meeting, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 20, 1993.

PAPERS PRESENTED continued

"Mennonite Migrations in the Twentieth Century: A Northern Canadian Perspective." Association of American Geographers, Annual Meeting, Atlanta, Georgia, April 7, 1993.

"A Battle They Could Not Win: The Introduction of Public Education into a Conservative Mennonite Community." Western Social Science Association, Annual Meeting, Denver, Colorado, April 23, 1992.

"Searching for a Promised Land: Migration To and From a Northern Alberta Mennonite Community." Southeastern Division, Association of American Geographers, Annual Meeting, Asheville, North Carolina, November 26, 1991.

"Embracing the Unknown: The Migration Patterns of Northern Alberta's Mennonites." Association for Canadian Studies in the United States, Biennial Meeting, Boston, Massachusetts, November 23, 1991.

"Expanding the Farmer's Frontier: Three Settlements in Alberta's North." Eastern Historical Geography Association, Annual Meeting, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, September 12, 1991.

"Migration to a Northern Frontier: The Homesteaders of the Fort Vermilion District, Alberta, 1915-1940." Canadian Association of Geographers, Annual Meeting, Kingston, Ontario, June 7, 1991.

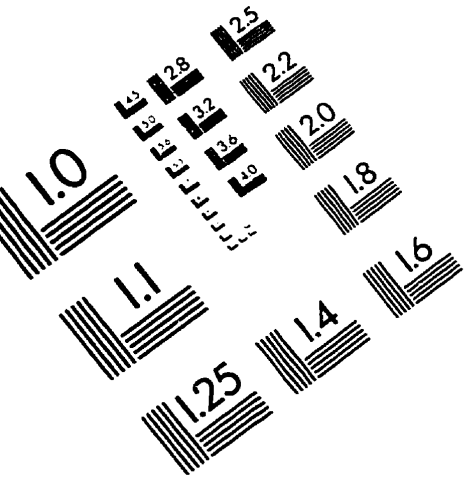
"Social Change in a Mennonite Community: La Crete, Alberta, 1950-1965." Western Social Science Association, Annual Meeting, Reno, Nevada, April 27, 1991.

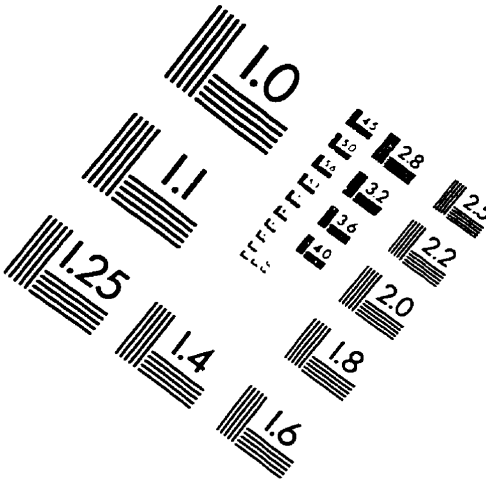
"Cultural Change on the Northern Agricultural Frontier: The Transformation of an Alberta Mennonite Community." Eastern Historical Geography Association, Annual Meeting, Quebec City, Quebec, October 5, 1990.

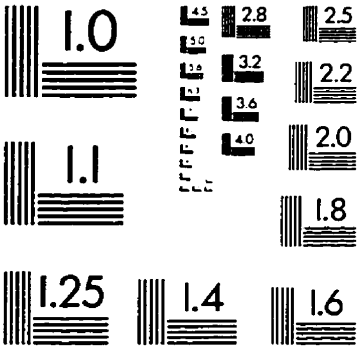
"Early Agricultural Development in the Lower Peace River Country, Alberta, 1879-1935." Canadian Association of Geographers, Annual Meeting, Edmonton, Alberta, May 31, 1990.

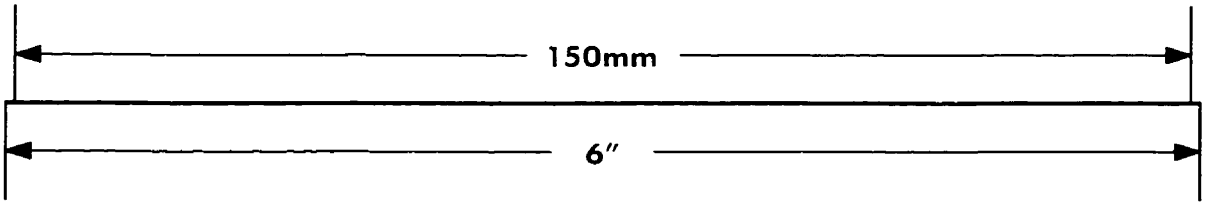
"Pioneer Settlement in the Lower Peace River Country." Pioneer America Society, Annual Meeting, St. Charles, Missouri, November 10, 1989.

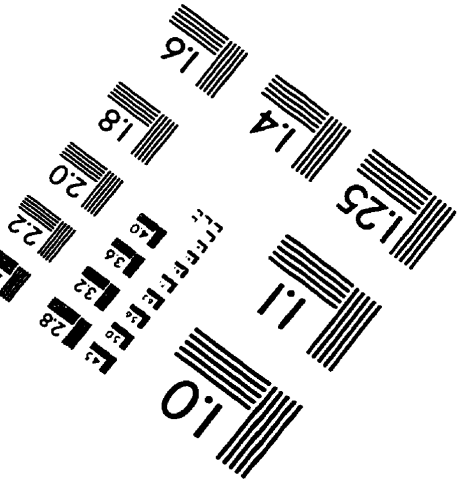
IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)

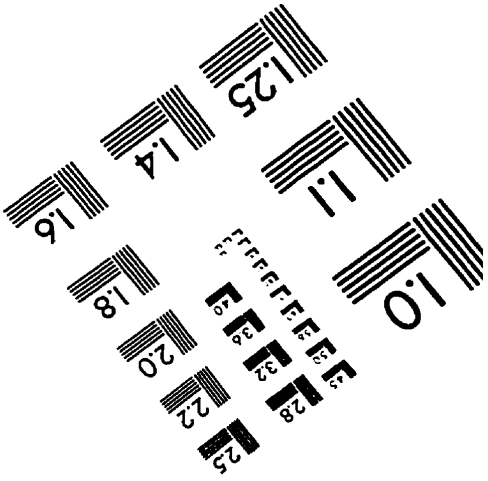












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