

No. 60 | Spring 2009

\$10.00

# Manitoba History

The Journal of the  
Manitoba Historical Society



*The Labour Issue*



## Manitoba History

Published three times a year by the  
Manitoba Historical Society

ISSN 0226-5036

GST Reg. No. 12281 4601 RR0001

Canada Post

Publication Agreement No. 40015704

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Shaw Printing, *Winnipeg*

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Issues of *Manitoba History* are generally published in February, June, and October.

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The cast of the 2005 world-premiere of the musical *Strike!* by Danny Schur and Rich Chafe.

Photo credit: Andrew Sikorsky.

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The history of labour represents a critical topic in this province’s past. When one thinks of labour history in Manitoba, it is the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike—which occurred 90 years ago this year—that comes most often to mind. And while it is a venerable topic, there is much we can learn beyond the Strike, from master-servant relations in the early days of the fur trade on Hudson Bay, to the labour actions that helped shape the workers’ movement in the early twentieth century, to the stories of working class families in Winnipeg’s north end during the Great Depression.

This issue of *Manitoba History* looks at a few of these topics, including Jonathan Hildebrand’s perceptive analysis of the role of early Winnipeg Street Railway strikes in the development of an urban consciousness, and Scott Stephen’s examination of the negotiations that characterized labour relations on Hudson Bay in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, no history of labour in Manitoba would be complete without at least a nod to the 1919 Strike. Danny Schur’s article recounts the story of his play *Strike!* while Michael Dupuis describes the colourful career of “Colonel” G. C. Porter, a long-time Winnipeg reporter who covered the Strike for newspapers across the country.

We hope you enjoy this special Labour issue of *Manitoba History*.

Robert Coutts  
Editor-in-Chief

# Class, Community, and Urban Consciousness: The Winnipeg Street Railway, 1902–1910

by Jonathan Hildebrand  
Department of History, McMaster University

When the people of Winnipeg opened their newspapers on the morning of 30 March 1906, they were greeted with headlines proclaiming the previous day as the “Most Riotous Day in City’s History,” a “Day of Clash Between Strikebreakers, Police and Crowds” during which “Two Streetcars [were] Burned by the Mob.”<sup>1</sup> The city’s first strike by street railway workers against the Winnipeg Electric Railway Company turned violent when local citizens stopped the company from continuing its operation in defiance of its striking employees. This conflict revealed for the first time how an urban consciousness—an understanding of the city not only as a place within which capitalism functioned, but also as a space actively formed in the interests of capital—could merge into a class consciousness capable of challenging capital. The existence of this urban consciousness will be argued here through a discussion of labour relations on the Winnipeg street railway and their connection to the wider public from 1902 to 1910, with particular attention being paid to the street railway strikes of 1906 and 1910.

Street railways occupied a prominent place in early twentieth century urban life<sup>2</sup> through their very existence within the spatial communities and neighbourhoods of the city. Construction and extension of lines, use of space in the streets, as well as the cleanliness, crowdedness, and safety of the cars were all factors affecting the everyday lives of urban dwellers. Moreover, the citizens’ understanding of what it meant to live in a city was informed and shaped in part by class issues, through interactions with and

proximity to the street railway workers as well as through the experience of dealing with a public utility owned by a capitalist company. The Winnipeg strikes and the discourse surrounding them provide several examples of how class-consciousness both informed and was informed by urban consciousness, most notably during and leading up to the 1906 strike, in which nearly all the violence was initiated by members of the public and not the striking workers. This urban consciousness was formulated around

ideas of urban citizenship and public interest, and forged through arguments waged in the press over what constituted “public interest.” Its startling assertion in 1906 no doubt took the forces of capital, including the publishers of newspapers whose revenues depended on business advertising, by surprise. Yet this consciousness was also contested and by 1910, both the city’s capitalist interests and the daily press had developed new rhetorical devices with which to weaken the

equation of class and urban consciousness, resulting in the establishment of a public interest that did not sympathize with labour. In both years, the company and the strikers appealed to the public through the city press, attempting to fashion an urban consciousness in line with their own particular interests. Furthermore, in reporting on the strike, the newspapers themselves often manipulated the events in order to construe a certain type of “public interest,” sometimes speaking on behalf of an unspecified “public” and thus attempting to define the nature of the public interest.

Defining what is meant by “urban consciousness” is critical. The work of David Harvey serves as a point of departure in this respect. He argues that the city is “an agglomeration of productive forces built by labor employed within a temporal process of circulation of capital.”<sup>3</sup> It is furthermore ruled by class forces, segmented

## Mayor’s Request to Citizens !

TO THE CITIZENS OF WINNIPEG :

WHEREAS a strike has arisen between the employees of the Winnipeg Electric Street Railway Company and the said Company, I request the co-operation of all true Citizens to assist the Police Officers in maintaining order upon the streets and public places of the city.

The law in regard to disorder and disturbances in the streets, will be rigorously enforced. I would earnestly request the strikers and sympathisers to consider the importance of law and order being maintained.

Winnipeg, March 29.

THOS. SHARPE,  
Mayor.

*Manitoba Free Press, 30 March 1906, page 11.*

*In 2008, Jonathan Hildebrand graduated from the University of Winnipeg. Currently, he is pursuing his MA in History at McMaster University, focusing on Canadian urban history.*

into “distinctive communities of social reproduction,” and organized as a spatially contiguous labour market. Thus it is the site of multiple social and political confusions while at the same time functioning both as a “testimony to and a moving force within the dialectics of capitalism’s uneven development.”<sup>4</sup> Because of increasing urbanization this confusing, conflicted, and inequitable urban context has become “the primary level at which individuals now experience, live out, and react to the totality of social transformations and structures in the world around them.”<sup>5</sup> To put it another way, people’s conceptions of themselves, their lives, and social conditions, occur within and are mediated by the urban context. Out of the complexities of the urban experience emerges a “consciousness of the meanings of space and time; of social power and its legitimations; of forms of domination and social interaction; of the relation to nature through production and consumption; and of human nature, civil society, and political life.”<sup>6</sup> In addition to defining urban consciousness, Harvey’s work is able to show how the city contributes to a consciousness of class by emphasizing the imbalance and conflict that characterizes urban capitalist development. Urban consciousness is confronted with the imbalance in class relations due to capitalist development, and integrates this imbalance into its understanding of the world. It is this *convergence* of class and urban consciousness that produces the potential for radical change.<sup>7</sup>

Relatively little work has been done on street railway strikes in North America and still less has focused on these strikes as they relate to the city and consciousness formation. Nevertheless, several scholars have undertaken studies that speak to the topic at hand. Christopher Armstrong and H. V. Nelles have addressed the street railways in Canada through the issues of organization and regulation, examining the creation of private monopolies within public utilities such as electricity, water, gas, and telephones, as well as the debates over municipal versus private ownership.<sup>8</sup> Their examination of the injection of

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**This conflict revealed for the first time how an urban consciousness—an understanding of the city not only as a place within which capitalism functioned, but also as a space actively formed in the interests of capital—could merge into a class consciousness capable of challenging capital.**

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capital by private companies into public utilities is also noteworthy. Urban utilities depended heavily on outside capital markets to finance expansion during this time, which was evident in the millions of dollars of Canadian savings placed by Canadian life insurance companies into the utilities sector around the turn of the century.<sup>9</sup> Not only did utilities such as hydro, gas, telephone, and street



Archives of Manitoba, Edgar J. Ransom Collection 457.

**Club-wielding police officers** had the challenge of keeping the streets clear during the 1906 strike.

railways provide “essential services to their users; they also supplied vast quantities of stocks, bonds, and other high-quality securities upon which finance capitalism depended.”<sup>10</sup> Privately owned utilities were therefore dependant on, and creators of, capital markets. The eventual private ownership monopoly of Canadian utilities resulted in a public response Armstrong and Nelles refer to as civic populism, a nationwide movement that protested “against inadequate service by arbitrary, self-serving monopolies from which a small elite grew conspicuously rich.” From this movement, the push for public or municipal ownership of utilities emerged.<sup>11</sup>

While Armstrong and Nelles have focused on the monopolization of public utilities and the place of the street railway within it, other authors such as H. John Selwood have examined street railways more specifically in the early twentieth century. Selwood’s discussion of the street railway in Winnipeg examines the extension of lines in the city from 1881 to 1913, demonstrating that the streetcar system expanded in response to patterns of urban development rather than instigating it.<sup>12</sup> Other works on street railway strikes in North America can be organized into two general thematic categories. The first group looks at street railway strikes in the context of broad social and political trends. These studies examine street railway conflicts as they related to larger issues such as national postwar upheaval,<sup>13</sup> *laissez-faire* economics,<sup>14</sup> Progressive Era labour unrest,<sup>15</sup> and large-scale American worker movements.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, other studies have emphasized

the role of the public and the wider community in street railway labour strife. High levels of public sympathy for the workers,<sup>17</sup> the local social and cultural contexts of streetcar strikes,<sup>18</sup> and the (often-violent) nature of public action against street railway companies<sup>19</sup> are all issues that receive attention in such studies. Such approaches to the study of street railway strikes help to bring the aspect of community (as well as the public's sense of what it meant to live in an urban community) into the discussion of street railway labour unrest.

The work that street railway men engaged in was challenging and of little ease. The job was particularly taxing in winter, as there was "absolutely no heat available for the motorman, who on very cold days looked like an Antarctic explorer." On stormy days, the open booths containing the driving controls at the ends of the cars would be "half-filled with snow and ice."<sup>20</sup> The operation of the cars could also be dangerous as well as challenging. Harry Hutchcroft, a motorman for the Winnipeg street railway company from 1906 to 1909, recalled that in the days before air brakes, "it took just plain ordinary brute force to bring those huge units to a standstill. The earliest brakes ... were manipulated with a wheel similar to those in use at the time on railroad box cars, and the motorman had to use both hands to the task, keeping his right foot firmly set against a ratchet control on the floor. One notch too many and on a greasy rail away went your Pullman like a sleigh on ice."<sup>21</sup> Operating streetcars safely in Winnipeg's various weather conditions was both demanding for workers and potentially hazardous for passengers.

That the Winnipeg street railway union had the strength and confidence to strike in 1906 was evident in its growth up to that point; the city's labour newspaper, *The Voice*, reported in 1904 that the union's Winnipeg branch, Local 99 of the Amalgamated Association of Street and Electric Railway Employees (initially formed in 1898),<sup>22</sup> numbered "some 110 strong," with new recruits being added.<sup>23</sup> Friction between the employees and the company began to increase in late March of 1906 when the union approached the company on two issues, namely the wage scale and safety appliances, particularly the installation of sand boxes on the cars which would enable sand to be poured onto the rails and wheels of a skidding car, thereby seeking to reduce the number of streetcar accidents in the city. Although the motormen and conductors had received a wage increase of one cent per hour as of 1 March 1906, they claimed that this had been asked for (and should have been granted) two years previously, and they consequently requested another wage increase on 26 March.<sup>24</sup> In addition to increasingly fruitless meetings between employees and employers, the union was also angry over the dismissal of union president T. F. Robbins and secretary Fred Wagner who, according to the company, had been let go due to their "objectionable and insulting manner to the directors" during a meeting, which was "such that it was evidently a question of whether these men [Robbins and Wagner] were to operate the railway or whether the directors were to

continue to do so."<sup>25</sup> Adding to worker dissatisfaction, "an unusually large number of employees" were temporarily suspended for minor offences,<sup>26</sup> while other union officials were harassed in the weeks prior to the negotiations between the two sides. Discontent was indeed growing among the employees of the company.

As for the negotiations themselves, a representative from the international union, Fred Fay, arrived in Winnipeg on 27 March, and by this time the most important issues out of the twelve or so clauses comprising the employees' proposal to the company had been reduced to comprise an increase in the wage scale, recognition of the union, and a choice of streetcar routes based on seniority.<sup>27</sup> In the meantime, it was reported that 100 strikebreakers were being imported from Montreal, a charge denied by the company.<sup>28</sup> At a meeting of 28 March, union officials were informed by the directors of the company that no further concessions would be made, and later that evening, in a union meeting that stretched into the early hours of Thursday, 29 March, 237 members voted unanimously to strike. In response, street railway manager Wilson Phillips stated that the company intended to run its cars as usual.<sup>29</sup> With the battle lines drawn, the strike would now unfold in the streets of the city.

Violent reactions were not long in coming. On 29 March, the first day of the strike, two streetcars were destroyed, twelve were damaged, and two-dozen demonstrators were arrested. Crowds began to congregate along Main Street north of Portage Avenue early in the day, but no attempt was made to impede the streetcars until they had been running for about two hours. At that time, a Broadway car going south down Main was stopped, and its trolley cable cut by members of the crowd. The fender was then torn off and a large rock heaved through one of the car's windows with a hail of rocks and mud to follow. The passengers fled the car while the non-union conductor and motorman attempted to stay. When the hurling of rocks and mud at the car intensified, however, they disembarked.<sup>30</sup> The crowd, which according to the *Morning Telegram* had now grown to about 2,000 people, then spotted another approaching car. The trolley cable was cut, "the windows of the car totally smashed and one of the members of the crew badly pounded by [members of] the crowd."<sup>31</sup>

The *Telegram* further noted that the crowd seemed to be in strong support of the striking workers, cheering loudly whenever a car was set upon and wrecked, and as the morning progressed, incidents continued. On Higgins Avenue, a motorman was taken from his car by strike sympathizers and chased into a hotel bar, back out into the street, and finally rescued by two policemen, who escorted the car operator to the police station with a crowd of hundreds following them, "never for a moment ceasing their cries of ridicule, and threats of vengeance."<sup>32</sup> Streetcars left abandoned in the downtown streets had their windows smashed to pieces and their sides covered with mud thrown by demonstrators. The morning also saw streetcars being impeded in other ways: upon reaching

Main Street, a Portage Avenue car was greeted with jeers and shouts of “scab!” but managed to manoeuvre through the crowd until a large coal wagon cut in front of the car and proceeded along the track in front of it at a crawlingly slow pace. This continued partially up Main Street, with loud applause being showered on the wagon driver, until several policemen arrived and put an end to this somewhat humorous act of sympathy with the striking workers.<sup>33</sup> The fact that violence to company property occurred so immediately on the strike’s first day speaks to high levels

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**The eventual private ownership monopoly of Canadian utilities resulted in a ... civic populism, a nationwide movement that protested “against inadequate service by arbitrary, self-serving monopolies from which a small elite grew conspicuously rich.”**

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of anti-company feeling among the public, in addition to, as Babcock has argued, their sense of the justice that had to be meted out against the actions of the company, in support of the strikers.

The first day of the strike also saw the swearing in of “special policemen” as well as the activation of strikebreakers from the Thiel Detective Agency, an American company, who operated the streetcars and protected the property of the street railway. Provincial Magistrate McMicken swore in the Thiel men at the request of the Electric Railway, which created controversy due to the fact that McKicken was later placed under suspension by the attorney general because, according to the government, “he had acted improperly in granting official approval to private agents.”<sup>34</sup> At around noon, strikebreakers were involved in one of the more brutal occurrences yet seen during the strike. A southbound Main Street car filled with about eight to ten strikebreakers made its way back to the car barns and upon noticing two men, “presumably pickets,” standing on the street corner they emptied out of the car, “each armed with a maul handle,” and attacked the men who were, in the words of the *Manitoba Free Press*, “beaten down into the mud and mauled in a brutal manner.”<sup>35</sup> Despite the widespread nature of the destruction

and violence, particularly that which was directed against the company, few if any actual striking union men were involved. The city newspapers made efforts to point out that it was not the strikers who were participating in the demonstrations but sympathizers of the strike.<sup>36</sup>

As daylight faded on 29 March, strike sympathizers continued to act out against the company. An empty car that had been left on the track near the corner of Selkirk Avenue and Sinclair Street was set on fire by demonstrators, who had earlier driven out the car’s operators. Although the fire department was called out, the blaze had taken its toll by the time they arrived at the scene, and all that remained after the fire had been put out was a charred mass of rubble.<sup>37</sup> Later on, sometime after 8:00, a crowd participated in an extended destruction of an idle streetcar on Higgins Avenue. After attempting twice to set it ablaze, with both attempts being doused quickly by the fire department, a young man hacked away at the car for about twenty minutes with an axe in front of an estimated audience of 1,000 people. The crowd then pushed the car along Higgins all the way to Main Street, where it was switched onto the main line and pushed down into a subway, or underpass, to a chorus of full-throated cheers. The *Telegram’s* report estimated that the crowd reached about 4,000 to 5,000 people before the police arrived on the scene and dispersed the crowd completely by approximately midnight,<sup>38</sup> putting an end to the strike’s raucous first day.

Due to the violent occurrences of 29 March, Mayor Thomas Sharpe called upon the Royal Canadian Mounted Rifles from the Fort Osborne Barracks the following day. The troops occupied the stretch of Main Street between Higgins and Logan Avenues from 3:00 in the afternoon to 7:00 in the evening.<sup>39</sup> The morning had been relatively quiet, with no notable disturbances to speak of until the early



Archives of Manitoba, Edgar J. Ransom Collection 461.

**Feckless abandon.** Street cars ran full speed through the crowds. Due to the street car boycott, stopping to pick up passengers was often a pointless and possibly dangerous exercise. Note the absence of passengers aboard the car.

afternoon, even though large numbers of people had begun to congregate along Main Street. Around 2:00, the crowd became more agitated, shouting at streetcars as they passed carrying Thiel detectives and city policemen. Eventually a few onlookers placed stones on the track near Bannatyne Avenue. When the next passing streetcar stopped and the motorman disembarked to remove the obstructions, he was surrounded and roughed up, but managed to start the car and keep on moving. The arrival of military troops and a maxim gun did not seem to quiet the mood of the people crowding the street and under the watch of the troops a streetcar was stopped and its cable cut while a crowd threw eggs, rocks, and bricks against it. They then dragged the conductor, motorman, and Thiel detectives out of the car and made an attempt to tip it over, while Mayor Sharpe read the riot act to no avail. Only when the Mayor ordered the troops to load their weapons, and the ominous clicking of rifles was heard, did the crowd disperse.<sup>40</sup>

Things settled down somewhat for the next couple of days, as the Winnipeg Ministerial Association, a socially concerned group formed largely of Presbyterian and Methodist ministers in 1904,<sup>41</sup> which became affiliated with the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council, intervened in the dispute. Members of the Association interviewed both the street railway directors and the union leaders in order to facilitate a settlement, although none was yet reached. Furthermore, troops that were on standby at the Winnipeg garrison, in the event that their services might be needed, were relieved from duty.<sup>42</sup> A feeling of tension still existed, however, and very few people actually availed themselves of the streetcars' service, as had been the case during the previous day.<sup>43</sup> Only twelve cars were sent out on the third day of the strike, and they were loaded with

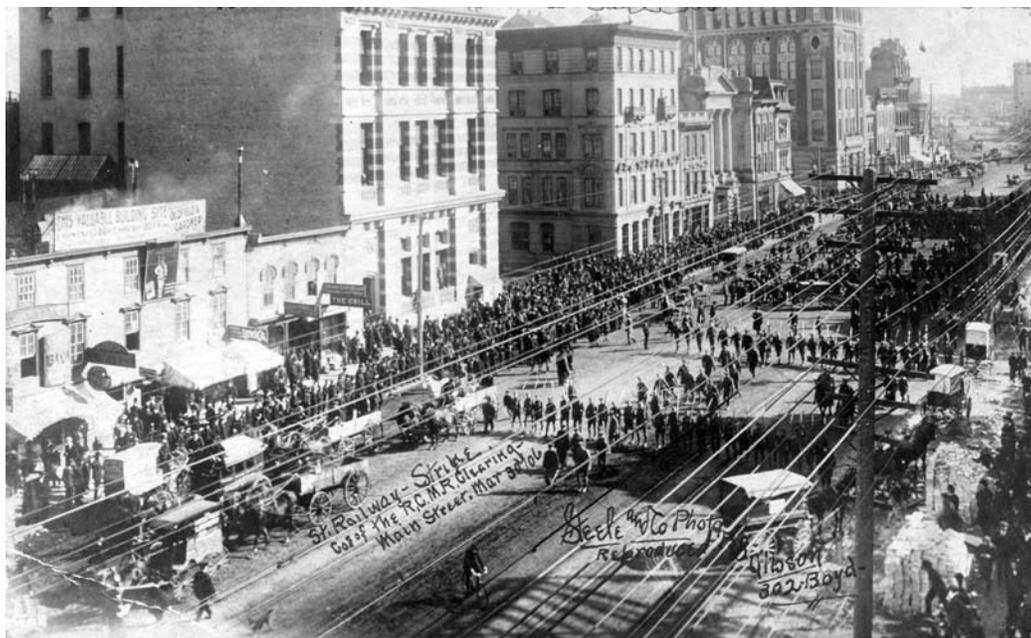
"policemen, detectives, and strikebreakers," functioning essentially as "armored trains."<sup>44</sup> The period of relative calm continued for the next few days, during which time the deputation of ministers continued to meet with both parties in the dispute.

Violence resumed on 5 April when the company attempted to provide night-time car service for the first time during the strike, an attempt that was cut short after only one hour. The daytime service had been largely undisturbed, although most citizens still chose to boycott the cars.<sup>45</sup> That evening, however, a crowd of thousands gathered around Main and Alexander and pelted a southbound car with stones, bottles "and every kind of missile."<sup>46</sup> Elsewhere a conductor and motorman were chased from their car by a crowd of people, but succeeded in outdistancing their pursuers. The evening also resulted in injuries to two police officers, both of whom were struck in the head and cut by thrown bottles.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile deliberations were still underway between the ministers, the employees, and the company, and on Saturday, 7 April, an agreement was reached. By undertaking the role of mediator between the two sides in the dispute, the ministerial representatives acted as "the medium through which the final agreement was arrived at."<sup>48</sup> As a result of the negotiations, the employees received an advance of one cent per hour instead of the two they had asked for, and for the third and fourth consecutive years of employment, they would receive 26 cents per hour, which they saw as satisfactory.<sup>49</sup> Union recognition though, was not achieved outright.<sup>50</sup> Although the Ministerial Association was credited as the main force in facilitating a solution to the work stoppage, *The Voice* noted that the upcoming visit of Prince Arthur of Connaught likely also played a role in

speeding up the process of reconciliation. To have the prince visit the city during a volatile labour dispute was not desirable for the city officials organizing the visit, and they sent several urgent letters to company owner and Toronto capitalist William Mackenzie in regarding this subject.<sup>51</sup>

A conspicuous feature of the violence in 1906 is that it was undertaken almost entirely by the public, as opposed to the strikers. The newspapers addressed this fact by often writing the crowds off as a rather uncivilized lot, rambunctious delinquents with no connection to or interest in the strike.



Archives of Manitoba, Edgar J. Ransom Collection 459.

**Clearing the streets.** The Royal Canadian Mounted Rifles patrolled Main Street at the request of Winnipeg's Mayor, 30 March 1906.

Although this was likely the case to a certain extent, the demography of the crowds was actually much more diverse than that. The *Morning Telegram* remarked that the crowd which was involved with the events of 29 March consisted of “labourers, business men, and in fact individuals from every walk of life” who all “seemed to be in sympathy with the strikers.”<sup>52</sup> This was also addressed in a letter to the editor published in the *Tribune*, in which the writer took

exception to the statements repeatedly made, viz., that the rioters are hoodlums. Yesterday and today I have been moving freely through the crowd and was a witness of the smashing of the cars Thursday and the riot between Henry and Higgins avenue on Friday. The young men who did the wrecking and rough work were as respectable looking as the scabs the company have imported to run the cars. I do not believe any strike was ever cheered on by a better crowd.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, the demonstrators were not merely people out to use the strike as an excuse to wreak havoc, but citizens for whom the street railway and the concerns of its employees held a special interest, and informed their view of life within the city. In addition to violent reaction against the company, another form of resistance taken on by the public was walking. While a small number of people did avail themselves of streetcar service during the strike, the overwhelming majority “preferred to stand by the men and uphold their motto ‘we walk.’”<sup>54</sup> Further to this *The Voice* made a point of reporting the case of two women who every day walked two miles from their home on Sherbrooke Street to their place of business in the city’s North End.<sup>55</sup>

Interestingly, while the boycott remained effective until the strike’s conclusion, “quite a number of people” in the southern regions of Winnipeg did make some use of the forty cars in operation on 5 April. In contrast, “there were practically no passengers” in the North End,<sup>56</sup> which brings to light the spatial organization of class divisions in the city. By 1895, the North End had become largely populated by the working class, while areas in the South such as Crescentwood and Armstrong’s Point contained the extravagant “palaces” and “private gardens” of the elite.<sup>57</sup> The North End had been a stronghold of worker solidarity since the strike’s beginnings, when the *Free Press* noted that “the sympathy of the public in the North End seems to be entirely with the men and hopes are most openly expressed that they will win.”<sup>58</sup> Indeed, only three North End streetcars were reported in service on 31 March and none of them held any passengers, as people elected to walk instead.<sup>59</sup> While support for the strikers was widespread, and extended across class lines, the location of the most stalwart strike support in the North End illustrates the spatial nature of class divisions in Winnipeg.

The fact that the public instigated the violence of 1906 and actively supported the strike by walking speaks to the important role the street railway played in the lives

of Winnipeggers and how it was an integral part of an urban consciousness within the city. But the development of this consciousness had been taking place prior to 1906. The debate over Sunday streetcars contributed to this development when it became a hot-button topic in 1902. Attempts were made by the Winnipeg city council in 1902 to fashion a bylaw that would allow for the operation of cars on Sunday, but the street railway company disagreed with the insertion of a clause stating that their employees would not have to work seven days a week. Since the council felt it important that the conductors and motormen retained their one day off during the week (a concern that was communicated to them by the workers themselves), the bylaw did not advance any further at the time.<sup>60</sup> After the company assured the council that no employees would have to work seven days a week (an assurance seen as weak by labour interests),<sup>61</sup> the bylaw was put to a vote of taxpayers in the civic election of December 1902. It was defeated.<sup>62</sup> City Council’s acceptance of what was seen as the company’s half-hearted promise of a six-day workweek, rather than an ironclad guarantee, speaks to the diversity of opinions that existed on the council in the weeks leading up to the vote. One alderman expressed outright approval of Sunday cars, while another maintained that the public should vote and decide on the issue. Alderman Horne expressed his personal opinion against Sunday cars, while remarking that City Council had little authority in the matter.<sup>63</sup>

The Sunday car issue also brought out animosity toward the Winnipeg Electric Company. A letter to the editor of the *Free Press* in November 1902, for example, argued that to vote “yes” on the question of Sunday cars was to “play into the hands of grasping, money-making corporations.”<sup>64</sup> This distrust of the company was also manifested in the attitude of many members of the public who were not opposed to Sunday cars themselves, but approved of them only when they could “be had on fair terms,” with “employees fully protected.”<sup>65</sup> When the Sunday car bylaw reared its head again prior to the 1905 civic election, these sentiments were repeated. The Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council called persistently for the insertion of a clause in the bylaw “forbidding the company to employ a man for seven days,”<sup>66</sup> and the public seemed to express a similar opinion when an informal public poll of the question, undertaken by the *Free Press*, produced a “distinct middle party who were for Sunday cars if secured on good terms and proper restrictions—but not otherwise.”<sup>67</sup> Of course, trepidation over the company’s control of public life and workers’ rights was not the only motive behind anti-Sunday car sentiments. The religious argument against neglecting the “day of rest” was also very widely employed. Nevertheless, opposition to Sunday cars that was based on concerns for the rights of street railway employees does show that the public was aware of working-class concerns and their relevance to more broadly held views of justice and fair treatment within an urban context.

While the Sunday car debate provides examples of the development of an urban consciousness in the years prior to the 1906 strike, the discourse surrounding the strike demonstrates the existence of this consciousness within the context of labour unrest. That there was a certain amity between the street railway workers and the public is evident in the recollections of Harry Hutchcroft:

During the summer and fall our task on the whole was a pleasant one, and it seems to me that the relationship between the streetcar men and the public was generally speaking quite a cordial one. We were acquainted with our regular patrons and both my conductor and I knew that we should pick up certain passengers at certain corners, especially on the morning trips, and we looked for them. Yes, even waited a few moments for them if we could see them scurrying up their streets. There were even the odd ones who would notify us if they were not expecting to go to work on the following day—just so we wouldn't be concerned about their non-appearance. You couldn't beat that for co-operation, now could you?<sup>68</sup>

Such cooperation between the workers and the public suggests a sense that they were members of the same community, separated by their occupations but united by their interest in maintaining friendly and functioning relationships within that community. This sense of commonality between street railway employees and other citizens was also alluded to in a letter written to the *Tribune* during the 1906 strike which stated that, "We, the citizens of Winnipeg, made the street railway a present of a franchise which is worth a million. Are not we, the citizens, entitled to say to them, 'You must not force a strike, you must not be sole judge, you should arbitrate whether our citizens are receiving a fair wage.'"<sup>69</sup> In the

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**A conspicuous feature of the violence in 1906 is that it was undertaken almost entirely by the public, as opposed to the strikers.**

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language of this assertion, the line between the working class and the citizens is blurred. According to this writer, the citizens were the patrons who "made" the company what it was (through using its service consistently and often). However, citizens are also identified as the workers, those who are entitled to a fair wage. The division between worker and citizen is removed, and both are conceived of as members of a common group with common interests, and class-consciousness is melded into a broader urban consciousness. To be sure, the discourse of the strike was rife with references to the employees and the public as two entirely separate groups, with the public often portrayed

as collateral damage in the battle between the company and its wage earners. However, the company was more often than not portrayed in the public discourse as being on the other side of the fence, so to speak, of both citizens and workers.

This portrayal is quite noticeable in newspaper accounts of the 1906 strike, which convey a feeling among citizens of the street railway company as outside entity, heavy-handedly exerting its influence over the city. The fact that the *Tribune* printed a facsimile copy of a document distributed by the company among its employees with the expectation that it be signed, would have allowed readers a window into the experience of the workers and the issues they faced and therefore allowing for the possible identification with the striking workers. The same edition of the *Tribune* also described the company's offer to "acknowledge" the union at a meeting with employee representatives as "half-hearted,"<sup>70</sup> thereby painting a picture of the company as unwilling to seriously consider the workers' concerns. Other assertions from the public included a show of support for the strikers in order to "show these monopolies that they can't run the city entirely."<sup>71</sup> One *Tribune* reader additionally characterized the street railway as "one of the most grasping concerns preying on the public. A handful of shareholders have a monopoly of a public utility, out of which they are enriching themselves at the expense of the people,"<sup>72</sup> and another reader wrote on April 2, "is there no limit to our subjugation to the Mackenzie and Mann interests?"<sup>73</sup>

The language of the company as an outsider is more explicit in a letter to the *Free Press* of 5 April 1906, which accuses William Mackenzie, of being an autocrat who "at a safe distance directs the policy of the company."<sup>74</sup> Likewise, one reader commented that although the company objected to its employees being advised or represented by an "outsider," the street railway itself was "ruled by a president who does not live in the city, but who dictates the policy of the company from Toronto."<sup>75</sup>

Suspensions of Mackenzie and the street railway as an invasive and powerful element within the city were not unwarranted. He was already an owner of the Toronto Street Railway, which he had purchased in aggressive fashion, and in part through some dubious back room dealings with city council.<sup>76</sup> Seeking to expand their business, a syndicate headed by Mackenzie and his partner Donald Mann in 1892 obtained a franchise to build an electric street railway in Winnipeg. Mackenzie wasted little time in consolidating his monopoly over the street railway utility, buying out A. W. Austin's rival line for \$175,000 in cash. Mackenzie's Winnipeg Electric Street Railway then built its own power plant, exerting competitive pressure on the Manitoba Electric and Gas Light Company, and eventually buying out Manitoba Electric for stock instead of cash.<sup>77</sup> Mackenzie's monopoly was further extended in 1904 when the electric railway company "acquired complete control of still another power company that had been established to develop a water-power source on the Winnipeg River,"

and as a result, the Winnipeg Electric Railway Company found itself with a virtual monopoly over power supply, lighting, and street railways in Winnipeg.<sup>78</sup>

The business undertakings of Mackenzie in Winnipeg show that utilities were not merely services provided to the public, they were also capital-infused companies with a bottom line of making a profit. As Harvey has commented, the city and its neighbourhoods are seen by the communities of money and capital simply as “relative spaces to be built up, torn down, or abandoned as profitability dictates.” However, from the standpoint of the people who live there, cities and neighbourhoods “form an absolute space of particular qualities” that contribute to place-bound loyalties and a sense of community.<sup>79</sup> Such loyalties were made clear in June of 1906, when twenty-eight residents of Colony Street petitioned the City of Winnipeg not to authorize “any extension of the Street Railway System along that portion of Colony Street lying between Broadway and Portage Avenue as it would be a detriment to us the residents thereon,”<sup>80</sup> an instance in which the interests of capital and the public came into conflict. All of these examples demonstrate the existence in Winnipeg

at the criminally foolish and exasperating methods of the board of directors of the company in dealing with the employees. The public likes to see fair play, and the men do not get it.”<sup>82</sup> Again, citizenship and membership in “the public” was defined as directly counter to the interests of the company. The *Morning Telegram* echoed similar feelings when it stated, “it is contrary to all the laws of fairness and contrary to the public interest for the Street Railway Company to fight every move made in the direction of peace.”<sup>83</sup> The company was thus seen as obstinately standing in the way of what the public and the workers wished to see: a solution to the strike.

Both the company and the union also attempted to appeal to the public and in this way perceived the public as a sort of third party in the dispute. On the eve of the 1906 strike, the workers acknowledged that any stoppage of service would have profound consequences for the citizens, and that the public deserved the “fullest consideration.”<sup>84</sup> Two days later, in the midst of violent outbursts, the company attempted to appeal to the public by asking whether the company would be permitted to carry on its business and to take measures to protect users of its service, and whether mob violence would be allowed to interfere with the company’s service to the public.<sup>85</sup> In 1906, these pleas of the company would not be effective in swaying a general public whose consciousness encompassed the interests of labour.

Standing in stark contrast to the events and discourse of 1906 was the second strike of the street railway workers in 1910. The causes of the 1910 strike and the issues at stake within it show that urban consciousness, although quite strong in 1906, was also contingent in nature and therefore not as pronounced four years later. In the years following the 1906 strike, motorman Andrew Scoble recalled that “Conditions at work did not improve very much and for the least infraction we were subjected to two day’s

[sic] off work without pay, the Company Officials were strict in some things and slack in other things.”<sup>86</sup> As early as June 1906, discontent among the employees of the company was being reported in the *Free Press*, which cited complaints of workers that “the agreement which ended the strike is being broken in some of its most important particulars, and the company are said to be carrying on a vigorous campaign to get rid of the union.” This campaign allegedly included placing those men, who had been quite active in 1906 on to “undesirable” routes, and assigning them thirteen-hour shifts, as well as harassment of the employees by company inspectors who would continually question them regarding their personal views on union matters.<sup>87</sup>

The relationship between the company and the men was evidently becoming strained once more, and in the autumn of 1910, the workers took issue with the company’s 12 October dismissal of three motormen and one conductor who, according to their employers, had broken the rule



Manitoba Free Press, 30 March 1906, page 1.

of a strong suspicion of the company, and a view of it as fundamentally counter to the interests and well-being of the city and its residents, workers and other citizens alike.

This is not to say that the public was assumed to be sympathetic to labour in 1906. Rather, notions of citizenship and public interest were debated and contested throughout the strike, and the result was a conception of public interest that had class and labour concerns as part of its make-up. *The Voice* praised those people who “have enough citizen-conscience to impel them to put up with [the] discomfort [of] walking as a protest.”<sup>81</sup> Proper citizenship was defined as taking an active stand against the community-invasive Winnipeg Electric Railway Company. Similarly, the violence of the strike sympathizers was condemned by the striking workers and labour interests generally. Rioters were discounted in *The Voice* as “hoodlums,” with the qualification that behind the violence lay a “deep indignation shared by all workers and the public generally



Archives of Manitoba, Edgar J. Ransom Collection 462.

**Battered and bruised.** This “stranded car” from the Portage Avenue line had nearly all of its windows broken during the strike. Damaged streetcars were a feature of both the 1906 and 1910 strikes.

“prohibiting the drinking of intoxicating liquors in bars while in the Company’s uniform.”<sup>88</sup> Two of the men had been members of the union executive, and the threat of a strike was immediately in the air as the union argued that the company had used the pretense of the rule concerning alcohol in order to fire the men because of their union affiliations. A strike was narrowly averted when the employees decided, at the advice of the international union, to instead pursue conciliation under the recently created federal Industrial Disputes Investigation Act (IDIA).<sup>89</sup> The federal conciliation board was to arrive at a judgment on the matter, but proceedings were decried by labour as discriminatory as soon as the board’s reports were issued. The impartiality of the board was also called into question when it was pointed out that the board’s chair, W. J. Christie, had acted as a representative for the street railway company in a 1909 arbitration with its employees.<sup>90</sup> When the board ruled in favour of the street railway company, a strike vote was taken by the employees, which resulted in the initiation of Winnipeg’s second street railway strike on 15 December.

The creation of the IDIA was based upon the idea of protecting the “community” interest, or the interests of society at large, through “law and order”<sup>91</sup> and its emergence in the 1910 dispute drastically reconfigured the roles of community, company, and workers. In 1906, the local Ministerial Association had been universally praised for affecting a solution between the local workers and their rogue “outsider” employers. In 1910, however, it was the street railway workers and their union representative

who were construed by the press and by the company as a rogue force, flying in the face of the conciliation board’s presumably neutral decision, and thus running counter to the public interest as defined by the company and the state.<sup>92</sup>

It became immediately apparent that the strikers would not enjoy the same level of public sympathy that they did in 1906. This is not to say that the streetcars operated completely unmolested throughout the strike. Indeed, four days after the strike had commenced, twelve streetcars that had been sent down Logan Avenue to pick up Canadian Pacific Railroad workers at the CPR shops were damaged. When the CPR men refused to board the cars due to the fact that no policemen were aboard for protection, the cars were

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**In 1910 ... it was the street railway workers and their union representative who were construed by the press and by the company as a rogue force ... running counter to the public interest as defined by the company and the state.**

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sent back, and were pelted with rocks and chunks of coal. Several of the cars’ crewmembers were badly cut on the hands and face due to the flying missiles and the smashed glass of the windows.<sup>93</sup> The following day, 21 December,

windows of several streetcars were smashed throughout the city, and police reported hostile demonstrations by strike sympathizers on almost every route in the city.<sup>94</sup> Later that evening a riot occurred between 7:30 and 8:00 pm at the Fort Rouge car barns. Upon the car's approach to the barns a gunshot was heard on the car, and as the passengers alighted from the vehicle, several special detectives stationed at the barn "rushed out and attacked the crowd, belaboring them with billies, switch irons, and other weapons."<sup>95</sup> One of the most vicious incidents occurred two days later when a car was burned down to its wheels on Logan Avenue by a crowd of about 200 people. Members of the crowd also beat the motorman and conductor quite badly, with the motorman's head being cut open and the conductor sustaining several cuts to his face.<sup>96</sup> Despite the action of some strike sympathizers against the streetcars, the majority of the public seemed indifferent and even hostile to the strikers. Although several cars were damaged throughout the city, the company soon managed to maintain a widespread service, with all routes in operation by 22 December.<sup>97</sup> Not only that, but the public patronized the cars in droves and on 19 December, the first Monday after the strike was called, the *Free Press* noted that cars in the North End were "packed all the afternoon, as indeed were practically all the cars toward evening,"<sup>98</sup> quite a change indeed from largely successful boycott in 1906.

The residents of the city clearly did not identify with the workers, a fact that was exemplified in a letter to the *Tribune* sardonically proclaiming, "What wonderful men those street car men are. Misguided they must be ... parading the streets seeking for sympathy from a community that they have done all they can against."<sup>99</sup> Most of the editorials and letters to the editor adopted a similar tone, often making sure to point out how inconvenient the labour stoppage was to citizens, the "innocent victims" of the strike.<sup>100</sup>

Why was this strike so different compared to 1906? The events of the December 1910 show that there were limits to how deeply class-consciousness could be accepted as part of an urban consciousness, and the public, through its actions and words, defined its limits in the areas of commerce, convenience, and social justice. First, commerce—throughout the 1910 strike, the press constantly mentioned that the labour stoppage was occurring during one of the busiest shopping times of the year, the period leading up to Christmas. Shop owners and businessmen were interviewed at the outset of the strike to discuss how they were being affected,<sup>101</sup> and the *Tribune* editorialized on 27 December that the street railway employees "precipitated a crisis at a season of the year which wrought incalculable injury to business interests."<sup>102</sup> Such arguments against the strike based on commerce were comparatively nonexistent in the minds of the citizens in 1906. The arguments employed in 1910 demonstrate how the street railway as a capitalist entity contributed to class-consciousness, as well as how it contributed to a "consciousness of limited but important individual freedom" in the spending of money<sup>103</sup> by transporting people to centres of business and

commerce. In 1910, it was the latter consciousness with which the public identified.

Secondly, the issue of convenience—although the street railway company was eventually able to offer a widespread service during the 1910 strike, the initial work stoppage of the union men produced an absence of streetcar transportation that was not greeted kindly by the public. The *Free Press* devoted a considerable amount of ink after the strike's first day to the plight of those people residing in the outlying regions of the city, remarking that "a walk of miles through snow and over slippery roads after seven or eight hours of serving in a departmental store or working in a factory could be nothing but a severe hardship."<sup>104</sup> Evidently, the harsh December weather made walking a much less cheerful process than it was during the spring of 1906.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, is the issue of social justice and conceptions of it during the strikes. In 1906, class-consciousness was an integral part of urban consciousness because of the public's identification with the workers, but in 1910, the public could not see justice in the strikers' cause as they had four years previously. The 27 December *Tribune* editorial charged: "The men have always maintained that they were fighting for the maintenance of a principle, but it has to be confessed that the public have been unable to follow or discern with any clearness the principle that was being trampled on."<sup>105</sup> The fact that the case had already been ruled upon in the arbitration of October could not have helped the public comprehend the workers' justification for going on strike. While the public was able to sympathize with fights to raise wages or improve working conditions, it could not favour "the life and limbs...of passengers [being] placed in jeopardy by permitting any variation from or breach of the rules relating to the use of intoxicants."<sup>106</sup>

Limits were indeed assigned to the definition of an urban consciousness in 1910, but it is important to note the role played by the street railway company in assigning these limits. Throughout the 1910 strike, the street railway union and other labour organizations sought to remind the public that the real issue for the strikers was not that of drinking alcohol while in uniform. In fact, union representatives took great pains to let the public know that it did not and had never approved of such activities. Rather, the key question for the strikers was one of justice through union recognition, as they felt that the men had been dismissed due to their union affiliations. Immediately after the strike was called, the street railwaymen stated their belief that "the people of Winnipeg will stand by them when they realize that the company has for a long time been planning to break up their organization." At a union's first meeting of the strike, it was further pointed out that, "the company had chosen the drinking charges entirely for their power to affect public opinion."<sup>107</sup> *The Voice* wryly addressed the company's insistence on the safety of streetcar passengers and bystanders as the motivation for dismissing the employees, by remarking that in the past, the

company had been slow and obstinate in adopting proper safety appliances such as fenders and guards, and stating that it was therefore “somewhat difficult to understand the sudden deep solicitude for the welfare of the general public which the company puts forward as an excuse for the discharge of these men.”<sup>108</sup>

Yet in spite of such protestations, the company was able to hold the majority of public sympathy by emphasizing issues that could not be construed as constituting a definition of “public interest” that sided with labour. The contingent nature of urban consciousness, so apparent in the disconnects and incongruities between the 1906 and 1910 strikes, can be explained in how the “confusion of urban social and political movements under capitalism derives from the ways in which individuals internalize diverse conceptions and act upon them in a milieu that demands mixed conceptions rather than giving anyone a clear-cut identity.”<sup>109</sup> The formation of urban consciousness is dependent on so many diverse and changing factors that it does not maintain the same form; thus the differences in definitions of consciousness and public interest in 1906 and 1910.

The Winnipeg street railway strikes of 1906 and 1910 provide rich contexts for an inquiry into the nature of an urban consciousness. The violence and boycott of the streetcars in 1906 was a pronounced feature of that strike, made more unique by the fact that nearly all the participants in the demonstrations were members of the public—strike sympathizers—and not street railway employees. This was due to the public’s identification with working class concerns, as well as a shared distrust of the Winnipeg Electric Railway Company. Evidently, the city’s capitalist interests did not anticipate the spontaneous response of the public, as they were not able to adequately quell the violent reaction. Furthermore, citizens not directly connected with the streetcar workers nevertheless saw them as members of the same urban community, a community that perceived the company as a manipulative organization oppressing the city through its monopoly of utilities such as the street railway that had become interwoven with the life of the community. Workers and citizens alike rejected the company’s attempted definitions of proper urban citizenship and public interest, instead accepting a conception of public interest that was class-conscious and that viewed the street railway company and its owners as invasive and harmful to the community.

On the other hand, the 1910 dispute reveals how an urban consciousness is not static, and is contingent in nature. Capital successfully contested urban consciousness in 1910, and consequently the public became frustrated with the striking workers on the bases of commerce, convenience, and social justice. More importantly, the company gained a larger measure of public sympathy by emphasizing certain issues as central to the dispute, issues that would not fit in with a class-public interest. The rhetoric of the city newspapers also changed, and with the Ministerial Association no longer in play as a mediator,

the press focused on the federal conciliation board as the main voice of mediation in the conflict and the strikers as standing in the way of the public good, a journalistic stance that bode well for the street railway company. On the other side of the dispute, labour interests were unable to sway the focus of the strike from the moral issue of alcohol to the class issue of union recognition and fairness for the employees. The main issues of 1906 were those that the public was able to get behind, but this was not the case in 1910. The unified community in which class and urban consciousness coalesced was weakened as a result of the 1910 strike, but as the evidence from 1906 demonstrates, it would not necessarily have to remain that way. ❧

### Notes

1. *Manitoba Free Press* (hereafter *MFP*), “Two Streetcars Burned by Mob,” 30 March 1906, p. 1; *Winnipeg Morning Telegram* (hereafter *WMT*), “Was Most Riotous Day in City’s History,” 30 March 1906, p. 1; *WMT*, “Day of Clash Between Strikebreakers, Police and Crowds,” 30 March 1906, p. 5.
2. Armstrong, Christopher and H.V. Nelles, *Monopoly’s Moment: The Organization and Regulation of Canadian Utilities, 1830–1930*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988, p. 46.
3. Harvey, David. *Consciousness and the Urban Experience: Studies and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985, p. 250.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Harvey makes this clear in his study of Paris, wherein he argues that the class consciousness of the Paris Commune was forged out of, and as a part of, “a search to transform the power and social relations within a particular [urban] class configuration constituted within a particular [urban] space of a capitalist world.” Harvey, David. *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 308.
8. Armstrong and Nelles, *Monopoly’s Moment: The Organization and Regulation of Canadian Utilities, 1830–1930*.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 141–146.
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19. Young, Dina M. “The St. Louis Streetcar Strike of 1900: Pivotal Politics at the Century’s Dawn,” *Gateway Heritage* 1991, vol. 21, no. 1 p. 13; Scharnau, Ralph. “Streetcar Strike 1903: Dubuque Walks,” *Labor’s Heritage* 6, no. 3 (1995): 60; Robert H. Babcock, “The Saint John Street

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20. *Winnipeg Tribune*, "A Motorman Recalls His Old Tram Days". 17 September 1955, Archives of Manitoba (hereafter AM), Vertical File: "Transportation—Street Cars."
  21. *Ibid.*
  22. *The Voice*. "The Strike Won". 13 April 1906, p. 1.
  23. *The Voice*, "Street Railway Employees". 29 April 1904, p. 13.
  24. WMT, "New Increase Asked by Men". 26 March 1906, p. 9.
  25. WMT, "Today Decides the Momentous Question". 27 March 1906, p. 5.
  26. "Street Railway Men," *The Voice*, 23 March 1906, p. 1.
  27. *The Voice*, "Street Railway Service Tied Up". 30 March 1906, p. 1.
  28. MFP, "Recognition of Union Refused". 28 March 1906, p. 15.
  29. MFP, "Street Railway Strike Begun". 29 March 1906 p. 1.
  30. WMT, "Day of Clash Between Strikebreakers, Police and Crowds". 30 March 1906, p. 12.
  31. *Ibid.*
  32. *Ibid.*
  33. MFP, "Mobs Prevent Cars Running". 30 March 1906, p. 10.
  34. Bercuson, David Jay. *Confrontation at Winnipeg: Labour, Industrial Relations, and the General Strike*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974, p. 13.
  35. MFP, "Brutally Beaten". 30 March 1906, p. 10.
  36. *Winnipeg Tribune* (hereafter WT), "Street Cars Wrecked, Militia to be Called Out," 29 March 1906, p. 7; WMT, "Was the Most Riotous Day in City's History," 30 March 1906, p. 1; WMT, "Day of Clash Between Strikebreakers, Police and Crowds," 30 March 1906, p. 12.
  37. WMT, "Was the Most Riotous Day in City's History," 30 March 1906, p. 1.
  38. *Ibid.*
  39. WMT, "Another Day of Futile Effort to Run Street Cars," 31 March 1906, p. 1.
  40. *Ibid.*
  41. Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg*, p. 14.
  42. WMT, "Colonel Dismisses Winnipeg Garrison," 2 April 1906, p. 5.
  43. MFP, "Comparative Quiet Restored," 31 March 1906, 1; WMT, "Quiet Prevailed Along Car Lines," 2 April 1906, p. 5.
  44. WMT, "Quiet Prevailed Along Car Lines," 2 April 1906, p. 5.
  45. WMT, "First Night Service Tempts Unruly and Boisterous Crowd," 6 April 1906, p. 10.
  46. WMT, "Police Officers are Injured," 6 April 1906, p. 1.
  47. *Ibid.*
  48. *The Voice*, "The Strike Won," 13 April 1906, p. 1.
  49. WMT, "Directors and Workmen Settle Their Differences," 9 April 1906, p. 1.
  50. Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg*, p. 14.
  51. *The Voice*, "The Strike Won," 13 April 1906, p. 1.
  52. WMT, "Day of Clash Between Strikebreakers, Police and Crowds," 30 March 1906, p. 12.
  53. WT, "Mayor Sharpe's Attitude," 2 April 1906, p. 3.
  54. WMT, "Directors and Men Settle Differences," 9 April 1906, p. 10.
  55. *The Voice*, "24 Hours More," 6 April 1906, p. 1.
  56. WMT, "First Night Service Tempts Unruly and Boisterous Crowd," 6 April 1906, p. 10.
  57. Artibise, Alan F. J. *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975, pp. 158, 168.
  58. MFP, "North of the Subway," 30 March 1906, p. 12.
  59. *Ibid*; MFP, "The North End," 31 March 1906, p. 12.
  60. MFP, "May Be No Sunday Cars," 4 November 1902, p. 14.
  61. *The Voice*, "All Of One Mind," 14 November 1902, p. 4.
  62. WMT, "John Arbuthnot Once More Winnipeg's Chief Executive," 10 December 1902, p. 1.
  63. WMT, "What About Sunday Cars?" 6 May 1904, p. 9.
  64. MFP, "Opposed to Sunday Street Cars," 19 November 1902, p. 7.
  65. WMT, "Selkirk Hall Meeting," 5 December 1902, p. 4.
  66. *The Voice*, "Council and Cars," 28 April 1905, p. 9.
  67. MFP, "Sunday Street Cars," 12 June 1905, p. 1.
  68. WT, "A Motorman Recalls His Old Tram Days," 17 September 1955, AM, Vertical File: "Transportation—Street Cars."
  69. WT, "Should Arbitrate," 29 March 1906, p. 5.
  70. WT, "The Decision to Strike," 29 March 1906, p. 4.
  71. WT, "Sympathy With Men," 29 March 1906, p. 5.
  72. *Ibid.*, "Let There Be Order,"
  73. WT, "Where Are We At?," 2 April 1906, p. 3.
  74. MFP, "Adequate Protection for Street Railway Company," 5 April 1906, p. 13.
  75. MFP, "Favours the Organization of the Men," 6 April 1906, p. 5.
  76. Christopher Armstrong and H. V. Nelles, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company: Sunday Streetcars and Municipal Reform in Toronto, 1888-1897*. Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Limited, 1977, p. 43.
  77. *Ibid.*, *Monopoly's Moment*, pp. 94-95.
  78. Artibise, *Winnipeg*, p. 94.
  79. Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, pp. 254-255.
  80. J. W. Horne et al, to City Clerk's Office, Winnipeg, 1906, File no. 7799, City Council Letter Register, City of Winnipeg Archives and Records Control, Winnipeg, MB.
  81. *The Voice*, "We Walk," 6 April 1906, p. 4.
  82. *The Voice*, "Street Railway Service Tied Up," 30 March 1906, p. 1.
  83. WMT, "No Time for Stubbornness," 5 April 1906, p. 4.
  84. MFP, "Recognition of Union Refused," 28 March 1906, p. 1.
  85. MFP, "Company Asks for Protection," 30 March 1906, p. 9.
  86. *Andrew Scoble Papers*, AM, c.1969-1981, Originals & Photostat, 25 pp., MG 14 C111.
  87. MFP, "Trouble Brewing on Street Railway Again," 1 June 1906, p. 1.
  88. "Department of Labour, Canada—Trades Disputes," 19 December 1910, AM, RG 27, vol. 298, reel no. T-2687.
  89. MFP, "Strike is Averted By International," 19 October 1910, p. 1.
  90. *The Voice*, "An Attack on Organization," 23 December 1910, p. 7.
  91. Craven, Paul. *An Impartial Umpire: Industrial Relations and the Canadian State, 1900-1911*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980, p. 6.
  92. Harvey argues that, "in the context of the communities of money and capital, the legitimacy of the state has to rest on its ability to define a public interest over and above privatism (individualistic or familial, class struggle, and conflictual community interests." *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, pp. 259-260.
  93. MFP, "Street Cars Mobbed in Weston," 20 December 1910, p. 1.
  94. MFP, "Strike Riot at Fort Rouge Barns," 21 December 1910, p. 7.
  95. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
  96. MFP, "Street Car Burned and Crew Injured," 24 December 1910, p. 1.
  97. MFP, "All Car Routes Open Yesterday," 23 December 1910, p. 17.
  98. MFP, "Complete Service Promised Today," 19 December 1910, p. 2.
  99. WT, "The Street Car Strike," 31 December 1910, p. 4.
  100. MFP, "Street Cars Will Be Run Today," 17 December 1910, p. 1; "From the Public Standpoint," MFP, 17 December 1910, p. 13.
  101. MFP, "From the Public Standpoint," 17 December 1910, p. 13.
  102. WT, "The Street Car Strike," 27 December 1910, p. 4.
  103. Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, p. 254.
  104. MFP, "Trouble of the Wage Earner," 17 December 1910, p. 13.
  105. WT, "The Street Car Strike," 27 December 1910, p. 4.
  106. *Ibid.*
  107. *The Voice*, "Street Railwaymen Strike," 16 December 1910, p. 9.
  108. *The Voice*, "An Attack on Organization," 23 December 1909, p. 7.
  109. Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, p. 262.

# “Covenant Servants”: Contract, Negotiation, and Accommodation in Hudson Bay, 1670–1782

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Throughout its long first century (1670–1782), the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) drew its labour force almost entirely from the competitive labour “market” of early modern Britain, with the movement of men to and from the Bay reflective of the domestic labour mobility of the period. The relationship between the London Committee and their employees was that of master and servants, heavily influenced by the circumstances of trading in Hudson Bay. Men at all levels of the Company hierarchy could try to shape the reality of their HBC experiences, but did so in terms of commonly accepted ideals. The Committee and their servants all understood

the nature of ideal master-servant relationships, but they also had experience of the realities of life in various kinds of social and economic households. The Company’s servants internalized and practised the expected values of deference and submission, but did so without abandoning or deferring their own self-interest; indeed, they could use their mastery of the language to advance their own interests.

Eighteenth-century HBC servants seem to resemble later industrial wage-earners, in that they sold their labour for cash and were provided with most of the tools and raw materials with which they worked.<sup>1</sup> However, the terms of



E. E. Rich & A. M. Johnson (eds.), *James Isham’s Observations on Hudsons Bay, 1743, and Notes and Observations on a Book Entitled A Voyage to Hudsons Bay in the Dobbs Galley, 1749* (Toronto: Champlain Society for the Hudson’s Bay Record Society, 1949), page 148.

**The rodent hunt.** Governor James Isham drew a crude but effective illustration of the 18<sup>th</sup> century beaver hunt along Hudson Bay. Bayside service provided the opportunity for private trapping or trading with the proceeds split between the employee and the company or with the captain of the supply ship.

their service also invite comparisons to “pre-industrial” domestic servants or servants in husbandry (agriculture), though the length of service was much longer in Hudson Bay. Bayside servants’ relationship with their employer was based not entirely on contract, but contractual obligations

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were the most visible aspects of that relationship.<sup>2</sup> Underlying them was the much older institution of the patriarchal household-family, which served as the fundamental social unit on the shores of Hudson Bay (as in Britain).<sup>3</sup> Although membership changed, that institution maintained continuity over time.

**Signing On**

Early modern employment contracts were economic, social, and even moral covenants. The term “covenant” was used in the HBC through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Committee’s minutes of 27 February 1684 referred to “9 of the Covenant Servants” at Port Nelson (later known as York Fort). In mariner Daniel Lane’s testimony in a 1684 legal case, he described himself as “a Covenant Servant of the Hudsons Bay Company.” A 1688 letter to Port Nelson mentioned a new form of contract, and a marginal note summarized this paragraph of the letter as “new Covenants for Servants Sent.” The earliest known surviving contracts (1776) began, “I ... do hereby Covenant and Agree to and with the Governor and Company.”<sup>4</sup>

In general, service contracts in early modern Britain set out what the employee and employer could expect from one another in terms of remuneration and behaviour. This usually included (explicitly or implicitly) binding the servant to serve the master for a specified period of time and to obey his reasonable commands, while binding the master to maintain the servant for the duration of the contract and to pay the agreed wages (whether or not there was daily work, and whether or not the servant remained fit for work). These contractual terms were reinforced in the HBC by an Oath of Fidelity taken by all employees. On Christmas Eve 1718, for instance, each servant at York swore:

I do hereby Engage myself by Oath to Use my uttmmost Power With fidelity and Courage to defend the Intrest of the Hudsons Bay Comp[an]y against all Enimies either forrain or as Our Nation And will Obey all Such lawful commands as the Govr or Chief factor Shall Impose upon me and in my Station Shall Endeavour the Defending keeping & Secureing all the Rights & Priveledges of the foresaid Comp[an]y against all oppossers

whatever & this I Will do without any discontent or Cowardize to the Utmost Perrill of my Life.

Further I do hereby Oblige myself not to have any Dealing Trade Traffick or Commerce with Any Natives lying being or Inhabiting in any part within the fores[ai]d Comp[an]ys Charter unless I shall be orderd so to by the Govr or Chief factor in being & if I should know any Person or Persons that shall drive any Private Trade their Names I will Detect the Commodities so traded I will discover to the Govr or Chief Factor & in Case I shall be found guilty of any Clandastine or private trade or abeting or Coniveing with any other Person or Persons in Perloining or Confiscate any of the afores[ai]d Comp[an]ys Goods to my own or any other Person or Persons Use then & in Case I will Remitt not only Such Wages as Shall be due to me from the sd Compy but will be answerable for all Damages that Shall arise thro my Neglect or Breach of any of the Above Mentioned Articles.

York Fort America                      Jurat Coram me  
Decbr 24 1718                              Henry Kelsey Govr<sup>5</sup>

Several of the phrases used here are found in HBC contracts more than fifty years later, reflecting continuity in the London Committee’s expectations of its servants.

Service contracts were more rigid in law than in practice, and could be broken with cause and/or with mutual consent.<sup>6</sup> The eighteenth-century conception of the master-servant relationship appears somewhat contradictory: while still seeing the relationship as a family one (a view inherited from the later Middle Ages), it acknowledged the mutual obligations involved as basically contractual. Masters may have been seeking the best of old and new labour relationships, clinging to the image of servants as unfree while profiting from an increasingly free and mobile population of wage workers. However, the servant’s unfree status was often more than just an image, and the early modern employment contract certainly involved submission and subordination.<sup>7</sup> Evidence of men’s experiences of these relationships in Hudson Bay supports British historian Patrick Joyce’s argument that both workers and employers made sense of new values and circumstances in terms of older notions, and thus that new market ideologies operated within the context of older paternalistic language.<sup>8</sup>

The earliest surviving HBC contracts were signed in 1776.<sup>9</sup> The exact content of earlier contracts is unknown, although a set form certainly existed from at least the 1680s

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(and probably earlier). In 1688, the Committee mentioned sending Governor Geyer and his Council at Port Nelson “a New forme of Contracts for our Servants,” but gave no details.<sup>10</sup> At Albany in 1757, when Robert Temple felt the need to remind his men of their contractual obligations, he “took the Contract & read to them beginning at I do oblige my Self to Stay according to the aforesaid limited time & so on.”<sup>11</sup> Surgeon John Agnew’s 1776 contract may not have differed very much from earlier forms, considering how similar the phrasing is to the 1718 Oath of Fidelity quoted above:

I John Agnew Surgeon of Wighton in the Shire of Galloway Aged about 19 Years do hereby Covenant and Agree to and with the Governor and Company of Adventurers of ENGLAND, Trading into HUDSON’S-BAY, and their Successors to serve them for the Term of Three Years, to commence from the Time I shall arrive at HUDSON’S-BAY: (unless sooner recalled by the Committee of the said Company) after the rate of Forty Pounds p Year And to have Wages out and home as given to the Surgeons of the Ship those years; And if I intend to return at the Expiration of this Contract to give Notice to the Committee of the said Company the year before; But if no such Notice be given to stay another Year if required at the same Wages, and under the like Terms, Agreements, Provisions, Penalties, and Forfeitures as in this Agreement mentioned; And during my Voyage to Hudsons Bay and in my return to the Port of London, I will not quit or Desert the Ship in which I shall be ordered to embark, on any Account whatsoever without the Leave and Permission of the Commander of the Said Ship, in Writing; And, will do the Duty of Watch and Ward aboard the Said Ship and will Obey all such Orders and Instructions as shall be given me by the Commander of the said Ship. And to Ship myself upon the first Vessel or Ship that the Committee of the said Company shall Order me to imbark in, that shall go, or is bound for HUDSON’S-BAY; where I oblige myself to stay according to the aforesaid limited Time, and to do, and perform such Labour and Work, and obey such Commands as the Governor in HUDSON’S BAY, or chief Factor there, shall impose upon me. During my being in the said Company’s Service, I will, with the utmost Hazard and Peril of my Life, in my Station, with Courage and Fidelity, maintain and defend the said Company’s Factory and Factories, Territories, Rights, Privileges, Goods and Properties, against all Enemies whatsoever, either Foreign or of our own Country: and to the utmost of my Power, will cause the same to be maintained and defended by all others, according to the Duty of my Service: And I will in all Things submit myself to the Commands and Discipline of the Governor or Commander

in Chief for the said Company, and all other my superior Officers, by his Directions. And during my Abode there, I will not directly or indirectly Trade to or from any Place within the Limits of this Company’s Charter, for my own particular Account, or for any other Person or Persons, save only for the said Company, in any Furr, Skins, or other Commodities whatsoever, with the *Indians*, or with any other Nation inhabiting or trading in or about HUDSON’S-BAY. And that whatsoever Commodities I shall Trade for there, or get into my Possession, shall be only in Trust, and for the sole Use and Benefit of the said Governor and Company and their Successors. Any Person that shall drive any private Trade, I will endeavour to hinder, their Names I will detect, the Commodities so Traded for I will discover, as much as in me lies, to the Governor in the BAY, and the Committee of the said Company for the Time being. And in Case I the said John Agnew shall make any Breach or Default of, or in Performance of all, or any the aforesaid Covenants, Agreements, or Things, then I and my Executors and Administrators will not only forfeit and lose all Wages, Salary, and Monies, as by Virtue of this Contract, or otherwise, shall be due to me, or them, from the said Governor and Company, or their Successors, which I do hereby enable them to detain to their own Use and Benefit; But also I and my Executors and Administrators will, for every such Breach or Default, also forfeit and pay to the said Governor and Company the Sum of Eighty Pounds of lawful Money of ENGLAND, over and above all Damages that may arise, or happen to them, by Reason or Means of such Breach or Default. In Witness whereof I have hereunto set my Hand and Seal this Fifteenth Day of May in the Year of our Lord God 1776.

John Agnew

Sealed and Delivered in  
the Presence of Us;  
Henry Jefferys  
Edward Lascelles<sup>12</sup>

Special conditions could be negotiated orally, particularly in the early years. For instance, in May 1680, smith and armourer Thomas Coleman engaged for Hudson Bay for three years at 30s per month “and his wife to have halfe his Wages in his absence.”<sup>13</sup> In 1690, the Committee granted George Geyer £10 “you say was formerly promised by Sir James Hayes whereof though no mention can be found in our Bookes yet that is allowed you.”<sup>14</sup>

One striking aspect of HBC contracts is their temporal length. Contracts of three to five years were the norm throughout this period, much longer than other early modern workers usually spent in the employ of a single master. Most workmen on building projects, for instance, were paid by the day and employed either by the day, by

the piece, or by the project. Servants in husbandry worked alongside day labourers and usually took leave of their masters after one year.<sup>15</sup> Donald Woodward has found evidence that the town council in Hull (and probably elsewhere in northern England) employed labourers and/or craftsmen on retainer: he identified 16 “trusted labourers” at Hull between 1652 and 1679 who served the council for four or more years, but such long-term servants

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seldom worked more than 150 days a year for the council.<sup>16</sup> Uncertain and irregular employment was a pattern in almost all trades: in 1747, for instance, *The London Tradesman* described stonemasons as “idle” four months of the year, bricklayers five or six months, and jobbing tailors three or four months.<sup>17</sup>

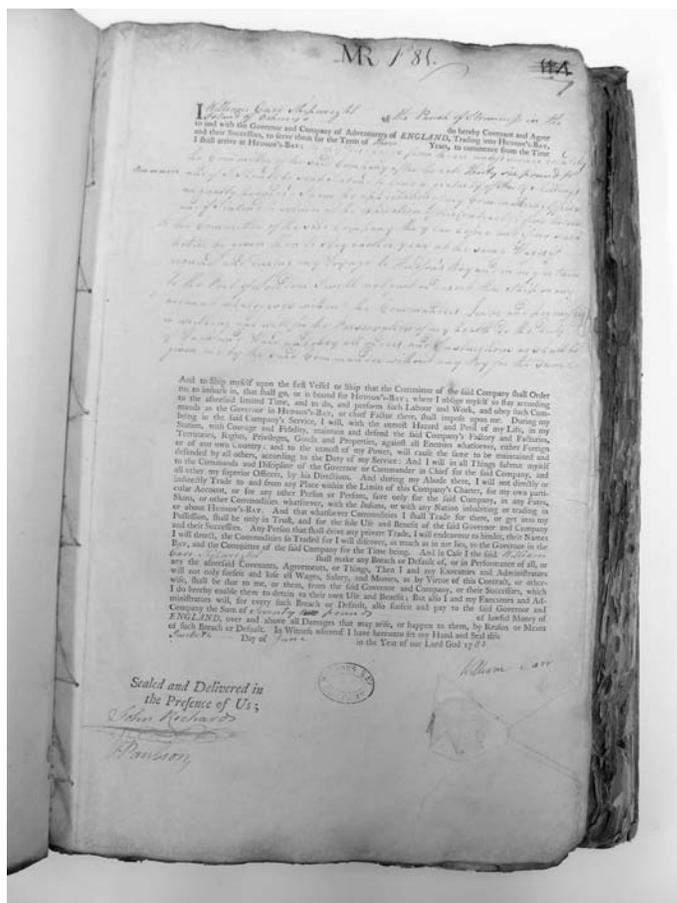
Three or four year terms were the norm in the late seventeenth century HBC; five-year contracts were rare in the early days.<sup>18</sup> After the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, five-year contracts became the norm, particularly for labourers.<sup>19</sup> Exceptions included apprentices, who were usually indentured for seven or eight years; surgeons, who almost invariably engaged for three years; and mariners, who generally served three- or four-year terms. Even there, however, the Company usually sought longer contracts when possible: in 1767, William Lockey was appointed master of the *Whale* sloop for three years, “though Five Years would have been more agreeable” to the Committee.<sup>20</sup>

Part of the reasoning behind long-term contracts was logistical: given the expense and trouble of transporting men to and from Hudson Bay, the Company did not wish to ferry them back and forth any more than necessary. Longer terms also reduced the need for constant efforts at recruitment and increased the proportion of reasonably experienced servants who (presumably) knew what they were doing. Most importantly, long-term contracts were an important way to maintain wage stability. The expiration of a man’s contract was the only point at which he could negotiate for higher wages, so the Committee was eager to limit those opportunities. The Committee chastised John Favell at Moose in 1764 for offering newly-recruited blacksmith John Pittway an extra £10 per annum for acting as armourer in addition to his regular duties: “We highly disapprove of any Servants requiring an Advance of Wages for doing business which his Station necessarily qualified him for—especially until his first Contract is expired and his Merit is known.”<sup>21</sup> Keeping labour costs as low as possible was critical: if the concern was going to survive, the Committee needed to find the most economical sources

of everything, including labour and its accompanying overhead.<sup>22</sup>

### Choosing to Leave the Service or to Stay in the Bay

Men whose contracts had expired were almost never prevented from leaving the Bay if they so desired, and were required to leave if they did not renew their service. However, men wishing to come home before their contracts had expired were usually only allowed to do so in cases of seriously poor health, domestic concerns at home, or chronic misbehaviour in the Bay.<sup>23</sup> Men without such excuses were told that granting their requests would set a dangerous precedent.<sup>24</sup> Five men who insisted on coming home early from Albany in 1755 had to pay £5 for their passage to and from the Bay: for labourer Thomas Stephens, this represented half a year’s salary.<sup>25</sup> In earlier cases of men coming home before their contracts had expired, the charge was based on the time involved in the passages. In 1685, shipwright William Benson and mariner Ralph Preston



Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Archives of Manitoba, Servants Contracts, A.32/3.

**Signed, sealed, delivered.** This contract with HBC employee William Carr was completed on 12 June 1783. In it, he agreed to “... oblige myself to stay according to the aforesaid limited time, and to do, and perform such labour and work, and obey such commands as the Governor in Hudson’s Bay, or Chief Factor there, may impose upon me.” A wedge-shaped notch cut into the lower, right corner of the page was folded back on a blob of red sealing wax to signify the legality of the document.



Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Archives of Manitoba, P-409.

**The Nonsuch Returns to London, October 1669**, with the first cargo of furs, as painted by Norman Wilkinson for the Hudson's Bay Company's calendar art series, 1945. The crews of the Company's ships were generally better-paid than HBC landsmen, and rarely accepted lower wages when they agreed to serve on land. Nevertheless, the annual supply ships could usually provide one or two men to fill immediate labour shortages on the Bay.

came home early from Port Nelson, although both men had only completed one of their contracted four years: they each paid £2.16.0 for their initial passages to Port Nelson, calculated at the rate of 20s per month.<sup>26</sup> That same year, Henry Chambre (Chambray) was allowed to come home at the request of his wife, but his account was charged £2.12.8 for the voyage to Port Nelson in 1684 and £1.12.8 for the voyage home in 1685 (again calculated at the rate of 20s per month), for a total charge of £4.5.4.<sup>27</sup> There is no indication of why Chambre had to pay for his passage both ways while Benson and Preston only paid for their passage out.

Sometimes, servants and/or factors (managers) were uncertain whether or not a man's time was out. First contracts, and any subsequent contracts signed in Britain, were in the Committee's hands in London, while contracts signed in the Orkney Islands were brought back to London by the supply ships after visiting the Bay;<sup>28</sup> however, contracts signed in the Bay seem to have remained there. Thus, terms of engagement were not always clear to all parties, especially in Hudson Bay. John Nixon complained from Albany in 1682 that he was not given enough information to reasonably predict his labour needs: "one of the greatest plagues that I have ... [is when] the men doe pretend their tymes are out, the trooth of which I am ignorant in, for yow doe not wryt to me how longe

they have served, or are to serve, but yow send order for their comeing home, and sendeth me non to supply their places."<sup>29</sup> Thomas McCliesh Jr (commanding York in 1723 and 1731), James Isham (commanding York in 1737) and Richard Norton (commanding Prince of Wales Fort in 1737) made similar complaints.<sup>30</sup> In 1719, Joseph Adams and John Henson were "Disconsolate" when they were told that they both had several years left in their apprenticeships, and asked for copies of their indentures to be sent to them.<sup>31</sup> In 1722, Joseph Myatt asked that men's contracts be sent to Albany from London, "for I am inform'd that it is whispered about by some of them that they can return home when they please."<sup>32</sup>

The expiration of old contracts and the negotiation of new ones often produced tension. Lack of information allowed Nixon's men to surprise him with wage demands, which he usually had to meet to avoid being short-handed.<sup>33</sup> Like servants in England, Company servants expected to improve themselves and their position as they grew older, achieving more responsibility and/or higher pay.<sup>34</sup> For some, the hope of such improvement may have prompted them to leave their former masters and enter the Company's service in the first place. As with other masters, however, the Company was not always able to offer young men the advancement they sought: in such cases, men

would usually seek a better position with another master. Thus, servants constituted an unusually mobile group within English and Scottish society: the physical distance between Britain and Hudson Bay was unusual only in its geographical extent.<sup>35</sup>

The Committee consistently tried to minimize such seeking of opportunities for improvement with long-term contracts. In 1723, the Committee took the unusual step of directing that servants whose contracts were expiring, and who refused to re-engage for at least two years, were to come home. Thomas McCliesh Jr at York considered this “the only method” of preventing “our being put to difficulty with the men whose times are expired, by endeavouring to impose upon us by demanding extravagant wages,” but also complained that the Committee had called 11 men home and sent only nine to replace them.<sup>36</sup>

Not all who went home did so because of dissatisfaction. Most men left the service without comment, and there is no more evidence of why they left than there is for why they came. No doubt many simply desired a change. There was nothing to inhibit their mobility; they had few possessions to carry, and their skills could be put to use in other settings. A Bayside factory was just one of many workplaces through which they would pass during their lives.

#### **Bargaining to Stay—or to Go Home**

Servants consistently preferred short-term contracts, which created more frequent opportunities for negotiating better terms. When John Fullartine at Albany “entertain’d some of the best hands” whose times were out in 1701, they signed one-year contracts, he “not being able to get them to Sign for any longer term.”<sup>37</sup> In 1716, Thomas McCliesh Jr reported from Albany that “Those men whoos time was Expired would by no means Contract for Longer then 2 yeares & some for one year.”<sup>38</sup> Of the 11 Albany men whose times were out in 1740, three (mariners Robert Crystal and John Harrison, and joiner Martin Andrews) were resolved to go home; three (labourers Thomas Miller and Peter Robinson, and tailor William Macklin) requested one-year contracts, four (labourers Peter Isbister Sr and Will Scott, armourer John Greenaway, and cooper/steward William Sinclair) requested two-year contracts; and sloopmaster Joseph Isbister was willing to stay for an unspecified length of time, “asking only that his wages be brought in line with those of other sloopmasters.”<sup>39</sup> Sloopmaster Thomas Mitchell asked for one year at £50 in 1747, and the following year rejected the Committee’s offer of a three-year contract. In 1752, sloop mate Charles Cromartie (who had been apprenticed to Mitchell in 1743) signed a one-year contract at £20 and was reportedly willing to sign a two-year contract if his wages were advanced to £24.<sup>40</sup> An unusual year was 1757, when four of the 11 Albany servants whose times were expiring asked for contracts of three years and one (labourer Thomas Halcro) asked for a four-year contract.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps the recent outbreak of the Seven Years War made Bayside service seem more attractive.

Of course, demands for short-term contracts were not always just bargaining tools for better wages. In 1706, for instance, Anthony Beale reported from Albany that “the men in the Countrey whose times was out not one would stay in a long time by reason there is no certainty of Ships comeing and at last when I got a fueue to Stay I was forced to give them extravagant Wages.”<sup>42</sup> Some men did not want to stay away from home for too long, lest some misfortune befall their family or friends in their absence: in 1770, for instance, Humphrey Marten warned the Committee, “Your Servants think it very hard to give two Years Notice, as in such a length of time many things may happen which may lay them under great difficulties.”<sup>43</sup> Also, men may have wanted means of escape if tensions within the factory became more than they wished to deal with.<sup>44</sup>

The process of re-engaging men could involve much negotiation and conflict, although the Company’s correspondence and other documents reveal less than they conceal. On one hand, the employee—whether old hand, skilled tradesman, or veteran officer—hoped or expected that the value of his services would be recognized with a new contract and higher pay, though he could never be sure if he was pushing his wage demands too far. On the other hand, the Committee—eager to reward merit but loath to encourage bad habits—hoped or expected that good men would want to remain in their service and be happy with the wages offered them, though they could never be sure if they were striking the proper balance between the cost and efficiency of their personnel. The Committee was aware of the range of influence available to high-ranking servants like factors, stewards, and foremen in early modern Britain. The Company’s directors might have sympathised with William Marshall, a West Indies merchant who in 1774 acquired a 300-acre farm in Surrey and kept a diary of his experiences. He was completely dissatisfied with his servants, and complained that his foreman “all along—has been *siding* with the men; instead of assisting me to manage them, he has been assisting them to manage me.”<sup>45</sup>

The Bayside factors were intermediaries in this struggle, in some ways representing one side or the other, and sometimes pursuing their own agendas. They relayed the men’s demands to London and in turn relayed the Committee’s replies to the men. The men trusted that their governor portrayed them in a favourable light in his correspondence with London, while the Committee trusted that their governors’ accusations of misbehaviour were warranted and that commendations for good behaviour were not self-serving. Meanwhile, the factors themselves worried that bitter homeward-bound servants might tell malicious tales to any Committee member who would listen. This geographic dimension of communication set the HBC apart from contemporary labour relations in Britain.

Circumstances sometimes stymied the Company’s attempts to keep its servants on long-term contracts. During the early years, for instance, servants were not required (as they were in the eighteenth century) to give one or even

two years' notice of their intention to either re-engage or go home. The earliest instruction that men must give notice appears to be in 1686, but as late as 1722 some men at Albany "whispered ... that they can return home when they please."<sup>46</sup> This placed more power in the men's hands and more pressure on the factors. In 1682, John Nixon complained that at ship-time "I am no more looked upon... then a cipher, especially when they are in their drink, so that if I command them about their bussiness presently they will hit me in the teeth of their times being out, and that they will goe home."<sup>47</sup>

A more orderly but (from the Committee's point of view) no more satisfactory picture emerged from Albany in the early 1700s. On 11 September 1705, the Albany council met to discuss the issue of which servants were to go home on the *Hudson's Bay*, which was preparing to depart. Governor John Fullartine reported, "Whereas ye Comp[any] haveing sent so few hands from England this Year & them for the most part very helpless, most of the Old Servants that were in the Country their time being out they stood upon very extravagant Termes & not a Man of them that were good for any thing would condescend to tarry under Seamans Wages which of necessitye we were forced to complye to."<sup>48</sup> Indeed, of the 18 men listed as re-engaging, not one agreed to less than £24 per annum, more than twice most labourers' starting wages. Unfortunately, the *Hudson's Bay* was unable to leave the Bay that year and had to winter on Gilpin Island, about 30 miles north of Eastmain House: nobody went home in 1705. In July 1706, Fullartine's successor, Anthony Beale, called the council together again to see which men would stay on and which go home. Like Fullartine, Beale found that "most of the best men, their times being out where for going Home and would not stay unless they had extraordinary Wages, which of necessitye we where forced to agre[e] to."<sup>49</sup> Of the 17 men listed as re-engaging, 11 had re-engaged the previous year and three of these negotiated another raise in salary.

There is no clear evidence from this period of collective bargaining, but the fact that contracts were negotiated only once a year imposed a sort of collectivity on the bargaining process. Even though men's terms were staggered, they expired in clusters, and short-term contracts increased the size of these clusters. For instance, if a factor had most of his men on three-year terms, he knew that every year about one third of the men would need to be dealt with, whereas five-year terms reduced the number of contracts likely to expire simultaneously. Men knew when a lot of contracts were expiring at once, and when the supply ships arrived they could see how many new men there were, and so could effectively gauge how much leverage they would have in negotiating new contracts for themselves. In 1703, Fullartine lamented that "those of Yor old Servants

that are here knowing that ye Country is at Such a pitch, stand upon very high & unreasonable tearms & the worst of them blow'd att 20 lb a year"; he convinced some "to condescend to tarry" by promising them extra provisions ("5 lb of Flower or Meal each man a week"), "without wch not one of them would have tarried this year."<sup>50</sup> Fullartine was determined to maintain a certain level of staffing for the maintenance and defence of his employers' interests and property during a period when Albany was the only HBC fort not in French hands. However, he was powerless to stop the men under his command from exploiting their employer's vulnerable position to improve the terms of their employment, and thereby increasing the cost of maintaining and defending the Company's interests and property.

The men may have decided among themselves to demand extra rations before they put their wage demands before Fullartine. Indeed, the men's room and board—whether considered as a non-monetary wage or as a moral and contractual obligation on the part of their employer—were an integral part of their wage demands, and any reduction in the quality or quantity of provisions

could be interpreted as a devaluation of their wages (and, perhaps, of their labour).<sup>51</sup> Officers also reacted to what they perceived as insufficient room and/or board. In the late 1760s, Andrew Graham claimed that "the officers' apartments [at Prince of Wales Fort] are

so small, and amongst the men's, [that it] often causes discontents between the Chief and them, so that few of them stays after the expiration of their first contract, if not sooner returns home."<sup>52</sup>

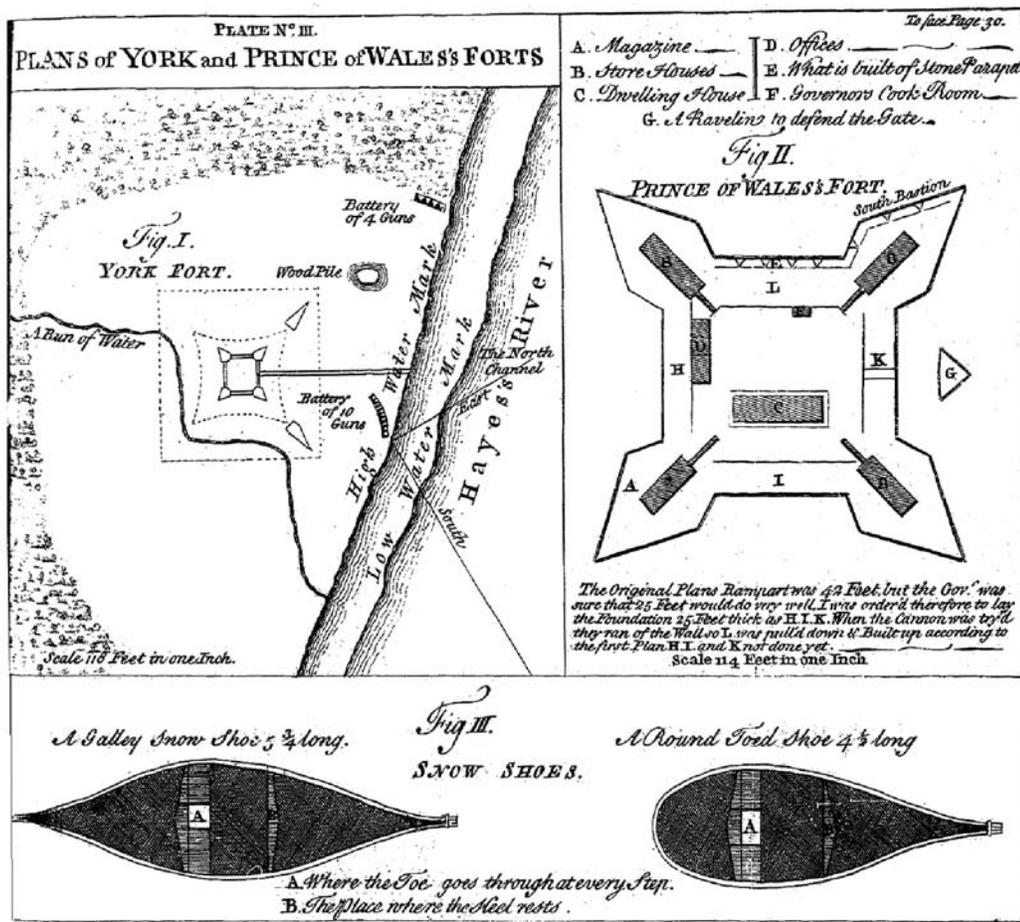
Whether men put their demands forward individually, as a whole, or in smaller groups is impossible to tell. Fullartine's 1703 report focused less on the process of wage negotiation than on proclaiming his loyalty and value to the Company while dodging responsibility for rising costs. Despite his concessions, Fullartine was unable to maintain his desired complement of 40: 14 men went home that year, leaving 35 men and boys.<sup>53</sup> More wage concessions made by Fullartine in 1705 and by Anthony Beale in 1706 could not prevent Albany's complement from falling to 27 by 1706.<sup>54</sup>

Bayside hands took risks, however, when they tried to exploit the Company's weakness. For example, they lacked information about changing circumstances at home that affected prospects for higher wages or more benefits. Wartime conditions enabled men to use recruitment difficulties to demand higher wages, but the arrival of peace could take them by surprise and lessen their bargaining power. For instance, although Fullartine and Beale felt that they were at the mercy of their men in this regard at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Beale's 1714 letter from Albany—written on the very day he learned of the end

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**... the factors themselves worried that bitter homeward-bound servants might tell malicious tales to any Committee member who would listen.**

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Joseph Robson, *An Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson's Bay from 1733 to 1736, and 1744 to 1747*. London: J. Payne and J. Bouquet, 1752.

**Home away from home.** Joseph Robson's plans of York Fort and Prince of Wales Fort as he knew them in the 1740s remind us that HBC trading posts were not spacious. Although most men had opportunities to work outside of the fort walls on various tasks, the factories could still act as hothouses for personal conflicts which, in turn, could have prompted them to leave the Company's service at the earliest opportunity.

of Queen Anne's War—mentioned 28 men whom he was sending home and only two men whom he was engaging or re-engaging.<sup>55</sup> Beale was lowering his wage bill and trimming his garrison to reflect the perceived security of peacetime.<sup>56</sup> In 1764, Albany surgeon William Richards' request to renew his contract for two years at £48 per annum was refused. Unbeknownst to him, the Seven Years War had ended, and "the General Peace has lowered the price of Wages in every Instance." He was replaced by Eusebius Bacchus Kitchen at £36.<sup>57</sup>

The renewal of contracts could also be an opportunity for employees to demonstrate their "devotion" to the Company by not taking advantage of crises with demands for higher wages; such "devotion" could then be rewarded at a later date. The Committee made this explicit in 1690, when they instructed George Geyer not to let any man come home from Port Nelson who could be persuaded to stay:

for the more peaceable & orderly Government of our Factories in this time of Publick troubles [*i.e.* war with France], our express order is, that none

shall Remove their posts or station wherein they are durezza during this war ... but acquiesce Cheerfully and obediently in their Respective places & Employments during there [these?] troubles or our further pleasure signified, as they Expect our favor or tender our displeasure ... ashureing all persons that shall behave themselves modestly & peaceably in their severall places, they shall be sure to find the Companies favor & agreeable Rewards according to their merrits.<sup>58</sup>

When informing John Bridgar of his appointment to the command of Moose Fort in 1686, the Committee admitted that "your resting satisfied in our Determination & pleasure will lay some sort of obligation upon us," and promised to reward merit, diligence, and industry.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, the 1692 order that no men were to be allowed to come home was accompanied by the

assurance that "for such whose times are Expired we shall take it kindly of them who stay chearfully & willingly in Our Service & not faile to remember them."<sup>60</sup>

Some servants placed their trust in the Committee's future largesse. In 1722, the Committee ordered Thomas McCliesh Jr at York to retain mariner John Wateridge for one more year on reasonable terms: McCliesh reported that Wateridge "has freely consented to tarry at his former wages [£18 per annum] ... and has left it to your honours' generosity to advance his wages next year, in hopes to appoint him gunner." With McCliesh's support, Wateridge was appointed gunner at £24 per annum in 1725.<sup>61</sup> However, having achieved the position he sought, Wateridge proved reluctant to commit to a long-term contract. In 1727, the Committee expressed their willingness to retain Wateridge as gunner at York: when asked to sign a contract for three years, he refused, although he was "willing to continue longer in your service from year to year." The Committee disapproved of this attitude and, when he again refused to sign a long-term contract in 1728, recalled him. By this time, too, Wateridge had lost McCliesh's patronage: the Governor

commented that “it was high time” the gunner was sent home, “having been very unmannerly by reason I seized some [illicit] brandy that came from on board the *Mary*.”<sup>62</sup> At Prince of Wales Fort in 1740, Richard Norton appears to have had some difficulty persuading chief mason Thomas Kingston to tarry for one year (“that your honours might not be put to a nonplus”) and to rely on the Committee’s promise of “a suitable gratuity to his desert.” However, once Norton came to an agreement with him, Kingston persuaded two other masons to stay on similar terms.<sup>63</sup>

The Committee might accede to men’s demands—or even offer them higher wages or more benefits without being asked—in the expectation that this would produce greater fidelity and industry in the future. In 1740, the Albany Council responded to such encouragement by declaring that “Your Addition to Mr [Joseph] Isbister’s Sallary [*i.e.* raising it from £40 to £50] is a fresh mark of Your Indulgence to all dilligent Servts and will excite in us a zeal for the future of meriting Your favours.”<sup>64</sup> Sometimes, the Committee tried to entice their senior employees into signing on for long terms. In 1770, James Nicholson at Moose was offered £40 a year if he would engage for at least three years, and Isaac Leask was offered £50 a year as Second at Prince of Wales Fort, in expectation that he would sign a long-term contract.<sup>65</sup> Leask’s superior, Moses Norton, was sent a contract with a blank space for him to fill in the number of years, the Committee expressing their hope that Norton would sign for at least four years.<sup>66</sup>

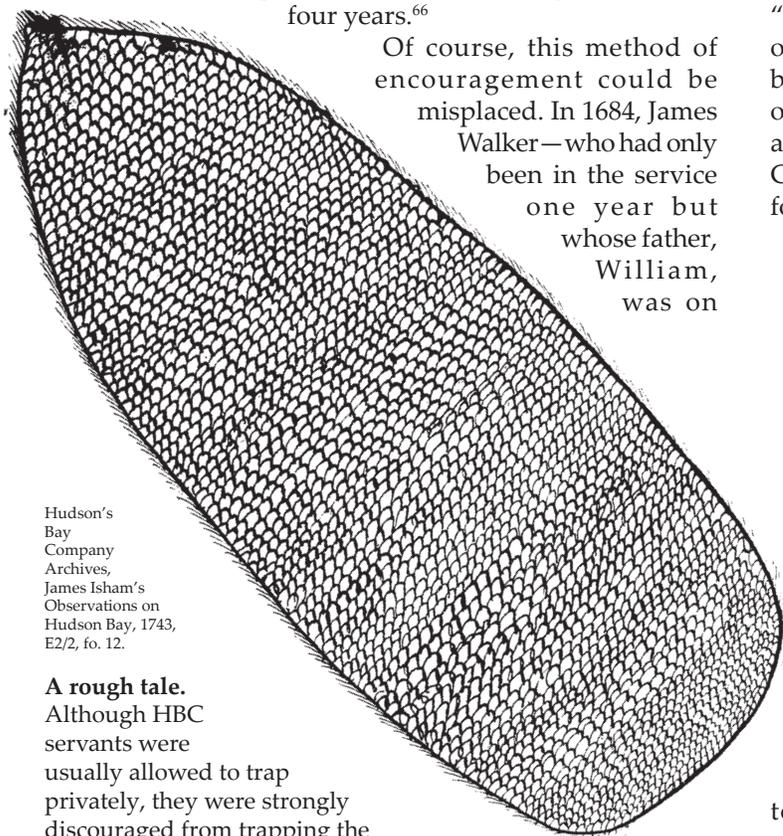
Of course, this method of encouragement could be misplaced. In 1684, James Walker—who had only been in the service one year but whose father, William, was on

the Committee—was named Second at Port Nelson “to shew our readiness to reward the good services which any of those implied [*i.e.* employed] by us shall doe for the Compa[ny]. and although he is but young in our service we doubt not but he will by his courage, activity & Dilligence answer the good opinion we have conceived of him.”<sup>67</sup> However, Governor John Abraham sent Walker home from Port Nelson on the same ship that brought news of his promotion, charging the young man with being “Quarrelsome etc.”<sup>68</sup>

A more complex example is that of Thomas Phipps Jr, cousin of Committee member Thomas Phipps Sr. In 1682, when the younger Phipps was warehousekeeper at Moose, the Committee raised his salary to £70 and advanced his position in the hierarchy to third in command: the Committee had “received a good Charact[e]r of you” and improved the terms of his employment “to encourage your fidelity & diligence in our Service.”<sup>69</sup> A few weeks after this offer was made, however, young Phipps came under grave suspicion of being connected with an interloping expedition planned by the elder Phipps, who subsequently lost his place on the Committee. Another letter was written, ordering him to be removed from his post and sent home.<sup>70</sup> However, the second letter never reached Hudson Bay, as the ship which carried it was lost at sea, and in any case favourable references from returning servants soon persuaded the Committee that he might be trusted. In 1685, he succeeded John Abraham in command of Port Nelson, “which we [the Committee] designed as a particular marke of our Favour to him,” but he offended the Committee by demanding £200 per annum—twice the wages he was offered and twice the wages John Bridgar was receiving as Governor of the Bottom of the Bay (James Bay).<sup>71</sup> The Committee’s response contrasted his demand with his former good service,

which we looked upon to deserve an Encouragement & advancement to an higher Imply, & since it must needs have bene unexpected to you, we promised our selves not only a gratefull acceptance & full satisfaction from you in it, but also a very hapy success & Improvement of our Trade & affaires at Port Nellson by yr Industrey & prudent conduct. ... But it seemes very strange to us, that for so signall a marke of our Favour and respect which we designed to you, you should have no other gratefull sense then to endeavor to introduce a new president [*i.e.* precedent] & a new charge upon us by rayseing our Sallerey there which all your Predecessors have bin content & thankfull for.<sup>72</sup>

As well, the Committee expressed their displeasure with Phipps in letters to other Bayside factors, perhaps to deter similar behaviour on their parts.<sup>73</sup> Phipps returned home in 1686 but, despite his “ingratitude,” in February 1687 was negotiating terms of a new contract. Those negotiations dragged on through the spring until



Hudson’s Bay Company Archives, James Isham’s Observations on Hudson Bay, 1743, E2/2, fo. 12.

**A rough tale.** Although HBC servants were usually allowed to trap privately, they were strongly discouraged from trapping the staple of the Company’s business, the beaver. Instead, they were instructed to focus on marten and other skins.

finally collapsing under the weight of Phipps' constant bargaining. The Committee had been willing to give him another chance, but they had not found him "soe Candid and Ingenious" as past and present servants had led them to expect.<sup>74</sup>

The most conspicuous example of the Committee using benefits and wage increases to strengthen the loyalty (or the perceived loyalty) of its servants was in the aftermath of the loss of James Bay to the French in 1686. Beginning in 1688, Governor George Geyer at Port Nelson received a series of letters from his employers that sometimes verged on the obsequious. In Geyer's hands rested all of the Company's trade and interests during this anxious period.

Wee look upon your prudence and resolution amidst such disorders & in soe Tempestious a time to bee the Chiefe means that Wee received, a Tollerable Trade the last year, and that Wee have our Factory Preserved. ... These Considerations as well as our particular esteeme for you And the Opinion Wee have of your Fidelity & experience, in promoteing the best wayes to Secure our places & encrease our Trade, hath Caused us to repose a great Trust in you in Continueing you our Governor, And to excite your Courage & Sence of our Nations Honour the more Wee have Honoured you in a way which was never before practiced by obtaineing the Gracious favour from his Ma[jes]tie to Constitute you Governor by his owne Royall Commission. ... We have appointed you noe Deputy Governor at Port Nelson relyeing entirely on your Conduct & experience, and tho wee recd many Complaints against you here by some, whoe came home the Last yeare of the Great Quantity of Beavor that you have Concealed to Ship home for your owne use at private Opertunities. ... yett Wee have overlook't all, and are resolved to lay such an Obligation of kindness & Confidence upon you, as shall engage your Fidelity as well as utmost industry, And that it shalbe noe bodyes fault but yours if Wee have not a Thriveing & Flourishing Trade.<sup>75</sup>

Thus placed upon Geyer's shoulders were the gratitude and good will of his employers, the defence of his nation's interests, the obligations felt by a man whose sins had been overlooked (if not forgiven), and the full responsibility for any future failures. He was also given a three-year contract, ostensibly because "Wee think it not Convenient, that the Cheife men whoe Gouverne our affaires ... should bee at an uncertainty, of being every yeare Called home, which prevents them of prosecuteing those measures, for our Security & Advantage, which otherwise they may take"—but probably also because the Committee did not want to have to replace him with a less experienced factor sooner than necessary.<sup>76</sup>

The Committee's apparent willingness to overlook Geyer's private trade may seem puzzling, but was a ploy sometimes used by masters with servants "of a better Rank." The early 18<sup>th</sup>-century moralist William Fleetwood observed that "the Reputation of Servants is so dear and valuable" that many masters were reluctant to accuse them of "false dealing." He recommended hinting at knowledge of servants' sins, as the Committee sometimes did, because "a light Suspition, may promote that Industry and Vigour, and give new Life, to make indeed amends for what is past." While "a prudent connivance and concealment of their faults of this kind" might reclaim them, "the divulging of them, is likely enough to ruine them for ever, either by hardning them in Sin, or taking away their Credit, so that they never can be trusted or employed by any other."<sup>77</sup> The Committee presumably felt that Geyer's indiscretions were outweighed by his past, present, and future service to the Company.

Each year's letter from London brought new encouragement for Geyer, including gratuities of £100 in 1690, 1691, and 1692. Throughout this period, however, Geyer actually wanted to go home. He first asked permission in 1687, but the Committee refused it in 1688:

You See Wee make you the Cheife usefull man, to us and Wee are of [the] opinion that you haveing been soe many yeares in our Service and are soe well experienced in all our affaires and in our true interest that you will never desert our employmt as long as wee think fitt to Continue you in it, And therefore Wee doe not Answere your request of Comeing home this yeare, but approve of your Modesty that it was with a Submission & Resignation to our pleasure & Service.<sup>78</sup>

In 1690, they told him,

In Regard ... of the present warr here with France ... & that wee have soe much experience of your good services & your usefulness to us now more especially at this Juncture, wee must & doe earnestly intreate you not to thinke of Removeing or Returneing home at this time of a Publick warr, & when wee are Besett with soe much Trouble & soe many difficulties, & that wee have need of your good Conduct & faithfull Resolution to maintaine & defend our Interest ... And therefore wee entreate you with patience & Courage to abide by it, & to Inspire the Like Resolutions into your Deputy Mr. Walsh at New Severn, that soe God sending a happy end to this warr, Wee may have Cause to thanke & to Reward you both.<sup>79</sup>

In 1691, he was told that "we cannot possibly dispence with your coming home this year ... Wee doe not doubt but you will cheerfully continue there one year more, affaires here in Europe (as to the Warre) being at A greater

Crisis for this Summer then ever and God alone knowing on which side he shall please to cast the advantage of the scale, Soe that both as to the safety of our Factory & as to the improvement & enlarging our trade in this Juncture Wee have neede of double help and United force."<sup>80</sup> The Company used its vulnerability to strengthen its negotiations with Geyer, appealing for his help and calling upon a sense of unity which was seldom emphasized in peacetime.

In a private letter, the Committee described their relationship with Geyer in more personal terms than in the official correspondence. The "Preservation of Port Nelson in this dangerous time" was "a very tender point to us" in 1691, and was wholly dependent "upon your Conduct & Courage." This was quite true, as Severn River had been abandoned the previous year and an expedition to Churchill River in 1688/89 had come to naught. The letter reminded Geyer of "the Obligations you will putt upon us" by agreeing to stay in the country, hoping that "your owne Zeale & wishes to the Welfare of this Company is such that in a time of apparent danger you would not desert our Service When your owne Honour as well as the Oblidging us doth call for your stay & you will scorne to leave that Government environed with dangers which you enterd upon in Peace & Tranquility." It painted a picture of a world consumed by war, where England's enemies lurked behind every rock or bush, and "when you consider it you will find it as dangerous to come home as to stay there; But much more dishonourable." He was reminded of his duty to his sovereign—for he held a royal commission and commanded the last English possession in Hudson Bay—and his duty to the men under his command, who would be as demoralized by his departing as they would be encouraged by his remaining. Finally, the Committee (perhaps rather disingenuously) concluded, "not doubting your hearty & ready Concurrence with our desires, which Wee have Chosen to request & make a kindnesse to Our Selve[s] rather then to Command, Wee Commend you heartily & all your affaires to the Protection of the Allmighty & remaine / Your very Loving Friends."<sup>81</sup>

Geyer agreed to stay one more year, and for this the Committee praised and thanked him: "hoping (as you say) the Warre may be by that time ended, that you may Leave our Concerns there in a peaceable & flourishing Condition & that you would not willingly Leave your Post before you saw them soe settled, is so ingenious & honourable in you, & kind towards us, that we assure you it hath a great influence upon us that know the value of your meritts & how happily Our affaires there have prospered under your Conduct." They then asked him to stay one more year, "when probably you will have the honour & satisfaction you seeke, of Leaving that Trade which you have enlarged, that Building which you have erected, that Vineyard which you have Planted, in a Peaceable & flourishing Condition, & out of danger of being undermined by the Foxes, or destroyed by the Wild Boares of the Forrest."<sup>82</sup> Geyer's personal relationship with the Company and its interests

was vividly coloured by the image of Geyer as the careful husbandman. Such agricultural metaphors were rarely used in HBC correspondence, but here the Committee may have been trying to reinforce Geyer's attachment by painting him as the governor of a colony rather than just the manager of an isolated trading post. Geyer's royal commission and the emphasis placed on it in the Committee's private letter of 1691 could also have helped reorient Geyer's perceptions of his role and importance. However, the Committee's strenuous efforts to retain him in their service notwithstanding, Geyer returned home in 1693—a year before the French captured Port Nelson—and when he sought to re-engage in 1697, the Committee told him that there were no suitable vacancies.<sup>83</sup>

### Conclusion

During its long first century (1670–1782), the Hudson's Bay Company developed personnel practices not on the basis of abstract policy but by patching together experiments and expedients. The Company's initial vulnerability increased the value of loyal and experienced servants, and frequent shortfalls in wartime recruitment allowed old hands to demand and receive higher wages and gratuities. Peace after the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 allowed the Company to prune its payroll and to resume the carefully optimistic expansion that French attacks had interrupted in the 1680s.

Throughout the period discussed here, political and economic authority within the Company was supplemented with cultural authority. There is no evidence that the London Committee explicitly envisioned their overseas posts as household-factories but, as the central social institution in British domestic and economic life, the household was the obvious template for the organization of the posts.<sup>84</sup> Although most people in Britain were rooted in their locality and its concerns, the high degree of labour mobility within Britain (especially within England) was possible partly because people who moved to new localities could expect to find similar customs, economic structures, and parish institutions.<sup>85</sup> Although Hudson Bay presented no such familiar points of reference, the new trading posts did offer the opportunity to transplant at least some of the most important ones. Thus, the social regulation of the Company's factories closely resembled the social structure of the household-family without any party involved having to consciously construct the factories along such lines.<sup>86</sup>

HBC servants came to Hudson Bay from a competitive labour market in early modern Britain. Although the demands of physical distance made HBC service unique in some respects (such as the length of service), HBC contracts were typical of early modern employment agreements. They stipulated a basic economic transaction, monetary and non-monetary wages in return for services rendered over a specified period of time; but they also acted as social and moral covenants, binding master and servant in a network of reciprocal (but often undefined) obligations. The available evidence indicates that both

parties' understandings of these obligations remained consistent—though not always congruous—through the Company's long first century of operations.

The renewal of contracts provided opportunities to emphasize those obligations, by both workers (through deferential behaviour) and by the Committee (through paternalistic behaviour). However, opportunities for conflict and tension also existed, and servants seeking better terms risked being seen as ungrateful or disingenuous. In wartime, or at other moments when the Company seemed vulnerable, deferential and paternalistic behaviours could be reinforced by the invocation of courage and national duty, but they could also be undermined if servants were perceived as putting their own interests ahead of the Company's. In fact, deferential behaviour can also be perceived as pursuing individual rather than corporate interests: the short-term deferment of the former, allegedly in favour of the latter, could potentially reap more long-term benefits than straightforward wage demands. ❧

### Notes

1. See Woodward, Donald, *Men at Work: Labourers and Building Craftsmen in the Towns of Northern England, 1450–1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 1.
2. Joyce, Patrick, "Work." In F.M.L. Thompson, ed., *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750–1950, volume 2: People and their Environment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 159, observed that most workers in early modern Britain were dependent on waged labour at some point in their working lives, and that very few workers were completely independent of capitalist markets for labour and commodities. "Wage and non-wage characteristics of labour were deeply embedded in each other, and capitalist wage work rarely took a pure form."
3. See Tadmor, Naomi, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 41, 63; Laslett, Peter, *The World We Have Lost: Further Explored*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: Methuen, 1983, p. 76.
4. Rich, E. E., ed., *Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1679–1684: Second Part, 1682–1684*. Toronto: Champlain Society for the Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1946, pp. 204, 272. HBC (London) to George Geyer & Council (Port Nelson), 2 June 1688, Rich, E. E. & A. M. Johnson eds., *Hudson's Bay Copy Book of Letters Commissions Instructions Outward 1688–1696*. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1957, p. 20. Contract of John Agnew, 1776, Manitoba Archives/Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA), A. 32/3, fo. 11; also see Williams, Glyndwr, ed., *Andrew Graham's Observations on Hudson's Bay 1767–91*. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1969, p. 246.
5. "The Oath of Fidelity taken to ye Hudson's Bay Compy at York Fort Decbr 24<sup>th</sup> 1718," HBCA, B. 239/b/1, fo. 6.
6. Kussmaul, Ann, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp. 32-33; Cliffe, J.T., *The World of the Country House in Seventeenth-Century England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, p. 90.
7. Hecht, J. Jean, *The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth-Century England*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956, p. 71; Thompson, E. P. "Patricians and Plebs," In Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture*. New York: The New Press, 1993, p. 36; Rule, John, "Employment and Authority: Masters and Men in Eighteenth-Century Manufacturing," In Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox, & Steve Hindle, eds., *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1996, p. 287. H. Clare Pentland's discussion of 'pre-industrial' labour relations resembles Thompson's, but assumes a relative scarcity of labour in early Canada: Pentland, *Labour and Capital in Canada 1650–1850*, ed. by Paul Phillips Toronto: James Lorimer, 1981, p. 25.
8. Joyce, Patrick. "The historical meanings of work: an introduction." In Joyce, ed., *The Historical Meanings of Work*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 8.
9. See HBCA, A. 32/3, fos. 10-13.
10. HBC (London) to George Geyer & Council (Port Nelson), 2 June 1688, *Letters Outward 1688–1696*, p. 20. With the exception of apprenticeship indentures, most contemporary labour contracts in Britain were probably oral: Kussmaul, pp. 31-32. Oral contracts relied heavily on local and/or craft customs, and thus would probably have been unfeasible for Hudson Bay.
11. Robert Temple & Council (Albany) to HBC (London), 30 May, 6 June, 15 August, 18 August 1757, HBCA, A. 11/3, fo. 17.
12. Contract of John Agnew, 1776, A. 32/3, fo. 11. The contract form was typeset: words and passages underlined in this transcription were handwritten in the original. The "sample" contract (1780s) included in *Graham's Observations*, pp. 246-247, agrees with this in essentials, but does not include the details inserted in the middle.
13. Rich, E. E., ed., *Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1679–1684: First Part, 1679–1682*. Toronto: Champlain Society for the Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1945, p. 65. It was not necessary for a servant to specify beforehand that he wanted certain portions of his wages remitted to friends or family members: he could send a letter of attorney or notice of his wishes to the Committee with the annual homeward correspondence packet. The Committee complied with their wishes whenever possible, but would not touch their servants' money without instructions. See the case of Eleanor and Hugh Verner in 1682: Rich, *Minutes, First Part*, p. 100. Also, see the case of Edward Stacey and Mr Hurluck (or Captain Hurloce): HBC (London) to George Geyer & Council (Port Nelson), 17 June 1692, *Letters Outward 1688–1696*, 138; HBC (London) to George Geyer & Council (Port Nelson), 17 June 1693, *Letters Outward 1688–1696*, p. 194.
14. HBC (London) to George Geyer & Council (Port Nelson), 22 May 1690, *Letters Outward 1688–1696*, p. 95.
15. For construction workers, see Gilboy, Elizabeth W. *Wages in Eighteenth Century England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), pp. 8-17, 41-56, 80-97; Woodward, *Men at Work*, pp. 12, 35, 45, 51-52, 65-69, 96, 116; Malcolmson, Robert W. *Life and Labour in England 1700–1780*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981, p. 35. For servants in husbandry, see Malcolmson, *Life and Labour*, p. 71; Kussmaul, p. 51-52; Abbott, Mary, *Life Cycles in England 1560–1720*. London: Routledge, 1996, p. 85.
16. Woodward, *Men at Work*, pp. 35-37, 102-105.
17. Rule, John, *The Experience of Labour in Eighteenth-Century English Industry*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981, pp. 49-57; Campbell, R., *The London Tradesman*. New York: Augustus M. Kelly, 1969; originally published London, 1747, p. 159, 160, 192-193.
18. In 1684, for example, the Committee asked Morgan Lodge (their unofficial "agent" in Kent) to engage men to "tarry in the Countrey three or foure yeares." HBC (London) to Morgan Lodge (Gravesend), 16 May 1684, *Letters Outward 1680–87*, 110. Twelve of the 13 men engaged in 1674, eight of the 14 engaged in 1680, and 19 of the 22 engaged in 1682 signed on for three years: Rich, E.E., ed., *Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1671–1674*. Toronto: Champlain Society for the Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1942, pp. 97, 107-109, 114-115; *Minutes, First Part*, 27-74, 184-227. Twenty-four of the 37 men engaged in 1683 and 23 of the 37 engaged in 1684 signed on for four years: *Minutes, Second Part*, pp. 83-106, 203-246.
19. For example, 12 of the 16 men sent to Albany in 1719 had engaged for five years: all 12 were labourers. HBCA, A. 16/1, fos. 2-15.
20. HBC (London) to William Lockey (no address), 7 March 1767, HBCA, A. 5/1, fo. 76d.
21. HBC (London) to John Favell (Moose), 23 May 1764, HBCA, A. 5/1, fo. 57.

22. See Burley, Edith, *Servants of the Honourable Company: Work, Discipline, and Conflict in the Hudson's Bay Company, 1770–1870*. Don Mills ON: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 4. Also see Rich, E. E., *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company 1670–1870*. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1958, 1959, I, pp. 188; Robson, Joseph, *An Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson's Bay*. Johnson Reprint, 1965; originally published London, 1752, appendix, p. 69.
23. HBC (London) to Thomas White (Moose), 22 May 1754, HBCA, A. 5/1, fos. 2d-3; HBC to White, 12 May 1756, A. 5/1, fos. 14-14d; HBC to Henry Pollexfen Sr (Moose), 23 May 1758, A. 5/1, fo. 24d; HBC to Humphrey Marten (Albany), 13 May 1767, A. 5/1, fo. 77d.
24. HBC (London) to William Richards (Henley House), 13 May 1767, HBCA, A. 5/1, fos. 78-78d; HBC to Edward Lawton (Prince of Wales Fort), 25 May 1768, A. 5/1, fo. 91.
25. HBCA, A. 16/3, fo. 89. The men were recent arrivals in Hudson Bay and were unnerved by the killings of five men at Henley House by a band of Lowland Cree in December 1754. Farley Grubb, "Does Bound Labour Have To Be Coerced Labour? The Case of Colonial Immigrant Servitude Versus Craft Apprenticeship and Life-Cycle Servitude-in-Husbandry," *Itinerario*, 1997, vol. 21/1, p. 41, found that masters charged indentured servants bound for the American colonies between £6 and £12 for passage, including all necessities.
26. HBCA, A. 15/3, fos. 40, 48.
27. HBCA, A. 1/8, fo. 28; A. 15/3, fo. 47.
28. See, for example, Richard Norton (Prince of Wales Fort) to HBC (London), 16 August 1733, Davies, K. G. & A. M. Johnson, eds., *Letters from Hudson Bay 1703–40*. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1965, p. 185.
29. Nixon, "Report to the Governor and Committee by John Nixon, 1682," in *Minutes, First Part*, p. 249.
30. Thomas McCliesh Jr (York) to HBC (London), 23 August 1723, *Letters*, p. 95; Thomas McCliesh Jr (York) to HBC (London), 7 August 1731, *Letters*, p. 159; James Isham (York) to HBC (London), 6 August 1737, *Letters*, p. 230; Richard Norton (Prince of Wales Fort) to HBC (London), 23 August 1737, *Letters*, p. 240. Also see the confusion in 1737 over the contract of labourer Patrick Sinclair: Joseph Adams & Council (Albany) to HBC (London), 17 August 1737, A. 11/2, fo. 89d; A. 16/2, fo. 77; Thomas McCliesh Jr, William Bevan, & Council (Moose) to HBC (London), 24 August 1735, *Letters*, p. 210.
31. Thomas McCliesh Jr (Albany) to HBC (London), 31 August 1719, HBCA, A. 11/2, fo. 40.
32. Joseph Myatt (Albany) to HBC (London), 22 August 1722, HBCA, A. 11/2, fo. 44d.
33. Nixon, p. 249.
34. Malcolmson, *Life and Labour*, p. 72.
35. Malcolmson, *Life and Labour*, pp. 71-73; Kussmaul, pp. 49, 55, 66-67; Snell, K. D. M., *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660–1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 334-337. Although migration for a variety of reasons was commonplace in early modern England, it was usually over short distances. Malcolmson, *Life and Labour*, p. 74; also Kussmaul, pp. 56-60; Clark, Peter, "Migration in England During the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries," *Past & Present*, May 1979, vol. 83, pp. 66-73; Eastwood, David, *Governing Rural England: Tradition and Transformation in Local Government 1780–1840*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, pp. 25-28. Studies of mobility in early modern Scotland have shown patterns similar to England (*i.e.* high levels of movement, primarily over short distances), but no detailed work has been done to ascertain whether turnover rates of population were as high as in some English communities: Whyte, Ian D., "Migration in early-modern Scotland and England: A comparative perspective." In Colin G. Pooley & Ian D. Whyte, eds., *Migrants, Emigrants, and Immigrants: A Social History of Migration*. London: Routledge, 1991, p. 92. It should be noted, however, that the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in England and Scotland have been relatively neglected in migration studies, partly because the sources from that period are "more intractable and less reliable" than those of both the preceding and succeeding periods: Clark, "Migration in England," p. 60.
36. McCliesh mentioned that the Committee's order was made "public in the factory," but did not comment on the men's reactions: Thomas McCliesh Jr (York) to HBC (London), 16 August 1724, *Letters*, pp. 98, 99.
37. "A Cobby of a Counsell Hold at Albany Fort Sepbr ye 1<sup>st</sup> 1701," HBCA, A. 11/2, fo. 1.
38. Thomas McCliesh Jr (Albany) to HBC (London), 16 July 1716, HBCA, A. 11/2, fo. 27.
39. Rowland Waggoner & Council (Albany) to HBC (London), 15 August 1739, HBCA, A. 11/2, fos. 100d-101. Most of these men got what they wanted: Greenaway two years at £30 (up from £25), Sinclair two years at £20 (up from £10), Macklin two years at £14, Peter Isbister Sr two years at £12 (up from £10). A. 16/3, fos. 7, 9, 10, 22. Joseph Isbister's wages were raised from £40 to £50: A. 16/3, fo. 9. Miller and Robinson received one-year contracts at £12 (up from £10, but they had asked for £14): A. 16/3, fos. 10, 23. Scott asked for two years at £14 (up from £10), but accepted one year at £12 and a second year at £14: A. 16/3, fo. 11. Crystal, though resolved to go home, actually stayed at Albany until 1741: A. 16/3, fo. 21.
40. Joseph Isbister & Council (Albany) to HBC (London), 18 August 1747, HBCA, A. 11/2, fo. 133; George Spence & Council (Albany) to HBC (London), 22 August 1748, A. 11/2, fo. 136d; George Spence & Council (Albany) to HBC (London), 4 August 1752, A. 11/2, fo. 151. For details of Cromartie's service, see A. 16/3, fos. 49, 84.
41. Robert Temple & Council (Albany) to HBC (London), August 1757, HBCA, A. 11/3, fo. 25. Halcro (£6 per annum) left his wages to the Committee's consideration, but he died at Albany on 15 November 1757: A. 16/3, fo. 88; A. 16/4, fo. 6. Three-year contracts were requested by and granted to labourer William Allen (who was described in the Officers' and Servants' Ledgers as a labourer at £10 per annum and Joseph Isbister's apprentice between 1753 and 1758, and who now asked to be engaged as a mariner at £20), while labourer Robert Isbister (at £6) left his wages to the Committee's pleasure and was disappointed: A. 16/3, fos. 92, 93; A. 16/4, fos. 7, 8. Shipwright John Fairfowl asked for a one-year contract but left his wages to the Committee's discretion, and continued at his current salary (£36): A. 16/3, fo. 89; A. 16/4, fo. 19. Sloop mate Robert Ingledew asked for two years at £30 (up from £25) but only got one year at that wage: A. 16/3, fo. 103; A. 16/4, fo. 12. Labourer and former apprentice Guy Warwick and writer John Favell both asked for £15 (up from £10) for three and two years respectively but accepted £12: A. 16/3, fos. 64, 96; A. 16/4, fos. 8, 20. Mariner Hugh Slater, formerly the servant of the late sloopmaster John Longland (d. 16 June 1757) asked for three years at £15 (up from £10) and accepted another year at his current wages, but was advanced to £20 in 1759: A. 16/3, fo. 97; A. 16/4, fo. 9. Labourer Thomas Austin asked for two years at £25 (up from £20) and got it by virtue of being a bricklayer as well: A. 16/3, fos. 65, 98; A. 16/4, fo. 10.
42. Anthony Beale (Albany) to HBC (London), 23 July 1706, HBCA, A. 11/2, fo. 15. For the irregularity of shipping to and from Albany between 1701 and 1712, see *Letters*, pp. 335-336.
43. Humphrey Marten & Council (Albany) to HBC (London), 3 September 1770, HBCA, A. 11/3, fos. 147d-148.
44. Aubert, Vilhelm, *The Hidden Society*. Totowa NJ: Bedminster Press, 1965, pp. 261, 275, suggested that high turnover among ships' crews may have been "an answer to tensions created by the fact that those who work in the same place also reside and spend their leisure time together."
45. Quoted in Kussmaul, p. 46.
46. HBC (London) to John Bridgar (Moose), 20 May 1686, *Letters Outward 1680–87*, p. 181; Joseph Myatt (Albany) to HBC (London), 22 August 1722, HBCA, A. 11/2, fo. 44d.
47. Nixon, p. 244.

## Covenant Servants

48. "A Councill Call'd this 11<sup>th</sup> of Sepr 1705" (Albany), HBCA, A. 11/2, fo. 9.
49. "A Councill Called the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 1706" (Albany), HBCA, A. 11/2, fo. 12.
50. "[H]ow I shall be able to perform my prommiss God knows for I have it not in the Country for 40 men wch is ye number I desire to keep if I can possibly procure so many." John Fullartine (Albany) to HBC (London), 2 August 1703, HBCA, A. 11/2, fos. 3-3d.
51. See Aubert, p. 265; Thompson, E.P., "The Patricians and the Plebs." In *Customs in Common*, p. 38. Ben-Amos, Ilana Krausman, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994, p.171, observed that the lack of clear boundaries between the moral and the contractual aspects of service agreements could easily lead to tension between master and servant.
52. *Graham's Observations*, p. 244.
53. John Fullartine (Albany) to HBC (London), 2 August 1703, HBCA, A. 11/2, fo. 7d.
54. Anthony Beale (Albany) to HBC (London), 23 July 1706, HBCA, A. 11/2, fo. 15.
55. Anthony Beale (Albany) to HBC (London), 2 August 1714, HBCA, A. 11/2, fos. 23d-24. The two men were Richard Staunton and Joseph Myatt, both future governors of Albany.
56. Only two years later, however, the new factor at Albany, Thomas McCliesh Jr (who had been among those sent home in 1714), complained about a rumoured French trading post at the mouth of the Severn River and reported, "Those men whoos time was Expired would by no means Contract for Longer then 2 years & some for one year, I was Oblidged to Comply with their Demands, Knowing what Treacherous next door neighbours we have to deal with." Thomas McCliesh Jr (Albany) to HBC (London), 16 July 1716, HBCA, A. 11/2, fo. 27. The French had constructed a trading post at or near the mouth of the Severn in 1702, but when they abandoned it is unknown.
57. HBC (London) to William Richards (Albany), 23 May 1764, A. 5/1, fo. 56d. In the same year, surgeon John Potts was allowed to continue at £48, but he had served longer than Richards and was formerly master of Richmond Fort: HBC (London) to John Potts (Fort Prince of Wales), 23 May 1764, HBCA, A. 5/1, fo. 59d.
58. HBC (London) to George Geyer & Council (Port Nelson), 22 May 1690, *Letters Outward 1688-1696*, pp. 102-103. Also, see HBC (London) to George Geyer & Council (Port Nelson), 21 May 1691, *Letters Outward 1688-1696*, p.123.
59. HBC (London) to John Bridgar (Moose), 20 May 1686, *Letters Outward 1680-1687*, 178-179.
60. HBC (London) to George Geyer & Council (Port Nelson), 17 June 1692, *Letters Outward 1688-1696*, pp. 141-142.
61. Thomas McCliesh Jr (York) to HBC (London), 23 August 1723, *Letters*, pp. 94-95; Thomas McCliesh Jr (York) to HBC (London), 16 August 1724, *Letters*, p. 97; Thomas McCliesh Jr (York) to HBC (London), 26 August 1725, *Letters*, p. 109. In 1723, Thomas White and Thomas Tutty, "both good men and very serviceable," and whose times were out in 1724, also offered (*Letters*, 95) to serve one year longer and "left it to your generosity to advance their wages," but did not mention any specific ambitions.
62. Thomas McCliesh Jr (York) to HBC (London), 16 August 1727, *Letters*, p. 128; Thomas McCliesh Jr (York) to HBC (London), 8 August 1728, *Letters*, p. 134.
63. Richard Norton & Council (Prince of Wales Fort) to HBC (London), 9 August 1740, *Letters*, p. 320.
64. Joseph Isbister & Council (Albany) to HBC (London), 24 August 1740, HBCA, A. 11/2, fo. 102.
65. HBC (London) to James Nicholson (Moose), 17 May 1770, HBCA, A. 5/1, fo. 112d; HBC (London) to Isaac Leask (Prince of Wales Fort), 17 May 1770, A. 5/1, fo. 121d.
66. HBC (London) to Moses Norton (Prince of Wales Fort), 17 May 1770, HBCA, A. 5/1, fos. 120-120d.
67. HBC (London) to John Abraham (Port Nelson), 14 May 1684, *Letters Outward 1680-1687*, p. 111. Two of James' brothers were also employed by the Company at this time: William Jr was the Company's attorney and Nehemiah was a ship captain. *Minutes, Second Part*, 83n.
68. HBCA, A. 1/8, fo. 26d; *Minutes, Second Part*, 83n.
69. HBC (London) to Thomas Phipps Jr (Moose), 23 May 1682, *Letters Outward 1680-1687*, p. 52; also see HBC (London) to John Nixon (Moose), 15 May 1682, *Letters Outward 1680-1687*, p. 45.
70. HBC (London) to John Nixon (Moose), 24 July 1682, *Letters Outward 1680-1687*, pp. 58-59.
71. HBC (London) to John Bridgar (Moose), 20 May 1686, *Letters Outward 1680-1687*, p. 177.
72. HBC (London) to Thomas Phipps Jr (Port Nelson), 20 May 1686, *Letters Outward 1680-1687*, pp. 191-192.
73. HBC (London) to John Bridgar (Moose), 20 May 1686, *Letters Outward 1680-1687*, p.177; HBC (London) to Henry Sergeant (Albany), 20 May 1686, *Letters Outward 1680-1687*, p.187.
74. HBC (London) to George Geyer & Council (Port Nelson), 3 June 1687, *Letters Outward 1680-1687*, p. 236; HBCA, A. 1/9, fo. 7d.
75. HBC (London) to George Geyer & Council (Port Nelson), 2 June 1688, *Letters Outward 1688-1696*, pp. 6-7.
76. HBC (London) to George Geyer & Council (Port Nelson), 2 June 1688, *Letters Outward 1688-1696*, p. 8.
77. Fleetwood, William, *The Relative Duties of Parents and Children, Husbands and Wives, Masters and Servants*. New York: Garland, 1985; originally published London: C. Harper, 1705, pp. 377-379.
78. HBC (London) to George Geyer & Council (Port Nelson), 2 June 1688, *Letters Outward 1688-1696*, p. 13.
79. HBC (London) to George Geyer & Council (Port Nelson), 22 May 1690, *Letters Outward 1688-1696*, p. 98.
80. HBC (London) to George Geyer & Council (Port Nelson), 21 May 1691, *Letters Outward 1688-1696*, pp. 117-118.
81. HBC (London) to George Geyer (Port Nelson), private, 21 May 1691, *Letters Outward 1688-1696*, pp. 125-127.
82. HBC (London) to George Geyer & Council (Port Nelson), 17 June 1692, *Letters Outward 1688-1696*, pp. 139, 140.
83. Alice M. Johnson, "Geyer, George," *DCB I*, pp. 328-329.
84. Davidoff, Leonore, "The family in Britain." In F.M.L. Thompson ed., *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950, Volume 2: People and Their Environment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 71, called the household-family "the template for most other organisations and [it] was seen as the foundation of society." Also see Foster, John E., "The Indian-Trader in the Hudson Bay Fur Trade Tradition." In Jim Freedman & Jerome H. Barkow, eds., *Proceedings of the Second Congress, Canadian Ethnology Society*, vol. 2. Ottawa: National Museum of Man, Mercury Series, 1975, pp. 574-575, 577-578.
85. Eastwood, David, *Governing Rural England: Tradition and Transformation in Local Government 1780-1840*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, p. 24. Also see Fletcher, Anthony & John Stevenson, "Introduction." In Fletcher & Stevenson, eds., *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 9-10; Snell, K.D.M., "Gravestones, Belonging and Local Attachment in England 1700-2000," *Past & Present*, May 2003, vol.179, pp. 100-101, 131-132.
86. For a discussion of social patterns and popular culture being transplanted from Britain to the American colonies through processes of retention, storage, recovery, and borrowing, see Young, Alfred F., "English Plebeian Culture and Eighteenth-Century American Radicalism." In Margaret Jacob & James Jacob, eds., *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984, pp. 185-212.

## Playing in the Shadow of the Ukrainian Labour Temple: The Reminiscences of Jerry Szach

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### Editorial Note

February 2009 marks the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Ukrainian Labour Temple. It is Winnipeg's only remaining labour hall from the period of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike. The Labour Temple is a City of Winnipeg Heritage Building and Manitoba Department of Culture, Tourism and Sport designated Historic Site. An application for the hall's recognition as a National Historic Site is before the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. The Labour Temple was one of the most prominent of the web of labour, cultural and church halls that European immigrants created as they settled in Winnipeg's North End in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Readers interested in learning more about the Labour Temple should turn to Myron Shatulsky's recent series of articles published in the *Ukrainian Canadian Herald*. Shatulsky, the historian of the Ukrainian Labour Temple and its cultural and political movements, paints an intriguing portrait of life in the ethnic association halls and churches that populated the neighbourhoods surrounding the Labour Temple.

Jerry Szach, who was born on 7 November 1930, spent his early year's youth playing in the shadow of the Ukrainian Labour Temple, which is located on the corner of Pritchard Avenue and McGregor Street in Winnipeg. In this article, Jerry Szach's remembers his youth in Winnipeg's North End during the Depression of the 1930s. Today, Mr. Szach lives in Vancouver but continues to visit Winnipeg regularly.

### Introduction

Much is written about the Great Depression, also known as the Hungry Thirties or Dirty Thirties. It was a time of great hardships. My friends and I understood as best we could as children that our parents were struggling to care for their families. As kids though growing up in the North End of Winnipeg where poverty was so widespread we were mostly unaware of our social standing. We were poor but so was everyone else around us. What follows then are my memories of my childhood in Winnipeg's North End.

### Earliest Memory

My earliest memories all revolve around the Ukrainian Labour Temple at the corner of Pritchard Avenue and McGregor Street. It was one of more than 100 such halls scattered all across Canada. My parents were members of the Ukrainian Labour-Farmer Temple Association, a mouthful, which shall be referred to here as the ULFTA.



Jerry Szach at a young age.

J. Szach

One early such memory is of a funeral, that of Mikhaylo Lenartovich. He was a young man at the time of his death—in his early 30s, and I think he died of tuberculosis, a common disease of the poor, then and now. He was one of the editors who produced a variety of publications that emanated from the print shop located in the basement of the building, including *Ukrainski robotnychi visty* (*Ukrainian Labour News*). It is generally recognized as the only Ukrainian daily paper ever published in Canada—probably in North America.

The funeral was held at the Labour Temple and the crowd was so large it spilled out onto Pritchard Avenue and into the house across the street, because it was a cold day. The house had a veranda with windows about three feet off the floor. That was too high for me (I must have been about three at the time) and my mother held me up so I could see what was going on. All the time, it was impressed upon my young mind that a very important person had died—a leader of the working class. When the memorial service

## Playing in the Shadow of the Ukrainian Labour Temple

concluded, men brought the casket out onto the street and proceeded to carry it to Selkirk Avenue, then on to Main Street and all the way down Main to Market Square. That procession-turned-march through the city streets (probably without benefit of a permit from City Hall) culminated in a mass rally with thousands of people participating. While in Winnipeg in May 2006, I stood on the steps of the Labour Temple and looked across the street. The house is still there, as is the veranda with its windows.

Another early memory is being in the house of the Navis (Naviziwsky) family. Ivan Naviziwsky is recognized as one of the key founders of the ULFTA. They lived on Aberdeen Avenue, just west of the CPR line to Winnipeg Beach. As the adults sat and talked, several of us kids had great fun running under a big, round oak table in the kitchen. Who the other kids were, I have no idea, but one of them may well have been Myron Shatulsky. Who knows? Myron and I certainly go back that far together.

Also at that time, around 1933–1934, I remember placing chairs in the middle of our house, sitting my parents down, grabbing a piece of kindling, and commanding them to sing. “Ya choveek z kuyarami,” I proclaimed; this being my best attempt at pronouncing “Ya choloveek z okulyarami” — “I’m the man with the glasses.” This was a reference to Nicholas Huculiak, musical director of the cultural groups in Winnipeg. He wore thin, black-framed glasses and would never dream of conducting without a baton in his hand. I knew that when he raised his arms with that little stick in his hand, magical things happened and I wanted to replicate them in our own home.

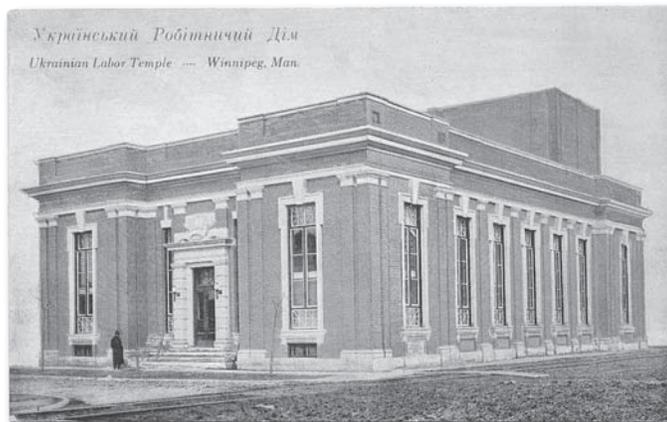
The house we lived in was on the north side of Boyd Avenue between Arlington and Sinclair streets. It was typical of many in the North End. A kitchen with a sink—cold water only—a wood stove and a cubicle about the size of a phone booth, which contained a toilet and nothing else. It also had a trap door, which opened to reveal a flight of stairs leading to a root cellar. Alongside the oven was a small wooden table and chairs to match. The front room was my parents’ bedroom. It had a *kufer* (trunk) for storing bedding, etc. And that was pretty well it. Both tables, chairs and such bowls/dishes as we had all came from the same source—Wakhnyak’s Second Hand store at the corner of Boyd and Sinclair. He had a three-wheeled bicycle with sidecar, which he used for deliveries, and for years was a common sight pedaling around the North End.

The middle room had my bed, a cupboard for storing staples, with an accordion type sliding cover and, during the cold season, a box stove—a *bayshtok* in Ukrainian immigrant parlance. The room also had a little larger table and, after around 1937–1938, a floor model radio. The first radio we got was a Rogers-Majestic from Manitoba Furniture, on Selkirk Avenue where the Ukrainian Legion is now located. It came on a trial basis from the store’s owner Mr. Mirlovich. It was really intriguing to me because it had what the company called The Magic Eye. When you worked the dial to pick up a station, as the dial got close to the proper frequency—for instance, CJRC at 630—the eye would start to turn green. It would begin at the six o’clock position and proceed up towards noon. This green light would keep going up both sides of the eye until it was right on 630. Bingo! The two sides would merge at 12 o’clock, so you knew you were right on target. But this radio had one major defect. It had only 17 tubes. (Transistors had not yet been invented.) This made for very poor short wave

reception—and my father was definitely interested in short wave. So we sent it back, to be replaced by a Philco with 21 tubes. This was a vast improvement and on many a night, when I was presumed to be asleep, I could hear the catch phrase “This is London Calling.” Sometimes, depending upon weather conditions, it was possible to pick up Moscow, and several times I could hear a voice ranting in German. Undoubtedly, Hitler. Of course, short wave came at a price. If you had any kind of radio, you were obligated to purchase a radio license from the

federal government. I think the cost was \$4.00 a year. Most people ignored this requirement. But if you wanted to pick up short wave signals, you had to mount an “aerial” (antenna) and run a wire from the radio to the outside to hook it up. This of course was a dead giveaway, so you couldn’t avoid the license fee.

The street was unpaved. It didn’t have even a topping of gravel so delivery trucks always got stuck in the Red River gumbo after a summer deluge. We kids used to watch gleefully as vehicles would attempt driving through it and inevitably ended up being pulled out by horses. The sidewalks were wooden—a couple of two by four runners with two by sixes nailed across to form the surface. There were open spaces between the planks to allow for expansion/contraction as the weather changed. I will return to the subject of the sidewalks a little later on.



Rob McInnes

**Greetings from the New Country.** An early 20<sup>th</sup> century postcard of Winnipeg’s newly constructed Ukrainian Labour Temple, captioned in Ukrainian, was probably intended to be mailed to relatives in the Old Country.



Association of United Ukrainian Canadians / Workers Benevolent Association Archives

The 1934 funeral cortege for Ukrainian activist Mikhaylo Lenartovich left the Ukrainian Labour Temple, proceeded down Selkirk Avenue, and turned south onto Main Street.

### An Immigrant Neighbourhood

The families who lived on our street were typical of the whole neighbourhood: Ukrainian, Polish, German, a couple of Italian households, and a sprinkling of Anglo-Saxons. My playmates were all Ukrainian and Polish with the exception of one kid, whose mother was German and father Polish. At one point, we shared a house with two other families—Ukrainians who also had three rooms on the main floor with a wall running the length of the house separating us, and an older Polish family who lived upstairs. Both our upstairs and main floor neighbours had access to the toilet and bathtub on the second floor, but it was off limits to us. I guess the landlord figured that running water and a private toilet was good enough for six bucks a month we paid him. That's what the rent was, but that six dollars was surprisingly hard to come by at times. With no bathtub, we had to bathe in a zinc washtub my mother used for soaking clothes. Soak, then boil on the stove in a big copper tub, rinse back in the zinc tub and wring out by hand before hanging on a line in the back yard; both winter and summer. In winter, it was quite a sight as my parents brought in the wash from outside: the sheets would be frozen stiff and looked like giant pieces of plywood.

The entire structure of the house had no insulation. Many times, we would awaken in the morning to find the pipes had frozen overnight and ice a quarter of an inch thick on the walls. I slept with the *bayshtok* stove on my right and the wall of ice on my left. The fact that I developed osteoarthritis in my left knee at age six is probably no coincidence. Many a night when we went to bed and the lights were out, I glanced over to the *bayshtok* to see it glowing red in the dark. It is a wonder we weren't all burned alive—while freezing! Another feature of the house—and there was no extra charge for this—was that it was completely infested with mice. They ran rampant, day and night. We had a cat that we never had to feed. She lived on the mice. She would eat until completely full, then settle down with her paws tucked under, and try to have a nap, only to be awakened by the noise of mice as they frantically scurried about. She would open her eyes, watch the creatures as they slipped and slid on the linoleum floor, and go back to her nap, confident in the knowledge there would be plenty to eat when she awoke. In the summer, she got a little more variety in her diet, when grasshoppers would descend upon us in the millions. But they served only as a supplement as the main course remained mice. For

a few years, our downstairs neighbours were the Kuchmeey family, also ULFTA members. Both of us had numerous traps set in various places and they would always be sprung when we arose in the morning. Still, despite the heroic efforts of the cat plus the traps, there was no discernible drop in the mouse population. One night Kuchmeey who, like my father, was unemployed decided to wage war on them. He stayed up all night, clobbering them with a broom. Next morning he showed us his handiwork: a quart sealer filled with mice. Nothing helped. My mother and “Kuchmeeyka” as she was known in the time honoured Ukrainian fashion, consoled each other. “Mice are not too bad.” “Rats are far worse” and “*Bozhe boroni* (God forbid) we should have cockroaches.”

Most people had bread and milk delivered to their homes, mostly by horse and buggy. Bread was two cents a loaf delivered by the likes of Standard Bakery, City Bread, Buckwold’s Electric Bakery, Northwest Bakery, and on and on. Despite the presence of such large commercial bakeries as Weston’s and Brown Brothers, it was the small, family owned, mainly Ukrainian and Jewish bakery trucks and wagons that were most often seen on the streets. One such bakery was Winnipeg Workers Bakery, a holdover from the famous General Strike of 1919. During that strike, the committee in charge realized that people had to eat and so the bakers of the day were pressed into service to feed the city. The name they chose was Winnipeg Workers and the name persisted right into the Thirties. Although the bakery had long since reverted to private ownership, people still patronized it out of a sense of loyalty to the concept. It was located on the north side of Selkirk, a couple of doors east of Arlington.

Milk was delivered the same way. In fact, the horses got to know their customers so well that the driver rarely had to issue stop-and-go commands. The horses knew at which houses to stop. It was possible to learn quite a bit about the politics of people on the block just by watching milk deliveries. Two or three of us used People’s Co-op products; others were served by Crescent Creamery, City Milk, Standard or Modern Dairies and even, in rare instances, by St. Boniface Creamery, indicating French-Canadian residents. Of course, all the Polish Catholic households had St. Joseph’s delivery. The creamery was located just west of McPhillips between Mountain and College. Everything else, all around, was nothing but bald prairie. Wagons and buggies were on wheels during the summer, but after the first snow fell, the wheels would be replaced by a type of ski, making it easier to cope with the snow and ice.

Heating our three little rooms required following a nightly ritual—well thought out by my father. First, he started the fire in the *bayshtok* with poplar. It was quick burning wood that didn’t last long at all, but it had the advantage of providing lots of heat readily, thus inducing a good draw up the chimney. Next came, tamarack from northern Ontario. It burned more slowly than poplar—but also cost more. After the two woods had done their job and created a good fire, Souris coal would be added. This

was a soft, bituminous coal that took longer to burn but, again, cost more than wood. Finally, just at bedtime, would come a big block of anthracite Drumheller coal. Black, shiny and replete with fossils, ferns, etc., from which it had been formed, this was very long burning, lasting into the morning so at that time the fire could be maintained without starting anew. The drawback with Drumheller was, of course, that it cost a lot more so it had to be used sparingly.

The ashes would be removed regularly and carefully set aside to fertilize the family gardens. Part of the back yard was used to plant tomatoes but the real garden was a block to the east, between Arlington and Parr streets. My father rented a full regular sized lot from the city for \$2.00 a year. It was 33 or 35 feet wide and about 100 feet in length. On a garden that size it was possible to plant a real variety of vegetables: corn, potatoes, beets, carrots, peas, beans, radishes, onions, garlic, leaf lettuce, cabbage, cucumbers and dill. During the heat of summer, it became a real problem trying to water a garden that large that was so far from home. At first, we tried carrying water in buckets but that proved to be totally unrealistic. So we made a deal with the people next door to the lot, a Ukrainian family named Popeel. If we could use their water, they could help themselves to any and all items grown. The arrangement worked to everyone’s satisfaction. The summers were hot. In the midst of this heat, my mother still had to make a fire in the kitchen stove. There was no alternative. Just to boil water for a cup of tea required a heat source and since we had no hot plate, the stove was it. We also lacked an icebox so we bought butter a quarter of a pound at a time and ran cold water over it constantly to keep it from melting completely. And water was not cheap.

Grocery stores abounded with virtually one on every corner and sometimes more than one. So, you didn’t go shopping once a week, you went to the store every day to meet that day’s needs. And every family had its favourite grocer. The reason was simple: no one had any cash, so you relied on the kindness of the grocer to see you through until you had some. Each day’s purchases would be listed on your bill, in duplicate, and totalled up when you had the cash to pay. At that point, some grocers would throw in a bag of apples or oranges—so happy were they to get paid. Others would simply tally up, knock ten percent off the total, tear off the top copy of the bill and that was that. The next time you went in for groceries, a new bill would be opened. As mentioned, everybody had their favourite grocer. In our case, it was a store on the northwest corner of Burrows Avenue and Arlington St. Although it was several blocks away from our home and there were other stores in between, we chose this one for a very practical reason: it was owned by the Mazoveeta family who were members of the ULFTA.

### Children at Play

Most of my preschool years were spent playing with the other kids on Boyd Avenue. In the summer, we would play

a game called Hippy Tippy. The rules are rather complex to go into but it required two lengths of broom stick—one about six inches long another two or two and a half times as long, and a hole in the earth a couple of inches deep and about three inches across. It was a game made up by and for kids; we had to provide our own entertainment since organized sports were still years in the future. If we got tired of Tippy, we would take six tin cans out of garbage bins, stack two sets of three about 12–15 feet apart and play a form of cricket. All it took was a bit of imagination and we could entertain ourselves for hours on end. As far as I can remember, nobody on the block had a fridge. But several families had iceboxes and we eagerly awaited the daily delivery of ice, especially in the summer. Ice was one commodity that always was delivered by truck: Arctic Ice Company, red trucks with blue and white lettering. We would watch fascinated as the driver climbed into the back, took a huge block of ice and proceeded to carefully cut out a chunk about 18 inches long, wide and high, then sling it on his shoulder over a rubber pad and carry it into someone's house. This was our cue for one of us to jump into the back and round up a few slivers of ice for all of us to suck on. This had to be accomplished in a hurry because if the driver returned and found one of us in his truck, he wasn't too happy; if it happened too often, he would close the door and deny us our treat.

Some of the boys enjoyed chewing tar—they claimed it tasted just like licorice-flavoured gum. Each spring, the paved roads like Arlington Street would be inspected for frost heaves. As the frost melted after a severe winter, the concrete cracked and city crews would come around with boiling tar to fill them in. Inevitably, some tar spilled onto the street and while it was still warm and pliable, it could be chewed. Not being a fan of licorice at all, I decided to take a pass on this particular pleasure.

In the winter, the game of choice changed to hockey. Like all other communities across the country, we played it constantly. But we couldn't always get our hands on a puck, so had to improvise. Horse droppings filled the need nicely, although they tended to sting when frozen. Somebody got the idea to take a magazine and stuff it behind his stockings, thus providing a form of shin pads. *Life* magazine was undoubtedly the best for this purpose, since it had a large format and was good and thick. Three or four additional horse turds would provide us with goal posts, and away we went. There was a further winter activity that everybody indulged in whenever possible and that was skating at the local rink. These neighbourhood attractions consisted of a flooded ice surface on city owned property, together with a clubhouse or shack built by volunteer labour. There were all kinds of unemployed, vigorous young men looking for something to do and these endeavours provided an outlet for their energies. The lots were simply appropriated in groups of three or four (they weren't being used anyway) and the shacks built using CPR siding. This siding was wooden, about three or four inches wide and came from actual CPR box cars, donated—willingly, or otherwise—by

the company. An old oil drum would be converted to a box stove and the structure thus heated. Now, the boys who built these rinks guarded their privacy zealously and all but members were absolutely refused entry to the building. But once a week or so, they opened up the ice surface to the public at large. You then had a choice of either walking to the rink with your skates on, or slinging them across your shoulders and changing into the skates and sticking your shoes into a snow bank—whichever you preferred. And, despite the hard times, I can't recall a single instance where someone came back for their shoes and found them missing after an evening of skating.

These rinks were scattered throughout the North End. The ones I easily remember are Leafs (Boyd and Arlington), CAACs (College and McGregor), Bronx Athletic Club (on McKenzie, between Machray and Church), Hermits (Mountain at Robertson), Bulldogs (inside the old Exhibition grounds on Sinclair at Dufferin), and Toph's (Redwood and Prince.) The latter two were constructed differently from the others: Bulldogs was a log structure and Toph's an entire CPR boxcar. It would be interesting to find out how they managed to swing that deal.

#### School Days: Slavko becomes Slavik becomes Jerry

While most of my preschool time was spent at home, there were occasions when that had to change. We were on relief all through the thirties (as were many other families). With both my parents unemployed and a child in the house, relief was finally granted to us sometime around 1933. But this occurred only after a good deal of struggle by organizations such as the ULFTA. Once in a while, either my father would be lucky enough to find work for a day or two, or my mother would go washing floors or walls for some relatively well off family. Sometimes it happened they both had work on the same day, which posed a problem. I could not be left at home alone and asking a neighbour to care for me was out of the question. One never knew when an inspector could come along and, if he found someone was at work, he would move immediately cut them off of relief. One particularly nasty such inspector was named Shalay. Being Ukrainian made him doubly dangerous, since he could pry out information that others might not be able to.

Thus it happened that I was baby sat (so to speak; baby sitters or the concept of paying to have children minded was unheard of) by a Jewish family named Blok. I suspect their actual name was Blokh but my parents always referred to them as Blok—so Blok it shall be. They lived in a large brick house with a big veranda on Garlies Street, on the east side, just north of Mountain. The family patriarch was Sam and he was either a dreamer or schemer—probably a bit of both. He was one of those people who just knew there was a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, if only he could figure out how to obtain it. His wife was named Rose, I think, and they had one son, Nathan, and three girls: Pearl, Jean and Fanny. One of the father's earliest schemes was to raise bees at home. He seemed unperturbed by the

thought that when winter came along with its 40 below weather he would have to find a place to keep the bees. At any rate, he needed hives built to get the project underway and that was how he met my father who was a skilled old country carpenter. On his first trip to the Blok house to get started on building the beehives, my father took me along and that was my introduction to the family.

The family was always very kind to me; polite and patient. My endless questions were answered in a straight, honest fashion, without talking down to me, as adults so often do with children. In a word, they truly treated me like family. They all had part time jobs of one kind or another (outside of Sam and Rose), and thus were able to get by. It usually fell to Fanny, the youngest, who was a teenager and worked part time for the Winnipeg School Board, to keep me occupied. It was from her that I learned the stories of the Three Bears, and Little Red Riding Hood, and so on. Stories I would never have heard at home because my parents at that time were hardly proficient in English. My parents also thought fairy tales were silly. Their attitude would have been: bears sleeping in beds? Eating porridge? Why fill a child's head with such nonsense? And, of course, it was nonsense. Even a child could tell that, but it gave me a boost before going to school because it put me on an even footing with the other students. When a teacher talked about Goldilocks or the Big Bad Wolf, I was not at a disadvantage to others.

I always looked forward to a visit with the Bloks. Not only because it was a break in the routine, but also because they were so nice to me. They knew I loved nuts so they would always have filberts, walnuts, etc. ready to feed me. Also, it was a rare chance to enjoy white bread—with butter, yet! We had white bread at home now and then, but infrequently. Bread was usually rye or pumpernickel. In the summer of my sixth year, Fanny and I were sitting in the kitchen when she looked at me, and said: "Well, Slavik, you'll be starting school this fall ...." Now, I had been named Slavko—no prefix such as Miro- or Yaro- or any other. Simply Slavko. (My good friend Myron Shatulsky had a very interesting column in the *Ukrainian Canadian Herald* recently on the ubiquitous nature of this name.) But for some reason everyone in the Blok household called me Slavik; maybe it was the Yiddish equivalent. Whatever, such was the case and I never made any big deal out of it.

So, Fanny says:

"You know, when you start school you're going to have to tell them your name. Have you ever thought of changing your name?"

"No."

"Well, maybe we should think about it. Now, there's nothing wrong with Slavik. It's a perfectly good name. But some kids are funny. They may decide to make fun of it. You wouldn't want to start school by having fun made of your name, would you?"



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A huge group attended the 1930 opening ceremony for Parkdale, an orphanage and seniors residence owned and operated in East Kildonan by the Workers Benevolent Association, a sister organization of the ULFTA.

“No, I guess not.”

“Well, then, maybe a change of name would be good. Do you know what kind of name you’d like to have?”

“No.”

“How about Jerry? That’s a nice name. Would that name suit you?”

“I guess so.”

“Good. That’s settled then. When you start school and they ask you your name, tell them it’s Jerry.”

And that was that, except for one other conversation I had with the patriarch himself. It was at just about the same time when I was starting school. He offered me the following advice “When you start going to school you’re going to meet all kinds of new kids. Some will be nice. Others will be not so nice. Some may even try to tell you there’s something wrong with you; that you’re not as good as they are. But you just remember one thing: you’re as good as anyone else. Will you remember that?” When I told him yes, I would, that ended the conversation. It wasn’t until years later—after having matured a little bit—that I realized what he was trying to do. He was informing me that bigotry existed and kids were not immune to it. He could have told me this fact in a manner designed to scare me, but he chose, instead, to do it in a positive way: be prepared for it but don’t let it get you down. Invaluable advice.

Shortly after the above happenings—maybe a year or two later—the family decided they had had enough of the old man’s shenanigans and kicked him out of their house and lives. They moved to a place on Redwood Avenue around Powers and then again to an apartment on Flora or Stella just west of Main. My mother and I kept in touch with them and visited them in both locations into the early 1940s, but then lost contact with them. That family helped me pass from preschool to the next important phase of my life and they did it with grace and kindness, though they were not much better off financially than most people in the North End. I will always treasure time spent with them.

With the question of my name having been resolved, there remained only two other hurdles to cross before enrolling at Margaret Scott School—one minor, the other a bit more serious. The minor one involved my age. A child had to be at least six years old to gain admittance to school and I wasn’t turning six until 7 November while school started right after Labour Day. My father promptly solved that problem by taking me aside one day and stating: “If anyone asks you when you were born, tell them July.” And that was that. The other one was a bit more complex. During that summer of 1936, I overheard my parents quietly discussing the question of my religion. I couldn’t see any problem—my religious beliefs mirrored those of my parents. They did not believe in any Supreme Being, thus, they professed no religious faith. What they did believe in was that ordinary working people, if they banded together in common purpose, could achieve remarkable things. And, in my opinion, they were correct. All the key forward thrusts in the history of humankind have come only after masses of people have become involved the

French Revolution, American Revolution, the fight for India’s independence waged by Gandhi, and likewise the civil rights movement in the United States. It seems that injustice continues until, to paraphrase a well-known quote from the movies, people get to the point where “they’ve had enough and aren’t going to take any more.” This notion of united action may appear rather quaint at present, but none can predict the future. And so, the perceived problem of my religious deficiency concerned me not at all.

My parents, on the other hand, had heard rumours that upon registering, each child was expected to declare his/her religion. Hence, the problem, one could choose any name they liked and even pick a birth date virtually at random, but God forbid you failed to state a religious affiliation. That was serious. So my parents decided that an appropriate religion would have to be selected. In reality, there were only two options: Catholic or Orthodox. Catholic was immediately rejected because of the Vatican’s ambivalent (some would say friendly) attitude towards Mussolini’s Fascism and Hitler’s Nazism. Thus, by default, I would become for the purposes of school an Orthodox believer. But the question was how to accomplish this? Well, there was a Ukrainian Orthodox Church—fairly recently constructed—at the corner of Burrows Avenue and Sinclair Street and it was to become the site of my baptism or whatever the correct term is. When the big day came, towards the end of summer in 1936, I was taken to the church by my parents; just the three of us, no godparents or anyone else that I can remember. There were other candidates for the blessing, five or six of us all told—and all the others were infants. The priest duly started his routine, proceeding at a measured pace from one to the next, ending by dipping the baby’s bottom in a baptismal container of holy water. When it came my turn, I detected a momentary look of consternation on his face, as if he were thinking, “What am I going to do with this *bambula*?” (oaf). However, being the resourceful type, he muttered his incantation, dipped his hand in the water, sprinkled some on my head and duly pronounced me a true member of the Orthodox faith. And none could claim otherwise.

School opened up a whole new world to me. Our grade was considered to be “grade nothing” until the Christmas break, at which time adjustments were to be made. Not knowing the intelligence levels or preparedness of any students (there was no kindergarten or preschool) the teacher arbitrarily assigned us in September to Class I, II, or III. As things progressed, she was able to assess each of us and assigned each of us to a class. By Christmas, those who were in Class I were promoted to Grade 1 while the rest of the students had to wait until the following year to achieve that level. I was one of the fortunate ones who was assigned to Grade 1 and went into a different room with a new teacher in January of 1937. First thing in the morning was roll call. Once that had been dispensed with, we all had to rise and sing God Save the King—not O Canada. When the singing was over, we had to remain standing and recite in unison The Lord’s Prayer. It mattered not a



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May Day parade, 1936.

whit whether you were Christian, Jew, agnostic or anything else, you had to proclaim: "Our Father, which (sic) art in Heaven," and so on. The first few days were quite a jumble because hardly anybody knew the words in English but, as with all kids, we got the hang of it fairly quickly. We were constantly reminded that Canada belonged to the greatest empire the world had ever seen—the British Empire "upon which the sun never sets." Just about every room in the school had a wall map of the world, showing Britain and all its possessions in pink. In addition, the walls were adorned with photos of King George VI and other members of the Royal Family, including the princesses Elizabeth and Margaret Rose. Little did we know that barely a decade hence the British Empire would suffer the fate of all previous empires and dissolve into nothing. Every empire since recorded history has followed the same pattern: rise, rule and fall. At present, the United States seems to feel it is an exception to this immutable rule of history. We shall see.

The early part of January each year saw a drastic falloff in attendance. The reason, of course, was celebrating the Ukrainian holidays. After one such episode, our teacher was going through the roll and determining why certain students had been absent. After she got through with the Levitskiys, Peetyuras and Sadoviys she called out: "Marvin Berlin. Why weren't you at school last Tuesday?"

"Ukrainian Christmas" came the prompt reply.

"But you're not Ukrainian, you're Jewish,"

"Yeah," admitted Marvin, "but I've got to live with these guys."

For Ukrainian New Year's many of us took part in a tradition, which probably dates back to pagan times. We would leave home with a small bag of wheat to visit several homes to get the year started on a proper footing. We would enter the house, dip a hand in the bag, take out a small handful of wheat and scatter it around in a sowing motion, all the while reciting:

*Seeysya, rodysya, zhito pshenitsya  
Na shchastya, na zdorovya,  
na shchasliviy noviy reek,  
Shchob vam sya leepshe zhilo yak vtoreek.  
Sow and grow, ye rye and wheat  
For good luck, for good health,  
for a bountiful new year  
So your life should be better than it was last year.*

We would usually call upon only those that could pay for this blessing, because it was customary to pay the youngster a nickel or so and no one wanted to impose such an expectation upon a truly needy family. Although this honour was supposed to be restricted mainly to family and friends, I always included a trip to our landlord even though he wasn't Ukrainian, but Polish. I figured that if we could pay him six bucks every month he could afford a nickel once a year. I say "we" used to do this but, in truth, these rites were always performed by a boy. I'm not aware that girls did the same.

As mentioned earlier, the school population represented many ethnic groups. If only we had been given a little encouragement, we could easily have picked up three or

## Playing in the Shadow of the Ukrainian Labour Temple

four languages and what an asset that would have been in later life. Naturally, we did pick up quickly on all the curses, swear words, and off-colour expressions in the other languages, but that was all. The Ukrainian immigrants believed in the old adage: “Znaysya veel z volami, a keeny z konyami” — “An ox should keep company with oxen, and a horse with horses,” Obviously, the other immigrant groups felt the same because there was precious little effort expended to understand each other. And the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture did nothing to encourage such cross-pollination, so we ended up with ridiculous spectacles like a roomful of kids who had grown up with the polka or kolomeyka singing, “Do Ye Ken John Peel” or “The Ash Grove.” Not that there’s anything wrong with either of those songs. They’re fine for the cultures they represent, but to us they were alien. Thankfully, Canada is a much more tolerant society now, although much remains to be done to erase racism—particularly against people whose skin colour happens to be other than white.

Most times, corporal punishment reigned supreme and was applied at the slightest provocation. The chosen instrument was the strap—a hideous invention of leather or rubber, about three inches wide and a quarter inch thick. Most teachers and principals were only too eager to use it. For some it became almost addictive—if they hadn’t used the strap for a couple of days, they seemed to invent excuses to do so.

In those days, even though vehicular traffic was far lighter than now, there were still streetcars and buses, plus the odd truck, so the school patrol told students when to hold back or when to go by simply raising their arms at right angles to the body to hold us back. If any kid tried to pass when told not to (which never happened) it would be the duty of the patrols involved to report such a violation. That’s why we always referred to the patrols as “stoolies”—even while serving as one. By Grade 6, I along with my best buddies Ted Perich and Roy Nizalik, had in fact become part of the patrol. We took great pride in the way we marched to our stations and back, the way we took down the flag (the Canadian Ensign, it was called) and performed our duties in general. In fact, we were so good that in the spring of 1942 the school patrol of Margaret Scott School was declared the winner in a citywide survey. The best in the city award (complete with pictures and story in the *Winnipeg Free Press*) went to our little elementary school. We were really proud; not just for ourselves, but because we brought an honour to the entire North End, which was always at the short end of things—be it parks, pavement, sidewalks or anything else. And with this win, we proved that the North End could be as good, or better, than any area.

During those years, the Winnipeg school board had a policy of delivering milk to elementary schools. For two cents, you could have a half pint of milk brought to your



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**It pours.** A dramatic group in the Ukrainian Labour Temple performed *Rain*, a popular play by Somerset Maugham, circa 1929. Actors were all locals who worked a full day then acted by night.

room every day. When my mother found out such a service was available, she asked me if I would like to take it. But I could see that the offer was only half-hearted (because it would mean another ten cents a week would have to be found somehow) and so declined. I did add, however, that if she made it chocolate milk, I'd be happy to reconsider because I really didn't care for milk that much. One of the regular milk customers was a girl by the name of Joyce Ketchen. We all knew that the family was Ukrainian but we couldn't figure out where the surname came from, but that's beside the point. I remember her quite well because of her father. Upon the rare occasion that parents were invited to attend some function or other—usually no more than a couple of times a year—he would always show up wearing tinted, rimless glasses. Most glasses were rimmed, so these stood out and were no doubt more expensive. Not only that but he always wore a suit and tie, in contrast to the plain working clothes of most parents. Plus, he always had a big, fat cigar stuck in his mouth. He was a businessman and owner of Ketchen Printing, which published one of the Ukrainian nationalist papers.

In 1941, when the federal government closed all the Ukrainian Labour Temples across the country and confiscated all the contents—books, manuscripts, music, instruments, etc.—they also seized in Winnipeg the print shop, complete with presses, type, linotypes and everything else. Since there was hardly a market for such specialized equipment, it was sold at bargain basement prices to Mr. Ketchen. And so, what had been so painstakingly assembled through the years by the collective nickels and dimes of poor working people, all of a sudden ended up in his hands. After that, it seemed that whenever I saw him, his cigars had grown bigger and fatter than ever.

#### Mr. Lazechko: Guardian of the People's Health

No reminiscence of the North End would be complete without a word about Lazechko. He was a pharmacist and proprietor of White Cross Drugs at the southwest corner of Boyd and Arlington. But he was so much more than just a pharmacist. He was, in truth, the guardian of the people's health in the North End, and he ministered constantly to his flock. Indeed, he looked like a typical priest. His collars were always so stiffly starched that any priest would be envious. But they always seemed one size too small, so the folds of his skin rolled over them. His face was ruddy, with a high forehead and rather narrow eyes, coloured blue. He ran the operation by himself, peering out at people from behind a wicket that looked much like a bank teller's cage. A visit to or by the doctor was prohibitive. The five-dollar cost could be a killer, so people would go with their ailments to Lazechko. He was able to help them most times. He mixed his own potions and salves, so was able to clear up skin rashes and all kinds of minor problems. He was years ahead of his time because, in actuality, he ran a medical health centre. During the early thirties, he had a steam bath under the drug store but had to give it up after a few years because it was just too much for one person to handle. He

was married but no one ever saw his wife help him in any way in running the store. Indeed, she was regarded by some as being a *panyee*—an aristocrat. He also had daughters in high school. Two, I believe. The elder, Myra, proved to be quite a poet. While still attending Isaac Newton, she wrote a poem titled. "Let No Man Call Me Foreigner"—a ringing rejection of the prevailing Anglo-Saxon chauvinism, which won acclaim from one end of Canada to the other. Although she wrote many other poems and much prose in later years, under her married name of Myra Lazechko-Haas, I doubt any of her later works achieved the renown of that early, inspired poem.

Lazechko also kept leeches, which he rented out for healing purposes. I remember one occasion when my father had a bad bruise on his back, acquired on some job or other. Like all bruises, it turned an ugly blue-black-green colour and caused him a good deal of discomfort. Lazechko suggested the leech treatment. My mother heated up a stemmed glass, put the three or so leeches on the bruise, and placed the glass over them. The heated glass provided a sort of domed vacuum, which prevented them from going beyond the bruise. After the little medics had done their job and removed the bad blood, the pain was gone and they were returned to the drug store.

I don't know how Lazechko addressed the other kids, but I was always Sonny to him. He knew I like to read but really had nothing to read at home. We couldn't afford the daily paper and I had not yet discovered the joys of the school library. We did receive the *People's Gazette* (*Narodna Hazeta*) but it was of no use to me because I couldn't read Ukrainian. I pleaded with my parents to let me start Ukrainian school at the same time or shortly after entering public school, but they demurred, on the grounds that I would get "mixed up." How can I get mixed up, I reasoned—English is English and Ukrainian is Ukrainian? But they were adamant and I had to wait until 1939 to go to Ukrainian night school twice a week at the Labour Temple. Meanwhile, I wanted to read. Lazechko knew this and helped me out by giving me old Toronto *Star Weeklies*. The *Star Weekly* was delivered each weekend to Lazechko's store and he was supposed to return the unsold copies when the following week's edition arrived. But each week Lazechko saved one for me and gave it to me when I would stop by on Monday. I believed him when he said a copy was left over from last week, never realizing he still had to account for every last copy. One Monday I walked into the store as usual and asked if there were any old *Star Weeklies*. He said no, that they had all sold out. My disappointment must have been plain on my face because, as I turned to leave he said: "Just a minute, sonny, I just found one" and, reaching under the counter handed it to me from inside his wicket. It was only after I came home and started to read it, that I realized he had given me the current week's edition. So he was subsidizing my reading at his own expense. I really appreciated his generosity and tried to make up for it in part, at least, by offering to deliver for him. He really didn't need to run a delivery service but every once in a

while he would send me off with something for a customer. I think he wanted me to feel useful and not the beneficiary of charity.

When we moved away from Boyd Avenue, I pretty well lost touch with Lazechko. His life was a constant parade of people who should properly have been taking their problems to a doctor, not a pharmacist—talented though he undoubtedly was. Accident victims, young mothers with sick babies, old people with what was euphemistically called rheumatism (but could have been anything from arthritis to sciatica) all went to him for help. At times, it must have been overwhelming for him. He was the only person that many people could turn to and he struggled mightily to cope.

As if the daily struggle to survive wasn't enough, sometimes fate likes to place an additional burden on the poor. Like the fine summer morning, I awoke, got to my feet and fell flat on my face. I tried again. Same result.

"What's the matter?" my mother asked.

"I don't know. I can't stand."

And it was true; my left leg simply refused to carry any weight. Alarmed, my parents realized this was serious. Something even the mighty Mr. Lazechko couldn't fix. There was nothing to do but summon a doctor. Dr. Ribak appeared at our house carrying his medical satchel. He examined me but declared he could offer no remedy for my situation. There was a specialist, he said, a Dr. Galloway, located downtown, who should be able to help. If we agreed, he would phone ahead and clear the way for our visit. What choice did we have? So my parents told Ribak to go ahead and we took off for the streetcar stop. My father had to carry me to that first stop and between car transfers until we finally arrived at the office of Dr. Galloway, which was on the north side of Broadway, somewhere around Smith or Donald Streets. The doctor entered the waiting room asked me to stand up and walk toward him. I fell again. He performed a rather cursory examination of my left leg and then announced rather matter-of-factly: "the leg will have to come off at the knee. The cost will be \$300. Let me know your decision," and strode out of the waiting room, leaving in his wake a shocked family.

I immediately began to plead. "Don't let them cut off my leg. I'll walk again. I promise. You'll see—I'll walk again. Please." My parents both assured me nobody was going to do any cutting, but the looks on their faces belied their soothing words. We left the office of the esteemed doctor and headed back home, my mother and father discussing their options on the way. They finally agreed upon Kramer, in desperation. Kramer was a neighbourhood healer whose reputation rivalled that of Lazechko's. The common understanding was that he was doctor who had arrived from Europe but could not get accreditation in Canada. He himself was careful to avoid the label of medical doctor. He stated that "I am Mister Kramer, not Doctor Kramer. I do not practice medicine and do not charge a fee. But if someone comes to me for an opinion on something, I will provide an opinion, as is my right." Even though he didn't

charge a fee, the honour system prevailed and anyone visiting him was bound to leave something: a bag of apples, maybe some homegrown vegetables, a chicken, cash if possible, but something. Kramer, too, had to eat.

We arrived at home; my father went into the woodshed and emerged with a little red wagon that I had played with in my younger years. He sat me in the wagon and the three of us took off for Kramer's. He lived in a house, typical two-storey neighbourhood house with an enclosed glass veranda on Powers Street somewhere around Cathedral Avenue. When we arrived at the house we were met at the front door by a kindly looking man of slight build, about five feet six inches in height, with a small face and soft grey eyes. His voice and manner were gentle and sympathetic. He asked us to sit down and explain the problem. When we had, he didn't ask me to try to walk, or even stand. Instead, he came to the chair where I was sitting and knelt down on the floor in front of me. Taking my left leg, he gingerly moved it back and forth, simulating the natural walking movement. He then gently turned it one way, then another. Placing his hand alongside my knee, he applied a little pressure and asked: "Does this hurt? How about here? And here?" Satisfied, he rose to his feet, looked directly at my mother and said, "Don't let anyone touch the boy (we had advised him of our encounter with the specialist). Put him to bed and keep him there for two or three days and nights. By the end of the week he'll be running around with his friends." We left, but not before I noticed, my father put something into his hand, thanking him.

His prognosis turned out to be 100 per cent correct. By the end of the week, I had rejoined the Barans, Borovskees and Pastukhs on the boulevards of Boyd Avenue.

#### **Culture and Politics:**

#### **Youthful Days at the Labour Temple**

Mr. Mikita Krechmarovsky who taught night school at the Ukrainian Labour Temple was a unique character. He was clearly loved by anyone who ever had the good fortune to have been taught by him. A humble, kind man, he treated every student in his care as if she/he were his own child—a perfect environment for learning. He had absolutely no discipline problems. He maintained discipline by being kind and respectful at all times; he was simply too nice for kids to take advantage of him—unlike the man who replaced him during World War II. In 1941, the federal government used the Wartime Measures Act to close all the Ukrainian Labour Temples across Canada and imprisoned the ULFTA's leadership. Although he was never more than a simple schoolteacher, Krechmarovsky found himself interned in a concentration camp. Ironically, the Polish Labour Temple organization, which had exactly the same political and ideological outlook, was allowed to remain functioning. Strange, indeed, are the ways of bureaucracy, for we found ourselves attending Ukrainian school in the Polish Labour Temple at Pritchard and Prince with a brand new teacher named Yakeev Semenov. That worthy gentleman chose to enforce discipline by making miscreants

kneel in the corner at the front of the classroom where he had thoughtfully provided a bed of dried peas. He got his discipline, but respect was lost in the process.

Krechmarovsky never had to resort to punishment of any kind, even though he had well over a hundred children under his care—ranging from Grades 1 through 6—with more than one Grade in the room at any given time. He always stood in the vestibule outside the classroom and greeted each student as they were about to enter. He always remembered everyone's name and offered an encouraging word to each of us. To make sure his students were mastering the Cyrillic alphabet, he would ask each of us to stand and read aloud, after the first few weeks of Grade 1. As you progressed through the grades, the reading became more complex. But by this simple expedient he could always tell which students were "getting it" and which needed specialized help. After having started night school in the fall of 1938, I was promoted to Grade 2 in the spring of 1939. That fall as I was on my way into class, he stopped me and asked (in Ukrainian, of course) "Can you still read as well as you did last year?" "Of course," I confidently replied. "Good. Then, starting tonight, you sit with the Grade Threes." He had just skipped me a whole grade! I was so thrilled; I could hardly wait to get home to tell my parents. Not only did he pass me on a full grade but a few months later, he paid me an even bigger compliment.

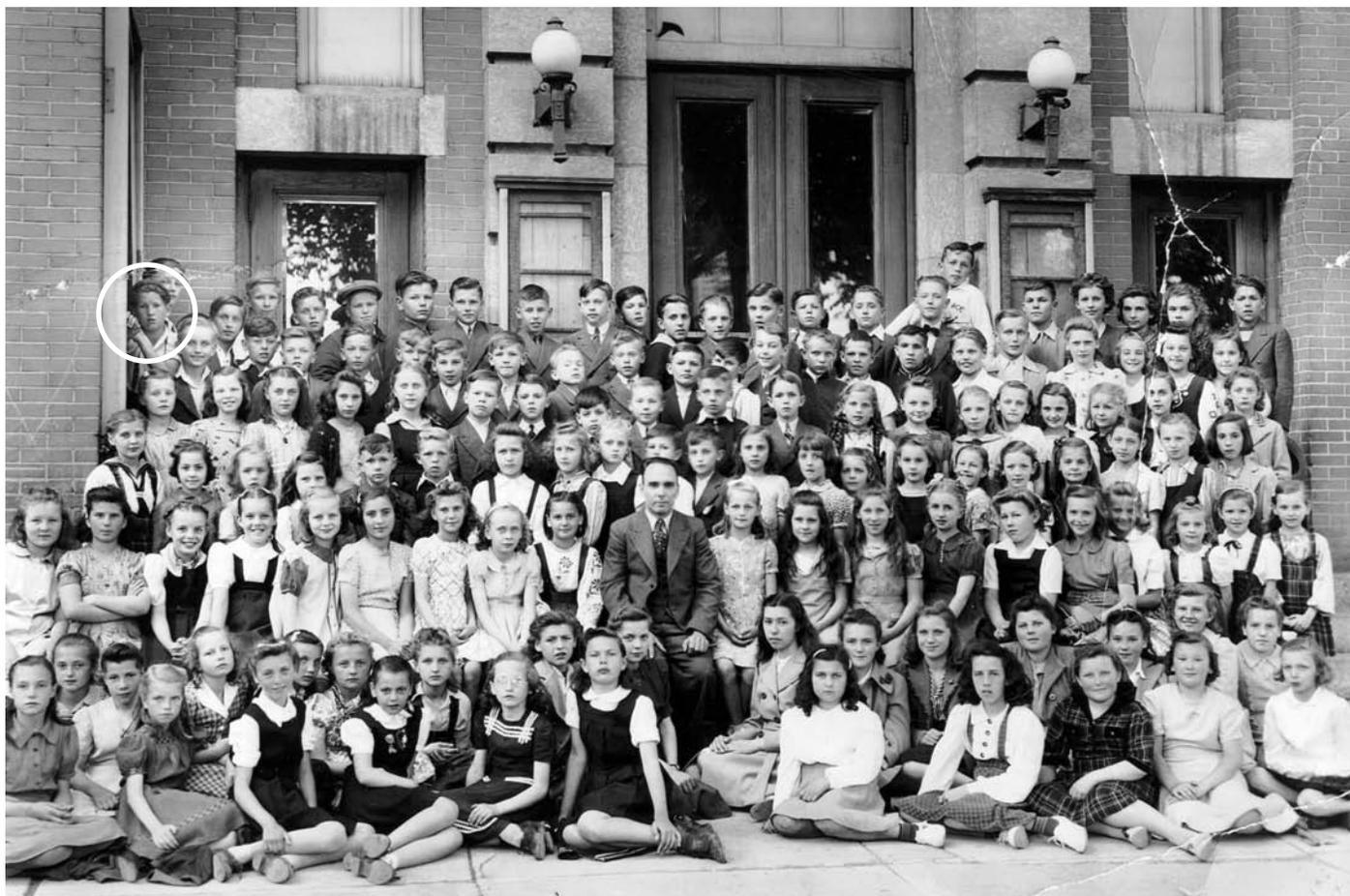
The drama group was intent upon staging a play called *Za Sinyem Morem* (Beyond The Blue Sea). One role called for a young lad aged about eight to ten. Could he recommend some one? Yes, he said, he could, and told me there was a part in a play waiting for me and whom I should report to. When I did, it could hardly be called an audition because there were no other candidates. Someone handed me a copy of the play and asked me to read certain portions in as loud a voice as possible, which I proceeded to do. And got the role. This was in the winter/spring of 1939/40 and gave me my first opportunity to appear on stage. I found the experience to be very rewarding and have continued performing in choirs, choral groups of all sizes and types, folk song groups and playing trombone in many different orchestras. The latest such appearance was in June 2006, at the Orpheum Theatre in Vancouver for the World Peace Forum. And who can say if it's the last? After I started work and my first ever vacation took me to eastern Canada along with three other friends, I made it a point to find this wonderful man while in Toronto where he had moved with his wife and daughter after the war. He was as kind and gentle as ever. That was the last time we met but I will never forget him and still think of him fondly from time to time.

Even before starting night school, I had already spent many days and nights within the walls of the Ukrainian Labour Temple. During the Thirties you could walk into the hall on any given day and find the place full of people—mostly men. The reason was obvious; unemployment. Figures ranged from 25 per cent to 40 per cent but nobody knew for sure. But it was clear there were

a hell of a lot of people out of work, so they came there for companionship and to talk politics. It was the era of the great show trials in the Soviet Union and it seemed virtually every week brought new revelations. The names came in an almost endless procession: Trotsky. Kamenev. Zinoviev. Tukhachevsky. Bukharin. Rykov. And on and on. Some brave souls expressed the opinion that "there's something not quite right there. How is it that, all of a sudden, everybody is a no-goodnik and Stalin is the only good guy?" But they were in a definite minority. Most took the position that the Soviet Union was the only Socialist country, surrounded by enemies who were constantly trying to undermine the regime from within.

Another event I remember during the 1930s revolved around the Spanish Civil War. As the war to save the Spanish Republic raged on, with clear signs it would soon engulf all of Europe, somebody in the Ukrainian nationalist community got the bright idea of sending a wristwatch to Adolf Hitler. This was before the infamous Stalin-Hitler pact of 1939, while Germany and the USSR were still bitter enemies. Hitler had made promises several times in his speeches to "liberate" Ukraine and some naive people believed him. His brand of national liberty soon became evident and could be attested to by the people of Europe from Norway to France to Greece. But this was still in the future. At the time in question, the word went around the North End that a meeting/fund raiser would be held at the Institute Prosvita Hall at Pritchard and Arlington, with the aims of (a) approving the idea of sending the watch to Hitler, and (b) raising funds for the purpose. When word of this meeting got out, the ULFTA decided it was a horrible idea and the organization would do everything possible to stop an action they deemed to be a black mark on the entire Ukrainian community. But how to stop it? They feared sending a contingent of protestors to break up the meeting would lead to fisticuffs and perhaps even bloodshed. So it was decided to send not only men but women and children too to the meeting in the hope that this would prevent violence. I went together with my parents. We sat down in the middle of the hall and recognized other friends and ULFTA members sitting scattered throughout the audience. After the chairman's opening remarks he asked for either a motion or discussion—I can't remember which, but it matters not anyway—and that's when he lost control of the gathering. One after another, speaker got up and loudly protested the entire concept of the meeting. There was a complete breakdown of order and the meeting was, of necessity, declared to be over. Obviously, no decision was reached on that day (it was a daytime meeting) and I can't recall that any attempt was ever made to hold another meeting, so I don't think Adolf Hitler ever got his wristwatch from Winnipeg. Saner heads must have prevailed.

If the days were devoted to politics, the evenings were for meetings, lectures and, on weekends, cultural events. Friday night was movie night, where we could view the classical films of people like Sergei Eisenstein



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**The Ukrainian Children School of Winnipeg** with teacher J. Semenoff, 1940s. Author Jerry Szach is circled.

and be entertained by the likes of Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy (always referred to as “Fat and Skinny”) and some top-notch Hollywood efforts like *Dead End*, *Angels With Dirty Faces* and *Robin Hood*—in colour yet. Saturdays were for *predstavlenyas*—presentations. It could be a drama, a folk operetta or a comedy, but there was always a presentation of some kind every week for over twenty years consecutively. The pool of acting talent was so deep and circle of directors so wide that there would often be three or four productions being worked on at the same time. Many of these productions were so popular that they had to be repeated. After spending weeks, if not months, in rehearsing and packing the hall (which held roughly 1000 people when standees were included) it seemed a shame to perform once in public and leave it there. So an extra performance would be squeezed in a few weeks after the first one, again to a sold out house. Sometimes, we were presented with Ukrainian translations of such popular fare as *Charley’s Aunt* or *Rain*. The drama group was justifiably proud of its range of work and was hugely popular. It was supported not only by ULFTA members but by the broader Ukrainian community and many Jewish people, most of whom were quite familiar with the Ukrainian language from their European roots. Indeed, one of the main reasons for building Canada’s first Ukrainian Labour Temple was

to provide a setting where the drama group could do its work without worrying about renting suitable halls, which were not plentiful to begin with.

Sunday mornings were turned over to the Junior Section, as over a hundred children took over every possible space in the entire building. Boys were taught how to carve wood, build models, and the rudiments of playing chess. The girls, on the other hand, received instruction in the fine arts like painting Easter Eggs, Ukrainian embroidery, and so on. There were no charges for any of these lessons. Sunday nights were reserved for concerts. Mandolin orchestras, choirs, folk dances, soloists, duets and other vocal combinations were on the menu. The children would leave their parents to sit in the first three rows—right up at the front of the theatre. And it was a true theatre with seats that were anchored to the floor, which sloped towards the stage. Naturally, when you had a bunch of kids like that—grouped all together—it could lead to distractions. So there was a need for discipline and the enforcer was a little old man named Kharchina. He would sit surrounded by the sea of kids and watch for rowdy or unseemly behaviour. He was elderly, with a fringe of grey hair framing a baldhead; very small in stature, he was hardly bigger than some of the older kids. But nobody messed with Kharchina. If you misbehaved, he would look at you and raise his finger

to his lips, telling you to quiet down. If you persisted, he would glance at you again—this time, wagging his finger back and forth, indicating your actions were a no-no. Then, if ever he had to look in your direction again, it was game over. He would take you by the hand and lead you back to your parent, which was the ultimate humiliation. To the best of my knowledge, nobody ever got to that point—so strong was Kharchina's reputation. Admission to all of these cultural events was by silver collection. This was strictly an honour system. Many a time an entire family of four would drop one nickel in the collection plate and take their seats. It was assumed that's all they could afford and nobody ever challenged them.

### Lemko Evenings

Once or twice a year our family routine would deviate on a Saturday evening so we could participate in a house party organized by the Lemko community. The Lemkos are a distinct branch of the larger Ukrainian nation. Geographically located at Ukraine's westernmost region—abutting against Slovakia—they speak a form of the language, which has inevitably been heavily influenced by Slovak, a sister Slavic language. The most distinctive feature of the Lemko version of Ukrainian is placement of emphasis on the wrong syllable in multi-syllabic words. The following example will illustrate: when a Ukrainian says "Ya zaplaCHU" it means: "I will pay", but when she/he says "Ya zaPLAchu" it means, "I will cry." Whereas when a Lemko says "Ya zaPLAchu" he means: "I will pay." Needless to say, two Ukrainians, ostensibly speaking the same language, can have some confusing conversations if one happens to be a Lemko.

My mother came from this community and she had a brother living on Jarvis Avenue in a tenement with several other members of the community. Some of the men were married, but most single. They numbered several dozen and tended to live in the area around Jarvis bounded by Robinson and Schultz streets. Fully a half or more of their number had managed to find work, usually of the menial kind. For instance, my uncle worked in the Galvanizing Shop at Manitoba Bridge & Iron Works. I'm not familiar with the details of the process but do know it involves electricity, hot metal and acids. He started work there as a relatively young man and, for the rest of his life, I rarely saw him without scabs on his hands and forearms and sometimes his face. These were either acid or metal burns. And one can only imagine the noxious fumes produced by this ungodly combination. He died of apparent heart failure on the job aged sixty-one.

The Lemko community would get together several times during the winter to have a party usually around a family event. Whenever we attended these parties we always traveled by foot, to save on car fare. My parents would bundle up, place me in a sleigh all wrapped up in blankets and trundle off to Jarvis from Boyd avenue—no small distance, especially when temperatures fell to 35 or 40 below zero.

Those who had a pay cheque threw in some money to have Drewry's brewery deliver a small keg of beer to the party site, which almost invariably was at the same house on Jarvis. The keg would come with a spigot and hand pump plus a supply of glasses: thick, with Drewry's painted on the side and shaped just like a beer keg. The keg had a bung at the bottom, which would be knocked out and replaced by the spigot. The keg would then be stood on end and the pump fastened to a receptacle on the top. After a few enthusiastic pumps built up enough pressure—lo and behold!—out would flow the beer. The beer would always be supplemented by a container of home brewed liquor. The kids always went with their parents; baby sitters were unheard of. So, after an evening of racing around and just as the party was starting to hit its stride, we would be hustled off to bed. By then we were tired enough that there were no complaints about having to go to sleep. As the adults had arrived at the house, their heavy winter outerwear was piled on a bed. When we were sent off to bed, we were placed on top of the pile, covered up, and instructed to go to sleep.

There was always at least one violin, sometimes two, to provide the music and, for a while, a man (I believe his name was Fred) who played a button accordion. But then Fred somehow got a job working in the mines of northern Ontario and took his accordion with him. Everybody remarked about how lucky Fred was because he had found steady employment—a rare occurrence indeed. But, it didn't take long for him to come back. He was injured in an explosion, probably due to inexperience, and came back to Winnipeg completely blind. To this day, I remember how he wore sunglasses while playing the accordion. In the end, some good fortune did finally smile upon him. He had been dating a young woman before he left for Ontario and when he returned to Winnipeg blind, many thought she would no longer be interested in him. But she stuck by him. They married and, as far as I know, spent the rest of their lives together.

Early one evening at one such shindig, I heard a knock at the door, a pause of a few seconds, and then the knocking resumed. This was strange, since most invited guests would knock and then let themselves in while announcing their presence. After all, nobody wanted to spend even a moment longer than necessary outside in the cold. So when I heard the knock and nobody entered, my curiosity was aroused. I watched as my uncle (who roomed upstairs in the house) went to answer. When he opened the door, it revealed the biggest man I had ever seen. He wore a buffalo coat and fur hat, which made him look twice as big. He exchanged a few words with my uncle who went into the kitchen to get two jiggers and a bottle of home brewed whisky that he stuffed into his jacket pocket. He went outside. There was a window on the side of the house and I peered out to see what was going to happen. My uncle gave the cop the jiggers to hold, took out the bottle and poured two shots into them. They clinked glasses and tossed back the shots. Now sufficiently fortified against the cold, the policeman

resumed his beat.

While on the subject of home brewed liquor, it should be noted that this product was omnipresent. Rarely did anyone put a bottle of government whisky on the table. Most of the homemade variety, provided it came from a reputable source, was actually very good—and much cheaper than store bought. For about 15 cents, you could get a Coke or 7-Up bottle full of the stuff. There was an “agent” placed in just about every block in the North End, so obtaining the liquor was no problem at all. Indeed, I’d venture a guess that even today, provided you know the right people; it wouldn’t be too difficult to buy some. The product was far too strong to drink straight and it had to be “cut.” This, of course, added to the appeal because one bottle would usually end up being two or three. The cutting was quite an elaborate procedure: first, you poured a teaspoonful straight out of the bottle into a spoon. Then, you put a match to it, to determine if (1) it burned with a pure blue flame and (2) to see how much residue was left. This residue was referred to as “feusal oil” or impurities. If there was very little then you knew that the contents were the real stuff. Next, you burned some sugar in a dry skillet, turning the sugar brown. This was then added to the whisky, imparting a golden colour and making it look very much like rye whisky. After the sugar and booze were blended, you could then “cut” the combination with water, 7-Up or some such mix. If you started with almost pure whisky, by the time you did all the above it was possible to end up with more than a 26 oz. sized bottle of still potent whisky. I watched my father and uncle go through this routine several times but this does not mean that they were constantly drinking. On the contrary, I rarely saw my father take a drink, other than at Christmas or other special occasion and my mother drank even less.

All this whisky was supplied from distilling to wholesaling to retailing at the street level, in the main, by a single organization. The supposed kingpin of this outfit was reputed to be one Paul Stanley. He was a Ukrainian but chose the name Stanley and that’s the only way people ever referred to him. In reality, however, Paul was merely the front man for a syndicate of seven or eight partners, chief among them being Bill Wolchok. He was the architect of the whole operation, beginning with building the first still, then expanding to a whole series of them and turning out 1000 gallons of pure alcohol daily. From Winnipeg, they shipped the product east, west, and even south as far as Chicago. One celebrated delivery entailed switching three entire boxcars, filling them with 45-gallon drums of booze, then diverting them to the Windy City. When the police finally were able to crack the operation Bill was the only partner to go to jail, serving five full years at Stony Mountain Penitentiary.

### Summer Pleasures:

#### Picnics and our Saturday “na spatseer”

Quite often, the ULFTA organized picnics on Sundays. Some were held in East Kildonan. The street car routes

ended on Henderson Highway at the old Bergen Cutoff, whose bridge can still be seen today south of the Chief Peguis bridge crossing the Red River. Where the tracks ended (the site of the Curtis Hotel now) specially chartered buses would take over and drive out to a farmer’s field east of the highway. The farmer was either a member or friend of the organization and allowed his property to be utilized this way once or twice a year. Other times the picnics would take place at Parkdale, east of Main. Parkdale is a few miles north of Middlechurch, just where the highway takes a jog. The land and buildings were owned by the Workers Benevolent Association, a sister organization to the ULFTA. The property ran from Main all the way to the river, with a creek running through it, and the buildings were of Manitoba Tyndall stone—the same material used to construct the Legislature. The entire complex was used as a home for orphans and administered jointly by the WBA and ULFTA. There are still people alive today who were raised in that orphanage and have remained grateful to those two organizations ever since. But most of the picnics were held on the old Exhibition Grounds (“Artsebeeshin” in Ukrainian immigrant speak) west of Sinclair and south of Dufferin. There would be kids’ races, with different coloured ribbons for prizes, a sand box, and always a horde of kids around so there was no shortage of playmates. While the adult men would lay down a blanket and play a card game named King Peedro (whose complexities were far beyond a child’s ken), the women would sit and chat and the children, as usual, would make their own fun.

One lasting memory from these picnics goes back to the summer of 1935. A group of young men were camped in tents on the Grounds. Some were the forerunners of the On-To-Ottawa trek; others were local Manitoba boys who had come to join it. The trek had started on the West Coast and picked up more strength as it headed east. Travel was by CPR freight trains and the object of the enterprise was “Work and Wages.” They had hoped to confront the Prime Minister, R. B. Bennett, but that Conservative politician had no intention of meeting with what he considered to be “this rabble.” So on July 1<sup>st</sup> of that year, at a public rally in Regina, he unleashed the RCMP on the crowd with resultant deaths and injuries to many people. That action effectively killed the trek but that did not become obvious immediately, so these young men were left in limbo. Meanwhile, they had to stay alive somehow, and I recall vividly how poor people—some of whom undoubtedly went to bed hungry at night—nevertheless found the human kindness to provide something for these young guys: a container of homemade soup, a sandwich, or a bagel. People did what they could. That memory is seared in my brain for all time.

However, while Sunday picnics were irregular, Saturday nights were the time to go *na spatseer*—for a stroll. At that time, Selkirk Avenue was Main Street and Portage Avenue all rolled into one. It was a procession of shops: grocers would display their wares on the sidewalks; there were tailors, hairdressers, furriers, furniture stores, meat markets, shops with ladies’ fashions—even an ice cream



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**The 1937 May Day demonstration** outside Winnipeg's City Hall.

restaurant. It was called Taylor's Ice Cream Restaurant and sat next door to the Merchants' Hotel on the north side at Andrews street. Of course, it was open only during the summer and people used to line up on the sidewalk waiting to get in and choose from maybe eight or ten flavours—an unheard of number. People would start the stroll at Arlington and proceed east from there, stopping to chat with friends who were also on a stroll, perhaps buy a bag of chips for a nickel (salt and vinegar free!) and press on. By and large, all these businesses were owned by Ukrainians and other Slavs. But from Salter on, the nature of the area changed and Jewish became the predominant culture. From there to Main, you would find Jewish dentists, doctors, delicatessens, and the Hebrew Sick Benefit Hall, next to Gunn's Bakery (both structures still exist). The Hall had a lunch counter, which served a corned beef sandwich second to none in the city and was available to other ethnic groups for rental. I had the pleasure of attending many a function there, including weddings and wedding anniversaries. If for some reason the ULFTA hall was unavailable, the Hebrew Sick Benefit was always an option.

While there were certainly Jews west of Salter and Slavs east of it, nevertheless those areas were defined as outlined above. On the other hand, the area between Andrews and Salter was a sort of transition zone. On the northeast corner

of Andrews and Selkirk, you found Soloway's—the North End's largest grocery store and a little farther down, just past the Palace theatre, its largest department store (the Eaton's of the North End), Oretzki's. The Oretzki brothers sold everything from apparel to shoes, and the shoe department drew people in like a magnet. The reason was their x-ray machine. When you were trying on a pair of shoes you could walk up to the machine, stick your feet into the slot at the bottom, peer down a visor tunnel and actually watch your toes as you wiggled them. People used to walk in off the street, go straight to the machine, and insert their feet just to watch this phenomenon. Today, of course, we realize that exposure to x-rays can be harmful and so it's kept to a minimum but then—who knew?

The Saturday night walk marked the end of the working week (for those fortunate enough to have jobs) and Sunday was the day of rest—all shops closed, etc. But Sunday night was the night for family and friends to visit. It seemed everybody was on the move Sundays, just like Saturdays, but with a different objective. This custom of visiting fell off dramatically after the war when we all were able to obtain phones. It was much easier to keep in touch that way. Besides, who wanted to leave a warm house in the winter to go and visit? An additional factor was that, during the 1930s, we all rented and lived close

to each other, but as things improved economically many bought their own houses in “better neighbourhoods.” They all still lived in the North End but much farther apart from one another. They still kept in touch but the Sunday night ritual of visiting all but died.

One unforgettable memory of Winnipeg summers was the presence of Jewish peddlers. There were three that come to mind. The first sold watermelons when they were in season, in August. Presumably, he also sold other produce because he could hardly earn a living on the melons. He operated, as did all of them, out of a horse drawn wagon. He would go up and down the streets shouting in his rich Yiddish accent: “Vademel-o-o-n—von cent a pound.” And the people would come to his wagon to choose their melons. Watermelon must not have been well known in western Ukraine, because my parents were certainly unfamiliar with it. I, however, had been given a taste at school by one of my friends, so could recommend it to them. I was a notoriously poor eater, so my recommendation carried a good deal of weight. My parents took a chance and bought one and, of course, liked it immediately. The second peddler sold live chickens. The women on the block would come out to inspect his stock, which was kept in metal cages so the customer could peer through the bars and make a choice. My mother had a real knack for choosing birds. She was not interested in fryers but wanted an old hen, which she knew would be ideal for chicken soup. She would inspect two or three birds, always feeling between their legs until eventually deciding on one. Invariably, she would pick one, which was just about to lay, so we would get an additional egg or two for the same price. But buying the chicken was the easy part. Next, it had to be killed, then plucked and cleaned before finally going into the soup pot.

The third peddler was a ragman. Instead of the streets, however, his domain was the back lanes. He would allow his mare to leisurely amble along while crying out “Lakhy. Lakhy!” — the Ukrainian slang for “rags.” He always had a collection of old lamps, shirts, pants, bottles, etc. When we kids heard his call we would cry out “Here comes Lakhy”, not knowing his true name, and go rushing over to see what wonders his wagon might hold. We would watch with interest, as some woman would come out of her home holding an old bottle and offering it to him for only a nickel. He, of course, would counter with one cent, and the haggling would begin. Usually he would get it for two or three cents, in the hope that down the line he might get a nickel for it. And so it went. All three of them were trying to *schlepp* a living as best they could—and it had to be earned during the summer because who could sell out of an open wagon in the winter?

I’ve referred several times to walking as the main means of transportation. And it was. People hated to part with a nickel for carfare and walking was so commonplace nobody even noticed it, let alone commented on the fact. But when we had to resort to public transportation, it was readily available. Streetcars ran along McGregor, Arlington, Mountain, Selkirk and Dufferin and buses along Salter, Arlington, Cathedral and Aberdeen. Most of the streetcars were the same as those in other parts of the city, running on dual tracks and having an operator/conductor at the front and conductor at the rear. But there was one streetcar, which was the pride of the North End. It was no doubt the oldest and smallest car in the entire Winnipeg Electric Company fleet so, naturally, was relegated to the North End. It had a top speed of somewhere in the order of 10–15 miles per hour, so people referred to it affectionately as the



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Unemployed workers and their families demonstrate outside Winnipeg’s City Hall, 1930s.

Mountain-Dufferin Flyer. Because there was no other like it, people took it into their hearts with the attitude “this is ours, this belongs to the North End.” It travelled in a U-route, starting at Main and going west along Mountain, then south to Dufferin and east back to Main Street. Because there was only a single track and no place to turn around at the end of the run, the car was actually designed like a ferryboat. After going outside to disconnect one trolley and connect the other, the driver/conductor (it had a crew of one) would simply disengage the throttle and brake handles at one end, walk down to the other end of the car and reconnect them at that end. Of course, in winter, he had the additional task of stopping in the middle of the car and putting a shovel or two of coal into the box stove located there. People simply loved that car and sometimes went out of their way to use it. In point of fact, the Mountain-Dufferin Flyer became an institution.

Our family used the Flyer most times when we weren't walking. About the only times we boarded a bus was to go to City Park. Its official name was Assiniboine Park but in the North End, it was always City Park.

### Christmas on Relief

For a kid like me, “on relief,” the coming of the Christmas holidays was anticipated with a mixture of inevitability and dread—the cruellest time of the year. Not having a religious background had very little to do with it, since many secular families nevertheless celebrated the occasion. But when a family is trying to subsist on three sacks of potatoes for the winter, there was nothing with which to buy trees or any other baubles. So I never received any kind of present at Christmas until I was about seven or eight years old. Word went around the North End that the Robertson Memorial church at the corner of Burrows and McKenzie would be handing out presents to needy kids. My mother and I joined the line-up on the sidewalk, eventually winding our way inside where I was handed a wrapped box and sent on my way with a “Merry Christmas.” Upon arriving home, I unwrapped it to find a team of horses with a detachable wagon. Both parts were stamped out of metal and painted in bright, happy colours. Not much of a present, one would think. But, decades later, my mother informed me that I spent hours playing with that outfit. I distinctly remember waiting in line for the present and remember a photo taken outside our house with me holding the wagon and horses at my feet (it exists somewhere in our family photo albums), yet remember nothing about playing with the set. Is it possible my memory—usually pretty good—blocked out the scenario? This feeling of what: inadequacy, second classness?—was certainly not helped by certain insensitive teachers who, upon returning to school after the holidays, asked everyone in the class to describe what they had received for Christmas. The fortunate few would recite a list of their booty while the rest of us sat glumly looking at the floor, wishing Christmas would never come again.

There was not much for the rest of my family to celebrate either, particularly during the early part of the

decade. One Christmas Eve my mother had gone to bed and I was lying a few feet from my father and uncle who assumed I was safely asleep. They were sharing a “festive” drink of homemade whisky—no doubt provided by my uncle—and decrying their fate. How was it, they asked each other, that in a country as rich as Canada, so many people were without jobs, decent lives and actually going to bed hungry? Then, in the middle of this bleak conversation, my father made a statement, which will stay with me for as long as I live. “And yet,” he said to my uncle, “we're still better off in Canada than in the old country.” Hearing those heartfelt words, I tried to imagine how terrible things must have been in Ukraine, but came up short. My imagination was not quite fertile enough.

Those early years without joy at one of the happier times of year have stayed with me always. I still don't feel quite comfortable receiving gifts at Yuletide even now. Somehow, they provoke a vague feeling of unease in me. However, I will happily admit that there was one institution connected with the holidays that I looked forward to with great anticipation each year, and that was the Christmas choir organized by the Hudson's Bay Co. It was a mixed choir of Bay employees, conducted by I know not whom. In fact, I rather doubt there were any announcements regarding the conductor. If there were, I certainly don't remember. But the choir was excellent; they appeared (or aired, I guess is the proper term) over one of the local radio stations and performed every morning between 8:30 and 9:00 o'clock, for a period of two to three weeks. That was one treat I never missed.

### A Room of My Own

As the Dirty Thirties drew to a close, conditions began to improve slightly, almost imperceptibly. Partly, it was because by then people had become inured to the bad times; if someone has been kicking you in the ass for ten years and suddenly stops, you're going to feel better even if nothing else has changed. But it was also more than that. There were encouraging signs of economic activity resuming—albeit slowly. The empty lot on Boyd Avenue where we had played for so many years, all of a sudden was denied to us because a house was being built on the property. And there were other signs that there was a bit more money around. As the last of the thirties slipped through the hourglass of time, my mother decided she could finally afford to take a break on the Labour Day weekend of 1939, and elected to visit the Sokolovsky family in Gonnor. Upon first arriving in Canada, she had worked for them as a *naymichka*—a maidservant. They must have been reasonable employers, I guessed, otherwise why would she choose to go back and visit? My father must have been temporarily employed because she took me with her on the trip. It turned out to be a very memorable weekend for several reasons. We took the streetcar to the end of the East Kildonan line where Mrs. Sokolovska met us with a team of horses and wagon. When we arrived in Gonnor we went to a wooden structure with a thatched roof and whitewashed clay walls. Inside was a

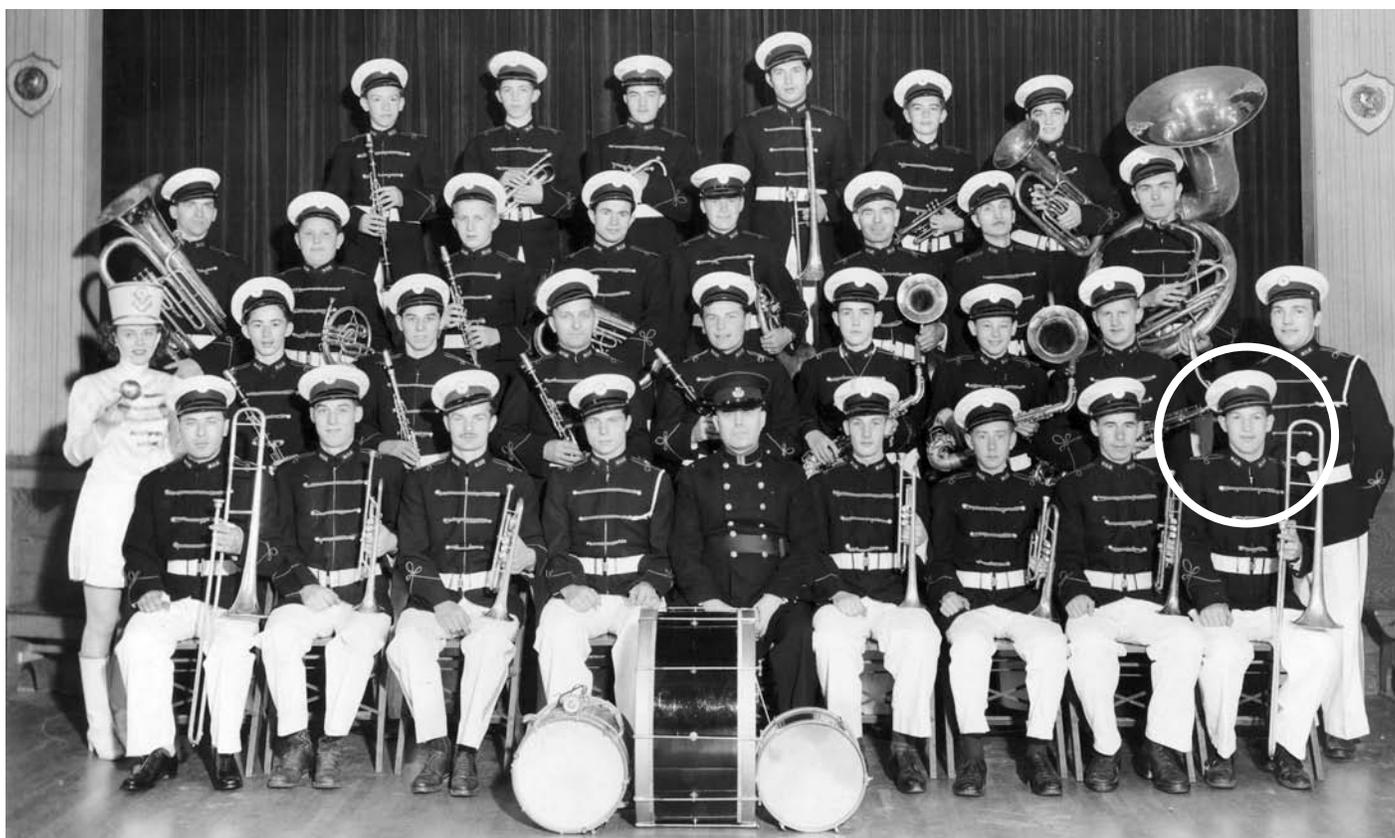
## Playing in the Shadow of the Ukrainian Labour Temple

one-room home with earth floor and a kerosene lamp for lighting. The visit was very pleasant throughout our stay. Next morning I had Bran Flakes for the first time in my life and that evening roast duck—another first. It turned out I liked them both, which was a relief to my mother. In fact, I still do like them.

When we climbed out of the wagon that Labour Day to pick up the streetcar on Henderson Highway and headed for home, it was to a changed world. We learned that World War II had broken out. Suddenly, as if by some miracle, everything changed and the Great Depression was over. Whereas before the war there were plenty of goods and services, but no money with which to buy them, all of a sudden things were reversed. People now had money but there were not enough products to satisfy demand, a classic recipe for inflation. So the government was forced to take steps forestalling it; to nip it in the bud before it took root. All through the Depression, the government claimed it had no power to control events. It was a worldwide problem; it was a lack of markets; it was due to external factors; all sorts of excuses for inaction were trotted out. But now, Ottawa virtually took over the national economy. Manpower was mobilized. Every person aged 21 and over had to register with the authorities and carry his Registration Card at all times. Farmers, who during the '30s sometimes plowed their crops under because they couldn't sell them, were

now deemed to be indispensable to the war effort. In many cases when young men from the farms tried enlisting in the armed forces, they were turned down because food production was so vital. Women, who had been relegated to narrow career choices like nursing, teaching or clerking, were now pressed into duty as assembly line workers, riveters, welders and electricians. In fact, one of the top pop tunes of the era was "Rosie the Riveter." To show it was serious about keeping inflation in check a Wartime Prices & Trade Board was established by the government to regulate prices, wages and virtually all economic activity. Rationing was introduced. Each family got a monthly allotment of coupons for necessities like sugar, tea, coffee, butter, meat and gasoline. Incidentally, this led to a rather brisk trade, like "we don't use coffee so we'll trade you for your tea coupons," etc.

While all this ferment was going on, our family was finally able to leave behind the mice on Boyd Avenue. With a bit of help from some friends, my father built a brand new home on McKenzie Street and we moved into it in the summer of 1942. For me, the move was symbolic as well as physical. I was nearing my twelfth birthday and on the cusp of adolescence. The child's eyes, which had witnessed the misery of the Depression, were now gazing hopefully to the future—and a brand new start. I would finally have a room of my own. ☺



Association of United Ukrainian Canadians / Workers Benevolent Association Archives

Workers Benevolent Association North Star Band, 1946. Author Szach is circled.

## Manitoba's Own Kentucky Colonel

by Michael Dupuis  
Victoria, BC

On 3 December 1913, "Bloody Jack" Krafchenko shot and killed a bank manager during a successful holdup at the Bank of Montreal in Plum Coulee, a small community outside of Winnipeg. Immediately, "Colonel" G. C. Porter, the city editor of the *Winnipeg Telegram*, wrote a sensational front-page account of the crime in which he called the thirty-two year old Krafchenko "a crook."<sup>1</sup> But the story did not end there.

A few days after the Colonel's story appeared, the wanted Krafchenko turned up at the *Telegram* building on Albert Street. Brandishing his murder-gun, he confronted the Colonel alone in his office. "I'm a boiler maker not a crook," shouted Krafchenko and waived his union card to prove it. The Colonel, an avid admirer of guns, pointed to the Luger and drawled in his suave Kentucky accent: "Very nice weapon you have theah, sir." "Yes, isn't it?" agreed the killer, taking his eyes momentarily off the Colonel to admire his weapon. Instantly the Colonel whipped his own six-shooter out of his drawer and had Jack covered. "Now, drop that gun and get out!" ordered the Colonel in his best feud-day voice.<sup>2</sup> Krafchenko quickly fled the building onto Albert Street. Meanwhile, the Colonel had a great scoop and was up one good pistol until the police arrived.

Garnet Clay Porter, known popularly in contemporary Canadian newspaper circles as the "Colonel", was undoubtedly one of the West's most colourful press personalities. Born 27 May 1866 in Russellville, Kentucky, Porter came to Canada at the age of thirty-four, leaving behind an adventure-filled past, which included episodes as a legal counsel, Kentucky outlaw and feudist, soldier of fortune, and Yukon prospector. A scar on his forehead was a lifelong reminder of a sniper's bullet he received while shooting and riding in a company of Teddy Roosevelt's famous Rough Riders. Was Porter a genuine colonel? Yes and no. In 1899, he was in the Blue Grass State editing a small, though influential, newspaper. He backed the right Democratic candidate for governor and his reward was a place on the gentleman's staff as aide and a Kentucky colonelcy, a title he kept for life.

*Mike Dupuis is a retired history teacher and independent scholar. He has published work in Manitoba History, Prairie Forum, Labour / Le Travail, Canadian Journal of Media Studies, and The Beaver. Currently he is writing a book on the press coverage of the Winnipeg General Strike.*

Settling in Toronto in 1900, supposedly because American lawmen were after him for an old feud shooting in the South, he entered newspaper work and developed into an ace reporter for Billy "Bug Eyes" MacLean, the publisher of the *Toronto World*. However, in 1904 the owner of the *Calgary Herald* persuaded Porter to become his editor-in-chief. At the time Calgary was a town of only 4,000 people but the Colonel felt at home with the cowboys, ranchers, Mounties and remittance men. He soon met and became friends with "Bob" Edwards the controversial publisher of the *Calgary Eye-Opener*.

Many tales developed from their friendship but one of the best involved the Colonel's wife Nancy. She was entertaining some lady friends from the East and wanted to share the colour of life in Alberta, so she showed them the *Eye-Opener*. On the paper's front page, Edwards had run a picture of her husband announcing him as a candidate for the Legislature in the constituency of Hootch. The story went on to predict that the Colonel would sweep the election "because every bartender, poker player, cattle thief and prostitute in the riding is whooping for the Colonel as his supporters."<sup>3</sup> Predictably, Mrs. Porter failed to see the humour in the story.

In 1906, the newly appointed editor of the *Winnipeg Telegram*, Mark E. Nichols, convinced the Colonel that the place to end his wanderlust was the Manitoba capital. At the time, the *Telegram*, nicknamed the "Big Blue Bugle" by the city's business community, but the "Yellowgram" by organized labour, was competing with the Sifton-owned Liberal *Manitoba Free Press* and the Richardson-owned Independent *Tribune* for circulation supremacy in Winnipeg. The fact that the "Tely" was the unapologetic party organ for the provincial Conservative party suited the Colonel perfectly, for he was a staunch Tory and always eager to be of service "to the cause." New staff soon learned the hard way about the Colonel's politics. After one of the paper's young reporters, Vernon Knowles, headlined a story "Laurier Cheered by His Followers," Porter thundered at Knowles: "Don't you know that no Grit is ever cheered in the Telegram?"<sup>4</sup>

At the *Telegram*, Porter cemented his reputation as a hard drinking, cigar smoking, and poker-playing prairie newspaperman. In his autobiography, "For the Life of Me," James H. Richardson, a cub reporter on the *Telegram* and later city editor of the *Los Angeles Examiner*, described the Colonel as "short, stout and red faced with hard little blue

eyes that bored right into you. He wore a neatly parted toupee, which didn't match his graying red hair and sat like a daub of paint on his round head. On hot summer days or in the frenzy of a deadline fever the colonel would remove the hairpiece and toss it on his cluttered desk beside the bottle of milk and the bag of gingersnaps that were his principal on-duty nourishment."<sup>5</sup>

Richardson also recalled standing knee deep in crumpled paper and cookie crumbs for his first interview with the man who gave him his start in the newspaper business. "Look kid," the Colonel said removing a frayed cigar from his mouth, "this is not a business for a nice young boy. It's a tough, hard business and it's dirty too. You work hard and you work long and you never make any money. You never get to live as other people do. You get to know things that are better unknown. I say you work hard and you work long and you never get to make any money and you grow old and tired and sad and wake up wondering what the hell happened to you."<sup>6</sup>

For the next ten years, Porter remained at the *Telegram* and was appointed successively news editor, managing editor and editor-in-chief. There is little doubt that the Colonel was a hard-boiled and demanding editor but he defended his attitude by declaring it was the only way to handle a staff of dynamite-laden reporters, a claim substantiated by Knowles who admitted the staff often produced an extra on a special news story without the Colonel's knowledge or permission.

Did Porter really keep a loaded pistol in his office desk? Depends who you believe. In *A History of Journalism in Canada*, W. H. Kesterton insisted that the Colonel "kept a loaded revolver in his desk."<sup>7</sup> However, veteran Canadian journalist Arthur Ford, who learned the journalist's art and craft under Porter, offered a different version for the Colonel's "gun." Describing how Porter revelled in a sensational or mysterious story, Ford stated that the Colonel "kept in his drawer the cut [illustration] of a smoking revolver to use in the opening paragraph of a good shooting yarn."<sup>8</sup>

In 1916, the Colonel left the *Telegram* and became a "stringer" or freelance journalist for several Canadian newspapers, including the country's two largest dailies, the *Montreal Star* and the *Toronto Evening Telegram*. A year later he started his own news service: a one-man version of Canadian Press (CP) called Porter's International Press News Bureau, which he operated out of the prestigious Royal Alexandra Hotel. Since salaries in postwar Canada were very low for newspaper reporters and journalists, freelance work was used to supplement incomes. Another benefit for stringers was that they were often allowed their own by-line (signature, initials, or full name) on a story in a major daily newspaper or magazine. As a freelancer the Colonel became famous for writing about two sensational events, both occurring in 1919: the Winnipeg general strike and the Ambrose Small murder mystery case.

Between 15 May and 26 June 1919, Winnipeg experienced a dramatic general sympathetic strike

involving over 30,000 union and non-union workers. Covering the strike for both Western and Eastern dailies, Porter contributed over fifty stories on the historic industrial dispute. However, there was no need to pitch his work to big city editors because they were eager for fresh news and views on the national news-making event. Over half of his dispatches were sent to the *Vancouver Daily Province* while the remainder were published in the *Vancouver Daily Sun*, *Calgary Herald*, *Edmonton Bulletin*, *Toronto Evening Telegram*, and *Montreal Star*.

While he tried to be objective in his reporting of the walkout, the Colonel could not conceal his anti-union feelings, dislike of several of the strike's leaders, and belief that the walkout was really a Bolshevik conspiracy fomented by revolutionists, agitators, reds and anarchists. One of his early accounts in the *Vancouver Daily Province* that reported a "soviet government" had been instituted in Winnipeg forced that paper's editor to print a clarification of Porter's claim (which turned out to be an exaggeration). Several other later dispatches in the *Calgary Herald* also caused the daily's editor-in-chief to defend against complaints that the Colonel was not fairly reporting both sides in the dispute.

Since Winnipeg's two hundred commercial and private telegraphers joined the work stoppage early in the dispute, Porter's stories originated and were datelined from different locations. Like other reporters, he took the 5:00 pm "Winnipeg Express" to file stories from across the border and returned on the early morning train to Winnipeg the next day. In a dispatch to the *Vancouver Province*, Porter explained how he and other reporters covering the Winnipeg strike were providing news to outside papers:

Inconceivable hardships have been endured by the newspapermen in their efforts to keep the outside world informed of what was going on here. Scores of outside correspondents were rushed into the city in the early hours of the strike and then the wires closed [17 May]. They skirmished all the way from Regina to Thief River Falls, Minnesota, and Fort William [Thunder Bay] and after many all-night trips in autos and freight cars were finally refused transmission in Canada ... Then the extraordinary spectacle was witnessed of the news being carried by trains as far as Thief River Falls and being transmitted back to Canadian papers, the wires to Calgary and Vancouver by which the stories were sent actually passing through Winnipeg.<sup>9</sup>

As stringers were paid on a space rate basis (number of words) for their stories, Porter eagerly reported thousands of words on the strike. By-lined "By G. C. Porter" he included lengthy descriptions of the challenges to newspapermen covering the event. On one occasion, he had a little fun in the telling. The Colonel sent a strike story to the *Montreal Star* in which he observed: "In the first days of the strike when food hoarding simply emptied the stores the correspondents

who had to get out of town over night to file their stories, always returned with a grip full of eggs, butter, hams and some times even more useful things belonging to careless people they had absent-mindedly picked up, so the trips were not wholly profitless."<sup>10</sup> Then with tongue-in-cheek he added: "One reporter showed up at the train with so many pound cartons of butter in his possession that the other correspondents were going to have him arrested for robbing a rural creamery, but a compromise was affected and the felony was compounded."<sup>11</sup>

The second big story for Porter in 1919 involved his specialty: a murder mystery. On the chilly night of 2 December 1919, Toronto Grand Opera House owner Ambrose Joseph Small mysteriously disappeared on his way home. The body of the 56-year-old, millionaire theatre magnate was never found. In late December John "Black Jack" Robinson, the powerful editor of the *Toronto Evening Telegram*, remembering the Colonel's skilful handling of other stories for the paper, gave Porter *carte blanche* on the sensational story. Though he had his own theories, the Colonel failed to solve the famous Toronto murder case. Nevertheless, the assignment was a dream-come-true for Winnipeg's dean of crime reporters because he wrote hundreds of thousands of words on the story for the *Evening Telegram* and dozens of other newspapers and magazines.

When the *Winnipeg Telegram* merged with its rival the *Tribune* in October 1920, the paper's new editor-in-chief immediately hired Porter. The Colonel ended his newspaper career writing a regular column "The Old-Timer Talks" for the Saturday *Tribune* supplement. He also continued freelance work specializing in crime stories especially written for American detective magazines. A charter member of the Winnipeg Press club, and a past president, he was granted the first life membership on his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1942. By this time, however, his eyesight was deteriorating and his drinking had caught up with him. Yet even these events resulted in tales.

Too proud to admit that he was going blind, he would walk across Portage Avenue to the street car stop near his home on Douglas Street, waving a handkerchief in front of him, and using his cane in a manner similar to that of the blind. Eventually a wild night on the town precipitated the end of the Colonel's drinking. "He was never a heavy drinker," fellow newspaperman Arthur Ford insisted, "but got on an occasional binge. The last time I saw him he was on the water wagon. He told me that some time before he got on a bender and when he came to, found he had been parading up and down Portage Avenue in a "plus four"

golf outfit. He was a short, stout man, had never played golf, and had no recollection of having even bought the strange outfit. He was so shocked at what happened he decided to become a teetotaler. I do not think he ever took another drink."<sup>12</sup>

On 5 March 1945, the Colonel was working at his *Tribune* desk on copy for his next "Old-Timer Talks" column. He died in his sleep that night and the following morning *Tribune* staff turned off the light on his desk and shrouded the typewriter with his old working jacket. The next day his funeral services brought forward a who's who of Winnipeg's newspaper community. The pallbearers were all former and current *Telegram*, *Tribune* and *Free Press* staff newspapermen including Bill McCurdy, Edward Macklin, Mark Nichols, Victor Sifton, Vernon Knowles, C. V. Coombe, A. E. H. Coe, and George Haston. Finally, on 19 September 1945, Nichols, then the publisher of the *Vancouver Daily Province*, unveiled at the head of a double grave (Mrs. Nancy Porter had died in 1937) a memorial stone in Winnipeg's Elmwood cemetery to perpetuate Porter's memory. At the bottom of the headstone was inscribed "30" meaning in newspaper circles, The End. ☛

### Notes

1. *Winnipeg Tribune*, 6 June 1945
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. C. Frank Steele. *Prairie Editor: The Life and Times of Buchanan of Lethbridge*, Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1961, p. 17.
5. Marjorie Earl. *Torch on the Prairies: A Portrait of Journalism in Manitoba 1859-1988*, Winnipeg: The Nor'Westers, 1988, p. 48.
6. *Ibid.*
7. W. H. Kesterton. *A History of Journalism in Canada*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967, p. 99.
8. Arthur Ford. *As The World Wags On*, Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1950, p. 12.
9. *Vancouver Daily Province*, 23 May 1919.
10. *Montreal Star*, 28 May 1919.
11. *Ibid.* It is likely that the reporter Porter was writing about in his story was fellow stringer John J. Conklin, a feature writer with the *Manitoba Free Press*.
12. *Winnipeg Tribune*, 12 June 1958.

There is some debate as to the origin of the word stringer. The possible derivations include (a) correspondents paid on the basis of "posted up string shaped strips" of their clippings placed on news boards, (b) one who "strings words together," (c) a writer paid by the number of words and therefore "stringing out a story" for maximum payment, (d) exclusive attachment, "as if by a string" by a freelance reporter to an individual paper, and (e) paid per inch of printed text generated with the length of the text measured against a "string."

## Strike While the Iron's Hot: Diary of a Musical

by Danny Schur  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

November 2001

In retrospect, it seems only fitting that a motivating factor in my creating a musical set against the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike was a meeting at a restaurant in Winnipeg's North End: Eddy's Place at the corner of Selkirk and McKenzie. It was at Eddy's that I had a mentoring meeting with then-editor of the *Winnipeg Free Press*, Nicholas Hirst.

I had by that time composed two large-scale musicals. *The Bridge*, commissioned to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ukrainian settlement in Canada, enjoyed a one-week run at the Walker Theatre in Winnipeg in 2000 and *The Tree* had just concluded its first professional workshop. I was casting about for ideas for a third musical and Nicholas Hirst was unequivocal; the Winnipeg General Strike was a passionate story with intense regional and national interest and the Strike itself remained a metaphor for the breakdown of civil society. While I had entertained the idea of adapting the story in musical form, the scope of the story, to say nothing of the political minefield of so bitter a community legacy, had scared me off.

Nicholas was adamant about one other aspect of creating successful musicals. He reasoned that musicals succeed when they build on the interest of a whole community, even a nation. *Les Misérables* succeeded, he



Jody Longworth

The cast of the 2006 Saskatoon Persephone Theatre production of *Strike!*

said, not just because it was based on the ultra-popular Victor Hugo novel, but because it came to symbolize the aspirations of the entire French nation, and of democracy itself. His advice was to seek strategic partnerships in Winnipeg to build the long-term success of the musical. To that end, he suggested I partner with a university drama department to develop shows.

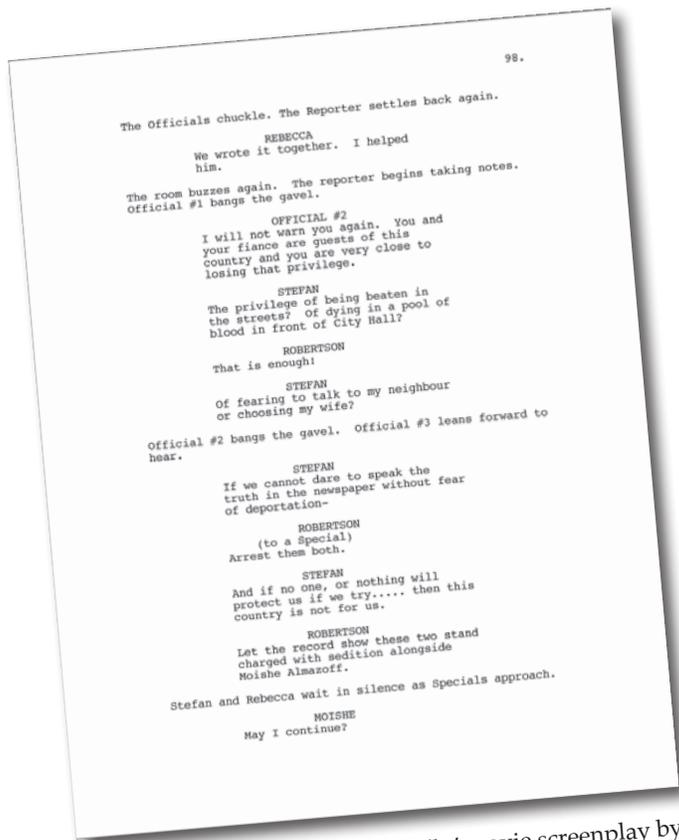
That very afternoon, I called Doug Arrell, Director of the University of Winnipeg Drama Department. By 19 November 2001, Doug and I had come to an agreement to co-produce workshop productions of both *The Tree* and my next musical *Strike!* (That I had not so much as committed one word to paper for *Strike!* speaks to Doug's incredible bravery!) When I opened up Alan Artibise's *Illustrated History of Winnipeg* and saw the famed sequence of pictures from the Strike, I was bitten.

December 2001 –  
September 2002

I found something incredibly intriguing about the pictures on pages 111–112 in Artibise's book. Twenty-first of June 1919, the day that came to be known as "Bloody Saturday" is surely one of the most photographed of Winnipeg's events. There are in fact photographs of the same instances, from multiple angles. And yet, despite the presence of several thousand witnesses, and a plethora of photographic evidence, there was precious little knowledge about the dead Ukrainian immigrant at the violent epicentre of Bloody Saturday: Mike Sokolowski.

I do not have a background in labour history. But as a Canadian of Ukrainian descent, the plight of Sokolowski (alternately spelled "Sokolowiski" in some accounts) struck a sympathetic chord with me. Here was the person killed, virtually on the steps of City Hall, and yet his legacy was so scant. I wondered if this lesser legacy was due, in part, from his status as an "enemy alien." It soon dawned on me that the framing for the story could be through

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A page from the *Strike!* movie screenplay by Danny Schur and Rick Chafe.

Sokolowski's eyes. The Winnipeg General Strike could be re-interpreted as an immigrant saga that lay beneath the broader labour story.

And so began the research, and therein grew the mystery—a mystery that endures to this day despite thousands of hours of research... by me and many others. We still cannot say with assuredness what Mike Sokolowski did to get himself shot. The only eye-witness account ("he was a real fanatic ... ran up to pick up a brick—he was only fifteen feet in front of a Mountie—he had just straightened up when he got it.") comes from a recollection of an eyewitness fifty years after the incident. There is a report printed in the *Montreal Gazette* that tells of Mike being shot in complete innocence. (Coincidentally, only out-of-Winnipeg coverage suggests the possibility of Sokolowski's innocence.)

In this enduring mystery, however, was born the dramatic pole of opposites. At one end was the absolutely innocent hapless immigrant—a boring dramatic possibility to be sure. At the other end of the dramatic spectrum was the wild-eyed Bolshevik revolutionary intent on assassinating the mayor or other civic officials. This possibility was too pat, too unsympathetic, to warrant the creation of a character a modern audience could associate with. But somewhere between those two poles—that was where the dramatic interest lie.

My goal was to uncover Sokolowski's story, to see if the true story might serve the historical fiction. In the winter of 2001–2002, I set upon a path of intense, some might say

obsessive, research into the historical person. If I can be accused of being obsessive in my research, it was because the trail turned out to be very cold. It was almost as if Mike Sokolowski did not want me to find out his true story.

The papers of the day all stated that he had a wife and three children but, according to cemetery records, no next of kin showed up at his pauper's burial. No relatives claimed his body from the Main Street funeral home where he lay and the coroner had to estimate his age because of a paucity of identification. The funeral home that took care of the arrangements burned in the 1920s, destroying any hope of retrieving documents. And if the reported family were in fact in Canada (and not in his Ukrainian homeland), no trace of them existed.

Through the course of my research in January 2002, I developed the relationships with the Winnipeg historical community that I enjoy to this day. Much credit must be given to the very patient Professor Nolan Reilly at the University of Winnipeg and Professor Jack Bumsted at the University of Manitoba. The research of Henry Trachtenberg, Ros Usiskin and Lily Stearns was also invaluable. I grew to be on a first-name basis with most of the personnel at the Provincial and City Archives, the libraries and more than a few North End churches.

On 10 January 2002, I stood on the snow-covered field in Brookside Cemetery where Mike Sokolowski lay in an unmarked grave. Here was the story that brought me to tears—the unknown immigrant whose life was symbolic of the era, but whom history had forgotten.

By March 2002, the arc of my Mike Sokolowski story had taken shape, with an interesting position on the dramatic pole. My research showed that, because of the chill in the Ukrainian community due to the internment during the Great War, many working class Ukrainians like Mike would have been hesitant to be associated with radical elements in labour, lest they suffer deportation. However, as borne out by the high numbers of non-unionized labour that joined the Strike (as much as two-thirds), many of Mike's class sympathized with the aims of the Strike. And then the perfect dramatic situation occurred to me: Mike could initially oppose the Strike, because he needed to earn the money to bring his family from Ukraine, but his death on Bloody Saturday could symbolize the biggest arc of change that a character could achieve. Someone who had been so adamantly opposed comes round to being the one who pays the highest price. That arc was the stuff of opera and musicals and presented me with many dramatic possibilities.

It turned out that history provided many dramatic possibilities. One of the most fascinating additional characters of the era was a Jewish left-wing activist and journalist who wrote under the name of Moishe Almazoff. Despite not being actively involved in the leadership of the Strike, Almazoff was arrested with the other bonafide Strike leaders in a vain attempt to prove the Strike a Bolshevik conspiracy. The Jewish community rose to his defence and his subsequent release was one of the little-known

inspirational moments of the post-Strike period. Henry Trachtenberg's excellent research showed, however, that Almazoff's neighbour, an itinerant Ukrainian Catholic, was responsible for the false accusations against Almazoff. Now there was a dramatic possibility! Without giving away the story to those that have not seen the musical, in my historical fiction, I created a way for Mike Sokolowski to do some very dramatically interesting things to get his family to Winnipeg, against the backdrop of the Strike.

**October – December 2002**

There is no better feeling for a writer than when, fully fortified by one's research, one can dive into the writing process. It feels as if the characters are literally able to leap from your imagination, because one's research has so informed their presence.

In addition to Mike and Moishe, I had discovered the wealth of potential that Winnipeg of the era was for character development. The captains of industry, the teaming masses of immigrants, the stratified classes of the British ascendancy, the suffragette movement, to say nothing of the divisions and subdivisions of labour—this polyglot, cosmopolitan prairie city that we call Winnipeg had it all.

It should come as no surprise then that within the space of six weeks, I wrote the script and composed some twenty songs for the first draft of *Strike!* By Christmas of 2002, I finally had that script to show Doug Arrell at the University of Winnipeg theatre department. Next step: U of W workshop May 2003.

**May – June 2003**

They say that the purpose of staging a musical in a "workshop" setting (a small-scale performance in a small venue to test out the show) is to find out if you want to live with the musical for the rest of your life! Having lived and grown with *Strike!* all these years now, it was in the U of W workshop in 2003 that the relationship almost failed.

To be sure, the support of Doug Arrell and the entire faculty and students was exemplary. Director Ann Hodges, choreographer Tom Mokry and I did not lack for enthusiastic community support. However, within a few days start of the two-week workshop, Ann Hodges took me aside and delivered a brutal blow; the musical had massive problems, which would doom the show, if not

addressed.

To her eternal credit, Ann was diplomatic in the extreme, stating that the musical could travel beyond Winnipeg and might succeed internationally, if fixed. I had made the mistake of incorporating too much of Mike's story. My passionate research had garnered a bloated, confusing story—a typical mistake of an inexperienced writer. Ann suggested I not worry about making the changes immediately; we could make the improvements in a subsequent workshop. I spent several feverish nights and had the changes ready within days.

Our first performance of the workshop occurred on 6 June 2003. I ensured that the invited audience was stacked with the theatre and historical community, journalists, government and labour officials, as well as many potential investors. All of the changes Ann Hodges suggested were spot on. I knew the show had succeeded when several people approached me that evening, asking to be investors.

**June 2003**

Brookside Cemetery was celebrating its 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2003. Many of Winnipeg's influential early citizens lie at Brookside, not far from Mike Sokolowski. The city administrator in charge of cemeteries, Rick Thain, was supervising the publication of a Brookside memorial book and wanted to include Sokolowski. Of all the featured stories, only



*Winnipeg Tribune*, 23 June 1919, page 1.

Mike's lacked a headstone to accompany his chapter.

What followed was truly a humbling and gratifying experience. Rick Thain saw to it that the City of Winnipeg paid for the base of a memorial and he then convinced Charles Brunet of Brunet Memorials to donate the headstone. It fell to me to compose the inscription on the headstone. The official unveiling of the monument on 20 June 2003 and the attendant publicity was overwhelming. Mike Sokolowski's story was of more interest to Winnipeg than I had ever imagined. His grave at plot 450, section 45 of Brookside Cemetery was finally marked eighty-four years after his death.

**September – December 2003**

After the U of W workshop in the summer of 2003, the creative team determined that we would subject the musical to yet one more workshop, this time with the added benefit of professional actors—always eager to rip apart a show to



Glenn Michalchuk

The 2004 outdoor, abridged production of *Strike! (Winnipeg Shocks the Nation)* in Old Market Square, Winnipeg.

the chagrin of writers. The one-week intensive workshop took place at the historically appropriate Ukrainian Labour Temple at Pritchard and McGregor, a mere stone's throw from Eddy's place, the restaurant where I had met Nicholas Hirst. Ukrainian Labour Temple historian Myron Shatulsky provided fascinating information about the Labour Temple's role in the General Strike.

By Christmas, 2003, the musical was ready for full-scale premiere. The only problem was, I was not! How could I raise the \$500,000 required for its premiere for a musical no one knew about? With 2004 being the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the General Strike, there was a unique opportunity to raise awareness of the historical event, and the musical.

#### January – May 2004

Mayworks is a festival of the arts that celebrates the contributions of working class culture. The festival was founded in 1994, to commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the General Strike. In Mayworks, I found a willing co-sponsor to stage an outdoor version of the musical which I called *Strike! – Winnipeg Shocks the Nation*.

In an effort to create advance interest in an eventual full-scale premiere, I adapted my two-act musical into a one-act outdoor spectacle featuring a cast of one hundred, period vehicles and mounted horses. The free show was staged in Old Market Square, literally metres from the events of Bloody Saturday, on 15 May 2004—the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Strike. Over three thousand people were in attendance and the spectacle was covered nationally. The outpouring of interest and the deep emotional connection to

the story were obvious; this was a story that all of Winnipeg wanted to hear.

#### 21 June 2004 to Present

In an effort to build community interest in the historical background to the musical, and in a legitimate effort to find out more of Mike Sokolowski's real story, I wrote and lead a tour entitled "Mike's Bloody Saturday" which retraces Mike's final hours. I have repeated the tours annually and am amazed at the new information tour attendees bring forth. Through the tour, I have connected with Sokolowski's long lost relatives. The attendant publicity brought me in contact with Mike Dupuis from Victoria, whose exhaustive research for his upcoming book about the Strike (*A Cloak for Something Deeper*) was the way I found out what happened to Sokolowski's missing identification: a reporter scooped it off the dead man.

#### July – December 2004

With the musical now front-page news, I felt the time appropriate to raise the money to put the show on in 2005. My venue of choice was the domed theatre in Kildonan Park a.k.a. Rainbow Stage, not to be confused with the musical theatre company of the same name. I chose the venue because only its large stage could encompass the scale of the production. As a publicly-owned venue, I applied to city officials to rent the theatre, only to be told that such rental was contingent on the approval of the theatre company that rented it each summer. Little did I know the battle I was in for.

## Strike While the Iron's Hot

The theatre company refused me access, despite the fact that my proposed production would be concluded before their access was required. Only after months of protracted antagonism in the media, civic administration and a final showdown at City Hall did the theatre company back down. I cannot help but wonder if the attendant negative publicity did them greater disservice than having allowed me access in the first place. The whole saga taught me a valuable lesson however; one must be prepared to fight for what you believe in.

### January – June 2005

With the delay in securing a venue, I was now months behind in raising the capital to mount the production. When final approval from City Hall came on 1 February 2005, I was faced with the following reality: I had to raise an average of \$5,000 per day for the next sixty days or the production could not be mounted for its 24 May premiere.

While I had some experience raising capital for my previous productions, nothing prepared me for the daunting nature of this fundraising drive. Without labouring the point too much, suffice to say that the community support for the project was so great that the goal was met. And what was so telling about the changed nature of the City was that support came from all parts of the political and social spectrum. The brutal divisiveness of the historical event had been replaced by a greater sense of civic interest that was beyond gratifying. Had the musical failed miserably as an artistic event, I would have felt a measure of satisfaction in just this sense of community interest.

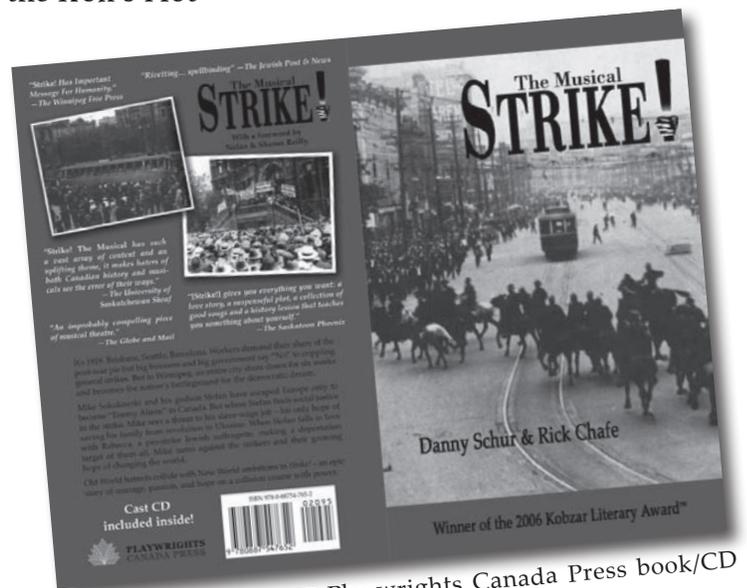
But succeed the musical did. The musical played for a 24-show run enjoyed by some fifteen thousand and became a critical and audience favourite. During the run, it generated a volume of press that re-ignited a new generation of interest in the General Strike and the plight of the era. Nicholas Hirst had been very right.

### September – December 2005

Flush with the success of a premiere production, all playwrights start dreaming dreams of Broadway—and I don't mean the one in Winnipeg! Having made connections with many Canadians in the musical theatre industry in New York, I winged my way to the Great White Way for a series of meetings to gauge the interest in the musical.

What I was pleasantly surprised by was that there was interest in the musical. The unpleasant surprise was that it would cost \$15,000,000 to mount. It dawned on me that one could produce a major feature film for less. And there began another avenue for the musical.

In concert with members of the Winnipeg film community, it was decided to develop the *Strike!* stageplay into a musical feature film. Taking a page from our own playbook, we developed a condensed version of the film, which we could use as a selling tool to garner a full production—something the film industry calls a "Proof of Concept (POC)."



The cover of the 2007 Playwrights Canada Press book/CD publication of *Strike!*

### January – May 2006

With support in the form of a budget of \$70,000, the *Strike!* POC film was shot over the course of four days in the very cold January of 2006. What is remarkable about the film is the tremendous community interest in its production. From financial donations to unrestricted access to locations to the participation of some 134 cast and crew, the film's production was another example of a community gathering to support its own. The POC could easily have cost \$500,000. When we premiered the film to an outdoor audience in Old Market Square on 13 May 2006, Old Market Square was filled again. The POC has since made its way into the hands of scores of Hollywood stars and agents and its work continues to this day.

### March 2006

The stage version of *Strike!* had the good fortune of being nominated for the inaugural \$25,000 Kobzar National Literary Award to be presented in a gala ceremony in Toronto. With my wife, parents and sister in tow, I was ecstatic when the musical garnered the award. But more important than the award itself was my eventual meeting of the person responsible for its funding.

When I arrived back in Winnipeg, the executive director of the Shevchenko Foundation, which presented the Kobzars, informed me that the patron of the award sought to meet me. To my surprise, the patron was a reclusive elderly Ukrainian woman from Winnipeg, and one that clearly remembered the events of Bloody Saturday. I was invited to visit her immediately.

### July – December 2006

The friendship that sprung up between Dr. Anne Smigel and myself was truly remarkable. As a member of the Ukrainian community, she was extremely proud that Mike Sokolowski's story was finally being told and she wanted to help tell it some more. She was adamant that

her financial assistance was going to assist in the creation of the full-length screenplay adaptation of *Strike!* With her assistance and that of the CTV television network in Winnipeg, my co-writing partner Rick Chafe and I were able to devote months of time to the creation of the screenplay. Her passing in 2008 was a sad day and the screenplay is dedicated to her memory.

#### September – October 2006

*Strike!* enjoyed its first out-of-town production at Saskatoon's Persephone Theatre. Proving the adage that musicals are never written, just re-written, my co-writing partner Rick Chafe and I engaged in re-writes that saw the creation of two new songs and innumerable small changes.

I must say that opening night at the Persphone Theatre run of the show was one of the most gratifying nights of my life. Gone were the worries that this was a Winnipeg labour story with limited national appeal. The Saskatoon audiences leapt to their feet (I wondered if they had been prompted by my presence) in the most spontaneous way. And the reviews were to die for! Ann Hodges' tough medicine at the initial U of W workshop had been very worth it. The resulting acclaim has garnered production interest from across Canada and the United States.

#### November 2006 – June 2007

CBC Winnipeg's award-winning producer Andy Blicq was at the time producing a new documentary about the Winnipeg General Strike, entitled *Bloody Saturday*. As a Winnipegger, Andy was taken with the story of the production of the musical and incorporated much footage from the musical into the documentary. Further, Andy brought *Strike!* actors and myself into the CBC recording studio and recorded special versions of material from the musical, for use in the program. The resulting feature brought the musical to its first national audience on 23 June 2007.

#### May – September 2007

By Christmas, 2006, CBC radio was convinced of the merits of my producing a nationally-broadcast radio-concert special of the musical. In yet another fit of adaptation, Rick Chafe and I adapted the two-hour, two-act stage play into a fifty-five minute, one-act radio play. One learns, as an adapting writer, never to fall too in love with one's own words!

There was no more appropriate venue to record the special than Winnipeg's Burton Cummings Theatre

(formerly the Walker Theatre). The theatre's history was indelibly tied to the General Strike and the ghosts of the Strike must have been well-pleased with 15 May 2007's live recorded concert. By now, the musical was resounding with the audience in a deeply moving way. The performances were magical and the audience response was touching. The warmth of the reception was abundantly evident when CBC Radio One broadcast the musical to a national audience on Labour Day, 3 September 2007.

#### September – December 2007

The publicity from the CBC Radio Concert Special cemented the desire for Toronto's Playwrights Canada Press to publish the book version of *Strike!* To the credit of publisher Angela Rebeiro, she was convinced to make the release Canada's only interactive play/CD combination. The logistical problems that resulted from the first-ever inclusion of a CD in a play book were stressful but the resulting release on 10 December 2007 succeeded in the book's #1 position on the Winnipeg non-fiction sales chart for two weeks – proving that the best time to release a play is in time for Christmas gift purchasing! I have prepared a free downloadable lesson plan for the book and the publication is a recommended resource in the Manitoba curriculum.

#### 2008

2008 was the year of the film pre-production, a euphemistic term for "spending a heck of a lot of time on the telephone with stars' representatives." The screenplay, so dearly desired by Dr. Smigel, is in the hands of such A-list stars as Anne Hathaway, Kevin Spacey, Warren Beatty and Ellen Page, to name just a few. The consensus from the industry is that the film will get made. At no point has the reaction been negative. If I have learned anything, the musical will live or die by continued perseverance and we hope to shoot in Winnipeg in summer, 2010.

#### 2009 / Epilogue

But the most exciting developments for the musical are still to come. With 2009 marking the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the General Strike, two big productions are planned in Winnipeg.

On 23 May 2009, we will re-mount the outdoor spectacle version of the show first premiered in 2004 in Old Market Square. But this time, the musical will be mounted on Main Street, right in front of City Hall. Returning will be the cast of one hundred, charging horses and (new to 2009), a 41-foot moving streetcar replica designed by *Strike!* designer extraordinaire, David Hewlett.

On 30 July 2009, the first of what is hoped to be an annual summer production of *Strike!* premieres for an eight-show run at the Forks Canwest Centre for the Performing Arts (a.k.a. Manitoba Theatre for Young People). And with some luck, *Strike!* will be so established as a Winnipeg institution by 2012 that a permanent transfer into the Canadian Museum of Human Rights will be possible. ☛

#### More *Strike!*

Clips from the *Strike!* POC film:  
[www.youtube.com/dannyschur](http://www.youtube.com/dannyschur)

Information on the musical:  
[www.strikemusical.com](http://www.strikemusical.com)

# Reviews

Roland Penner CM, *A Glowing Dream: A Memoir*

Winnipeg: J. Gordon Shillingford Publisher, 2007, 305 pages.

ISBN 1897289197, \$28.95 (paperback)



I regularly take students studying the history of Winnipeg to the Ukrainian Labour Temple on Pritchard Avenue in Winnipeg's North End. Standing in the Labour Temple's main hall, a room steeped in the history of the city's immigrant political and cultural struggles, I read to them a passage from Norman Penner's oral history interview on growing up in the North End. It is a particularly evocative description of his teenage years at St. John's

Technical High School, which he described as "a radical's paradise." Inevitably, at this point students want to learn more about the North End. I have now another place to which I may send them: Roland Penner's memoir, *A Glowing Dream*. Roland Penner, who has spent almost his entire life in Winnipeg, is the younger brother of Norman. Their father Jacob, who arrived in Winnipeg from present day Ukraine in 1904, was of those rare breed of Marxist socialists whose origins lay in a devote Mennonite upbringing. Three years later, he met Rose Shapack "a young, fiery-tempered, non-religious Jewish radical", also a recent arrival from Europe. They were introduced to one another at a rally at the James Street Labour Temple featuring "Red Emma" Goldman, the famous American anarchist and feminist. This was the beginning of the history of the "Red Penners." *A Glowing Dream: A Memoir* is Roland Penner's account of and reflection on his family's history, especially the remarkable record of political engagement that made the Red Penners one of Winnipeg's most prominent families on the left in the twentieth century.

*A Glowing Dream* will appeal to a diversity of readers. Penner's account of his years as a cabinet minister in Howard Pawley's NDP government, including Penner's lengthy account of his direct engagement in some of the most controversial political issues of the 1980s (constitutional debates, passage of the Human Rights Code, Morgentaler controversy, legal aid expansion, language conflicts, funding of post-secondary education) makes for fascinating reading. In the years immediately before his stint in government, Penner had traveled the country building support for the Canadian Association of University Teachers, of which he was a founding member.

He had begun this union activity at the University of Manitoba while a faculty member in the Faculty of Law. Penner's account of the union's first negotiations with the administration should be required reading for all faculty members who today might query the need for a union. Ironically, perhaps, when Penner's political career ended with the defeat of the Pawley government, Penner returned to the University of Manitoba on the other side of the negotiating table as the Dean of the Law School.

I admit that my own interest as a historian of social and political moments drew me most to Penner's account of his experiences in the years before he entered provincial politics, roughly the years through to the late 1970s. Penner's description of his life in North End Winnipeg is one at which poverty was always at the family's doorstep. The family never owned a home and in the 1930s moved annually from rented home to rented home. Jacob Penner's commitment to the Communist Party of Canada (CPC), of which he was a founding member, consumed much of his time. It may have been a good fight but it certainly did not earn him any money. On numerous occasions, Rose Penner had to seek out poorly paid piecemeal jobs often done from the home to make ends meet. But it is also clear that Rose was as committed to social justice issues as her husband and accepted that their public political lives meant that their personal finances would always remain precarious. Roland Penner comments that his parents' devotion to their children never wavered as it some times did in such families. Indeed, Penner goes into considerable detail about his parents' "devotion" to their children. Penner's emersion in the progressive political culture of the North End in the years before World War II makes for fascinating reading. His account of his youth ranges widely from his life in the Young Pioneers, a communist youth organization, to anti-fascist activities, May Day parades, and rallies around the Spanish Civil War. All this reminds us of the intensity of political debate in the city during the Depression.

## Thanks ...

The Editors wish to thank the following people who assisted in the preparation of this issue of *Manitoba History*: Louise Ayotte (Manitoba Legislative Library), Chris Kotecki (Archives of Manitoba), and Lily Stearns (AUUC/WBA Archives).

Penner's high school activities at St. John's Technical High School where the "unity of class" overcame divisions of ethnicity and religion is a captivating read. This was the time of the common front among leftists who together fought against poverty and unemployment and led a determined anti-fascist campaign. As Penner observes, all this came crashing down upon the CPC with the signing of the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact in 1938. The CPC's leadership's acceptance of this 180-degree political turn despite reservations from within its own ranks rocked the party. This was, Penner suggests, a dreadful miscalculation that weakened the CPC to a degree from which it never fully recovered. The party's decision had immediate and dire consequences for the Penner family, because it gave the state the excuse it was looking for to imprison leaders of the communist movement. In a poignant reminder of just how fragile political and civil rights are in Canada, Jacob Penner and dozens of other communists were imprisoned and held without charge from 1940–1942 simply for holding alternative political views. None was ever convicted of a criminal offence related to their political activities.

In 1941, following Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union and CPC's subsequent decision now to support fully the Allied forces, Penner like many communists of his age rushed to join the army. Although his enlisted years were largely uneventful, his life did take a dramatic turn towards the end of the war when he enrolled in what became known as the Khaki University. It was a university programme for soldiers at the war's end who had to spend months in England waiting their return to their homes. Penner's is a fascinating account of this rich and varied introduction to academic life. Penner continued his education at the University of Manitoba upon his return from England. He spent his undergraduate days immersed in left-wing student politics and cultural activities. He was a prominent member of the Debating Society, organized numerous political meetings on and off-campus, wrote prodigiously for the student newspaper and several communist publications, and pursued his first love, progressive theatre. Originally planning to study drama Penner eventually enrolled in law school for pragmatic considerations, from where he graduated in 1957. He soon took up an offer from Joe Zuken, a prominent city councillor and communist, to practice with him and his partners. Penner has many stories to tell of his legal career in a law firm that focused on labour and poverty related issues. Also, in the 1950s, Penner at various times managed the CPC owned Co-op Bookstore and promoted numerous concerts by some of the era's prominent folk and political musicians, including Peter Seeger, Miriam Makeba, and Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee. How he managed to balance all these activities with a marriage and a young family are a subject to which he offers only limited insight in the memoir.

In 1956, amid all these personal and professional changes in Penner's life, he and many other members of the CPC were shocked into questioning their party's uncritical allegiance to the Soviet Union. Khrushchev's revelations

of Stalin's brutality at a meeting of the Communist International and the Soviet occupation of Hungary were together a shock of seismic proportions to communist movements around the world. These were troubled times in the Penner family because of Norman's sharp criticism of the CPC's leaders among whose ranks he was considered an up and coming member. Roland proved sympathetic to his brother's arguments, but less vocal with his criticisms. However, their parents' continued largely unqualified support of the CPC created a delicate situation within the family. But the Penners proved to be a tolerant family and unlike many communist families of the era did not split apart over such issues. There is a good description of these political differences and their impact on the Penner family in *A Glowing Dream: A Memoir*; a remarkable letter from Jacob Penner to Norman about their political differences is reproduced in the appendices. Norman did soon resign after these events from the CPC and pursued an academic career in which he would make important contributions to history of the left in Canada. Roland never resigned formally from the CPC but, in the early 1960s, decided to let his membership lapse. *A Glowing Dream: A Memoir* is unfortunately somewhat short on details on this shift in political thinking that eventually would take Penner into the small-l liberal NDP government of Howard Pawley. *A Glowing Dream: A Memoir* is a well-written, sometimes humorous, reflection by Roland Penner on a Manitoban's political life on the left. It is well worth the read.

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## Future History

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- Winnipeg's Jewish community and the 1935 federal election
- The life and work of Reverend Harry Lehotsky
- Riding Mountain Nazis
- Mennonite radio in southern Manitoba
- Book reviews & more



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